



## **OPENING REMARKS BY**

**YB SENATOR TENGKU DATUK SERI UTAMA ZAFRUL  
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MINISTER OF INVESTMENT, TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

**FOR**

**REGIONAL SOCIALISATION OF THE ASEAN ECONOMIC  
COMMUNITY (AEC) STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE  
ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045**

**12 JUNE 2025 (THURSDAY) | 0920 – 0935 HRS  
DEWAN PERDANA, MITI  
KUALA LUMPUR**

**Excellencies from ASEAN Member States and Dialogue  
Partners joining us virtually**

**His Hon. Liew Chin Tong**

Deputy Minister of MITI

**Datuk Hanafi Sakri**

Acting Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General  
(Industry) of MITI,

**Your Excellency Attorney Allan B. Gepty**

Undersecretary, Department of Trade and Industry of the  
Philippines

**Your Excellency Tiffany McDonald**

Australia's Ambassador to ASEAN

**Dr. Ahmad Zafarullah Abdul Jalil**

Director of the ASEAN Integration Monitoring Directorate  
ASEAN Secretariat

**Mr. Shameer Khanal**

Cooperation Area Lead For ASEAN, Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

## **Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Assalamualaikum w.b.t., *Salam Sejahtera, Salam Malaysia Madani* and warm greetings to all.

1. Thank you for your presence here today – whether virtually or in person – at the Regional Socialisation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Strategic Plan of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.
2. MITI feels privileged to host this crucial stakeholder engagement session. This has been made possible with the firm support from the ASEAN Secretariat, and Australia for ASEAN Futures and GIZ<sup>1</sup>, as well as our private sector partners. Your respective contributions are critical to the success of ASEAN's economic integration and future achievements, so a big thank you to all of you.
3. Today's programme is **a follow-up to the signing of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future**, by our esteemed Leaders at the 46<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit on 26 May 2025, which also marked the **launch of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Strategic Plan 2026–2030**.

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<sup>1</sup> Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) is a service provider in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development.

4. Our **key objective today** is to **socialise this AEC Strategic Plan**, which reflects a shared commitment to shaping a resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking ASEAN over the next five years.
5. I believe the ASEAN Secretariat and MITI have put together a **robust engagement programme** - with esteemed panellists and regional experts – to help **highlight the opportunities and potential of ASEAN's next phase of economic integration**.
6. To the **almost 600** attendees of this forum, whether virtually or in person, we **appreciate your time and expertise** to help us clearly outline the **tangible benefits of better economic integration to businesses, civil society, academia, and all stakeholders** in ASEAN.

## **GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Ladies and Gentlemen.

7. At its core, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) **envisioned ASEAN as a single market and production base** — highly competitive, equitably developed, and fully integrated into the global economy.

8. Indeed, ASEAN has progressively embraced economic liberalisation since its establishment in 1967, with the creation of the **ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)** in 1992 - a key milestone. Since then, efforts have continued apace - deepening trade integration, encouraging interdependence in goods and services, facilitating productive flows of foreign direct investment (FDI), and strengthening ASEAN's position in global supply chains.
9. However, **globalisation** – once the driving force behind ASEAN's integration into global value chains and steady economic growth – **is fast being upended by recent geopolitical tensions, as well as trade and tariff wars.**
10. As the global order is being reshaped, **the only certainty is uncertainty** – which is not conducive for business growth and investor confidence. This, in turn, poses **serious risks to ASEAN's growth, resilience, security and long-term potential.**

## **ASEAN'S STRONG FUNDAMENTALS**

Ladies and Gentlemen.

11. Amid those challenges, **ASEAN must recalibrate its post-2025 economic integration framework.** Today's challenging landscape calls for **agility over aggressive growth**, and **resilience over radical expansion.**
12. In achieving that aim, ASEAN Member States' **collective response must be calm, collected and calibrated.** To that end, as ASEAN Chair, Malaysia has convened various **engagement sessions with Economic Ministers and Dialogue Partners** to chart a **coordinated approach** that will continue to shape ASEAN's external engagements.
13. Indeed, it is such coordination that has seen ASEAN **grow steadily over the past decade, averaging 4.4% annually.** ASEAN has a **680-million strong market, natural resources and young talent.** Coupled with its principles of **neutrality and centrality**, ASEAN is well-positioned to **play a bigger role in global supply chains, drive global trade and attract more investments.**
14. ASEAN also offers a **stable, predictable environment for various businesses to thrive.** All these are features that businesses and investors desperately need, but **features which other regions cannot easily replicate.** And those attributes are set to help ASEAN become **the world's fourth-largest economy by 2030.**

15. These **strong ASEAN fundamentals** assure us that while **the rest of the world may crack** under the **pressure of escalating geopolitical tensions**, ASEAN will **continue to strive and thrive**, thanks to its **Economic and Supply-Chain Complementarities**, as well as the spirit of **Inclusivity and Sustainability**.
16. So, to those considering doing business and investing in ASEAN, let me assure you that, regardless of where global trends may lead, **ASEAN Member States** remain **committed** to support a **transparent, free, fair and inclusive rules-based multilateral trading system** with the **WTO at its core**.

## **AEC STRATEGIC PLAN**

Ladies and Gentlemen.

17. Let me now delve deeper into the AEC Strategic Plan. As the successor to the AEC Blueprint 2025, the AEC Strategic Plan marks another key milestone **towards ASEAN's deeper economic integration and sustainable growth**. Structured in **5-year cycles** until 2045, it will **keep ASEAN's policies current and updated**, so we can be **more responsive to evolving business needs** and emerging challenges.

18. As the first instalment of this long-term vision, the **AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030** serves as a **comprehensive roadmap that outlines a clear and actionable path** forward. This has been carefully developed to implement the **economic aspects** of the **ASEAN Community Vision 2045**, by harnessing ASEAN's vast opportunities and potential.
19. I am sure the various **tangible economic benefits and opportunities** provided by the **AEC Strategic Plan** will be explored in depth during today's Panel Discussions.
20. For now, I wish to briefly highlight some of Malaysia's perspectives on the AEC Strategic Plan.
21. **One**, through the AEC Strategic Plan, ASEAN aspires to **significantly enhance intra-ASEAN trade by boosting interconnectedness of the single market** for goods, services and investments. By further **reducing persistent non-trade barriers**, we can realise the **fuller potential of intra-ASEAN trade**. This is what will strengthen ASEAN's competitiveness and build greater resilience against external shocks.



22. **Two**, the AEC Strategic Plan clearly demonstrates **ASEAN's readiness to embrace transformation, enhance connectivity, and promote innovation**, all anchored on the core principles of sustainability and inclusivity. This preparedness surely **strengthens ASEAN's global positioning and attractiveness**.
23. We are confident that ASEAN's efforts on, among others, **manufacturing productivity, resource efficiency, green financing and investments** as well as **energy security and sustainability**, will ensure that this region has the resilience to face future challenges and embrace golden opportunities.
24. **Three**, the AEC Strategic Plan places emphasises on establishing a **forward-looking digital economic framework** that is expected to **double ASEAN's digital economy to reach US\$2 trillion by 2030**.
25. **Four**, despite isolationist policies by some parts of the global economy, the AEC Strategic Plan strongly reinforces **ASEAN's commitment to market openness and proactive engagement with external partners**.

26. ASEAN seeks to enhance engagements with not only traditional markets and established Dialogue Partners, but also new markets, for our goods, services and investments. This will **reduce over-dependence on selected economies,** thereby **strengthening ASEAN's macroeconomic resilience.**

## Closing Remarks

Ladies and Gentlemen.

27. Given the diverse background and nationalities of today's attendees, I am confident today's multi-stakeholder gathering represents the views from across the region.
28. This dedicated platform demonstrates **ASEAN's continued efforts in promoting visibility and relevance of the AEC Strategic Plan.**
29. As Chair, we must also ensure that its **aspirations are not just conceptual**, but also **very real**, once realised and materialised for the benefit of ASEAN's businesses, sectoral industries and population.
30. On that note, well done to all those who have made this event a success, and I look forward to seeing the fruitful outcomes from today's sessions.

Thank you.