

Speech by veteran DAP Lim Kit Siang at the launching of the Chinese translation of Anwar Ibrahim's Asian Renaissance at the New Era College on Sunday, July 28 at 11 a.m.

Can the Thucydides Trap be avoided or will there be World War Three between United States and China?

Two years before Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim published his book "The Asian Renaissance" in 1996, he responded to Samuel Huntington's theory of "Clash of Civilisations" at the Georgetown University convocation in Washington in October 1994 and called for civilisational dialogue between East and West.

He said: "The question, however, is not whether civilizations will necessarily clash, rather whether civilizations ought to clash".

In November 1998, then-president of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, proposed a resolution to the United Nations General Assembly to declare a United Nations Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations.

Ironically, the designated year of dialogue was 2001, the year of 9/11 and the war against terrorism, giving great energy to the clash versus the dialogue side of the debate just when the dialogue counternarrative began to take hold.

This gave birth to the Alliance of Civilizations at the United Nations, the UNAOC, in 2005 under the leadership of then-Secretary General of UN, Kofi Annan, then-Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapater and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In a comment about the UN's "unjust" structure, Erdogan asked: "As Alliance of Civilisation I'd like to ask: Does the UN Security Council represent the entire world? Do its members represent all religious groups in the world? No they don't....If the UN exists for world peace, then it urgently needs reform."

In the last two decades, neither the UN Year of the Dialogue among Civilisations nor the Alliance of Civilisations have shaped the world to avoid a Clash of Civilisations to the extent that the question that is frequently asked internationally today is whether the world can avoid the Thucydides Trap or will there be a World War Three between the United States and China.

It is most appropriate that China has initiated a resolution at the 78th UN General Assembly on June 7, 2024 to designate June 10 as the International Day for Dialogue among Civilisations.

As the UN under-secretary-general and the UN Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) high representative, Miguel Moratinos, said in a statement on the occasion, “dialogue among civilizations contributes to improving awareness of universal values of humanity and enhancing understanding of the value of cultural diversity”.

As the world undergoes profound changes, China’s proposal to designate June 10 as the International Day for Dialogue among Civilisations addresses the urgency to enhance mutual understanding and solidarity among civilizations through dialogue is most meaningful and momentous, especially as coming from the Chinese Communist Party.

I was at the time in Dunhuang in China with its spectacular Mogao Caves in the Gobi Desert, with their murals, sculptures, and treasury of manuscripts — a World Heritage Site - as it was meeting point of Buddhist and Central Asian art and culture with Chinese civilisation more than two thousand years ago..

China’s proposal in the United Nations General Assembly on June 7 to make June 10 the International Day for Civilisational Dialogue made my visit to Old Silk Road from Lanzhou to Urumqui, with a tour at Jiayuguan Pass at the end of Great Wall, particularly memorable.

In fact, I will go one step further.

The 21st Century is the Asian century and all earthlings need a global mindset thinking beyond individuals, nations or even blocs of nations.

The world must make China's proposal to designate June 10 every year as the International Day for Civilisational Dialogue more successful than Iran's proposal and the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of the Dialogue among the Civilisations or the Alliance of Civilisation idea.

I propose a seven-nation committee from various civilisations to implement China's proposal of June 10 every year as International Day for Civilisational Dialogue — the nations being China, India, United States, Iran, Egypt, Turkey and Malaysia.

The inclusion of Malaysia is because Malaysia is the meeting point of various civilisations, in particular Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, Taoism and Sikhism

This international perspective make the publication of the Chinese translation of "The Asian Renaissance" in plural Malaysia particularly appropriate and relevant.

But it is not only the international aspect that this translation is appropriate and relevant.

I will even say that "the Asian Renaissance" will serve as Anwar's report card as Prime Minister in the 16th General Elections in 2026 or 2027.

In the Chapter on "Islam in Southeast Asia", he wrote:

1. "Islam came to Southeast Asia borne on the seas by Sufis and merchants rather than overland by soldiers brandishing swords. Conversion was by choice, not coercion, beginning with the urban ruling class and the trading community...(p 111)
2. "This peaceful and gradual Islamization has moulded the Southeast Asian Muslim psyche into one which is cosmopolitan, open-minded, tolerant and amenable to cultural diversity. Of

course, their outlook is also fashioned by the strong presence of people of other faiths who reciprocate Muslim tolerance. Unlike non-Muslims in the West, their perception of Islam is not distorted by the prism of the Crusades...(p 112)

3. "By being moderate and pragmatic, Southeast Asian Muslims are neither compromising the teachings and ideals of Islam nor pandering to the whims and fancies of the times. On the contrary, such an approach is necessary to realize the social ideals of Islam such as justice, equitable distribution of wealth, fundamental rights and liberties. This approach is sanctioned in a saying of the Prophet of Islam, to the effect that 'the best way to conduct your affairs is to choose the middle path.'"(p 113)

Anwar must be prepared to be judged as Prime Minister by his writings in this book.

If by the next general election Anwar is judged to have failed to measure up to lofty ideals of his book, he will suffer a grievous result: whether his premiership upholds the principle of cultural diversity - transcending the differences in ethnicity, culture and faith – safeguard the core values such as justice, virtue, compassion and public accountability or committed to end social inequalities, corruption, denial of basic liberties and downright oppression.

We are in the era of social media. If Malaysia and Asia can show the world how to deal with the extremism, intolerance, hate, lies and misinformation of the social media, to bring about and more inclusive and cohesive world, then global civilisation would have achieved a new breakthrough.

Then Anwar will join the ranks among Asian Renaissance statesmen such as Rabindranath Tagore, Mohammad Iqbal, Joe Rizal, Sun Yat Sen and Mahatma Gandhi and even become a World Renaissance personality.

- Lim Kit Siang