



**OPENING REMARKS BY  
H.E. DR KAO KIM HOURN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN  
CHINA-ASEAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INDUSTRY INNOVATION  
CENTER**

**Beijing, People's Republic of China, 24 May 2026**

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***Your Excellency Ke Jixin, Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology of People's Republic of China,***

***Excellency Zaw Win Myint, Ambassador of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to China,***

***Distinguished Representatives of the Embassies of the ASEAN Member States in China, Ladies and Gentlemen.***

Good Afternoon.

1. I thank the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China, and the China Academy of Information and Communication Technology for bringing us together today for the inauguration of the China-ASEAN AI Industry Innovation Center. It is a privilege to deliver the opening remarks for this important milestone in ASEAN-China AI cooperation.
2. ASEAN-China economic relations have become one of the region's most dynamic and forward-looking partnerships. Since 2019, China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner. But this partnership is not only about trade volume. Foreign direct investment from China into ASEAN has grown twenty-two-fold over the past two decades, rising from US\$1.2 billion to US\$25.4 billion<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN FDI database as of December 2025

3. The ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement Upgrade Protocol (ACFTA 3.0), signed at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, in October 2025, takes our partnership beyond traditional trade. Its new Digital Economy chapters create pathways for e-commerce, digital infrastructure, cross-border data flows, and cybersecurity. They also strengthen customs procedures, supply chain connectivity, and support for MSMEs. This is about building digital trade architecture in ASEAN-China economic cooperation.

***Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives,***

4. The digital economy now sits at the heart of economic growth, driving innovation, productivity, and new opportunities across industries. China's digital economy has reached 14.0891 trillion yuan - 10.5% of GDP<sup>2</sup> - powered by major advances in digital infrastructure, communication technologies, AI, and quantum computing. At the same time, ASEAN's digital economy has emerged as a new engine of growth, contributing US\$300 billion in Gross Merchandise Value in 2025 alone, and projected to reach US\$1 trillion by 2030<sup>3</sup>. The ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (ASEAN DEFA), set for signing in November 2026, is projected to unlock up to US\$2 trillion in the region's digital economy by that same period<sup>4</sup>. It will be a significant development and transformation of the ASEAN economy.
5. Today's inauguration marks the implementation of the ASEAN-China Action Plan on Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Digital Ecosystem (2026–2030), which will advance our cooperation in the coming years. Let me highlight several areas where deeper collaboration can make a meaningful difference in our cooperation.
6. First, we must embrace technologies that strengthen the region's digital backbone. The Asia-Pacific region is projected to account for 34% of global operational data centre capacity by 2028, with ASEAN contributing 51% of the pipeline in key Asia-Pacific markets<sup>5</sup>. ASEAN is now seeing data centres, semiconductor manufacturing, and connectivity networks converge into an integrated regional digital

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<sup>2</sup> [National Bureau Statistics of China](#)

<sup>3</sup> [e-Economy SEA 2025 Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> Study on DEFA

<sup>5</sup> [Aseanexchanges.org](#)

backbone. Deeper cooperation in digital infrastructure, including edge computing and low-cost, replicable Large Language Models tailored to ASEAN needs, can improve public service delivery in practical and scalable ways. As these technologies expand, demand for data centres is expected to quadruple from 2.6 gigawatts to 10.7 gigawatts between 2025 and 2035<sup>6</sup>. This growth highlights the urgent need for sustainable, energy-efficient, and resilient infrastructure, including greater adoption of green energy, improved efficiency, and stronger regional interconnection. China's leadership in 5G deployment and digital infrastructure offers valuable expertise that can help ASEAN advance next-generation connectivity while supporting our digital and sustainability goals.

7. Second, we must move beyond the issue of AI governance principles and focus on scalable AI deployment and development. AI could contribute between 10 and 18 percent to ASEAN's GDP, equivalent to nearly US\$1 trillion by 2030<sup>7</sup>. With DEFA in place, we could increase it substantially up to US\$2 trillion. The China-ASEAN AI Industry Innovation Center can play an important role in advancing responsible AI development and deployment across both regions. The Center will showcase technologies, products, and applications in sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and transportation, among other sectors, supporting both economic and social development. I strongly encourage the Center to facilitate exchanges among ASEAN and Chinese businesses, research institutions, and industry associations on key AI technologies.
8. I am also pleased to announce that the ASEAN AI Safety Network, or AI SAFE, which will be established late this year, can support these efforts through regulatory sandbox cooperation. This will help test AI model compliance, reduce policy risks, and support the development of an AI governance framework that reflects shared consensus between ASEAN and China.
9. Third, we must cultivate the next generation of talents. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects a net increase of 78 million jobs globally by 2030, driven by AI, green energy, and demographic shifts, even as 92 million jobs are expected

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<sup>6</sup> [Aseanexchanges.org](https://aseanexchanges.org)

<sup>7</sup> [Kearney](https://www.kenyon.com)

to be displaced<sup>8</sup>. This transformation is reshaping not only labour markets, but also the broader digital landscape. Inclusive digital transformation must ensure that MSMEs, marginalised communities, and startups have the knowledge, skills, and support needed to participate meaningfully in the digital economy. The Center represents exactly the kind of joint capacity-building platform we need to ensure that digital transformation benefits everyone. Through AI training programmes for ASEAN officials, corporate employees, and international students, it will strengthen practical capabilities and deepen regional cooperation.

***Excellencies and Distinguished Representatives,***

10. Today marks a historic moment for ASEAN-China digital cooperation. The opportunities before us are indeed immense. By working together, ASEAN and China can accelerate its development of an inclusive and sustainable digital society. The China-ASEAN AI Industry Innovation Center can become a catalyst for our shared digital future. It will transform economies and education, foster innovation and creativity, empower communities and citizens, and deliver sustainable prosperity for generations to come.
11. I am honoured to be part of this inauguration, and I look forward to the partnerships and progress that will emerge from this important initiative.

Thank you and I wish China-ASEAN AI Industry Innovation Center much success, starting from here and in the years to come.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/digest/>