



**P R I M E
M I N I S T E R**

**LECTURE BY
HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO**

**THE 2025 CHANCELLOR TUANKU MUHRIZ LECTURE
AT UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA**

**‘TIMOR-LESTE’S ACCESSION TO ASEAN: AN ACT OF SOLIDARITY IN
A FRACTURING WORLD’**

Kuala Lumpur, 29 October 2025



Palácio do Governo,
Avenida Presidente Nicolau Lobato,
Dili, Timor-Leste

Mengadap Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Yang di-Pertuan Besar Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus, Tuanku Muhriz Ibni Almarhum Tuanku Munawir, Canselor Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Saya menjunjung setinggi-tinggi kasih atas sudi perkenan Duli Yang Maha Mulia Tuanku berangkat mencemar Duli menghadiri SYARAHAN CANSELOR TUANKU MUHRIZ kali ketujuh pada pagi ini

Sesungguhnya, keberangkatan Duli Yang Maha Mulia Tuanku merupakan suatu penghormatan kepada saya dan pihak Republik Demokratik Timor-Leste

Yang Amat Mulia Tunku Besar Seri Menanti Tunku Ali Redhaudhin Ibni Tuanku Muhriz Pro Canselor UKM

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Datuk Rafiah Salim Pro Canselor UKM

Tuan Yang Terutama Dato' Seri Fransisco Kalbuadi Lay Timbalan Perdana Menteri Republik Demokratik Timor Leste

Yang Amat Mulia Tunku Zain Al 'Abidin ibni Tuanku Muhriz

Yang Berbahagia Profesor Dr. Sufian Jusoh Naib Canselor UKM

Yang Mulia Kerabat-Kerabar Diraja

Para Menteri, Timbalan Menteri, Ahli Parlimen dan Delegasi daripada Republik Demokratik Timor-Leste

Ahli-Ahli Lembaga Pengarah dan Pengurusan Tertinggi UKM

Yang Berbahagia Prof. Ts. Dr. Faizal Mohamed Menjalankan fungsi Timbalan Naib Canselor Hal-Ehwal Jaringan Industri dan Masyarakat Merangkap Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Pelaksana Majlis Syarahan Canselor Tuanku Muhriz Ke-7

Dif-Dif Jemputan

Serta para hadirin sekalian

It is a great honour to deliver the 2025 Chancellor Tuanku Muhriz Lecture at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

UKM stands as a symbol of Malaysia's confidence and imagination.

In the early years of independence, UKM was more than an academic institution, its establishment was an act of nation-building — an assertion of cultural identity and collective purpose.

Today, UKM is one of the great universities of our region — an example of Malaysia's academic excellence and commitment to cooperation, innovation and good governance.

That spirit is embodied by your Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sufian Jusoh, whose work in law and policy across our region, including in Timor-Leste, gives practical meaning to regional solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This week is of profound importance for the Timorese people.

The accession of Timor-Leste as the eleventh member of ASEAN marks a new chapter in our nation's history - and in the story of Southeast Asia.

Our ascension to ASEAN affirms Timor-Leste's identity as part of the Southeast Asian family.

It represents the work of over two decades of nation-building and a commitment to regional peace, cooperation and shared prosperity.

Our journey to this moment has been long and often lonely.

The Portuguese arrived in 1515. For centuries, colonial rule defined our place in the world. In 1975, as Portugal departed its colonies, the Timorese declared independence. But nine days later, Indonesia, fearing instability on its borders, and with the backing of major Western powers, invaded.

For twenty-four years we endured occupation.

I led our resistance forces in the mountains and valleys of our country, often cut off from the world, but never from the conviction that self-determination was our right.

For decades we felt forgotten.

The fall of the Suharto regime gave us hope. Then in early 1999, the new Indonesian President, B.J. Habibie, agreed to allow the Timorese to vote on our future.

In August 1999, the Timorese bravely exercised our right to self-determination and voted overwhelmingly for independence.

On 20 May 2002, Timor-Leste was reborn as an independent and sovereign nation.

It has not been easy, but we have built a peaceful, democratic and inclusive nation. A country governed by the rule of law, respect for human rights and a strong supporter of international law.

I share this story not only to tell you who we are, but to remind us all that the journey of Timor-Leste is part of the larger story of Southeast Asia.

We may have taken longer to emerge from colonialism and conflict, but today we stand together with our region — united through our accession to ASEAN.

This moment belongs to every Timorese who struggled for freedom, to those who rebuilt our communities, and to the young who will now grow up knowing that their future is tied to that of our region.

From the beginning, we understood that the success of our small country depended on friendship and cooperation with our region.

We gave priority to reconciliation with Indonesia. Today, our strong and friendly relationship stands as a true example of reconciliation — providing a model for the world.

It was my dear friend, Indonesia's first directly elected President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who first encouraged us to apply for ASEAN membership in 2011.

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is a great statesman who consolidated democratic governance in his country while building solidarity throughout our region.

It humbles me that I stand now, where he stood in 2022, delivering the Chancellor Tuanku Muhriz Lecture.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this fracturing and uncertain world, Timor-Leste cannot stand alone.

Our development will not advance in isolation.

Our security is tied to the security of our neighbours.

Our identity - forged through struggle and resilience - belongs to the same family of nations that share our seas, our storms and our hopes.

When Timor-Leste achieved independence, our hard-won sovereignty brought with it not only opportunities, but responsibilities.

The same is true as we enter ASEAN. We understand that belonging brings duty: to strengthen cooperation, to uphold peace and to build together a more just and united region.

Our nation embraces the core values of ASEAN:

- peaceful cooperation
- respect for sovereignty
- unity in diversity
- regional solidarity
- collective responsibility for enhancing regional peace
- good governance, and
- the principles of democracy, respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights and ASEAN centrality.

For Timor-Leste, these are not abstract ideals. They reflect our lived experience — of struggle, reconciliation and nation-building.

ASEAN membership holds deep meaning for us. It affirms what our people have always known in their hearts: that we are part of Southeast Asia, joined by geography, by history and by spirit.

We look to our Southeast Asian neighbours in friendship and solidarity, knowing that this region will shape our destiny.

For Timor-Leste, this moment carries both recognition and promise.

It is a recognition of the sacrifice of the Timorese people and our success in building a State from the ashes of conflict. It reflects our commitment to reconciliation, peace and regional solidarity.

ASEAN membership is a final step in our long journey toward political self-determination, a transition from separation to integration, from isolation to belonging.

It also carries great social and economic promise for our people.

Integration into Southeast Asia opens a gateway to trade and investment, to education and training and to the exchange of new ideas and cultures that will enrich our nation and connect our people to the wider region.

It will open new markets for our entrepreneurs, new partnerships for our farmers and fisher people, and new pathways for our young people — the generation that will carry Timor-Leste forward.

ASEAN memberships will expand the horizons of our people, connecting them to a region of almost seven hundred million — a region of growing prosperity and shared purpose.

Through ASEAN, Timor-Leste's young people will see new doors open across the region, from Jakarta to Manila, from Hanoi to Kuala Lumpur.

Through ASEAN frameworks, we can contribute to our region's progress — from sustainable agriculture and resilient fisheries to modern infrastructure, vibrant tourism and digital innovation.

Active participation will strengthen our institutions, improve governance and build the resilience of our society.

We will now be able to stand as equals in our region, not as observers, but as contributors.

ASEAN membership also gives confidence to potential investors. It signals that Timor-Leste has joined its region and aligned with its rules and norms.

We intend to seize the economic opportunities of membership to create jobs and build a better future for our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While Timor-Leste embraces the opportunity of ASEAN membership, our accession comes at a time of international peril.

The world around us has become more fractured and unstable — more volatile, more unpredictable. The forces that once held nations together are weakening, and the principles that guided global cooperation are being tested.

The international legal, economic and trading systems that shaped the world since the end of World War II are under great strain.

Rising geopolitical tensions and growing isolationism have weakened the multilateral order. International law is too often ignored, and global institutions are losing both authority and effectiveness.

The United Nations is struggling in the face of multiple global challenges, including conflict, climate change, deep inequality and fragile States.

Like the Millennium Development Goals before them, the Sustainable Development Goals will struggle to be achieved.

Extreme inequality, insecurity and exclusion are eroding social cohesion, fueling fear and division across the world. Too many nations are turning inward, placing self-interest above the common good.

We now face the prospect of a world both fragmented and re-ordered — where power replaces principle, and solidarity gives way to self-interest.

At the same time, we are witnessing great advances in technology — changes that will shape how we live, how we work and how we relate to one another. Among them is Artificial Intelligence, or AI, which is already transforming societies in ways we are only beginning to understand. Used wisely, it can be a force for good — bringing health and education to excluded communities and fostering connection and cooperation across borders.

Yet AI also carries destructive power. It can spread misinformation in fragile contexts, distort truth and deepen divisions within our societies.

In this time of change, uncertainty and fragmentation, it may seem easier for nations to retreat into isolation, self-interest and exclusion.

ASEAN has chosen a different path. In the face of daunting global challenges, it continues to build cooperation and foster solidarity — between peoples and between nations — proving that unity remains possible even in a divided world.

ASEAN remains a source of imagination, inclusion and hope. In an interconnected world, it recognises that cooperation is not a choice but a necessity. It offers a counter-narrative to division — one that values collective well-being, celebrates diversity and keeps faith in the possibility of progress.

In a world that is fracturing, ASEAN's embrace of Timor-Leste stands as a powerful act of international solidarity.

It is in this uncertain world that ASEAN's decision carries its deepest meaning. It declares that our region continues to choose inclusion over exclusion, cooperation over competition. It is a repudiation of the politics of fear and division, firmly based in the conviction that international cooperation still matters.

Even in a fractured world, ASEAN shows clarity of purpose — proving that diversity is not a weakness but the foundation of our collective strength.

For Timor-Leste, this is the ASEAN we have long admired and the ASEAN we are proud to join.

For ASEAN, we hope that our membership brings a new generation and a new story, reinforcing a shared sense of purpose and unity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we mark this new beginning for our country, I wish to acknowledge, with deep respect, the role of Malaysia.

It was under Malaysia's chairmanship that Timor-Leste was welcomed as the eleventh member of ASEAN.

Malaysia's support for our membership was led by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, a steadfast friend to Timor-Leste. He understands the pain of struggle and the value of reconciliation. His commitment to peace — from the resolution of regional disputes to his

calls for justice in distant conflicts — reflects a leader who sees the dignity of nations as bound to the dignity of people.

Malaysia now holds a special place in the memory of our nation and in the hope of our future. It was here, in Kuala Lumpur, that Timor-Leste was embraced by its regional family. And it is here that the promise of Southeast Asia — unity in diversity, cooperation in peace — continues to find new meaning.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As Timor-Leste begins this new chapter as a member of ASEAN, we do so with humility, gratitude and determination.

We know that membership is not the end of our journey — it is the beginning of a deeper responsibility: to contribute to the peace, stability and prosperity of our region.

Our history has taught us that no nation is too small to make a difference, to uphold dignity, justice and the right to live in peace.

In welcoming Timor-Leste during a time of global uncertainty and conflict, ASEAN has shown the world that solidarity is stronger than division.

Let us all continue to stand together, for peace, for cooperation and for our common humanity.

Thank you very much.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão