BRIEF

KSI
KNOWLEDGE · STRATEGY · INNOVATION
STRATEGIC INSTITUTE FOR ASIA PACIFIC

ASEAN LEADERSHIP & PARTNERSHIP FORUM

NAVIGATING ASEAN IN A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ERA: KEEPING CENTRALITY, SECURING PROSPERITY AND EMPOWERING PEOPLE

6th May 2026, The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The ASEAN Leadership and Partnership Forum (ALPF) 2026 brought together government leaders, policymakers, parliamentarians, business executives, academics, and regional stakeholders to discuss ASEAN's strategic priorities amid growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty. The forum examined the impact of global conflicts on trade, energy security, and supply chains, while also exploring opportunities in digital transformation, AI integration, sustainable financing, renewable energy, and regional connectivity. Through high-level discussions, leadership sessions, and collaborative dialogue, the forum reinforced the importance of ASEAN centrality, regional resilience, sustainable growth, and cross-border cooperation in navigating an increasingly complex global environment.

Welcome Remarks

Mr. Jose Ma. A. Concepcion III, Chairman, ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) Philippines

ASEAN Centrality & Regional Integration

ASEAN centrality is presented as the foundation of the region's economic security, geopolitical relevance, and collective strength in a changing global order. The ASEAN bloc is highlighted as a major global economic force due to its large population and expanding combined economic output. Regional integration is emphasized as essential for sustaining long-term growth, stability, and competitiveness in the global economy.

Strategic Economic Priorities for Growth

The speech prioritizes strengthening food security, improving supply chain resilience, and deepening trade and investment cooperation across the region. It highlights digital transformation initiatives such as upgraded ASEAN platforms designed to connect MSMEs with funding, mentorship, and market access. It stresses the importance of investing in innovation, artificial intelligence, energy, and agriculture to support sustainable and future-ready economic development.

From Vision to Measurable Impact

Mr. Jose Ma. A. Concepcion III called for a shift from dialogue and discussion to concrete implementation and real-world results. Success is defined by tangible outcomes such as increased investments, job creation, and expanded economic opportunities. The overall goal is to ensure inclusive growth that benefits businesses, entrepreneurs, workers, farmers, and communities across ASEAN.

Tan Sri Dr. Munir Majid, Chairman, CARI ASEAN Research and Advocacy, President, ASEAN Business Club Chairman, International Advisory Board, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, Malaysia

ASEAN Leadership & a New World Economic Order

The speech calls on ASEAN and the Global South to take a more active leadership role in shaping a fairer and more stable global economic system. It emphasizes that ASEAN centrality must be demonstrated through practical cooperation and implementation rather than declarations and rhetoric alone. Regional trade frameworks such as RCEP and CPTPP are highlighted as important foundations for building stronger economic integration and global influence.

Geopolitical Challenges & Economic Pressures

Tan Sri Dr. Munir Majid warns that growing geopolitical tensions and global conflicts are creating serious economic uncertainty and instability. Rising energy prices, inflation, and disruptions to supply chains are identified as major threats that could significantly impact ASEAN economies.

Regional Cooperation & Long-Term Resilience

The speech stresses the importance of stronger regional cooperation, policy coordination,

and economic resilience in addressing both immediate and long-term challenges. ASEAN is encouraged to strengthen partnerships and create more coherent economic systems that can better withstand global disruptions. Despite current uncertainties, the speaker expresses optimism that ASEAN can emerge stronger by taking decisive leadership and maintaining its commitment to regional prosperity and stability.

Special Address

YABhg. Tun Dato' Seri Utama Ahmad Fuzi bin Haji Abdul Razak, Former Governor of Penang, Former Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia

Preserving ASEAN Centrality in a Shifting Global Order

The keynote address stressed the importance of ASEAN maintaining its unity, neutrality and strategic relevance amid growing geopolitical tensions, great power rivalry and global uncertainty. The speaker emphasised that ASEAN centrality must remain the foundation of regional diplomacy and cooperation.

Strengthening Regional Prosperity Through Cooperation and Connectivity

The speech highlighted the need for ASEAN member states to deepen economic collaboration, improve regional connectivity and strengthen partnerships in trade, investment, technology and sustainable development to ensure long-term regional prosperity.

Empowering People Through Inclusive and People-Centred Development

The address underscored that ASEAN's progress must ultimately benefit its people by creating opportunities, enhancing social inclusion, improving livelihoods and ensuring that development remains equitable and sustainable across the region.

Enhancing ASEAN Leadership and Strategic Partnerships

The former governor called for stronger leadership, dialogue and multilateral engagement among governments, businesses and institutions, stressing that ASEAN must continue building constructive partnerships while remaining resilient, adaptive and united in facing future challenges.

Session 1: Strategic Resilience: Navigating the Global Economic and Energy Crisis and Supply Chain Landscape

Speakers: H.E. Dr. Kirida Bhaopichitr, Vice Minister for Commerce of Thailand**; Mr. Nguyen Quang Vinh,** Executive Vice Chairman, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) / Executive Chairman, Vietnam Business Council for Sustainable Development (VBCSD) / Chairman, ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) VietNam; **Dato' Ramesh Kodammal,** Chairman**,** ASEAN India Economic Council (AIEC), Founder / Chairman, Goldtex Group, Malaysia; **Mr. Chris Humphrey,** Executive Director, EU-ASEAN Business Council, Singapore; **Mr. William Lee,** Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Easybook; **Mr. Alan Tan,** Chief Economist, Affin Group, Malaysia; **Mr. Mohd Sedek Jantan,** Director, Investment Strategist and Country Economist, IPPFA

Moderator: Tan Sri Dr. Munir Majid, Chairman, CARI ASEAN Research and Advocacy, President, ASEAN Business Club, Chairman, International Advisory Board, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, Malaysia

Impact of the Middle East Crisis on Global Markets and Supply Chains

Speakers discussed how the escalating Middle East crisis had driven up global energy prices, resulting in higher transportation, logistics, and manufacturing costs that affected businesses and consumers worldwide. The increase in fuel and raw material prices was expected to place additional pressure on inflation, trade performance, and consumer spending, particularly in export-oriented ASEAN economies that relied heavily on stable global supply chains and international market demand.

Strengthening Long-Term Economic, Energy, and Food Security Resilience

Panelists emphasized that ASEAN countries must accelerate long-term structural reforms by investing in renewable energy, strengthening food security, and diversifying supply chains to reduce vulnerability to future geopolitical and economic shocks. Countries such as Thailand were highlighted for promoting solar infrastructure and electric vehicles, while ASEAN's agricultural capacity positioned the region to play a stronger role in global food security and sustainable economic development.

ASEAN's Continued Role as a Regional Growth and Investment Hub

Despite increasing geopolitical uncertainty and slowing global economic conditions, ASEAN continued to be viewed as one of the world's most attractive growth regions due to its young and digitally connected population, expanding middle class, and growing renewable energy and technology sectors. International speakers from Europe and India reaffirmed the importance of deeper collaboration with ASEAN in areas such as AI, manufacturing, trade diversification, food security, and sustainable investment.

Transportation Digitalization and the Shift Toward Electric Mobility

The transportation industry highlighted the urgent need to transition toward electric mobility and digitalized systems in response to rising fuel costs and sustainability concerns. Discussions focused on how digitalization could improve operational efficiency and reduce costs in bus and ferry services, while ASEAN countries explored opportunities for regional cooperation in cross-border EV charging infrastructure and greener transportation networks to support long-term environmental and economic goals.

Session 2: Future of Digital Economy and Green Energy Transition

Speakers: Dato' Seri Dr. Vaseehar Hassan Abdul Razack, Executive Vice Chairman, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, Malaysia, Director, Bank Rakyat**; Dr. (HC) Noni Sri Ayati Purnomo,** President Commissioner, Bluebird Group Holding, Indonesia, Deputy President Commissioner, PT Blue Bird Tbk; **Ms. Josephine Romero,** Senior Adviser to the ASEAN BAC PH Chair and Adviser for Go Negosyo, Angat Lahat Sa Digital, Philippines**; Mr. Matthew Chen,** Chief Executive Officer, OneConnect Financial Technology (International)**; Mr. Shazali Sulaiman,** Founder & Partner, Shazali & Partners, Brunei Darussalam, Co-Chairman, ASEAN Economic Club (AEC); **Mr. JJ Samuel A. Soriano,** Chairman & Chief Executive Officer, Soriano Trust Co. Ltd, Philippines; **Ms. Arina Kok,** Asia-Pacific Climate Change Advisory Leader; Asean Climate Change and Sustainability Services Co-Leader; Malaysia Climate Change and Sustainability Services (CCaSS) Leader; and Partner, Ernst & Young Consulting Sdn Bhd; **Ms. Rossana A. Fajardo,** Country Managing Partner, SGV (EY Philippines)

Moderator: Datuk Seri Mohd Iqbal Rawther, Deputy Chairman, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, Malaysia, Chairman, Economic Club of Kuala Lumpur (ECKL)

ESG Compliance and Sustainable Financing Became Central to Regional Economic Planning

Financial institutions, corporations, and policymakers highlighted the growing importance of ESG compliance and sustainable financing in shaping ASEAN's future economic landscape. Banks were increasingly aligning investment priorities with sustainability principles, while digital technologies were being used to strengthen transparency, improve ESG monitoring, and help businesses meet evolving international sustainability standards and investor expectations.

The Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) Was Positioned as a Key Driver of Regional Digital Integration

Speakers described DEFA as a transformative framework that would harmonize digital regulations across ASEAN, lower compliance costs, facilitate seamless cross-border data exchange, and strengthen trust in regional digital trade systems. The agreement was expected to create greater opportunities for SMEs and entrepreneurs by lowering barriers to entry and enabling businesses of all sizes to participate more effectively in ASEAN's rapidly expanding digital economy.

AI Upskilling, Mentorship, and Education Reform Were Critical for Future Workforce Development

Panelists emphasized the urgent need for ASEAN countries to move beyond basic digital literacy and invest in large-scale AI upskilling, mentorship programmes, and education reform to prepare the region's workforce for rapidly evolving technological demands. Discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening foundational learning, critical thinking, and adaptive skills from an early age to ensure future generations could successfully navigate AI-driven industries and increasingly digital workplaces.

Regional Cooperation on Energy Transition, Digital Governance, and Investment Attraction Was Essential to ASEAN Centrality

Speakers stressed that ASEAN's long-term competitiveness and centrality would depend on stronger regional cooperation in areas such as energy connectivity, digital governance, sustainability reporting, and tax harmonization. Discussions on the ASEAN power grid, sustainable infrastructure financing, and coordinated policy frameworks underscored the importance of execution, regulatory alignment, and talent development in attracting long-term investment and supporting a resilient, digitally connected, and sustainable regional economy.

Luncheon Welcome Remarks

Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, Chairman, ASEAN Economic Club, President, KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, Malaysia

ASEAN Cooperation & Regional Dialogue

The speech emphasises the importance of bringing together governments, businesses, and civil society to address ASEAN's shared challenges and opportunities. It highlights strong regional participation from ASEAN member states and international representatives, reflecting the importance of multilateral cooperation and dialogue. The forum is positioned as a platform for strengthening ASEAN centrality, governance, and regional partnerships in an increasingly complex global environment.

Future-Proofing ASEAN's Growth & Stability

The address stresses the need for ASEAN to become more resilient and future-ready through stronger regional integration and cooperation. Key priorities identified include energy security, food security, housing security, digital economy development, and green transition initiatives. The speaker also highlights innovation, digital frameworks, and sustainable economic growth as critical pillars for ASEAN's long-term prosperity and competitiveness.

Luncheon Address

YB Senator Dato Awang Bemee Bin Awang Ali Basah, President of the Senate, Malaysia

The Role of ASEAN Parliaments in strengthening ASEAN Governance, Centrality and Connectivity

Strengthening ASEAN Governance Through Parliamentary Accountability

The speech emphasised that ASEAN parliaments are essential in ensuring transparency, accountability and public trust by debating policies, scrutinising governments and representing the concerns of citizens at the national level.

Reinforcing ASEAN Centrality in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape

Amid rising geopolitical tensions, an economic fragmentation and global uncertainty, the address stressed that ASEAN centrality must be continuously strengthened through unity, cooperation, credible institutions and a shared regional purpose.

Enhancing Regional Connectivity and Inclusive Development

YB Senator Dato Awang Bemee Bin Awang Ali Basah highlighted the importance of both physical and institutional connectivity, citing initiatives such as the ASEAN Power Grid and

the Digital Economy Framework Agreement as examples of ASEAN cooperation that directly benefits people across the region.

Building a More People-Centred and Resilient ASEAN

The speech underscored that ASEAN must remain relevant to ordinary citizens by ensuring regional cooperation delivers practical benefits such as peace, economic opportunities, energy security and digital inclusion, with parliaments serving as a bridge between regional ambitions and public realities.

Kingsley Advisory and Strategic Initiatives Sdn Bhd
Published in May 2026

Copyright Notice
2026 Kingsley Advisory and Strategic Initiatives Sdn Bhd
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means; electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission from Kingsley Advisory and Strategic Initiatives Sdn Bhd

Prepared by:
Research Department
KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific

Contact Information:
A-08-01, Plaza Mont Kiara, 2, Jalan Kiara, Mont Kiara, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
T +603 6419 9698
F +603 6419 9683
E info@kasi.asia
W www.kasi.asia