

**Opening Remarks  
By**

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**at the  
High Level Roundtable Discussion on Regional Cooperation and Integration**

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Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to welcome such a distinguished group of regional leaders to this important High-Level Roundtable on Regional Cooperation and Integration. In our ever-deepening globalized economy, it is paramount that we continually keep ourselves abreast of the changing landscape—to adapt and adopt policies that better link regional and subregional economies together.

To share experience on ways to meet evolving challenges is an essential component of the knowledge process—one that helps maximize the benefits and minimize the costs associated with greater economic integration, and the cooperation so vital in managing these closer links.

That is why it is exciting to have such a knowledgeable group of leaders and experts participating in today's discussion and dialogue.

Our discussion today coincides with the launch of the second issue of ADB's *Asian Economic Integration Monitor*. Produced twice a year by

ADB's Office of Regional Economic Integration—and its hard-working team at the Asian Regional Integration Center—the AEIM is the only regular publication I know that analyzes trends and progress in integration across Asia and the Pacific.

It examines the region's deepening connectivity, in infrastructure and elsewhere, growth in trade and investment, financial integration and macroeconomic interdependence. And it monitors increasingly important issues such as labor mobility, as well as progress in developing regional public goods, from disaster preparedness to disease prevention to cross-border environmental concerns.

This issue also contains a special section that contributes to the debate on the best ways to move forward on trade liberalization—and how best to disentangle the ever more complex noodle bowl of free trade agreements. ASEAN of course is making a major attempt to consolidate these through its Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, which began negotiations in November last year at the ASEAN Summit.

We are also releasing today a compendium of the proceedings of a conference held nearly one year ago in Kunming, which for the first time brought together participants from all the regional economic cooperation programs throughout Asia and the Pacific that ADB supports.

As you know, since our long-term Strategy 2020 was issued in 2008, regional integration has risen to become one of ADB's three strategic agendas—along with inclusive economic growth and environmentally sustainable growth. It is a central theme and has gained traction as an

indispensable component of creating economic efficiency and increasing productivity, of moving from low cost to higher value production across our region's production networks and increasingly complex, just-in-time supply chains. It is about raising income levels, boosting the growing middle class throughout the region and helping in our collective fight against poverty.

I think we can all be proud to be a part of these efforts, and I look forward to a stimulating morning of discussion, debate, and dialogue.

Allow me to introduce to you our moderator for this roundtable discussion, the Dean of the ADB Institute in Tokyo, Masuhiro Kawai, who will set the stage for today's discussion.

Thank you.

(499 words)