



SPEECH BY:

**YAB DATO' SERI DR. AHMAD ZAHID BIN HAMIDI
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA
CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL TVET COUNCIL**

FOR:

**AT THE ASEAN TVET COUNCIL 4TH REGIONAL POLICY
DIALOGUE
“TVET FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL ADVANCEMENT”**

ON:

**11 JUNE 2025 (WEDNESDAY)
04.10 PM**

HELD AT:

**COUTYARD HOTEL,
MELAKA
MALAYSIA**

SALUTATION

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim.

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

And a very good afternoon.

OPENING REMARKS

1. Today, in this shared moment beneath the Melaka sky - a city of legacy and learning, we gather not merely to discuss policies, but to chart a future that **is bold, inclusive, and deeply rooted in the lives of our people.**
2. To me, this is more than just a dialogue. It's a call to reimagine TVET - not as a fallback, but as a path to dignity, a bridge to opportunity, and a promise that no one, whether in a township or a remote village - is left behind.
3. Malaysia is deeply **honoured to host this 4th Regional Policy Dialogue of the ASEAN TVET Council**, and in **conjunction with National TVET Day 2025** - I stand before you not just as a policymaker, but as a believer that skills are not merely tools for industry, but instruments of transformation. That in the hands of a rural youth, a welding torch, a drone, a coding language - can spark not just employment, but empowerment.

TVET: A Mission Beyond Borders

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. I come from humble beginnings, from **Bagan Datuk**, a small

town in the state of **Perak**, where the river writes stories before the pen does, and where ambition often stretches further than opportunity. I was raised among people who worked with their hands and prayed with their hearts - earning a living not through privilege, but through **perseverance**.

5. But one question has stayed with me all my life: **"Can we build a nation where every talent no matter where they are born - is given a fair stage to shine?"**

6. That question is what **fuels** my lifelong commitment to the **TVET agenda** - a mission I have carried across borders. I believe the future must never be defined by geography or background, but by **skill, grit, and access to opportunity**. And I always believe **TVET is the vehicle** that can move our youth from the backroads of rural life to the frontlines of innovation.

7. In **China**, I met Premier **Li Qiang** and secured **5,125 industrial placements** for Malaysian students. That commitment came with trust - symbolized by the gift of **six electric vehicles** to support our TVET institutions.

8. In **Abu Dhabi**, I met with the Crown Prince and Chairman of the Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence.

That conversation led to a landmark **MoU between UniKL and MBZUAI**, placing our students at the **frontier** of AI and future technologies.

11. At the recent **ASEAN Summit**, I made it clear: **TVET must be at the heart of our regional agenda** - it is the **foundation of a stronger, more inclusive ASEAN**. Shortly after that, I delivered a lecture at **University College London**, where I reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to becoming **ASEAN's TVET Certification and Excellence Hub**.

9. But the path is not without thorns. We still fight the **stigma** that TVET is for those who could not go further - when in truth, it is for those who dare to go further, faster, with purpose.

10. We also still face **fragmentation** - too many institutions speaking different languages, while industry calls for one clear standard.

11. Then, we still see **rural youth disconnected** - not for lack of ambition, but because connectivity fails them.. because modern tools don't reach them... because guidance doesn't find them.

12. And yet, in these challenges, I see the very reason why we as ASEAN members must fight harder. Why we must stitch every broken **thread** into a stronger fabric of opportunity.
13. TVET is not just about courses or certifications. It is about *possibility*. It is about lifting a family out of poverty because one child learned to code. It is about the farmer's son who became a drone technician, or the Orang Asli girl who became an expert in green tech.
14. This is the journey I walk. This is the work we must continue. And this is the ASEAN we must build - together.

Malaysia's Leadership Through Policy: Driving ASEAN's TVET Transformation

15. As Chair of ASEAN 2025, Malaysia is committed to driving the regional theme of **Inclusivity and Sustainability**. To achieve this, we must build a workforce that is skilled, adaptable, and inclusive - especially in rural and regional areas. **TVET is the key enabler in this mission.**
16. In Malaysia, we have long recognised that **TVET is not just a tool for economic development**, but a **cornerstone**

for rural upliftment. That is why we **embedded** it within our **National TVET Policy 2030**, aligning it closely with the ASEAN TVET Council Work Plan. But we did not stop at policy.

17. We acted. We restructured. We delivered. Through **deliberate inter-agency collaboration**, we transformed our TVET landscape. Under our national policy, we are preparing professionals for **high-growth, high-value industries**. This transformation then has been matched by **real systems change**.

18. The launch of **UP_TVET**, Malaysia's integrated portal connecting **1,398 TVET institutions nationwide**, has radically improved access, transparency, and alignment with industry demand. With real-time data, students, including those from rural areas can now chart their path based on real labour market needs.

19. And the results speak for themselves. In 2024, **TVET enrolment reached 436,285 students**, while **53.5% of SPM school leavers** (*our final public examination for secondary education in Malaysia*) - chose TVET.. a clear indication that public perception is shifting. Most importantly, **graduate employability now stands at 95.1%**, showing that TVET is

no longer a secondary option, but a **first-choice pathway** with real, measurable outcomes.

20. Our approach is also **inclusive**. We have also ensured that **Indigenous communities and persons with disabilities** are not left behind. Tailored initiatives and specialised programmes allow them to gain meaningful skills, contribute to their local economies, and uplift their families with dignity.

21. Malaysia's model is backed by strong governance. **The National TVET Council**, which I chair, ensures policy alignment, reduces overlap, and strengthens coordination across ministries - so no talent or resource is wasted.

22. We also know **industry must lead, not watch**. That's why employers are treated as **co-owners of outcomes** - helping close the skills gap and align TVET with our New Industrial Master Plan.

23. What we offer is more than a policy - it's a proven model. A model built on real delivery, inclusive practices, and regional relevance. Malaysia stands ready to share, support, and scale this model for the benefit of ASEAN as a whole.

Elevating TVET as a Regional Ecosystem: ASEAN's Collective Mission Forward

Ladies and gentlemen,

24. Today's dialogue is about building an ASEAN-wide ecosystem - one that places TVET at the center of our region's future, with the **ASEAN TVET Council (ATC)** as the nerve center that connects policies, aligns standards, and drives shared growth.

25. This Dialogue must chart a clear way forward. First, we must expand TVET access to rural communities, especially youth because the future cannot be built on urban skills alone.

26. In Malaysia, **GIATMARA**, a long-standing TVET institution under MARA and my ministry - has shown what's possible. It has equipped rural youth with skills, and over **50 graduates have become millionaires** in various technical fields. With the right mix of training, mentorship, and market access, TVET becomes a powerful tool for poverty **eradication** and generational change.

27. Secondly, **ASEAN must close the skills gap through**

industry-led, demand-driven training. We need a regional talent pipeline shaped by factories, plantations, and green industries across ASEAN. This requires industries to co-develop training, share **apprenticeships**, and open cross-border job opportunities.

28. Thirdly, **we must build TVET as a full ecosystem** - aligning education, industry, infrastructure, certification, and digital access, all guided by data and coordinated by ATC.

29. As ASEAN Chair this year, Malaysia is ready to coordinate and lead. We propose the formalization of Malaysia as the **ASEAN TVET Certification and Excellence Hub** and we look forward to the full support of all member states in making this a shared regional legacy.

Closing: Skills as ASEAN's New Currency

Ladies and gentlemen,

30. Across the globe, we are witnessing a powerful shift. TVET is no longer on the side-lines - it now stands at the **very centre of national economic strategies** and in this global race for relevance, **skills are the new currency.**

31. Malaysia is not only championing skills development but

we are laying the groundwork for ASEAN to become a **TVET powerhouse**. Let us work together to ensure TVET remains **accessible, relevant, and future-proof** for all.

32. Let us commit to building an ASEAN where **no talent is left untapped**, and **no community is left behind**.

Thank you.