

**OPENING REMARKS FOR THE ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY COUNCIL
(AECC) SPECIAL SESSION ON ASEAN DEFA**

**BY H.E TENGKU DATUK SERI UTAMA ZAFRUL TENGKU ABDUL AZIZ, AECC
CHAIR**

Your Excellencies, esteemed AECC colleagues, the ASEAN Secretariat, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to all.

- It is my great honour to once again welcome all of you to this second special engagement on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), convened ahead of our 26th ASEAN Economic Community Council (AECC) Meeting.
- This special session provides a timely platform for us to take stock of the progress made in the DEFA negotiations and, more importantly, to deliberate on two (2) critical issues that require policy guidance from the AECC, namely:
 - i. The treatment of customs duties on electronic transmissions; and
 - ii. The application of financial services commitments with respect to the location of computing facilities.
- In addition, we will also receive an update on the Work Plan towards the full conclusion of DEFA by 2026, which will serve as a strategic roadmap for our continued collective efforts.
- Following the 14th DEFA Negotiating Committee Meeting held earlier this month, I am encouraged by the steady and tangible progress achieved since our first special session on 28 August 2025. The ongoing work of

the NC reflects our shared commitment to deliver DEFA as one of Malaysia's Priority Economic Deliverables (PEDs) for this year. It is heartening to note the growing convergence among ASEAN Member States across several chapters, driven by the strong coordination of the DEFA NC and the valuable support of the ASEAN Secretariat.

- That said, the issues before us remain complex and will require our strategic guidance and political direction to ensure that negotiations advance in a balanced, pragmatic, and forward-looking manner.
- Excellencies, as we deliberate today, let us remember that DEFA is not only about accelerating digital trade and innovation, but also about ensuring inclusivity and equitable participation, so that our MSMEs, start-ups, and communities across ASEAN can fully benefit from a trusted, secure, and interoperable digital ecosystem.
- In this spirit, let us be guided by ASEAN's enduring principles of consensus, inclusivity, and mutual benefit, while remaining bold and forward-looking in our ambition to deliver a high-quality, future-ready DEFA that reflects both the dynamism and diversity of our region.
- I am confident that through our collective wisdom and leadership, today's discussions will help chart a clear and actionable path towards the timely conclusion and signing of DEFA by 2026. This will not only reaffirm ASEAN's leadership in shaping the global digital economy, but also ensure that our people and businesses remain at the heart of this transformation.
- With that, I thank you and let us move to the next agenda.