

For immediate reporting

ASEAN INTENSIFIES ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AMIDST GLOBAL CHALLENGES AT THE 55TH ASEAN ECONOMIC MINISTERS' MEETING AND RELATED MEETINGS

1. Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong is representing Singapore at the 55th ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) Meeting and Related Meetings from 19 to 20 August 2023 in Semarang, Indonesia. On 19 August, in addition to the AEM, Minister Gan attended the 37th ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) Council Meeting, the 26th ASEAN Investment Area Council (AIA), the ASEAN Business Advisory Council Meetings and the launch of the New ASEAN Tariff Finder.

2. Discussions centered on ASEAN's continuing efforts to integrate more closely amidst a challenging global economic environment. ASEAN Member States (AMS) engaged actively on further creating a conducive environment for cross-border trade and investment flows, addressing top-of-mind issues such as digitalisation and sustainability to help businesses capture new growth opportunities, boosting resilience and positioning the region for longer-term growth. Reflecting its commitment to intensify economic integration in the region, ASEAN announced the following outcomes in Semarang:

- i. Conclusion of the ASEAN Services Facilitation Framework (ASFF); which aims to foster a more transparent and predictable business environment for our companies to engage in cross-border trade in services in the region.
- ii. Signing of several Mutual Recognition Arrangements, namely the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Mutual Recognition Arrangements; ASEAN Sectoral Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Building and Construction Materials; ASEAN Food Safety Regulatory Framework Agreement; and Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Sectoral Mutual Recognition Arrangement for Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) Inspection of Manufacturers of Medicinal Products. Collectively, these MRAs will reduce impediments to trade as well as time and costs arising from duplicative re-testing, inspection and certification.
- iii. Endorsement of the ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality and the Study on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), which will bring ASEAN one step closer to its vision of a single digital economy and carbon-neutral future.
- iv. Launch of the new ASEAN Tariff Finder which provides a single and user-friendly portal for businesses to better access updated information on trade regimes and tariff rates within ASEAN.

- v. Signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to help ASEAN businesses better leverage and monetise their Intellectual Property (IP). One of the initiatives launched under the MoU is the ASEAN IP Register accessible via the ASEAN IP Portal, a one-stop platform for businesses to search ASEAN IP data.
3. The ASEAN Economic Ministers also noted the continued progress of the negotiations on an upgraded ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) chaired by Singapore.
4. Minister Gan said, “ASEAN is important to Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world. The annual AEM Meetings and the good outcomes from Semarang are testament to ASEAN’s commitment and efforts to remain open, connected and integrated with one another. A rules-based trading environment, and capturing the potential of digitalisation and sustainability are important for businesses in the region. Singapore will continue to work in partnership with ASEAN Member States to deepen ASEAN’s value proposition as an attractive trade and investment region for our global partners.”
5. Singapore and ASEAN share strong bilateral trade and investment relations, which has continued to display robust growth post-pandemic. ASEAN is Singapore’s largest trading partner in goods, as well as Singapore’s largest investment destination. In 2022, Singapore’s total trade in goods with ASEAN amounted to S\$344.3 billion, an increase of approximately 19% over the previous year. In 2022, Singapore invested S\$23.9 billion into ASEAN, an increase of approximately 8% from the previous year.

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