

# Greater Kuala Lumpur driving Asean's vision for growth and sustainability

By Muhammad Azmi Zulkifli

**W**ith a GDP of about US\$3.8 trillion, Asean has established itself as a dynamic and rapidly evolving economic hub, demonstrating remarkable progress and resilience. Poised to become the world's fourth-largest economy by 2030, this economic bloc is a formidable force, laying a solid foundation for a prominent role on the global stage.

Rich in diversity — spanning languages, cultures and economies — and its greatest asset: a vibrant, increasingly tech-savvy young population, Malaysia's leadership in 2025, if done well, could move the needle for Asean to accelerate its development trajectory and realise its potential as a global economic centre.

In alignment with this regional growth, Malaysia recorded impressive approved investments valued at RM254.7 billion in the first nine months of 2024. This figure represents a 10.7% increase [1] from the previous year, with 4,753 new projects approved. These projects are expected to create 159,347 new jobs, propelled by the services, manufacturing and primary sectors.

With all eyes on Malaysia, 2025 brings high expectations, including the potential to double our investment volume as we take over the rotating chairmanship from Laos. Malaysia will set a shining example of Asean as a unified investment destination, leveraging its heightened global visibility and strategic influence to showcase the region's immense potential.

The time has come for Malaysia to showcase its economic strength and investment potential on a bigger scale while simultaneously steering Asean's agenda toward initiatives such as digital transformation, sustainability and regional trade agreements that align with the priorities of current and prospective investors. Greater Kuala Lumpur



LOW YEN YEING/THE EDGE

(GKL) will serve as a strategic investment gateway, reinforcing Malaysia's investment potential while ensuring spillover benefits to the entire region.

## TOWARDS ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045

As chairman, Malaysia is uniquely positioned to take the driver's seat in spearheading efforts to realise the Asean Community Vision 2045. At this critical juncture, it is imperative to implement integrated regional strategies that drive sustainable economic growth, foster social inclusivity and prioritise environmental responsibility.

GKL is poised to be a model city that embodies Asean's aspirations for business excellence, innovation and inclusivity. Strategic investments anchored in digital and green technologies, forward-thinking urban development and targeted measures to enhance socio-economic differences will enable the city to set a benchmark for regional progress.

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Only with bold actions and by leveraging its role as a regional hub can GKL complement Malaysia's goals in accelerating Asean's journey toward a resilient, sustainable and interconnected future — one where investments thrive, consistently surpass expectations and drive transformative growth by the collective strength of neighbouring Asean nations.

#### PEOPLE-CENTRIC POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

A region's economic progress is only as strong as its people. This underscores the critical role of leaders and policy-makers in developing and implementing people-centric strategies that attract sustainable investments and drive long-term growth.

Economic resilience often thrives on key pillars such as digital transformation, upskilling initiatives and inclusivity. By equipping the workforce with future-ready skills tailored to modern industries, Malaysia is solidifying its position as a hub for high-value sectors. This offers investors access to a dynamic, competitive and adaptable talent pool.

Prioritising digital advancements not only accelerates economic recovery but also lays the groundwork for a robust, innovation-driven economy. Such policies ensure that Malaysia remains at the forefront of regional progress, leading the way in creating sustainable growth opportunities for its people and the broader Asean community.

#### CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Global warming and the global shift toward renewable energy present Malaysia with a significant opportunity in 2025. The country's unwavering commitment to inclusivity and sustainability positions it as a key player in shaping Asean's future.

By integrating green economy and renewable energy investments into both the national and regional agendas, Malaysia aligns economic growth with environmental stewardship. Initiatives promoting the circular economy and advancing social equity further reinforce this vision, creating a balanced approach that reflects Asean's collective priorities.

This holistic strategy not only supports Asean's shared aspirations but also attracts forward-thinking investors seeking sustainable and impactful opportunities, solidifying Malaysia's role as a leader in driving transformative, long-term growth.

#### GREATER KUALA LUMPUR AS A REGIONAL HUB

Along with Malaysia's chairmanship of Asean, GKL in 2025 stands as a premier gateway for leading global companies aiming to penetrate the dynamic Asean markets.

With its world-class infrastructure, diverse talent pool and robust business ecosystem, GKL offers unparalleled advantages as a strategic launchpad. Capitalising on these

strengths, it not only attracts high-value investments but also establishes itself as a main hub for innovation, trade and regional integration, aligning seamlessly with Asean's economic aspirations.

At the same time, boosting regional investments requires Asean to adopt harmonised policies that simplify cross-border transactions, creating a seamless environment for businesses and investors.

By aligning regulatory frameworks, the region can eliminate barriers, reduce costs and enhance transparency, making Asean a more attractive destination for foreign direct investment.

#### COLLABORATION, CONNECTIVITY AND STABILITY

To attract more investment to Malaysia and Asean member states, fostering regional collaborations and aligning national priorities with Asean's collective goals is paramount. Cross-border projects that address shared economic and social challenges not only deepen regional integration but also highlight Malaysia's commitment to sustainable growth.

Meanwhile, connectivity remains a cornerstone for any economic integration and investment attraction. Malaysia must prioritise investments in digital and technological advancements to enable seamless intra-Asean trade and communication. Initiatives such as the development of smart cities and regional transport networks are instrumental in creating interconnected economic hubs that boost efficiency and innovation. These advancements not only elevate operational capabilities but also ensure resilience and adaptability for future industries. By safeguarding critical components — be it infrastructure or data — through robust regulations and policies, Malaysia can position itself as a leader in fostering a secure, sustainable and forward-thinking regional ecosystem.

And finally, peace and stability form the foundation of investor confidence, and Malaysia can demonstrate leadership in maintaining a secure Asean. Advocating for a rules-based order ensures regional security and fosters trust with advanced economies. It is crucial, however, to safeguard Asean's progress by prioritising regional autonomy and cooperation, ensuring that external pressures or competing interests do not disrupt its collective goals. By doing so, Malaysia can help create an environment conducive to long-term investments and sustainable growth.

GKL's role as a hub for diplomacy further enhances its value by offering a platform for mediating and resolving regional challenges. With Malaysia's Asean chairmanship, we can contribute to the Asean bloc's vision of shared prosperity, representing a population of more than 600 million. By championing stability and collaboration, Malaysia can solidify its reputation as a trusted partner for investors seeking a resilient and forward-thinking region. ●

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