



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY YAB DATO' SERI ANWAR BIN IBRAHIM PRIME MINISTER  
ASEAN INVESTMENT CONFERENCE ASEAN 2025: FORGING A RESILIENT AND  
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CONVENTION CENTRE**

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The global trading system is under intense strain, more so than at any point in recent memory. Last week, the United States unveiled its latest turn toward economic nationalism – sweeping tariffs on all imports, being part and parcel of what has been dubbed as “Trump tariffs against the rest of world.”

Malaysia’s trade with the United States has long been a model of mutual gain. Our exports support not just growth here but high-quality jobs across the United States. This commercial relationship has served both countries well but these measures may end up harming all.

Yet, we do not believe in megaphone diplomacy. As part of our soft diplomacy of quiet engagement, we will be despatching our officials to Washington to begin the process of dialogue. There may be limited room to revisit the underlying intent, but there is still scope for adjusting the policy’s implementation.

In the meantime, Malaysia will adapt, as we always have. Winds may shift, but we do not drift. Our trade diversification strategy is already gathering pace.

While we intend to remain steadfast trade partners with the US, we will, in tandem, do whatever it takes to safeguard our economic interests. This includes engaging proactively with the US towards achieving a mutually beneficial outcome and at the same time, diversifying and strengthening our ties with all major trade markets across the EU, Asia, Middle East and Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These efforts are not occurring in a vacuum. They unfold against a backdrop of mounting uncertainty, one that transcends any single country’s policy choices. Globalisation, once assumed to be forging ahead, now appears to be in retreat.

Protectionism is resurgent, supply chains are being reconfigured, and multilateralism is increasingly spoken of in the past tense.

In this environment, ASEAN stands out as a beacon of hope and positivity. We are still broadly committed to openness, cooperation and institutional continuity. Our total trade in goods stands at 3.5 trillion dollars. But this figure is not guaranteed. With the barrage of tariffs sweeping across the world in fast and furious fashion, we are witnessing the fraying of the global order. Therefore, ASEAN must rely more on itself.

This means strengthening intra-ASEAN trade. We must move beyond rhetoric to execution. Tariff liberalisation within the region is largely complete, but regulatory alignment, cross-border logistics, and digital connectivity remain unfinished business.

It also means safeguarding and expanding our external linkages. Our Dialogue and Sectoral Partners span six continents. Few regional blocs can claim such a network. As Chair this year, Malaysia will prioritise the revitalisation of strategic platforms such as the ASEAN Plus Three as mechanisms for economic resilience.

Our vision for ASEAN is a prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive region. This will require political will, serious capital, fortitude and a strong dose of good fortune. It will also require swift progress in initiatives at the sub-regional level.

A key example in this regard is the Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone. While this will not be a silver bullet, it is nevertheless a significant step. By lowering barriers and coordinating policy between two closely linked economies, we create a demonstration effect: a case study in cross-border economic logic. Malaysia is also committed to invest in developing our border areas such as in the northern peninsula with Thailand, Sabah and Sarawak border with Kalimantan to promote economic activities for the benefit of people on both sides of the border.

Resilience also requires investment in infrastructure that can weather storms, both literal and financial. Our Southeast Asian neighbours are especially prone to natural disasters. Furthermore, the effects of climate change have become more insidious. Our capacity to manage adverse weather events, safeguard critical infrastructure and protect vulnerable communities must be significantly improved.

Green growth is no longer a matter of environmental virtue, but a strategic economic necessity. Technologies such as carbon capture, circular production models, and low-emission innovation are not peripheral experiments. Indeed, they are poised to define the industrial landscape of the coming decade.

And then there is the digital economy: a space of both great promise and great inequality. The region's digital transformation is well underway, but uneven. Meantime, the trajectory of artificial intelligence is surging ahead with the speed of lightning. If the asymmetrical digital progress is left unchecked, it risks deepening divides. Investments in digital literacy, infrastructure, empowerment and governance must go hand in hand.

Meanwhile, the small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the bulk of our employment base, yet are often the most exposed to shocks and the least equipped to respond. Compliance with global sustainability standards is daunting for a company of, say, five people. That is why Malaysia, with the support of our partners, is launching the ASEAN Simplified ESG Disclosure Guide for SMEs. This is a practical tool to help small businesses take their first steps towards more sustainable and transparent operations.

It is initiatives like these – concrete and grounded – that will decide whether our vision for ASEAN becomes a reality or fades into a footnote of history.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At times like these, there is a temptation to retreat into nostalgia or fatalism, to assume that the international order is beyond repair or that regional cooperation is too slow to matter.

But ASEAN has always been a creature of evolution, not revolution. Its strength lies not in drama, but in durability. Over nearly six decades, it has withstood wars, crises, and coups, and still managed to inch forward, often frustratingly, but forward nonetheless.

Today, even more pertinent than ever, we must pursue greater economic integration in ASEAN. During this week's ASEAN Finance Track, as you will hear of various efforts to strengthen our economic cooperation. These include:

- a. The ASEAN power grid: We are engaging with the private sector investors and also MDBs like the ADB and the World Bank on financing projects to transmit electricity from Vietnam to Kelantan via submarine cables and on to Singapore via on land transmission lines;
- b. Expanding ASEAN payment connectivity: We currently enjoy digital payment connectivity between Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. Later today, we launch extending the payment linkage to between Malaysia and Cambodia, with the ambition to cover the other nations in ASEAN. This will help promote intra-ASEAN trade and tourism;

c. Promoting greater economic integration to enable businesses to better leverage on ASEAN as a market, to further grow regional champions in sectors including financial services, energy, healthcare tourism, telecommunications and logistics.

The Trump tariffs are not the first challenge to multilateralism, nor will they be the last. But if ASEAN can hold its nerve – staying open, pragmatic and cohesive – it may yet be among the last believers in a world that works better when it works together.

With that, I am pleased to launch the ASEAN Simplified ESG Disclosure Guide for SMEs in Supply Chains.

Thank you.

**--BERNAMA**