

**REGIONAL OUTLOOK FORUM 2018
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**WELCOMING REMARKS BY MR TAN CHIN TIONG
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Professor Wang Gungwu, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2018 Regional Outlook Forum, the twenty first such event since its inception in 1998. This year is also ISEAS's 50th anniversary. I would like to thank all, including many of you here with us today, for your past and continuing support for our work at the Institute.

The theme of today's Forum is "Trends, Uncertainties and Opportunities", reflecting what is happening in the region and globally.

In the immediate future, there is both good news and not so good news. The economies of the advanced industrialised countries, especially the US, are doing much better than expected. Just a few days ago, the Dow Jones index soared above the 25,000 mark, setting a new record high for this key indicator of American economic performance. The US' unemployment rate of 4.1% is the lowest since 2001.

In Asia, China and India are projected to maintain a healthy growth rate of over six per cent even as the world and the region face headwinds of protectionism and inward-looking nationalism.

In the geopolitical and geo-economic arenas, the North Korean nuclear crisis remains unresolved, with missile tests and provocative Tweets increasing tensions in the Korean Peninsula. But the resumption of talks between North and South Korea when it happens can be a first and important step in managing the decades-long crisis.

President Trump's state visit to China in November last year, give some respite to the spectre of a trade war between the world's two largest economies. But Washington's push for what it considers "free and fair trade," with more emphasis on the "fair" component as opposed to the "free" part, will continue to bedevil US-China relations and adversely impact on the rest of the world.

Indeed, the Trump Administration's "America First" agenda has shaken confidence in US' willingness to provide international leadership and uphold the rules-based international order which it established in the 1940s.

Within Southeast Asia, while aggregate economic growth can be expected to improve, racial and religious divisions and identity politics continue to cause tensions and conflicts in several countries. The Rohingya issue in Myanmar and its ramifications can set back the country's developmental and modernisation goals, not to mention the damage already done to its image and reputation. Malaysia's 14th General Elections are expected to be held in the next 6 months. The outcome may have wide-ranging and long term implications on Malaysia's political landscape.

Further south, election fever is heating up in Indonesia as contenders prepare for the legislative and presidential elections in 2019. Thailand, which has been undergoing a royal transition, is also getting ready to hold a general election under the new constitution mandated by the current military government. In the Philippines, the Marawi conflict has not only left a bitter legacy of destruction and a trail of immeasurable human sufferings, but has also reminded the region of the dangers posed by a potent mix of extremist ideologies, ultra-conservative religious teachings, and terrorism.

With diminishing prospects of a peace settlement between the Manila government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and signs of revival of communist insurgency in other parts of the country, the Philippines face a challenging political and security outlook.

These opportunities and challenges form the backdrop in which ASEAN charts its future beyond its golden jubilee in 2017. And this year, Singapore chairs ASEAN for the fourth time.

The emerging and continuing political and economic trends of 2018, and the challenges and opportunities that await us will be discussed by the international and regional experts assembled here today.

I thank all of them for making the trip to Singapore and to spend time with us today.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all participants for your continuing support for the ROF, and to wish everyone an interesting day.

Thank you.