



H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN
Pre-Recorded Opening Remarks at the
ASEAN NEXT 2025

3 December 2025, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

His Excellency Mr. Hem Vandy, Minister of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation of Cambodia

Dr. Song Jianyuan, Deputy Director-General, Department of Science and Technology of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,

Dr. Prakoso Bhairawa Putera, Director of Policy Formulation for Research, Technology, and Innovation, The National Research and Innovation Agency of Indonesia (BRIN),

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to address ASEAN NEXT 2025 in Phnom Penh. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) China for its continued support in funding ASEAN NEXT—our flagship ASEAN–China STI cooperation since 2018—and to Cambodia’s Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI) for convening this forum and demonstrating strong leadership under COSTI.

ASEAN NEXT has established itself as an important platform for advancing science, technology, and innovation across our region. This year's theme—“*Role of Infrastructure Technology and Innovation in Successful Manufacturing*”—speaks directly to the economic realities shaping ASEAN’s industrial future. It underscores how modern infrastructure—especially in logistics, transport, digital connectivity, and energy systems—forms the backbone of competitive and resilient manufacturing. By focusing on this nexus, we highlight ASEAN’s commitment to boosting industrial productivity and supply-chain robustness through collaboration, innovation, and sustained infrastructure investment.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Building on this shared vision for strengthening manufacturing through innovation, in June 2025, we launched the ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation (APASTI) 2026–2035—an ambitious framework designed to position ASEAN as an innovation-driven region. A central priority is strengthening public-private partnerships in strategic sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, with measurable outcomes targeted for achievement by 2030.

ASEAN's manufacturing sector is expanding rapidly, though the pace and structure of this growth differ across the region. While some Member States continue to attract global value chain investments in labour-intensive industries such as garment production, others are emerging as competitive hubs for higher-value sectors including automotive and electronics.

At the same time, manufacturing supply chains are becoming more complex and geographically distributed to enhance resilience and manage risk. In response, firms are increasingly adopting advanced technologies and integrating operations across the entire value chain to raise efficiency, strengthen production capacity, and sharpen competitiveness. These developments reinforce ASEAN's position as a rising hub for sophisticated, technology-enabled manufacturing.

Building on this momentum, the quality of infrastructure becomes a decisive factor in sustaining and elevating ASEAN's manufacturing competitiveness. Infrastructure forms the backbone of manufacturing excellence. Reliable transport, energy, and digital systems allow firms to optimise operations and scale efficiently. The Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone illustrates how strategic infrastructure can draw investment and strengthen supply chain connectivity.

Throughout ASEAN, an extensive network of Special Economic Zones—from the Johor–Singapore and Batam–Singapore growth corridors to cross-border linkages between Thailand and Malaysia—demonstrates how coordinated policies and infrastructure can deepen regional production integration.

Simultaneously, ASEAN–China economic cooperation continues to deepen and broaden, with the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol creating fresh opportunities in digital trade, standards harmonisation, and innovation ecosystems, further reinforcing modern and resilient manufacturing across the region. Yet infrastructure and integration alone are not enough; science, technology, and innovation depend equally on a skilled and adaptable workforce. In ASEAN, only 48.8% of large firms, 36.1% of medium-sized firms, and 16.8% of small firms provide employee training.

Additionally, the limited access to training among workers in Southeast Asia's sizeable informal economy represents one of the region's principal policy concerns. We must close this gap to ensure our workforce can navigate emerging technologies effectively. This forum offers a meaningful opportunity to tackle this issue.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN NEXT 2025 goes beyond technology transfer and capacity building to showcase best practices in smart and sustainable manufacturing, advanced materials, and digital infrastructure. In advancing these priorities, we continue to benefit greatly from the experience of our valued Dialogue Partners, particularly China. Since the establishment of the ASEAN-China Dialogue Partnership in 1996, our cooperation in science, technology, and innovation has grown substantially. China has consistently been our robust and dedicated partner with impressive manufacturing sector growth. By 2024, China's manufacturing contributed 30.1% to its GDP, with the sector accounting for 28.4% of global manufacturing output—achievements from which ASEAN can draw valuable lessons.

Our cooperation with China through COSTI initiatives—such as the China–ASEAN Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition and the ASEAN–China Joint Research Project—further strengthens knowledge sharing and advances best practices in infrastructure and manufacturing. As we progress, our efforts must remain inclusive and sustainable, ensuring continued innovation and diversification while maintaining gender equity, environmental stewardship, and social innovation—principles fundamental to realising our ASEAN Community Vision 2045 of a resilient, innovative, and people-centred region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I emphasize that ASEAN NEXT 2025 represents our commitment to concrete action. Let us use this opportunity to strengthen our infrastructure technology and innovation in the manufacturing sector, deepen regional integration, and unlock new paths for growth.

Thank you.
