

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather here today at a truly pivotal moment in human history.

For centuries, global politics and security were defined by states — by governments, militaries, and formal treaties.

But today, this traditional world order is being fundamentally challenged by a new and formidable force: private, non-state actors wielding technological power.

The prominent presence of tech leaders at President Trump's inauguration in January 2025 was emblematic. It signaled not only the consolidation of power between political leaders and tech elites but also their appetite for influence and dominance in global affairs.

We all witnessed how Elon Musk played a multifaceted and highly visible role in the U.S. presidential election campaign of 2024 — not only contributing vast financial resources but leveraging his social media platform X to amplify partisan messages, and later being entrusted to help transform state bureaucracy.

These are not merely tech corporations, nor just another generation of CEOs.

These are architects of a new reality.

Companies like Meta, Google, and OpenAI do not simply produce software or devices; they build the very infrastructure through which we work, communicate, and govern ourselves.

Their leaders and owners are now shaping the rules of our digital existence.

From steering global communication flows to driving the development of artificial intelligence, these giants have evolved from market players into global policy-shapers.

Their influence extends beyond innovation. They are shaping how communities think, how democracies function, and even how states govern themselves.

We are witnessing the rise of new power elites.

These tech titans — our modern-day “tech barons” — hold an unprecedented concentration of economic, informational, and geopolitical power.

Their decisions bypass and undermine parliaments.

They sway national elections, determine who is heard online, and even affect a nation's ability to wage war.

This centralization of power — driven by market consolidation and network effects — poses a direct threat to democratic governance and state sovereignty.

How does this resonate with ASEAN, global superpowers, and for states such as ours?

It means that private technological actors have opened a new dimension of geopolitical competition.

Look no further than the rivalry between the United States and China.

This is no longer just a contest between governments; it is a struggle mediated through corporations.

States are compelled to choose between competing ecosystems, and their national security is increasingly entangled with corporate interests.

This risks fragmenting the global digital landscape, creating rival technological spheres of influence that divide nations and regions.

So, where do we go from here?

We must recognize that the old model of state-centric power is no longer sufficient.

We must imagine new forms of governance that encompass both state and non-state actors.

We are not passive users in this new order; we are citizens.

The struggle to hold these new powers accountable is the defining political challenge of our age.

And the solution will not emerge from one country or one corporation, but from a collective global commitment to ensure that technology serves humanity — never the other way around.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The role of tech leaders in shaping geopolitics is but one example of the new security challenges we must confront.

We must also contend with a steep rise in political violence.

The world today is witnessing more conflicts, more violence, and more humanitarian catastrophes.

In 2024, one in every eight human beings lived amid conflict. Over fifty countries were at war.

Palestine remains the most conflict-ridden, while Ukraine and Sudan stand among the other global flashpoints. And the list grows longer.

When global mediation was most needed, the Israeli attack on Qatar was unprecedented, heinous, and horrendous.

Even Qatar — long regarded as a trusted mediator — has itself become a target.

So who will defend peace, when even proven and honest brokers are attacked?

Especially when the United Nations — once the cornerstone of global mediation — is increasingly constrained, paralyzed by divisions within its own Security Council.

What has happened to the UN is nothing short of tragic.

Its role as the lead guardian of peace has diminished. Its repeated failures to prevent conflicts, genocides, and humanitarian disasters have eroded trust in its effectiveness.

Friends and colleagues,

The truth is — we do not have formidable solutions for the challenges of tomorrow. The future remains uncertain, and the path ahead is uncharted.

But if we do not yet have all the answers, we do have something just as powerful: the lessons of the past.

It is by looking back — at the wisdom, solidarity, and trust that carried us through times of upheaval — that ASEAN can find its compass to navigate the complex future.

Our founders understood this well when they established ASEAN in 1967 amid strife and turmoil.

They recognized that our collective strength was our greatest asset.

They cemented that vision in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1976 — a treaty that continues to remind us of three enduring fundamentals.

First, the primacy of diplomacy. The “ASEAN Way” — rooted in dialogue, consultation, and consensus — has proven to be our strongest tool.

It has ensured that no dispute among our members has ever escalated into armed conflict, a remarkable feat in such a diverse region.

Second, the power of solidarity. Time and again, our unity has shielded us from external pressures and guided us through crises.

From post–Cold War expansion to our response to the Asian financial crisis, solidarity has safeguarded our individual interests while fortifying our collective resolve.

And third, the foundation of trust. Our resilience is built on trust — not only in our institutions, but in each other as a family of nations. Trust allows for candor, for compromise, and for peaceful resolution.

Today, we face new tests: intensifying rivalries, economic volatility, technological upheaval, and the climate crisis.

As we address these megatrends, the wisdom of our past is more vital than ever.

When external rivalries intensify, we must reaffirm our neutrality and dialogue. ASEAN Centrality must remain a neutral, trusted platform for honest discussion and a defender of a rules-based international order.

When economies grow volatile, we must draw on our past successes in integration.

Resilience in supply chains, and innovation in digital, green, and blue economies will be essential. The lesson is clear: openness and collaboration deliver shared prosperity.

And when societies are tested, we must place our people at the heart of our efforts.

Our Socio-Cultural Community must be more than a framework; it must empower. We must bridge development gaps, protect the vulnerable, and uplift our youth and women — ensuring that no one is left behind.

By investing in education, human capital, and social protection, we prepare our citizens not just to endure change, but to thrive within it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN’s story is one of resilience through evolution.

Our strength has never been about standing still — it has always been about adapting.

From five founding members to ten, and soon eleven with the accession of Timor-Leste, ASEAN has proven that our vision is to grow, to include, and to improve.

As we chart the next chapter, let us remain guided by the wisdom of our past: dialogue over conflict, unity over division, and prosperity shared by all.

And let us never forget that the greatest wisdom of ASEAN is our collective will — the will to bind ourselves together in friendship, cooperation, and trust.

Thank you.