



H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN
Opening Remarks
Commemorative Reception as a culmination of
the ASEAN-India Friendship Year 2022
14 March 2023, The Westin Hotel Jakarta

Excellency Jayant N Khobragade, Ambassador of India to ASEAN,

Excellency Kok Li Peng, Permanent Representative of Singapore to ASEAN,

Members of the Committee of Permanent Representative to ASEAN (CPR),

Excellencies, Ambassadors, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Jayant for his leadership and collaboration in further advancing ASEAN-India cooperation.

Last year marked an important milestone in the ASEAN-India partnership in light of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-India relations, and the designation of the year as ASEAN-India Friendship Year.

The undertaking is a testament to three decades of productive and mutually beneficial partnership between ASEAN and India, which are multidimensional and underpinned by robust trade and strong socio-cultural and political ties between the two sides.

Throughout the Friendship Year, ASEAN and India have successfully implemented fruitful commemorative activities in various sectors of cooperation. To highlight a few, the *ASEAN-India Start-up Festival 2022* showcased that ASEAN has a vibrant and promising start-up ecosystem. Likewise, *the ASEAN India Music Festival 2022* has successfully bridged the best of Southeast Asian and Indian music whilst also highlighting our shared cultural trajectories dating back to ancient times.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This commemorative reception is also a good occasion for us to celebrate the establishment of the *ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*, and reflects on ways and means to augment this CSP to ensure it becomes substantive, meaningful and mutually beneficial to both sides in the coming years.

ASEAN and India have a strong common interest in ensuring regional peace, security and stability, since these are essential pre-requisites for progress and prosperity. To this end, we encourage India's continued support to the ASEAN Centrality in the evolving regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific, and its deepened dialogue and coordination to be further strengthened through the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms and fora.

Moving forward, ASEAN and India would need to exert our concerted efforts to materialise the implementation of the *ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific for Peace, Stability and Prosperity in the Region*, which was adopted by our Leaders in 2021.

Since the launch of the *ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025*, ASEAN economic integration continues to make great progress. With a combined GDP of more than 3.4 trillion US Dollars in 2021, the region has now emerged as the world's fifth-largest economy, and is on-track to become the fourth largest by 2030. Despite this positive development, the global economic uncertainties and the emerging megatrends and disruptions, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and climate change and the wider sustainability concerns, will continue to influence ASEAN's economic future trajectory, as well as its partnerships with the rest of the world.

In this regard, I would encourage India to further boost trade and investment ties with ASEAN, including through the full and effective utilisation of the *ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)*, prompt conclusion of *ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) Upgrade Negotiations*, as well as the possible participation of India in the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement* in the future.

Through this opportunity, we wish to highlight four key economic partnership priorities that ASEAN would like to advance further with India, through meaningful economic cooperation and integration efforts that are fit-for-purpose for the 21st century environment, namely market integration; sustainability and decarbonization; digital transformation; and inclusivity, particularly Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and Public-Private Partnerships.

Furthermore, ASEAN and India could also intensify their cooperation in the fields of maritime, cybersecurity, science and technology; transport and connectivity, digital economy, green economy, blue economy, fintech, tourism, agriculture, sustainable development and public health, amongst others. Likewise, both sides are encouraged to step up efforts to enhance people-to-people contacts through exchange programmes involving youth, students, media and artists as well as scholarships programmes and capacity building and training courses.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

ASEAN truly appreciates India for its substantive contributions towards the ASEAN Centrality and the ASEAN Community-building efforts, and for being one of ASEAN's major trading partners over the past years. We also treasure the fact that our partnership has nurtured people-to-people linkages with the view of enhancing mutual trust, mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's culture, arts and history.

Moving forward, and guided by the *ASEAN-India Plan of Action*, ASEAN remains fully committed to working closely with India to take our partnership to greater heights for mutual interests. Lastly, let me wish everyone here a wonderful evening.

Thank you.
