

Speech: Minister Mark Field speech: The UK and All of Asia: A Modern Partnership

It is a great pleasure to be here in Jakarta, my first stop of a two-week; six-country; nine-city visit across South East Asia.

Over the last year, since I was appointed Minister for Asia and the Pacific, I have criss-crossed the region – from Beijing to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur to Kathmandu, Hanoi to Honiara.

Over the next two weeks I will be adding Brunei, Manila, Vientiane and Phnom Penh to that list, as well as covering some familiar ground.

It has been a privilege to meet a host of people from all over Asia, as well as the significant Asian diaspora in the UK.

But I rarely have the opportunity to talk about the UK approach to Asia as a whole. Today I'd like to put that right.

Ours is an approach that encompasses All of Asia, and as such I would venture to say that we are following in your ancestors' footsteps.

As far back as the seventh century, the Sri-vi-jayan Empire, based right here in modern day Indonesia, built flourishing trade routes that spanned the whole of Asia, from India to China – and across South East Asia.

Engaging with all the nations and regions of Asia was the right approach in the seventh century, and it is even more so today, as the whole world tilts towards this diverse continent, with its enormous opportunities as well as some real challenges.

I should say that my passion for Asia long pre-dates my appointment as Minister. You might say I was born with it.

In 1962, my parents married just across the Sea of Java in Singapore. My father was stationed there with the British Army. I grew up hearing their stories about life in Asia.

My interest grew stronger when I first visited over twenty years ago. It was already so different from my parents' photographs and change continues apace.

Quite rightly, the UK's relationship with Asia has changed too, from that of my parents' time more than half a century ago, to the partnership we enjoy today, with our eyes firmly fixed on the future.

I have seen plenty of evidence of that myself, but I have been struck too by the region's sheer diversity. To any Asian audience this is obvious.

With a population of well over 3 billion people, more than 2,000 languages, and a vibrant mix of faiths and communities, Asia is both everything you can imagine, and nothing you would expect – diversity at its finest.

But most of all I have been staggered by the palpable sense of energy right across the region.

Booming tourism, smart technology, prodigious flows of business and trade.

Growth rates the western world could only dream of.

The economic ingenuity of the people.

A dynamic drum-beat of enterprise that is setting the rhythm around the globe.

And crucially it is a drum-beat that is being driven by the young. More people live in Asia than in the rest of the world combined, and over one third are under the age of 25.

Asia represents the future of this planet.

All of this explains why the UK government operates an “All of Asia” policy.

And I use the phrase “All of Asia” deliberately.

We have sometimes been accused of being too focused on the largest economies in the region to the exclusion of others.

That was not true in the past and it is not true now.

For centuries the UK has recognised the tremendous opportunities in the region.

The context may have changed, but we have been engaged in All of Asia ever since.

All of Asia is not just a catchy phrase for think tanks, academics, and the media – and I am aware some of those industries’ esteemed representatives are here today!

It is a reality.

That is why the UK has over 50 diplomatic missions across Asia, including in all ten members of ASEAN. And it is why we are expanding still further, opening three new Posts in the Pacific and boosting the numbers of diplomats posted in the region.

There are hard-headed reasons for doing so. Decisions taken by Asian nations directly affect British security and economic interests.

If we are to engage effectively, we must be active and present right across the region.

This is why I have made a point of covering as much of the ground as possible myself.

By the end of this trip, I can proudly say that I will have visited all ten ASEAN countries in just over a year, and some twice.

That I hope shows how much this vital pillar of the continent matters to the UK.

The conversation with ASEAN member states on our post-Brexit relationship with ASEAN is well underway, to ensure we maintain a close bond through a formal connection that is as broad and ambitious as possible.

Of course, the UK has long had strong bilateral ties across this region, be it through governments, businesses, schools, and critically our peoples.

But once the UK is outside the EU, our room for manoeuvre will be greater.

Many of my counterparts recognise the brief period of uncertainty this brings, but speak enthusiastically of the new opportunities for bilateral co-operation with the UK that will follow.

And yes – that includes new free trade agreements and enhanced trading partnerships.

Partnership is central to all we do in Asia.

All of Asia is about working together to promote and protect the things that matter most to all of us, both directly between nations and through the multilateral institutions we hold dear, as we will do with our Indonesian friends on the UN Security Council from January.

So what are the key issues?

Where do we hope to strengthen cooperation?

We see three, which are my priorities as Minister for Asia and the Pacific: prosperity, security and values.

It is with the basic freedoms and values we hold so dear – those enlightened and humane values which have deep roots in the soil of Asia – that I should like to start.

The UK will continue to be a steadfast advocate of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

We believe people here in Asia – and the world over – should be free to express themselves and live the lives they choose.

It means being free to engage in healthy debate, both face to face and online.

It means being able to practise our faith or change it without fear of discrimination, or being free to have no faith at all.

It means being valued for what we can contribute, regardless of our religion, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

It means making the most of our diversity.

In the words of Indonesia's national motto – Unity in Diversity.

It is why the UK supports these freedoms and continues to promote them right around the world.

It is why, for example, we stand up for the rights of the people of Hong Kong and for the principle of "One country, two systems".

In this year alone, I have discussed concerns about freedom of religion or belief in Nepal and Pakistan.

During my recent trip to China, I raised our concerns about the region of Xinjiang amid reports of oppression and re-education centres.

In Burma/Myanmar, I have highlighted the need for those who have perpetrated atrocities to be brought to justice. In Thailand and Cambodia, I have encouraged the authorities to create the conditions for elections that are free, fair and transparent.

And in the Maldives, we have joined with partners in speaking out against those who seek to undermine the democratic process.

These examples illustrate some points of concern, but there are also powerful examples of how open societies and democratic principles have won through.

With over 800 million voters, India is right to boast of being the world's largest democracy.

Malaysia's elections provided an emphatic endorsement of the power of democracy – something that is already vibrant in Indonesia.

And in the months ahead I look forward to seeing the people of Thailand, Bangladesh and Afghanistan – as well as here in Indonesia – express their views at the ballot box.

The UK's next priority across Asia is our common prosperity. It is central to the successful, thriving and sustainable societies of the future.

Many of the industries that will be vital for building that successful future are still in their infancy, as indeed are the regulations that will govern them.

We can work together now to fashion a common approach.

And while we should celebrate the fact that a number of Asian countries have reached or are reaching middle-income status, we all know that across the region, there remain huge disparities in wealth, education and opportunity.

Many governments face a serious challenge in creating quality jobs to meet

people's aspirations: in India alone, a million new job seekers enter the market every month.

This is where I hope the UK can offer support to partners across Asia, in four key areas.

The first is education.

Our global campaign to promote 12 years of quality education, especially for girls, was endorsed by 53 leaders at April's Commonwealth Summit in London, including 18 from Asia.

Since 2011, we have supported more than 6.8 million primary school children in Pakistan, and a similar number in Afghanistan.

In South East Asia, our Education is GREAT Campaign is reaching out to more than 660 million people, promoting the value of education and the English language – the official language of ASEAN.

Meanwhile the largest number of overseas students in the UK are from China; and the five branch campuses of UK universities in Malaysia – as well as others in China – demonstrate the huge appetite for top quality British education, as does the fierce competition for our prestigious Chevening scholarships.

Second, we are working together to improve the business climate – vital to encourage investment and create the jobs of the future.

Across Asia, we will invest over £200 million through our Prosperity Fund and other programmes to help lift people out of poverty, by improving the conditions in which they are able to do business.

Here in Indonesia, we are helping develop a robust digital procurement system that will reduce corruption and increase transparency.

In the Philippines we have supported the Government with their Ease of Doing Business Act. And we have recently concluded an MOU with the United Nations Development Programme to help promote a fairer business environment within ASEAN.

Meeting the demand for modern infrastructure across All of Asia is vital to ensure the continent is free, open and prosperous.

Not just to get millions more people physically from A to B efficiently and sustainably, but also to connect them virtually, so they can access the online market place.

The UK has world-class professional and financial expertise to help Asia meet that demand and to source the funds it needs to support jobs, sustainable growth and prosperity.

We have cutting-edge technical know-how and world-leading financial clout in the City of London, a constituency I have been proud to represent as an MP

for more than 17 years.

London is the undisputed global centre for infrastructure finance, a natural hub for Green Finance, a vital contributor to new international financial products such as Indian rupee-denominated Masala bonds, underwritten in London, and a growing hub for international Islamic Finance.

It may come as a surprise to some that the UK was the first Western nation to issue a sovereign sukuk – or sharia-compliant bond – and that, to date, the London Stock Exchange has issued over \$48 billion of these bonds.

I have also had the pleasure of attending the launch of two Indonesian Komodo Bonds in London.

We recognise the importance of China's Belt and Road Initiative for meeting Asia's infrastructure needs.

That is why we have appointed a dedicated Envoy for Professional and Financial Services who is working to promote our unique offer and to ensure that investments in Belt and Road are the right ones and meet high international standards.

The third area is research, innovation and everything associated with the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'.

Technology self-evidently holds the key to unlocking many of the problems the world faces.

The UK and our Asian partners' strengths in science, technology and innovation mean we have a great deal to offer each other.

I saw some of the fruits of this cooperation for myself at a robotics and regenerative medicine lab in Osaka, where I simultaneously found myself in the future and the past when I came face to face with Leonardo da Vinci reincarnated in robot form!

When I was in China last month I saw many examples of our collaboration with Chinese institutions.

I met Professors from Oxford, Cambridge and King's College London and saw an impressive UK-China research centre working on plant science in Beijing.

This kind of collaboration is at the heart of people-to-people relationship with China, bringing mutual prosperity.

And in India our UK-India Technology Partnership will work in areas like AI in healthcare, electric vehicles and advance manufacturing to create new opportunities for growth and jobs.

The fourth area of cooperation under the prosperity umbrella is about laying the groundwork for future Free Trade Agreements and trade partnerships across the region.

The UK has always been and will continue to be a global champion of free and open international trade. After Brexit, we will work quickly to establish a new economic partnership based on the final terms of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement.

Japan is the second biggest source of non-European FDI into the UK. Thanks in part to our Japanese friends, a vehicle comes off a British production line every 20 seconds.

We will also seek to transition EU Free Trade Agreements with Singapore, Vietnam and Republic of Korea, while exploring new opportunities, such as FTAs with Australia and New Zealand, potential membership of the CPTPP, and enhanced trading partnerships across the region.

But we all know that there can be no lasting prosperity without security.

That is why it is so important that we – the UK and all the countries of the region – work together to uphold the rules-based international order.

The UK has plenty to offer.

We are a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a committed member of NATO, the G20 and the Commonwealth, and an active participant in the Five Power Defence Arrangements in South East Asia.

We have a world-class military.

We are the only G20 member to spend both 2% GDP on defence and 0.7% of GDP on overseas development. We have stood shoulder to shoulder with Japan, South Korea and other countries in denouncing nuclear adventurism by North Korea.

And it is why we urge all parties to respect freedom of navigation and international law in the South China Sea, including the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague.

Our money and military presence are playing their part across Asia.

As one of the few countries able to deploy air power 7,000 miles from our shores, in 2016 we sent our Typhoons to train with Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia for the first time.

Our Royal Navy has deployed two ships to the Asia Pacific this year – HMS Albion and HMS Sutherland, with more of our world class fleet due to visit by the end of the year.

Our almost unbroken naval presence provides a visible demonstration of the UK's commitment to enforcement of UNSC sanctions and to peace, security and prosperity in the region.

We are strong members of the Five Power Defence Arrangements with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. British Forces Brunei have remained there since independence, at the invitation of His Majesty the Sultan.

And we are enhancing security and defence relationships elsewhere in the region, through joint military exercises with South Korea and Thailand, among other things.

We are committed to a secure, free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific, playing an active role in maritime security in the Indian Ocean region through military, multilateral and commercial engagement and capacity building.

We have used our expertise in maritime domain awareness to support regional initiatives in the Indian Ocean region.

As the world's primary hydrographic charting authority, I can proudly report we are taking steps to chart the ocean with partners, helping to improve safety at sea, trade routes and security.

We are also building a new framework for cyber security cooperation with India and other countries in the region. And we are strengthening counter terrorism cooperation, with a new Regional Counter Terrorism Hub.

Asia also faces challenges related to ongoing and past conflict. We have an enduring commitment to Afghanistan, as shown by our recent commitment to a troop uplift, and we are working with the international community to help Afghanistan become more stable, secure and self-reliant.

The meeting of religious scholars here in Jakarta in May did much to advance the religious narrative in favour of peace.

Elsewhere, we are clearing landmines in Cambodia; and providing over £129m of assistance to date to the Rohingya people from Burma who have been forcibly displaced from their homes.

These are all tangible signs of our commitment to All of Asia, and our wish to further intensify our partnerships in the region.

Crucially, they also illustrate our determination to ensure that disputes in the region are resolved, not through force, militarisation or coercion, but through dialogue and in accordance with international law.

I have given just a small snapshot of UK activity across Asia.

I hope I have demonstrated emphatically that our All of Asia policy is broad, ambitious and focussed on the future.

It recognises that Asia will be the crucible in which the world of the 21st Century will be forged – fuelled in large part by the energy, creativity and entrepreneurship of the millions of young people growing up in Asia today.

And our All of Asia policy is tailored to the things that will matter most to them: getting a good education, finding a decent job, having their rights respected and feeling confident that their future is secure.

It is about working together, with all of Asia, in a partnership of equals.

Working together to build a future that is safer, more free and more prosperous.

A future in which we can all contribute fully, and achieve our full potential.

I look forward to working with you all towards this shared goal.

Thank you very much.