



## **MALAYSIA CALLS FOR REVITALISED RULES-BASED GLOBAL TRADING ORDER, WTO REFORMS AT 31<sup>ST</sup> APEC MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRADE (MRT) MEETING IN REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

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Malaysia, **reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to shaping a resilient, inclusive and future-ready trade environment, through a revitalised rules-based trading order and WTO reforms,** during the 31<sup>st</sup> Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Ministers Responsible for Trade (MRT) Meeting, held in Jeju, Republic of Korea from 15 to 16 May 2025.

Hosted by the Republic of Korea under the theme *“Building a Sustainable Tomorrow: Connect. Innovate. Prosper”*, the meeting brought together APEC Trade Ministers amidst a backdrop of increasing geopolitical tensions, structural economic shifts and rapid technological transformation. The Malaysian delegation was led by YB Senator Tengku Datuk Seri Utama Zafrul Abdul Aziz, Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI).

In his intervention, YB Tengku Zafrul reaffirmed Malaysia’s strong commitment to the multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at its core. Malaysia underscored that an open, transparent, and fair-trading system is essential to regional and global economic stability. Aside from calling on APEC to play a leadership role in revitalising the rules-based trading order, **Malaysia also called for the urgent restoration of WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism, and progress on key negotiations such as digital trade and fisheries subsidies.**

The Minister also emphasised Malaysia’s proactive approach to regional economic integration and sustainable development. Malaysia highlighted national initiatives such as the National AI Roadmap and the establishment of a National AI Office, both of which aim to

harness artificial intelligence to reduce trade friction, increase productivity, and strengthen supply chain transparency across borders. In addition, the Minister highlighted the **importance of aligning digital and trade facilitation frameworks across the region**. He proposed closer convergence between APEC's digital initiatives and ASEAN's Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), including mutual recognition of digital credentials and trusted trader schemes, to enhance regulatory coherence and promote seamless digital trade.

YB Tengku Zafrul said, "APEC must not merely respond to global trends, but must shape them. This means **embedding trust, interoperability and inclusivity into every initiative, particularly in our approach to AI, cross-border trade facilitation, and just climate transition**. On inclusivity, one of Malaysia's suggestions was also on the **scaling up of capacity-building efforts, particularly for small and medium enterprises, in areas such as circular economy, carbon accounting, and smart agriculture**. Real progress is when businesses of every size have sufficient capacity to benefit from advances in technology and AI to achieve sustainable growth."

In the 2025 Ministers Responsible for Trade Joint Statement, the Ministers collectively recognised the importance of the WTO to advance trade issues and reaffirmed APEC's role in creating a more resilient and prosperous Asia-Pacific region.

As part of Malaysia's broader leadership in advancing regional cooperation, and in its capacity as ASEAN Chair, **YB Tengku Zafrul also hosted the inaugural APEC-ASEAN Ministerial Caucus** on the sidelines of the MRT Meeting. Bringing together ASEAN member states that are also APEC economies, **the Caucus served as a strategic platform to align economic priorities, enhance inter-regional collaboration, and coordinate responses to shared challenges**. Under Malaysia's chairmanship, the meeting also highlighted the importance of ASEAN unity and centrality in addressing complex regional and global issues, while emphasising the importance of resolving trade tensions through dialogue and safeguarding open, fair, and inclusive trade in the face of growing protectionism.

YB Tengku Zafrul also held **bilateral discussions with key counterparts**, including **Ambassador Jamieson Greer, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR)**, to discuss issues relating to the reciprocal tariffs imposed by the United States. This high-level engagement provided Malaysia with an important opportunity to share Malaysia's proposals to address the US tariff matter. In Malaysia's capacity as ASEAN Chair, the Minister also highlighted ASEAN Member States' collective efforts in responding to the tariffs, particularly through the issuance of the Joint Statement by ASEAN Economic Ministers on 10 April 2025.

## **MINISTRY OF INVESTMENT, TRADE AND INDUSTRY (MITI)**

**16 MAY 2025**

### About MITI:

MITI is the key driver in making Malaysia the preferred destination for quality investments and enhancing the nation's rising status as a globally competitive trading nation. Its objectives and roles are oriented towards ensuring Malaysia's rapid economic development and achieving the country's stated goal of becoming a developed nation.

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