



MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

SPEECH

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FOR:

ASEAN UNIVERSITIES EXHIBITION AND FORUM 2025 (AEF2025)

DATE | TIME:

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VENUE:

SUNWAY RESORT HOTEL, PETALING JAYA, SELANGOR

Assalamualaikum wbt and Salam Malaysia Madani.

1. Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, and future leaders, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural ASEAN Universities Exhibition and Forum 2025 (AEF2025). This landmark event is dedicated to showcasing the excellence of ASEAN universities, promoting innovation, and strengthening collaboration within our dynamic and diverse academic community.
2. We are honored to have more than 90 exhibitors, representing higher learning institutions from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste.
3. I extend my deepest gratitude to the organizers, Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) and the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MoHE), for their unwavering commitment in making this event a reality. Their dedication to advancing education and fostering regional cooperation has been instrumental in bringing us together today.
4. In conjunction with AEF2025, I am delighted to highlight the successful organization of the ASEAN Student Mobility Programme, in collaboration with Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) and 13 esteemed Malaysian universities. Since its commencement on 11th February 2025, this initiative has welcomed 500 mobility students who are present with us today. Let us all give them a well-deserved round of applause!

The Role of Universities in Advancing ASEAN's Future

5. As our Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, has emphasized, Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship is guided by the theme "Inclusivity and Sustainability", reflecting our

commitment to ensuring that progress benefits all and that no one is left behind.

6. As Malaysia assumes the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2025, this forum stands as a testament to our collective efforts in building a stronger, more integrated educational ecosystem across the region. It is an opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogues, forge lasting partnerships, and pave the way for a future where education transcends borders.
7. In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, universities are no longer just institutions of higher learning; they have become engines of innovation, centers of knowledge exchange, and catalysts for economic and social development. Our institutions must equip students not only for existing jobs but also for careers that are yet to emerge. Education is the foundation of a resilient and progressive ASEAN.
8. Over the past decades, ASEAN universities have gained global recognition. Institutions in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia are now ranked among the best, with others making significant strides in catching up.
9. The QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education Rankings consistently recognize ASEAN universities for their research impact, innovation, and strong industry partnerships.
10. Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are establishing themselves as higher education hubs, attracting students from across the region and beyond.
11. ASEAN universities are producing world-class research in science, technology, business, and the humanities, offering localized solutions to global challenges.

12. While this progress is commendable, we must work together to ensure that ASEAN universities remain competitive amidst the rise of global education giants.
13. Today, as we convene for AEF2025, we reaffirm our shared commitment to strengthening ASEAN's higher education ecosystem—by fostering academic mobility, advancing collaborative research, and reinforcing university- industry partnerships. This year's forum theme, "Empowering ASEAN's Future Leaders: Innovation, Sustainability, and Global Competitiveness," encapsulates our aspirations and the path forward.

The Importance of Student Mobility in ASEAN

14. One of the cornerstones of higher education in ASEAN is student mobility.
15. Programs like the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) and other university exchange initiatives enable students to study in different countries, enhancing cross-cultural understanding and fostering global perspectives.
16. Mobility strengthens regional integration, reinforces ASEAN identity, and produces graduates who are adaptable and globally competitive.
17. Countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia are increasingly becoming preferred destinations for students from neighboring nations, enriching the academic landscape and fostering a stronger sense of ASEAN solidarity.
18. To further strengthen student mobility, we must implement policies that facilitate seamless student movement, establish mutual recognition of academic credits across ASEAN institutions, and enhance government support for mobility programs.

Scholarships: Investing in the Brightest Minds

19. To attract the most talented students within ASEAN, we must expand scholarship opportunities. Scholarships play a critical role in enabling students with potential to access quality education, regardless of financial constraints.
20. Malaysia and Singapore already offer generous scholarships for ASEAN students, but we need more regional initiatives to ensure broader accessibility across all member states.
21. Public-private partnerships in scholarship programs can further enhance access to quality education, ensuring that no deserving student is left behind.
22. When we invest in scholarships, we invest in the future leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers of ASEAN.

The Power of Transnational Education

23. Another key aspect of ASEAN's higher education future is transnational education (TNE).
24. The establishment of branch campuses of foreign universities in Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam has provided world-class education while retaining talent within ASEAN.
25. Dual-degree programs, joint research collaborations, and online education partnerships offer students access to global knowledge while remaining in their home countries.
26. Digital transformation is breaking barriers, making education more accessible through hybrid learning and virtual classrooms across ASEAN.

27. By strengthening transnational education, we ensure that our students receive a globally competitive education while staying rooted in ASEAN's rich cultural and economic landscape.

The Future of Education in ASEAN

28. Moving forward, ASEAN's education landscape must focus on:
 - i. Digital Transformation – Universities must embrace AI, big data, and the metaverse to create a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment.
 - ii. Lifelong Learning – Education must extend beyond graduation, emphasizing continuous upskilling and reskilling to keep pace with evolving job markets.
 - iii. Sustainable and Inclusive Education – Higher education must be accessible to all, including marginalized communities, while addressing sustainability and social equity.
 - iv. Industry-Academia Collaboration – Universities must collaborate closely with industries to ensure graduates are job-ready and equipped with real-world skills.

Malaysia's Role as ASEAN Chair

29. As ASEAN Chair, Malaysia has a unique opportunity to shape the future of education in the region.
30. We can lead efforts to harmonize higher education policies, facilitating student mobility and academic collaboration.
31. We can expand ASEAN scholarship programs to ensure students from all backgrounds have access to quality education.

32. We can champion transnational education, digital learning, and innovation-driven curricula aligned with Industry 4.0.
33. Malaysia's role is clear—to serve as a bridge between ASEAN universities, governments, and industries, ensuring that education remains at the core of regional progress.

Conclusion: Building a Knowledge-Driven ASEAN

34. In conclusion, universities are the cornerstone of ASEAN's future. By enhancing student mobility, expanding scholarships, promoting transnational education, and embracing innovation, we can position ASEAN as a global leader in higher education.
35. Malaysia, as ASEAN Chair, has the responsibility to lead this vision and ensure education remains at the heart of regional integration and prosperity.
36. Today marks a milestone as Malaysia proudly launches the ASEAN GEMS (Global Exchange for Mobility & Scholarship) platform, a transformative initiative that will serve as a central hub for scholarship opportunities across ASEAN, empowering students with greater access to academic funding and mobility programs.
37. I am pleased to announce that for 2025, we have secured 300 scholarships, amounting to approximately USD 4 million— a significant step in expanding educational access. We invite other ASEAN universities to contribute to this noble initiative.
38. To all students, academics, and future leaders—you are the architects of ASEAN's tomorrow.

39. On behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, I wish you all a successful and impactful forum. It is now my honor to officially launch the ASEAN GEMS platform.
40. Let us work together—governments, universities, industries, and students—to build a knowledge-driven ASEAN, one that is innovative, inclusive, and future-ready.

Thank you. Terima kasih. Xie Xie. Nandri. Khop Khun Khap. Cảm ơn.
Salamat po.