



President Halimah Yacob meeting Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah at the St Regis hotel in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday during her three-day state visit to Malaysia. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

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Singapore, Malaysia should set up ways for the young to build ties: President

The aim is for them to develop a stronger culture of support and understanding

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KUALA LUMPUR – Singapore and Malaysia should multiply the opportunities for their young people to build relationships across the Causeway, President Halimah Yacob said on Wednesday.

They will be the future leaders of the countries, and have to believe strongly in the importance of good bilateral relations for mutual growth, benefit and survival, she said.

She added that while ties are close now, people from the current generation in leadership lived through shared history and economy-building, and learnt together the importance of economic and social interdependence.

“But our lived experiences may not be applicable to our young ones... So, we need to provide them with opportunities, with platforms, where they can then acquire these experiences,” said Madam Halimah.

She was speaking to the media at the end of her three-day state visit

to Malaysia.

She had been invited by the Malaysian King, Sultan Abdullah Ahmad Shah, following his visit to Singapore last October.

Responding to a question on what young people from both countries can learn from one another, she said that they may have different thoughts from the older generation, and their relationships across the Causeway must be invested in to develop a stronger culture of support and understanding.

For example, there could be more exchange programmes for schoolchildren, which need not be confined only to Kuala Lumpur, but could be extended to different Malaysian states, she suggested.

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Madam Halimah said the scope of collaboration between both countries could be expanded – not just that between governments, but also in the private sector. The private sector can then look for growth areas in the individual states in Malaysia because they all have different strengths, she added.

The Singapore President also spoke about the importance of strengthening bilateral relations amid a challenging global environment with intensified tensions.

Singapore does not want to be dragged into any side, and so it wants to strengthen its ties with other countries, and also within Asean, said Madam Halimah.

Asean countries can collaborate with one another and be stronger economic partners, given the tremendous potential within the bloc and its close to 700 million people, she added.

The agreements in cyber security and the digital and green economies that the two countries signed during Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim’s visit to Singapore in January could be pathfinders applicable to the rest of Asean, said Madam Halimah.

The head of state also spoke about the state of women in politics in Singapore and Malaysia, following her meeting with four female Malaysian politicians on Tuesday evening.

She said that during the discussion, they realised the challenges that women political leaders face are the same everywhere around the world – entrenched stereo-

types and fewer opportunities.

“Women should be given a choice as to what they want to do. Then society must trust that women have the ability to understand what is the importance of their contribution, and how to benefit society and their families as well,” she said.

“It is not just the political structure that we need to think about, it is basically the whole of society that needs to have both the individual and collective realisation that women have a role to play, and they can contribute.”

In terms of opportunities, Madam Halimah noted that political parties around the world are largely dominated by men.

“If you want to see more women in politics, there must be a conscious effort, therefore, to suss out potential women leaders to enter politics, and to help them onto the political platforms,” she said, adding that she would like to see more women in politics in Singapore, beyond the 30 per cent of MPs currently.

There is also a need to help women develop and assume leadership positions elsewhere within the economy, to prepare them for a role in politics, she said.

On top of that, there has to be a strong support system for the different functions that women perform, whether in society or at home.

“Whether it is Singapore or elsewhere, women still carry the bulk of the caregiving responsibilities... That really is something that

occupies a lot of your time, so we need to provide a really supportive ecosystem if we want to see more women leaders,” she said.

On Wednesday morning, Madam Halimah also met, in her capacity as chancellor of the National University of Singapore, the Sultan of Perak and University of Malaya chancellor Nazrin Shah.

In a Facebook post, Madam Halimah said they reaffirmed the excellent ties between Singapore and Malaysia, including Perak, as well as the close cooperation between both universities.

They also discussed the importance of racial and religious harmony in building cohesive societies, and the imperative for Asean to stay united in the increasingly unpredictable geopolitical environment.

A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday said that the visit reaffirmed the warm and multi-faceted relationship between Singapore and Malaysia, and signalled the commitment of both countries to deepen their longstanding economic, cultural, educational and people-to-people linkages.

It added that the state visit was an excellent opportunity for both sides to take stock of bilateral cooperation and renew the commitment to expand cooperation in a variety of fields to improve the lives of both peoples amid an increasingly uncertain and challenging external environment.

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