

**TRANSCRIPT OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR TRADE AND
INDUSTRY (TRADE) GAN KIM YONG'S MEDIA DOORSTOP ON THE
58th ASEAN ECONOMIC MINISTERS' (AEM) MEETING AND RELATED MEETINGS
(22 SEPTEMBER 2025)**

First, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the government and the people of Philippines for their hospitality and for hosting the ASEAN Economic Ministers' (AEM) Meeting and Related Meetings. I also want to thank our host, Secretary Roque, for being a very able Chairman to lead the discussion, and we have been very efficient and always on time. Very happy to have made significant progress in our discussions among the ASEAN Economic Ministers. Let me just give a very quick update on the various key initiatives that we have arrived at.

First and foremost, within ASEAN, one of the most important agreements is the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA). We have achieved significant progress. We signed it earlier, and now we hope to be able to bring into force earlier, ratifying it earlier by member countries. Originally, it was scheduled for next year. We are now planning to bring it forward to this year, and we are working very hard with our fellow ASEAN members to race to the end and to cross the line before the end of the year. And we are optimistic that we'll be able to do so. This will bring forward many of the benefits for our businesses and for our people. It will facilitate trade in a significant way. At the same time, it also simplified and clarified many of the rules to make it easier for businesses to be conducted within ASEAN. This will further enhance and facilitate intra-ASEAN trade. At the same time, it will also make ASEAN a very important and very attractive destination for investment, because investors know that in ASEAN they will be able to trade within ASEAN freely. This is something that we are very happy to see progress in our ATIGA.

At the same time, the second area that we have made progress in is ASEAN Trade in Services Agreement (ATISA). The ATISA came into force in 2021. It has been five years since then. We are now trying to work with our partners to see what the priorities are that we want to review. This will further improve the services trade within ASEAN, which is another area that we are making progress in.

The third area within ASEAN that we are making progress in is on the green economy. We have just completed discussions on the DEFA, the Digital Economy Framework Agreement. We are hoping that we will be able to finalise it by the end of this year and have it come into effect sometime next year. This is something that we have made progress in. Beyond the Digital Economy Framework Agreement, we are now starting to discuss the ASEAN Green Economy Framework Agreement (GEFA). We have started the feasibility study on the Green Economy Framework Agreement. With the completion of the feasibility study, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, we will be able to then embark on the scoping exercise. Once we complete the

scoping exercise, we will commence negotiations on the Green Economy Framework Agreement. This will be a mirror image of the Digital Economy Framework Agreement. On one hand, we have digital economy; on the other, we have a Green Economy Framework Agreement, and we hope to be able to commence a negotiation on GEFA by sometime next year. This is what we have been working on within ASEAN, enhancing integration among ASEAN member countries.

At the same time, we are also looking at how we can strengthen our partnership with other countries, other economies and other regions. One area that we have made significant progress is on the Regional Cooperation and Economic Partnership (RCEP). Under RCEP, we have agreed to set up an ad hoc Accession Working Group. This will allow us to look at the potential members, new members that will be added to RCEP, and this will allow us to expand our membership and expand our coverage in terms of the economy that we are covering today. RCEP already covers about 30% of our global GDP, as well as 30% of global population. So, with additional members, this will also signify that RCEP is a growing region and will continue to grow. At the same time, we are also taking a review of RCEP, and see how we can further strengthen our RCEP provisions and rules, so as to be even more facilitative in terms of RCEP trade among our members. On these two angles, it is very important for RCEP, for us to first expand our scope of coverage of countries and economies, and at the same time deepen our collaboration within our members. This will be beneficial for us.

Secondly, we have just signed the upgraded ASEAN – Hong Kong Investment Agreement (AHKIA). This will also facilitate investment both in Hong Kong as well as in ASEAN. This will facilitate economic integration between Hong Kong and ASEAN member countries. This is something that is very important for us. In addition, we are also looking at the discussion with the EU on our Digital Trade Principles (DTP). I think we are aware that we are making progress. This discussion and negotiation is ongoing. We are also hoping to be able to complete the negotiation on the DTP by sometime next year. Following that, we will continue to explore what else we can do with EU, in terms of digital economy, and the discussion is ongoing. We're also having a discussion on the various FTAs with the different partners, including Korea, China, Canada, and as well as India. For China, we have completed the negotiation already. In terms of FTA, we are working on Korea, India, and EU. EU is something that we have been discussing – what else can do between EU and ASEAN. FTA may be a longer-term objective, but we can take a modular approach. I had suggested during the meeting that perhaps we can take a step-by-step approach, look at what we can do together, and over time, then we can have a longer-term vision of having an FTA between EU and ASEAN. This is, in a nutshell, what we have worked together, and we have achieved during this year's ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting.

Next year, Singapore will take over as the Chairmanship of ASEAN, and we will also be assuming the Chairmanship of AEMs. I hope that we can build on the achievements that the

Philippines have done this year, and continue to build on the momentum, and to see whether we can make further progress in the ASEAN integration, both internally within ASEAN, as well as connections with our key partners beyond ASEAN.