



**TRANSCRIPT OF OPENING REMARKS BY
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN AT
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 51ST ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING
AND RELATED MEETINGS, 2 AUGUST 2018**

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to Singapore, and to the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Recently, Dr Henry Kissinger said: "We are in a very, very grave period." Whether or not you agree with him, I think the people in this room will agree that ASEAN is at an inflexion point. We are transiting into a multipolar world; we are all acutely aware of the storm clouds of the trade war; and we also can see and feel the disruption that the digital revolution is causing all around us.

It was with this in mind, and the need to ensure that ASEAN is future-ready, that we launched and settled on this theme of "Resilience" and "Innovation" for our year as Chairman of ASEAN.

At the 32nd ASEAN Summit in April, our Leaders distilled the goal of forging a "Resilient and Innovative" ASEAN into a 'Vision Statement'. I am here today to report to the Prime Minister and to all of you that we have made some progress in these last couple of months. Let me outline a few milestones.

First, we have laid the groundwork for enhanced cooperation against security challenges including terrorism and cyber-threats. Our Leaders adopted a statement on cybersecurity cooperation at the April Summit, and committed to build a peaceful, resilient and secure cyberspace. Singapore will host an ASEAN counter-terrorism symposium in October, which seeks to encourage regional dialogue on combating the root causes of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalism.

Second, ASEAN's efforts to improve trade facilitation in the region are

bearing fruit. The negotiations on the RCEP – the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership – have taken an encouraging step forward. At the 5th Intersessional Ministerial Meeting held in July, our Ministers in charge of economies committed to substantially conclude the RCEP by the end of this year. The ASEAN Single Window has gone ‘live’ amongst five ASEAN Member States, and with the others expected to come on board soon. ASEAN is also working steadily on an E-Commerce Agreement. The E-Commerce Agreement and the Single Window will facilitate the digitalisation of trade procedures, and we believe will boost intra-ASEAN trade.

Third, we have found new ways to connect our people and our economies. The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) has taken off since its establishment at the 32nd ASEAN Summit. We have a pioneer batch of 26 cities. We’ve already had two meetings – in May for the Smart Cities Governance Workshop, and on 8 July when we had our Inaugural ASCN Meeting. This network has since endorsed a common framework that sets out ASEAN’s definition of a smart city; will develop action plans with concrete projects; and is an opportunity to not only share best practices, but also share failures – because in fact, we probably learn more from avoiding each other’s mistakes.

Whilst the network’s membership is regional, its reach has been global. Our 26 cities are exploring exciting collaborations with ASEAN’s external partners, private-sector solution providers and multilateral financial institutions. When I launched the smart cities meeting on the 8 July, I was delighted to witness the signing of five agreements amongst the ASCN cities and various partners – in particular private-sector partners. This demonstrates that the ASCN network is already catalysing projects with real-world impact. Each city in ASEAN represents a unique opportunity and presents competitive advantages. If we can find the right recipe to integrate our services, we can transform our cities into interoperable nodes. This word “interoperable” is worth highlighting, because whether you talk about e-Commerce, e-trade, single windows – in ASEAN, given our diversity, we believe in interoperability rather than imposing a single uniform system across the entire ASEAN sphere.

To enhance our regional connectivity – this is now in the real world – we also have an ASEAN Declaration on Cruise Tourism, which was adopted in January. This will boost our efforts to transform ASEAN into a single vibrant and thriving cruising destination.

Fourth, we continue to build on initiatives to deepen people-to-people connectivity. Singapore will profile the Best of ASEAN Performing Arts in contemporary music and song-writing to the regional and international audiences in November this year. In conjunction with our Chairmanship, the National Gallery Singapore has curated a new audio tour titled “*Art in ASEAN: 10 Highlights*” that

looks at the confluence of ideas and culture across ASEAN, through significant works of art from each of our ten ASEAN Member States.

We are also investing heavily in our youth, who hold the key to ASEAN's future as the children of a digital age. The Singapore-ASEAN Youth Fund was renewed with a SGD 5 million top-up earlier this year. This weekend, Singapore will host "*Hyperplay*", the first-ever ASEAN e-Sports and Music Festival, at the Singapore Indoor Stadium. I hope you will take the opportunity to watch and participate, hopefully, in these events. We hope that this will provide more opportunity for interaction amongst our young people and also help ultimately forge a common ASEAN identity.

Whilst we celebrate these achievements, it is also important for us to take a reality check and to appreciate the many challenges which lie ahead; and for us to remember that we need to remain anchored on the core principles of ASEAN unity and Centrality. Just now, at the meeting with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Ministers, one question that was posed to the Prime Minister was: "What do we make of unity and Centrality?" – basically, how do we implement it? And the Prime Minister highlighted that you need unity *first*, before we can achieve and aspire to Centrality.

At the same time, we need to maintain an open, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture. We need to double down on our Community-building efforts, whilst enhancing cooperation in newer areas including smart cities and e-Commerce. ASEAN has to remain a testament to the benefits of free trade and economic integration – that is why the RCEP is important. And in fact, free trade and economic integration has been the recipe for peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia over the last five to seven decades.

But we also have to acknowledge that ASEAN cannot do this alone, and we have to collaborate with our external partners through ASEAN-led mechanisms. I am confident that our discussions over the next three days will yield meaningful outcomes, and I would just like to highlight a few issues that we will be discussing. The ASEAN Plus Three will be exploring a statement on cooperation against anti-microbial resistance; Singapore plans to host a cybersecurity-related ARF workshop later this year; and the EAS is negotiating a range of statements on salient topics including cybersecurity, smart cities and counter-terrorism.

Let me conclude with a quotation from Singapore's first Foreign Minister, who was there at the signing in Bangkok, 51 years ago. In 1967, he said: "If we do not hang together, we will all hang separately." 51 years later, this wisdom still holds true. We need to find the right balance – between hanging on to our foundational principles, and yet at the same time transforming our societies for the future. We need to find the right balance between promoting our national interests, and yet

safeguarding our regional unity. If we can find this balance, then we can make common cause, and despite the fact that this may be a very, very grave period, we should also be in position to seize the many opportunities that lie ahead of us.

So thank you all for your presence, and we have much work to do over the next few days. Thank you very much.

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