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Ry Sochan | Publication date 19 December 2022 | 22:03 ICT

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Prime Minister Hun Sen receives the lifetime achievement award from the KSI at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh on December 19. SPM

Prime Minister Hun Sen on December 19 was presented with the Distinguished World Leader Lifetime Achievement Award, in recognition of his “brilliant” leadership over the past 40 years.

The award was conferred by the Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific (KSI), a Malaysia-based independent non-profit policy think tank with a focus on economic development, business and free trade.

Speaking at the award ceremony at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh, Hun Sen lauded KSI for its “successful” organisation of the Global Chinese Economic and Technology Summit and touted enhanced economic ties between ASEAN and China. He praised China’s continued support for maintaining ASEAN centrality and unity in the emerging regional architecture and promoting the mutual reinforcement of ASEAN-led mechanisms.

He urged ASEAN and China to further deepen cooperation in all fields, especially in accelerating socio-economic integration, removing trade barriers and strengthening regional supply and production chain resilience.

“ASEAN-China will continue to build on their achievements as well as enhance cooperation to promote peace, stability and development in the region and the world,” Hun Sen said.

The prime minister also expressed hope that the next generation will continue to unite with China to maintain peace and promote national and regional development based on tangible mutual benefits to all parties.

“We continue to face more problems and risks with greater uncertainty, such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical competition, an uncertain outlook for the global economic vision, climate change and the continued disruption of the supply chain and global production,” he said.

Given these challenges, he called on ASEAN and China to work together to further promote open, transparent, environmentally sound, complementary and mutually beneficial regional cooperation.

“We need to continue to increase efforts to promote other regional initiatives and cooperation to maximise the development potential of the two regions,” he said.

Hun Sen said China’s development from a poor agrarian nation just a few decades ago into a global technological superpower today is a “great achievement” that has benefited not only the Chinese people, but has also had a lot of positive consequences economically, socially and geopolitically for ASEAN and Cambodia.

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He said that Cambodia in the modern era has always been supported and assisted by China. More importantly, China provided full support during the difficult time of the Covid-19 pandemic by helping Cambodia to fully control it through a steady supply of vaccines, which contributed to a reduction of the socio-economic impact on the Kingdom.

He said that maintaining the prestige of ASEAN in all aspects globally is a goal that is inseparable from the contributions of ASEAN's dialogue partners, especially China as it is the world's second-largest economic power.

“Meanwhile, in the bilateral framework, cooperation between our two countries [Cambodia-China] has progressed politically, economically and socially. The relationship between Cambodia and China has grown proudly and is now recognised as a friendship forged with the strength of steel,” he said.

Thong Mengdavid, a research fellow at the Asian Vision Institute's Mekong Centre for Strategic Studies, said that ASEAN-China relations have improved over the past 31 years with China bringing socio-economic development to the whole ASEAN region through investments in energy, infrastructure, public health services and other sectors.

He said that ASEAN and China announced the upgrading of their relations to a “comprehensive strategic partnership” in 2021, aimed at maintaining a good relationship as neighbours while deepening cooperation in the fight against Covid-19, promoting economic growth, promoting the UN mechanisms and principles, and safeguarding peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

“China is a development partner that focuses on regional integration of economies, cultures and technologies with the goal of building a ‘single destiny community’,” said Mengdavid.