



Remarks

**by H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN,
at the Welcome Reception of the Australia-ASEAN Business Forum 2026
“Deepening Australia-ASEAN Economic Integration
in a Changing Global Landscape”**

28 September 2026, Government House, South Australia

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- ***The Honourable Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia,***
 - ***The Rt. Honourable Jane Lomax Smith, Lord Mayor of Adelaide,***
 - ***The Honourable Chris Picton MP, Minister for State Development, South Australia,***
 - ***The Honourable Anoulack Chanthivong MP, New South Wales Minister for Industry and Trade; Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology,***
 - ***Your Excellency Nooraslena Sallehuddin, High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam to Australia and Chair of the ASEAN Committee in Canberra,***
 - ***Mr. Francis Wong, OAM, Chairman, Australia-ASEAN Business Forum,***
 - ***Excellencies Ambassadors and High-Commissioners,***
 - ***Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.***

1. Good Evening, and it is wonderful to be with you all here in Adelaide for the Australia-ASEAN Business Forum 2026. Let me begin by thanking Mr. Francis Wong, Chairman of the Australia-ASEAN Business Forum, for his leadership and his continued efforts in bringing together the business communities of ASEAN and Australia, and beyond. I also want to thank Your Excellency Governor for kindly hosting us this evening and I understand that she has been serving in this position for nearly 5 years, and as she is leaving, we must express our appreciation for her great leadership.
2. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to The Honourable Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, for so graciously hosting us here at Government House this evening. It is a pleasure to gather in this beautiful and historic building, and a fitting way to begin our Forum in a setting that reflects the warm and longstanding friendship between Australia and ASEAN.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. This year carries particular significance for our relations, as we mark the 5th Anniversary of the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Established in 2021, the Partnership reflected not only the maturity of ties, cooperation and partnership that began in 1974, but also a shared understanding that the challenges ahead call for deeper cooperation and greater engagement.
4. Australia has been with us from the very beginning of ASEAN's journey, and our relationship has grown into one of ASEAN's most enduring and comprehensive partnerships.
5. Over five decades now, our relationship has been grounded in mutual respect, practical cooperation, and a shared commitment to an open, peaceful, stable, and prosperous region. It has continued to evolve and expand over time. Today, it encompasses not only government-to-government cooperation, but increasingly strong links among our businesses, investors, financial institutions, research institutions, universities and communities. This broader network of relationships is an important foundation for the continued growth, transformation, and resilience of our partnership.
6. As Comprehensive Strategic Partners, ASEAN and Australia are committed to carrying this foundation forward and deepening our partnership in a changing world. The Australia-ASEAN Business Forum is an important platform in this endeavour, bringing our business communities closer together and helping to accelerate trade, investment, innovation, and practical cooperation for shared prosperity. For years, this Forum has given our business communities a platform to exchange views, identify opportunities, build partnerships and deepen economic cooperation between ASEAN and Australia, bringing the private sector closer to the broader ASEAN-Australia partnership. This is precisely why the Forum is valuable, and why it continues to endure.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. This year, our Forum turns to the theme *"Deepening Australia-ASEAN Economic Integration in a Changing Global Landscape"*. We are meeting at a time when the global economic environment, shaped by geopolitical uncertainty, is undergoing significant transformation. Shifts in trade, technology, investment, energy markets and global supply chains are creating both new challenges and new opportunities for our economies.

8. Amid these developments, ASEAN's economy has continued to demonstrate resilience, recording robust growth of 4.9 per cent in 2025,¹ and projected at 4.5 per cent this year². In 2025, ASEAN's combined GDP reached approximately US\$4.3 trillion, maintaining our position as the world's fifth-largest economy, attracting around US\$245.7 billion in foreign direct investment³. Our total trade in goods reached US\$4.4 trillion⁴, while trade in services reached approximately US\$1.40 trillion⁵.
9. ASEAN also remains a highly integrated and dynamic economic region. Intra-ASEAN trade continues to represent the largest share of our total merchandise trade, accounting for 20.5 percent⁶. ASEAN now has seven Free Trade Area (FTA) agreements with external partners in place, and we expect to conclude negotiations on the ASEAN-Canada Free Trade Agreement this year, our first with a country in North America. This is a clear sign that regional integration remains at the heart of ASEAN's economic strength, even as our extensive external partnerships continue to connect us to markets and value chains around the world.
10. Australia is an important part of this economic landscape. Our economies are highly complementary, and there remains significant scope to expand two-way trade and investment further. I recognise Australia's continued focus on this front *through Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, and I am pleased to note that ASEAN-Australia two-way trade in goods and services rose from AUD 1,260.6 billion in 2024 to AUD 1,323.5 billion in 2025⁷, while two-way direct investment flows grew by AUD 1.2 billion, from AUD 6.8 billion to AUD 8.0 billion over the same period⁸. These figures tell us that our efforts are paying off, even as considerable room for growth remains.
11. The ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area, or AANZFTA, has provided an important foundation for our economic relations, with Australia's continued support, an AUD 53.3 million programme delivered together with New Zealand, supporting ASEAN Member States make full use of AANZFTA and RCEP. In April last year, the Second Protocol to Amend AANZFTA entered into force, substantially enhancing the Agreement in areas including rules of origin, customs procedures and trade facilitation, competition and electronic commerce, while introducing new

¹ ASEAN Statistics, GDP data as of July 2026.

² ADB Asian Development Outlook, July 2026.

³ ASEAN Statistics, FDI data preliminary as of 1 July 2026.

⁴ ASEAN Statistics, IMTS preliminary data as of 1 July 2026.

⁵ ASEAN Statistics, Trade in Services data preliminary as of August 2026.

⁶ ASEAN Statistics, IMTS preliminary data as of 1 July 2026.

⁷ DFAT, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/trade-and-investment-data-information-and-publications/trade-statistics/trade-in-goods-and-services>, August 2026

⁸ Australia Bureau of Statistics. International Investment Position, Australia: Supplementary Statistics. May 2026. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/international-trade/international-investment-position-australia-supplementary-statistics/latest-release>

chapters on trade and sustainable development, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and government procurement.

12. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, offers another important framework for deeper regional economic integration. I am pleased to note that this year's Forum, for the first time, welcomes the other four RCEP countries alongside Australia, namely China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand. This has not only enlarged the Forum's participation but sharpened its focus on regional economic integration, which is particularly valuable as we work to strengthen and expand cooperation in a rapidly changing global environment.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

13. The growing ASEAN-Australia economic partnership is increasingly bound up with the broader transformation of our economies. Digitalisation, technological innovation, the energy transition and the changing shape of global supply chains are reshaping how businesses operate and how economies compete. These shifts call on us to work together not only as trading partners, but also as partners in innovation, investment, capacity building, and other areas of shared interest. Tomorrow's Forum will turn to these very areas, and I look forward to what I expect will be a rich discussion.
14. It is equally important that our economic integration remains inclusive. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 sets out our ambition to build a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN Community. For us, deeper integration is not just about increasing trade volumes or attracting more investment. It is about ensuring that businesses of every size, workers and communities alike, are able to participate in and benefit from the opportunities that regional economic integration creates.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. Moving forward, our collective efforts should build on these foundations and turn them into tangible benefits for our region and people, and beyond. This means fostering greater trade and investment, encouraging innovation, strengthening the resilience and connectivity of our supply chains, and creating more opportunities for our businesses and our people. In doing so, we can keep our economic integration responsive to a changing global environment, and sustain growth across the entire region that is both inclusive and resilient. A strong ASEAN-Australia economic partnership remains a central pillar of the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

16. With that, I look forward to two days of fruitful discussion ahead. Once again, I want to thank Your Excellency Governor for her time this evening and I want to thank Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen for your presence. I wish you all a wonderful evening. Thank you.
