



**PRIME  
MINISTER**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY PRIME MINISTER  
KAY RALA XANANA GUSMÃO  
AT THE ASEAN BUSINESS AND YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM  
ORGANISED BY THE CONFEDERATION OF ASIA-PACIFIC CHAMBERS OF  
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (CACCI), THE YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS GROUP  
OF ASIA PACIFIC (YEGAP) AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF YOUNG  
ENTREPRENEURS OF TIMOR-LESTE (ANJET)**

Timor Plaza, Dili

26 May 2026

Excellency, Mr. Thorsten Bargfrede, Ambassador of the European Union to Timor-Leste



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

## Members of Government

Mr. Jorge Serrano, President, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Timor-Leste (CCI-TL)

Mr. Peter McMullin AM, President, Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) President

Mr. Antoninho Junior Ximenes Guterres, President, National Association of Young Entrepreneurs of Timor-Leste (ANJET)

Mr. Hiromi Aoki, Chairman, Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia Pacific (YEGAP)

Mr. RJ Tan, ASEAN Young Entrepreneur Carnival Chair

Mr. Stuart Mkojera-Thomson, CACCI Vice President

International Trade Centre Timor-Leste Team

International and Timorese Entrepreneurs

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to speak at this forum, which brings together Timorese entrepreneurs, regional business leaders and partners who will help shape the economic future of our nation.

Last week we celebrated the 24th anniversary of the Restoration of our Independence. This anniversary had special significance for the Timorese people. Our struggle against occupation lasted 24 years, from 1975 to 1999. This year, we also mark 24 years since the Restoration of Independence.

During the occupation, many Timorese gave their lives for a country they would never see, while those who survived carried the suffering of the struggle in their families, their communities, and their own lives.

Our independence was not given to us. It was won by sacrifice, by resilience and by the belief that the Timorese had the right to live as a free people in their own land.

After 24 years of occupation, we now celebrate 24 years of independence.

We have achieved much since the Restoration of our Independence in 2002.

From the ashes of conflict, we began a process of peacebuilding and State-building. We worked for national reconciliation within Timor-Leste and for reconciliation with Indonesia, because we understood that sustainable development would not be possible without peace with our neighbours and peace among ourselves.

Together, we built a peaceful and democratic nation, with an open economy, governed by the rule of law, with respect for human rights and international law.

Guided by our Strategic Development Plan, we have built national infrastructure, including an extensive road network, energy generation and distribution, a national port, airports, and communications infrastructure.

These are important achievements. They are the foundations of our State, and they should give confidence to our people.

But after 24 years of independence, this is also a moment for national reflection.

As a country, we still have much to do. We must build a resilient nation with a strong economy that protects our sovereignty and provides jobs and opportunities for our people.

Independence alone cannot feed us.

A resilient nation needs its own productive economy, its own businesses and its own people creating work, opportunity and confidence.

Sovereignty is more than a slogan. It must be lived through the skills of our people, the confidence of our businesses and the capacity of our economy to sustain our future.

A country that depends too much on imports is not yet economically sovereign.

A country where too many young people cannot find a job is not yet fulfilling the promise of independence.

A country where too much activity depends on the State must continue to transform itself if it is to build long-term resilience.

This is why the development of the private sector is essential for the survival and sustainability of our State.

And that is why the next 24 years must be about building the economic strength to sustain our nation.

The generation that fought for independence gave us political freedom.

The generation that built our State gave us peace, institutions and national infrastructure.

The generation before us now must build an economy that allows our independence to endure.

This is why the Government is committed to creating the conditions for private sector growth and investment.

We have a stable economy, consistent growth, low inflation, and a low tax environment.

We welcome foreign investment that creates jobs, transfers skills, and supports the development of our industries, including tourism, agriculture, services, and petroleum.

In 2024, Timor-Leste joined the World Trade Organization, opening new opportunities for trade, investment and private sector growth.

We are also establishing a National Development Bank to support entrepreneurs and small businesses that too often have ideas and ambition, but cannot access the credit they need to grow.

As a new member of ASEAN, Timor-Leste is also taking its place within the economic and strategic life of Southeast Asia.

ASEAN membership will provide an opportunity to connect our businesses, our entrepreneurs and our young people with one of the most dynamic regions in the world.

Timor-Leste has put itself forward to assume the chairmanship of ASEAN and to host the ASEAN Summit in 2029.

This would be the largest international event ever held in our country, with opportunities for our private sector, including for young entrepreneurs who are ready to provide services at a regional standard.

Timor-Leste is also fortunate to have minerals and petroleum resources.

The development of Greater Sunrise remains central to our long-term economic future. Together with the Tasi Mane Project on our south coast, it will support industrial

development, create jobs, build skills, and support the social and economic development of our nation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While our country has a bright future, we will not be able to achieve our potential without the nation building efforts of our businesses and our entrepreneurs.

That is why our country needs the young entrepreneurs who are here today. We need your ideas, your passion, your ambition, and your courage.

And to our international guests, I ask you to work with them. Mentor them. Partner with them. Invest with them. Bring them into your networks. Help them see that their ambition and their future can extend beyond our borders.

This is the value of CACCI, YEGAP, ANJET and the networks represented here today. These platforms create relationships. They give young entrepreneurs access to ideas, confidence, and partners. They help a small country participate in a larger regional economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I finish, I want to thank the distinguished guests and partners who have joined us today.

I thank the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which for almost 60 years has connected chambers of commerce and business organisations across the Asia-Pacific region.

The President of CACCI, Peter McMullin, has been a long-standing friend and supporter of Timor-Leste. He assisted in the establishment of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Timor-Leste and has continued to support our private sector, including through his recent work with female entrepreneurs under a program supported by his Good Business Foundation and the Australian Government.

I acknowledge the work of the Young Entrepreneurs Group of Asia-Pacific, which brings together young entrepreneurs to build relationships, encourage cooperation and strengthen future regional leadership.

I also thank the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Timor-Leste and the National Association of Young Entrepreneurs of Timor-Leste for their work in building our national economy and empowering our young entrepreneurs.

I acknowledge the ongoing support of the European Union and the International Trade Centre Timor-Leste to business development and our friends here from the Philippines who are helping connect Timor-Leste to wider networks of entrepreneurship, investment, and cooperation.

The support here today shows our young people that they are not alone and that their businesses can be part of a wider region.

It shows Timor-Leste that the next stage of our development will be built through friendship, partnership and shared ambition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The sustainable future of our nation depends on building a strong and resilient economy, creating jobs, and giving our young people the opportunity to build their lives in their own country.

I urge Timor-Leste's young entrepreneurs to take risks, build businesses, and support our national development. If you succeed, our nation will succeed.

And I urge the international entrepreneurs and partners here today to join with us in friendship and cooperation. Work with our young people. Share your experience. Invest not only in projects, but in the future of a young country that is ready to take its place in the region.

Together we rise. Together we can build our country, protect our sovereignty, and give the next generation of Timorese people a future worthy of the struggle that made our independence possible.

Thank you very much.