

**Remarks by
H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand
At the Opening Ceremony of the 52nd ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting
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Your Excellency General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand,

Excellencies the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and the Secretary-General of ASEAN,

*Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

To my ASEAN colleagues—the 10 ASEAN Foreign Ministers, and all other distinguished Ministers and Guest, I wish to extend the warm greetings from the people of Thailand. We sincerely appreciate your being with us today.

Just over a month ago, our leaders convened here in Bangkok for the 34th ASEAN Summit. They spoke of the fast-paced geopolitical, geo-economic and social changes taking place regionally and globally, and of the challenges and opportunities they present us. They range from the rising competition among major powers to life-changing technologies brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and from the global challenges of climate change and transnational crime to erosion of trust and appreciation in regionalism and multilateralism. Our leaders highlighted the need for ASEAN to be more forward-looking and to strengthen its unity—**to speak as one to be heard**.

We also adopted a key document— “the ASEAN Outlook On the Indo-Pacific” that provides the framework for practical engagement with nations along the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The key modalities for such engagement will be connectivity, sustainable development, economic and maritime cooperation. In this regard, ASEAN centrality is assuredly the key constructive element in this evolving economic and strategic equation.

Most significantly, at the Summit, our leaders articulated an ASEAN Vision on how to strengthen ASEAN partnership and collective unanimity to promote sustainability of our commitments and endeavors in building our people-centered community that leaves no one behind, and affords hope to those most needed.

We also discussed how ASEAN could help turn conflicts into cooperation, both regionally and beyond, while upholding ASEAN principles of non-interference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Every year at the ASEAN Summit, leaders set out our collective goals for the years to come. Some goals are novel, some not, some innovative, some not so ground-breaking, but with more pertinent and effective mechanisms to realizing them.

This year we are becoming more aware of the great sea change that is coming our way regardless of our liking or readiness.

As mentioned before, internationally, we are witnessing a gravitational shift in the world's center of power equation.

Environmentally, the arctic is melting twice as fast as the global average and it represents only the surface of the ecological degradation the world is facing with no quick-fix solution insight. The extreme weather and severe natural disasters bear heavy socio-political burden on our citizens and governments.

Politically and economically, we are witnessing increased nationalism that sometimes could run counter to our shared long-term interests.

Technologically, the inevitable arrival of 5G where the Internet of Things is becoming a reality. It will bring about great paradigm shifts that create a world that many of us gathered here today cannot fathom, or imagine. It is often described as creative destruction on old industries; and it will change human behavior and outlook.

In light of these sea changes, ASEAN needs to be more **agile**. We also need to augment the **ability to anticipate** which could be our weapon for strategic thinking, the timeliness, and the effectiveness of our response to these changes that represent both challenges and opportunities.

But most important of all, ASEAN, in the penultimate days of the 21st century brave new world, will have to perhaps **go back to basic** and **heed the fundamental needs of human beings** in order to move forward on a solid footing as we embark upon the schisms of transformational phase of human history.

While leaders must look after their own peoples, we must recognize that looking inward and being myopic is not our option, and never will be. The challenges we are facing are global in nature and hence require collective solutions. In safeguarding the livelihood and well-being of our peoples amidst a great turmoil, we must be more onward and forward looking than ever before. We must choose to enlarge the piece of pie that we are sharing through free flow of trade and commerce, and not adopting the beggar-thy-neighbor attitude and approach. Through the consequential deepening of partnership and cooperation among its members, and with other partners outside of ASEAN, that we will become part of the sustainable solution, not that of the problem.

That is why as chairman of ASEAN this year, Thailand has emphasized the importance of partnership and sustainability. In time of great challenges, more corporation is needed because we all are stakeholders in securing a better future for our peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

ASEAN centrality and unity are two critical elements that will enable ASEAN to be counted and effective in the world arena. It is a difficult balancing act, but overcoming fear and distrust among ourselves, and between us and other powers will make ASEAN an integral part of sustainable global peace and prosperity that could lift all boats. All our endeavors, such as ASEAN Regional Forum, or Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and many other forums and dialogues that ASEAN initiated and participated, must be purposeful because the wave of changes will allow us little room for error, let alone to maneuver.

ASEAN has gone through the test of time. We have our ups and downs, yet we have managed to last, some would say unexpectedly. The road ahead could be treacherous, but we can survive and prosper if we combine our strengths, and, honestly and prudently, address our weaknesses. As such, we should be ready to engage regionally and globally in answering to the sea change that is awaiting us at the door step.

Thank you.