

Charting a Resilient and Inclusive Future for the Region

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The ASEAN Future Forum 2025, held on February 25-26 in Hanoi, Vietnam, served as a strategic platform for leaders, policymakers, and experts to deliberate on the challenges and future directions of ASEAN. Organized by the Vietnamese government in collaboration with the ASEAN Secretariat and international institutions, the forum underscored the region's commitment to resilience, economic cooperation, digital transformation, and inclusive security.

Forum Highlights and Key Discussions

The forum featured a series of plenary sessions, roundtable discussions, and exhibitions, all designed to explore the evolving landscape of ASEAN's geopolitical, economic, and technological environment.

Addressing Security and Economic Resilience

The forum commenced with an exhibition titled *Vietnam's ASEAN Journey: 30 Years of Progress and Future Aspirations*, showcasing Vietnam's contributions since joining ASEAN in 1995. Opening speeches by Vietnamese Prime Minister H.E. Pham Minh Chinh, ASEAN Secretary-General H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, and Malaysian Ambassador H.E. Dato' Tan Yang Thai emphasized ASEAN's unity and collective progress.

A key roundtable discussion focused on *Women, Peace, and Security: Digital Inclusion for Sustainable Peace*, where panelists examined the digital gender divide and its implications for security. Experts from UN Women and regional organizations highlighted the need for inclusive cybersecurity policies to ensure women's participation in digital governance. Another session on *Smart Agriculture for Regional Food Security* explored the role of AI and IoT in transforming ASEAN's agricultural sector.

In the first plenary session, *Megatrends – Envisioning ASEAN and the World in 2035*, experts discussed global challenges, including aging populations, rapid digitization, and geopolitical tensions. The second plenary, *Revisiting ASEAN's Fundamentals – Preparing for Future Challenges*, emphasized the need for institutional reforms and a cohesive approach to tackling emerging threats.

Digital Transformation and Regional Cooperation

The second day featured high-level speeches, including remarks from Malaysian Prime Minister YAB Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who underscored the importance of ASEAN's strategic autonomy in an increasingly fragmented world. He called for stronger regional economic cooperation, sustainable development, and Malaysia's leadership in green technology investments.

Subsequent plenary sessions delved into ASEAN's preparedness for emerging technologies. *AI, Quantum Computing, and Beyond* explored the transformative impact of artificial intelligence on cybersecurity and governance, with China and New Zealand presenting collaborative AI initiatives.

Meanwhile, *Bridging Divides – ASEAN's Potential in a Fragmented World* focused on ASEAN's diplomatic role amidst growing tensions between global powers, with India, Japan, and the EU reaffirming their commitment to ASEAN-led solutions.

Key Takeaways and Strategic Recommendations

Strengthening ASEAN's Role in Regional Security

- ASEAN must reinforce its commitment to regional stability, particularly in addressing the Myanmar crisis and tensions in the South China Sea.
- Greater emphasis on cybersecurity cooperation is necessary, with Malaysia playing a leading role in integrating AI-driven security frameworks.
- Women's participation in security and peacekeeping missions should be expanded through leadership training and digital skill development.

Economic and Digital Transformation

- ASEAN must adopt a cohesive approach to AI governance, ensuring ethical and transparent implementation.
- Investments in renewable energy and green supply chains should be prioritized, with Malaysia spearheading regional sustainability efforts.
- Efforts to bridge the digital gender divide should be intensified to enhance inclusive participation in the digital economy.

Diplomatic and Institutional Strengthening

- ASEAN must maintain strategic neutrality while fostering stronger economic ties with global partners.
- Subregional cooperation initiatives, such as the Mekong Subregional Cooperation, should align with broader ASEAN development goals.
- ASEAN's decision-making framework should be more agile to respond effectively to emerging geopolitical and economic shifts.

Conclusion

The ASEAN Future Forum 2025 reaffirmed the region's commitment to adaptability, unity, and sustainable progress. As ASEAN navigates a complex global landscape, Malaysia's proactive role in security, technology, and economic resilience will be crucial in shaping a stronger and more cohesive regional bloc. The insights and policy recommendations from this forum will serve as a foundation for ASEAN's strategic roadmap towards 2045.