

Keynote Address at the First ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting

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PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA**

AT THE

FIRST ASEAN DIGITAL MINISTERS MEETING

(1ST ASEAN DIGITAL MINISTERS' MEETING – ADGMIN1)

PUTRAJAYA, MALAYSIA,

21-22 JANUARY 2021

Honourable ASEAN Ministers
ASEAN Secretary-General, (Dato Lim Jock Hoi)
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Alhamdulillah – Praise be to Allah that we are able to gather today for this first meeting of ASEAN Digital Ministers (ADGMIN1) which has to be held virtually at this time when this region and the rest of the world are still furiously battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Malaysia highly values the honour it has been accorded to chair this maiden meeting which carries the theme “ASEAN: A Digitally Connected Community”.

3. If I may recall, the 1st ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers (ASEAN TELMIN) Meeting, now renamed ADGMIN1, was held in Kuala Lumpur way back in July 2001.

4. That meeting was physical in nature, with all visiting delegates getting to experience the sights and sounds of Malaysia and the hospitality of Malaysians, unlike this virtual meeting we are having today.

5. Nevertheless, the fact that we are able to meet in a virtual environment, given the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates the progress ASEAN is making as a digitally-connected community.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. ASEAN, undoubtedly, has seen progress in the digital environment although the level of advancement may differ from one member state to another as well as between areas within each member state.

7. As you may all be aware, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 (AEC 2025) recognises Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as the key driver in ASEAN's economic and social transformation.

8. It states that AEC 2025 will aspire to propel ASEAN towards a digitally-enabled economy that is secure, sustainable and transformative and to further leverage the ICT for an innovative, inclusive and integrated ASEAN.

9. I do not wish to dwell on AEC 2025 here but it may be useful to bear in mind the outlined key ICT strategic measures, with the emphasis on the importance of centralisation and unity in the efforts to develop the ASEAN Community in the areas of cybersecurity, personal data protection, 5G, and promoting innovations and e-commerce.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. It may not be an overstatement, I believe, to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has given the ASEAN member states the unanticipated nudge to move faster down the digital road.

11. I can say for sure that the pandemic has accelerated the growth of digital economy in Malaysia. Things have changed drastically on a daily and, sometimes, on an hourly basis.

12. The Malaysian Government has identified digital economy as one of the key economic growth areas to achieve our national commitment of elevating the country to be a nation of sustainable growth while ensuring fair and equitable distribution across income groups, ethnicities and regions.

13. We will drive forward the promise of shared prosperity for all, by focusing on empowering Malaysians with digital skills, enabling digitally-powered businesses and driving digital investments.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. I understand that Malaysia has been given the honour to coordinate the development of the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 (ADM2025) that will be launched at ADGMIN1.

15. ADM2025 aims to guide the development of the ASEAN digital sector over the next five years, and incorporates efforts to support digital transformation for the traditional sectors, creates a fair and competitive digital marketplace, builds a safe and reliable digital environment, creates intelligent digital citizens, realizes ASEAN as an inclusive, sustainable and accessible digital ecosystem and, eventually, creates ASEAN as a competitive digital economy bloc.

16. The ADM2025 continues to build on the efforts of the previous two Masterplans, the ASEAN ICT Masterplan 2015 and 2020, but reflects the changing landscape and pervasiveness of ICTs whereby digitalisation now cuts across multiple sectors of the economy, impacting the way we work, live and play.

17. I am confident that ADGMIN1 will be able to strengthen the cooperation among ASEAN countries in developing a digital ecosystem as the backbone in its post-COVID-19 development plan.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. ASEAN, as a region, has continuously discussed and expressed our support to the existing set of international rules, norms and principles of responsible behaviour of states in cyberspace.

19. We are the first region that has expressed agreement to subscribe, in principle to the 11 voluntary, non-binding norms recommended by the 2015 United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) Report.

20. This statement demonstrates ASEAN commitment in moving forward the issues of rules, norms and principles of responsible behaviour of states in cyberspace, as well as focusing on regional capacity-building in implementing these norms.

21. Perhaps, we could initiate effective cooperation to build upon what we have set in motion, and explore closer collaborations in our endeavours of ensuring a safe and secure cyberspace.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. ASEAN member states could consider legislation on data privacy and users' rights that can be applied to any digital entity practising in the region.

23. Digital platforms could be required to assume greater accountability, allowing them to be sued as long as they have control over their products.

24. ASEAN could also consider stronger legislation pertaining to hate speech that, among others, compels digital platforms to remove or/and mete out punishment for any speech wilfully promoting violence and attacks, be it verbal or physical, including but not limited to harassment and threats against a person or persons based on their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability or nationality.

25. I believe there are areas under the present laws which need to be reviewed to accommodate new technologies and challenges, especially in the parameters of security in cyberspace.

26. Technology has evolved at a rapid pace and so does the emergence of new cyber threats and new challenges.

27. Consequently, there must be a mechanism to enable the existing laws to be applied in cyberspace and new laws be enacted if the need arises.

28. Malaysia also recognizes the cross-border nature of cybercrimes and the challenges in bringing cybercriminals to justice as this requires a coordinated and integrated regional approach.

29. We must be mindful that cyber threats are rapidly changing and encroaching into every sphere of our lives, including how we communicate, how we work, how we conduct online transactions, how we carry out purchases and even how we defend our national security. They have also become more sophisticated, complicated and transboundary in nature.

30. In this regard, ASEAN member states can no longer operate and work in isolation.

31. I wish to emphasize here that Malaysia is committed to providing greater efficiency and connectivity for people across the region.

32. As such, Malaysia is moving towards these security objectives with a comprehensive plan and strategy to provide a secure, trusted and resilient cyberspace, while at the same time fostering economic prosperity for the well-being of all ASEAN member countries. Malaysia is ever willing to share our expertise and experiences with our ASEAN member states.

33. Besides these initiatives, ASEAN could consider setting up a fund as a means of improving digital and Internet infrastructure among member states.

34. We could also come up with an online platform to connect small- and medium-sized businesses and artisans across the region, selling original goods directly to consumers, thus, easing transactions.

35. A board of trustees with members appointed from ASEAN countries could determine the company that will be set up, maintain and run the platform.

36. As a community and as a region, ASEAN is now more important than ever. For countless generations, we, the people of South-East Asia, have traded and worked with China and Japan as well as the United States of America.

37. These are the world's biggest economies and also the most developed and sophisticated in the digital era. There may be differences and tensions across the Pacific between the United States and China, but we are happy to work with them all.

38. In so doing, we stand to gain from each of these partner countries. While we hope they can cooperate better together, we should also cooperate more with each one of them.

39. By working through ASEAN Plus Three, we can promote digital engagements and encourage ICT investments from China, Japan and South Korea. The best digital advances now in North-East Asia can be writ-large for the larger East Asia.

40. By working with our key ASEAN Dialogue Partners in North America, we can expand global digital best practices into our region. We should leverage strategically on these facets of ASEAN to provide the best possible opportunities for our people, in particular for our future and our younger generation.

41. ASEAN Member States may not be among the world's most developed nations, at least not in the old development context. However, technology

now offers the prospect of leapfrogging in development through a new digital context.

42. To succeed, we need to be finely attuned to the imperatives of the movements and the industry by acknowledging the challenges and the realities, and making the best of them to fashion the right opportunities we want.

43. We are not lacking in term of human resources so vital to the task. Our people can be trained in the best institutions in the world as some have already been.

44. The main challenge before us right now is staying ahead of the curve in two principal areas: mitigating cybercrime and advancing the digital economy. These two concerns sometimes turn out to be the same thing.

45. Our national enforcement agencies must be equipped with state-of-the-art tools to fight cybercrime such as in digital forensics. They must also be fully integrated regionwide to be really effective against cross-border transgressions.

46. There can be no acceptable reason for falling short. Member states should have more resources and determination than criminal syndicates.

47. ASEAN authorities should also be fully and constantly engaged with the United Nations and other multilateral institutions. Productive synergies must be developed from working on common norms, conventions and protocols.

48. Economic development has always been a core priority for ASEAN and the ravaging Covid-19 has made it even more so. The digital economy is uniquely placed to boost our economies, structurally and sustainably.

49. We know the choices we have to make. Let us make them together to streamline our efforts, optimize our performances, and maximize our potentials in the ASEAN spirit for all the relevant stakeholders.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

50. In conclusion, I would like to congratulate and thank the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia, Malaysia, for its role in organising this meeting and coordinating the event.

51. I would also like to record my appreciation to all fellow ASEAN member states for placing their trust in Malaysia to host this first ADGMIN1 meeting.

52. On that note, I wish you a fruitful discussion and meaningful interaction over the course of this meeting.

Thank you.

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