

**Keynote Speech by
H.E. Maris Sangiampongsa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand,
at the Nikkei Forum 30th FUTURE OF ASIA**

“Asia’s Challenge in a Turbulent World”

Thursday 29 May 2025, 11.30 - 12.00 hrs., Imperial Hotel Tokyo

President and Chief Executives of Nikkei,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Thank you, Mr. Kosuke Inoue, for the kind introduction.
2. It is an honor to join all of you here in Tokyo, at a pivotal moment when the world demands not only reflection -- but united and decisive action. The theme of this year’s Forum, “*Asia’s Challenge in a Turbulent World*,” is not only timely, but also urgent.
3. For we live today in truly turbulent times. In recent years, the world has undergone seismic disruption, causing unprecedented shifts in our global landscape on all fronts. The COVID-19 pandemic was just the beginning. It overwhelmed health systems, fractured supply chains, and eroded social cohesion. But as we began to recover, new storms emerged: trade wars, geopolitical fragmentation, supply chain decoupling, and a worsening climate crisis. These cascading shocks have exposed vulnerabilities, undone substantial progress, and weakened the very foundations of global trust.
4. In today’s world, where geopolitical tensions can shape and impact markets, we continue to be not only interconnected, but also deeply interdependent. While some may find short-term gains in this era of “Great Fragmentation”, there still remain broader, more complex, risks. These challenges are multifaceted, transnational, interlinked, and beyond the capacity of any one nation to face alone. **We need a renewed commitment to cooperation.**
5. This is especially the case for ASEAN, especially in these uncertain times. The Indo-Pacific has become the epicenter of the intensifying US-China rivalry, reflecting the region’s central role in global supply chains and economic interdependence. This rivalry is confined not only to trade and economic competition, but also encompasses security and geopolitical dimensions.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

6. The old saying, “**unity is strength**”, is now more crucial than ever. We do not seek confrontation, but we must protect our interests in a world shaped by the competition of giants. We must not allow ourselves to be divided or sidelined. Each of our nations brings unique strengths and faces different challenges. But only together -- through **solidarity and cooperation** -- can we assert our collective agency. Regional collaboration is thus the key to redefine Asia’s role -- not as a bystander, but as a proactive force for stability, growth, and peace. This is our shared mission -- **to shape Asia’s new future**.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

7. Tariffs and countermeasures have become tools for geopolitical leverage -- raising costs, disrupting supply chains, and fragmenting trade. Thailand, like many others, has felt the consequences.

8. The cycle of retaliation must be discouraged. Though we have recently seen a de-escalation in the tariff war – lifting stock markets and currencies – this may only prove temporary. If negotiations fail, tensions will return. How long must we drift in these uncertain waters?

9. The global economic system we painstakingly built over decades was anchored in stability. Today, we see the loss of predictability, trust and economic clarity. Uncertainty has become the new normal. **And we must adapt.**

10. In today’s fractured world, the concept of **co-opetition**—a fusion of cooperation and competition—has become not only relevant but essential. While nations compete for markets in a race for innovation, it is undeniable that global challenges demand collective solutions. From climate change and pandemics to supply chain resilience and technological standards, no country can stand alone. Strategic rivalry need not preclude collaboration; in fact, it is precisely through cooperation that we can build a more stable, inclusive, and sustainable international order.

11. And what is certain is that we cannot rely on traditional markets alone. Given these disruptions, Asia will need to work strenuously to diversify access to new markets, and intensify our cooperation to cushion the impact from ongoing conflicts. For Thailand, like other open economies, we must maintain a rules-based multilateral trading system.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

12. Asia's strength lies in its resilience. But we must do more than endure. We must lead. This is our moment, at the crossroads of a generation, to chart a new course. Let Asia ride the storm -- together.

13. We must seize this moment to turn challenges into opportunities, to turn threats into possibilities. And, in my view, there are **five strategic priorities** that will drive Asia's next chapter of growth and prosperity.

14. **FIRST, trade and investment.** We must deepen regional economic integration and remain steadfast in our commitment to free and open economies. This means advancing trade connectivity in all dimensions, promoting high-quality investment, and diversifying markets. Such efforts are crucial to insulating our economies from the ripple effects of tariff wars between major powers, which can undo years of hard-won development progress.

15. **In this regard, Thailand sees great potential in expanding the use of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** and other existing trade and investment frameworks, while also negotiating new agreements. RCEP, the world's largest free trade bloc, representing one-third of global GDP, continues to be a powerful engine of growth. We must work together to reduce tariffs, streamline customs procedures, and strengthen regional supply chains.

16. Thailand encourages fuller utilization of the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP). We also remain committed to advancing discussions on the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) within APEC, including by exploring viable pathways forward. This includes our aspiration for BRICS membership.

17. **On the bilateral front, we must make the most of the Japan-Thailand Economic Partnership Agreement (JTEPA) to reinforce our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).** This includes boosting trade in goods and services, particularly e-commerce, and fostering a more dynamic investment climate – through capacity building, human capital development and greater people-to-people exchanges. Thailand looks forward to tackling challenges head-on and identifying new areas of cooperation under JTEPA for our shared benefit in a rapidly changing global landscape.

18. **In the same spirit, Thailand is pursuing FTA negotiations** with other key partners, such as the European Union, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea, among others, as well as with China and India, through ASEAN. Our recent

achievements in concluding FTAs with EFTA, Sri Lanka and Bhutan are concrete examples of our dedicated pursuit of freer trade.

19. **We are also taking bold steps at home.** Thailand has initiated its accession process to the OECD, which is a pivotal first step in our journey toward becoming a high-income and innovation-driven economy by 2037. By aligning our policies and practices with OECD standards through comprehensive reforms, we aim to elevate our competitiveness, governance, and sustainability. This marks one of the most significant national transformations in Thailand's modern history.

20. **In this endeavor, we deeply appreciate and value Japan's steadfast support.** Japan has always been the most impactful and trusted companion along our journey towards the OECD. The road ahead is long, but our resolve is unwavering. We are ready to run this marathon.

21. **SECOND, resilient and smart supply chains.** We must build supply chains that are resilient to shocks and ready for the future. Thailand's **Eastern Economic Corridor**, or **EEC**, lies at the heart of this strategy. As our flagship development initiative, the EEC is designed to become the region's premier hub for advanced manufacturing, logistics, and innovation -- and a gateway to ASEAN's fast-growing markets.

22. **We are rapidly upgrading strategic infrastructure in the EEC**, from Laem Chabang Deep Sea Port and Map Ta Phut Industrial Port to high-speed rail links and the upgraded U-Tapao International Airport. Smart industrial estates are being developed, equipped with advanced utilities, 5G technology, and green energy solutions.

23. **We are deeply appreciative to Japanese companies for their continued trust.** To date, Japanese investments in the EEC total over 30 billion baht (or about 910 million US dollars) across nearly 90 projects. Building on our long-standing economic partnership, Thailand is confident that, together with Japan, we can co-create supply chains and high-value industries that will define our shared future. We will form an important part of the global value chain that keeps the wheels of the global economy moving.

24. **THIRD, green transition and sustainable growth.** We must accelerate the green transition to achieve our global climate goals. Sustainability is not optional -- it is survival. The growing consequences of climate change, from extreme weather to rising sea levels, endanger not only our environment but also our economic and social stability. In this domain, Thailand is determined to lead ASEAN as a **green and sustainable manufacturing hub**.

25. **We aim to transition to a low-carbon society and reach net-zero by 2065**, and we look to Japan's expertise in clean energy and mobility innovation to guide us on this journey. We are also exploring investments in **clean nuclear energy** and **biofuel** to diversify our energy mix. Japan's advanced nuclear technology can be instrumental in this regard.

26. **We deeply value our longstanding partnership with Japan in the automotive sector.** While we embrace clean mobility and low-carbon solutions, we remain firmly committed to supporting our existing automotive ecosystem, including internal combustion engine (ICE) technologies. Thailand will continue to provide a stable investment climate and regulatory clarity to ensure that Japanese automotive businesses thrive. Your investments in Thailand are not only welcome—they are safe and secure. Looking ahead, we see great potential for Japanese automotive businesses to expand and innovate in Thailand, especially in the transition toward sustainable and next-generation vehicles.

27. **This is a moment to deepen our collaboration** – in R&D for hybrid vehicles, fuel cell innovation, and carbon capture technologies. Thailand offers a strategic base and a growing market. Together, we can lead Asia's clean mobility revolution and shape the industries of tomorrow.

28. **FOURTH, digital transformation and the future of work.** In this intelligent age, digital innovation – Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, the Internet of Things - has the power to fast-track sustainable growth. If deployed wisely and inclusively, it can transform our economies and societies.

29. **Thailand aims to become a leading digital hub in Southeast Asia.** Our digital ecosystem is expanding rapidly, fully supported by government policies that empower startups and SMEs.

30. Humans must master AI, not the other way around. For this reason, Thailand is drafting AI legislation to ensure responsible governance and innovation, addressing legal frameworks, risk management, and policy development. We have also adopted the National Artificial Intelligence Action Plan (2022–2027) to strengthen our AI capabilities while promoting ethical, inclusive, and sustainable deployment. Our goal is to foster a trustworthy AI ecosystem that benefits all people.

31. At the same time, Thailand has set an ambitious goal to cultivate a **robust digital workforce**. To achieve this, the Thai government is implementing comprehensive plans to develop a workforce of 280,000 individuals in high-tech sectors over the next five years, including AI, EVs and semiconductors.

32. **We are working with global partners to strengthen our digital infrastructure and workforce.** Amazon Web Services (AWS) has launched the Skills to Jobs Tech Alliance in Thailand, aiming to develop talent in emerging technologies and cloud computing. Similarly, Microsoft plans to open its first regional data center in Thailand, enhancing cloud services and providing training in AI to some 2.5 million people in Southeast Asia by 2025. Google has also announced a one-billion-US-Dollar investment to establish a data center and cloud region in Thailand, expected to create an average of 14,000 jobs annually until 2029. To this end, we are upskilling not only our youth but also our older and elderly population, because, like Japan, Thailand is entering into a super-aged society. We must future-proof our people.

33. **ASEAN is emerging as a global digital leader.** Its digital economy is projected to reach 1 trillion US dollars by 2030. The ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) will soon provide a common foundation for digital trade, AI governance, and data flows.

34. **We must ensure that this transformation is inclusive.** SMEs need access to digital tools, financing, and cross-border platforms. We must also enhance regional cooperation on data governance, cybersecurity, and AI ethics.

35. **Thailand is investing heavily in tech startups and smart cities.** We are especially grateful for Japan's support in upgrading our disaster preparedness systems, particularly early warning capabilities -- highlighted by the recent tremors from the Myanmar earthquake felt across Thailand.

36. As we seek new engines of growth, the obvious answer, to be sure, lies in advanced industries of the future. But let us not forget, it is the power of creativity and the power of human invention that move things forward. In today's world where hard power dominates headlines, it is soft power that sustains relationships. The rich culture, history, nature, and values that weave the delicate fabric of our society are much more powerful than anything else. It is the people who are the drivers behind Thailand's creative and digital economy.

37. Which leads me to my **FIFTH** and **FINAL** point, **the people**. At the heart of every transformation are the people. Our overriding goal is to achieve people-centered growth that ensures human security, strong livelihoods, and social well-being. Skills development, cross-border mobility, education, and health systems are critical not just for human capital, but also for regional stability.

38. So, as Thailand accelerates its digital transformation to build a vibrant AI ecosystem, digital literacy becomes vital for inclusive participation, resilience, and opportunity. With this, Thailand will accelerate AI adoption for our people across

various sectors. and will be training at least 10 million AI users, 90,000 AI professionals, and 50,000 AI developers over the next two years. Bridging the digital divide begins with ensuring that every individual of every age has the digital literacy needed to navigate today's rapidly evolving world.

39. Bridging the digital divide is just one part of the equation, ensuring their well-being is another. **Good health represents the true wealth of a nation;** thus good health starts at home. That is why for decades, Thailand has remained strongly committed to strengthening our health systems to ensure equitable and affordable access to quality healthcare for people of all ages. Thailand is proud of our universal health coverage (UHC) model, and values Japan as a true champion and global pioneer in health security. We look forward to deepening our cooperation with Japan in this matter.

40. Last but not least, beyond physical and economic well-being, we recognize the transformative power of culture, creativity, and national identity. Thailand is investing in its **soft power**—from food, fashion, and festivals to film, design, and digital content—through our national “One Family, One Soft Power” initiative. We see the creative economy as a powerful engine for inclusive growth, innovation, and global influence—one that is uniquely powered by people and their imagination. This is an area ripe for collaboration with Japan, a country whose cultural industries inspire the world. Together, we can elevate Asia's voice through creativity and shared values.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

41. **We are living through a polycrisis.** Yet within this storm lies an opportunity for Asia to lead — as a voice for peace, stability, and cooperation. We must speak with one voice, across the region and beyond.

42. Global institutions still matter, even amid fragmentation and rising nationalism. We must continue to **reaffirm our full support for multilateralism, as well as our strong commitment to a rules-based and inclusive global governance and multilateral trading system.** I agree that the system is in need of reforms to better serve the global majority in today's fast-evolving context. Thailand therefore joins the global call to strengthen and revolutionize the United Nations and the WTO, among others, to become more inclusive, effective, and fit-for-purpose. From now on, we need institutions that work for everyone, not just a select few; institutions where developing and middle-income countries are better heard and can fully take part in shaping the global agenda.

43. Through all of this, Thailand will continue to be a bridge builder. Whether through ASEAN, APEC, OECD, BIMSTEC, ACMECS, or ACD, we will work earnestly to connect regions, promote understanding, and amplify Asia's voice. The growing phenomenon of "minilateralism" reflects a changing global landscape. Thailand believes that these platforms complement and reinforce one another, rather than work at cross purposes. They can serve as building blocks for broader multilateral cooperation.

44. In the case of ASEAN, in order to promote balance, peace, and stability in the region, ASEAN must uphold its centrality and relevance by adhering to the **ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific**, which emphasizes dialogue over confrontation, inclusivity over exclusion, and cooperation over rivalry. We seek to avoid the escalation of confrontation, to preserve ASEAN's strategic equilibrium, and to navigate geopolitical flashpoints through dialogue, restraint, and cooperation.

45. On the South China Sea, as nations both large and small, we are deeply reliant on international shipping routes that pass through one of the world's most critical maritime corridors. Approximately one third of international trade passes through these contested waters, directly impacting our economies, supply chains, food and energy security. That is why Thailand will work with all to ensure the freedom of navigation and the peaceful and prosperous use of these waters.

45. At the sub-regional level, Thailand will work closely with our neighbors to address common challenges. In the case of Myanmar, as our immediate neighbor, Thailand wishes to see a peaceful, stable and unified Myanmar, which can only be realized by Myanmar alone. Any viable and lasting solution must be Myanmar-led and Myanmar-owned, and we truly believe that constructive engagement is the only way forward. To complement ASEAN's efforts in implementing the 5-Point Consensus, Thailand is mobilizing the voice of all of Myanmar's neighboring countries in parallel. For these reasons, Thailand is playing a proactive role in engaging Myanmar in the sub-region, particularly in discussions to address pollution and transboundary crimes, such as online scams and drugs.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

46. In closing, I leave you with this thought: Asia need not fear the challenges posed by global powers. The United States and China are major players -- but so is Japan. And by joining hands with Thailand, ASEAN, and the wider region, we can unlock boundless opportunities.

47. Together, we are stronger. Together, we can drive innovation, resilience, and shared prosperity for the region and beyond.

48. Thailand is your trustworthy partner. We have grown together, through both good days and bad days. Let us build together even brighter days beyond the storm.

49. To our Japanese investors and businesses: your presence in Thailand is deeply valued. Thailand is strongly committed to providing a safe, stable, and predictable environment where your investments can flourish. Thailand will continue to be a place where partnerships endure, innovation thrives, and mutual prosperity is not just a goal — but a shared reality.

50. I thank you very much. *Arigato gozaimasu.*

* * * * *

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
29 May 2025