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PRESS RELEASE
MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE
(MOTAC)

**MALAYSIA ADVANCES "FORWARD-LOOKING" SOCIO-CULTURAL
AGENDA AT THE 35TH ASCC MEETING**

MANILA, 5 MARCH 2026 – Malaysia reaffirmed its commitment to regional progress at the 35th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting today. By contributing forward-looking socio-cultural solutions, Malaysia continues to ensure that ASEAN cooperation translates into tangible benefits for its people.

The Malaysian delegation was led by YB Mr. Chiew Choon Man, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, representing the Minister, YB Dato Sri Tiong King Sing. During the session, YB Chiew commended the Council Chair for continuing the **ASCC High-Level Forum**. First introduced during Malaysia's ASCC Chairmanship last year, this forum serves as a vital platform for Ministers to exchange perspectives on emerging issues beyond traditional biannual closed-door meetings.

Chaired by His Excellency Rex Gatchalian, Secretary of Social Welfare and Development of the Philippines, the meeting was attended by ASCC Council Ministers, regional representatives, and the ASEAN Secretariat. Throughout the deliberations, **Malaysia underscored the critical importance of translating regional commitments into measurable outcomes**. While the council has targeted 44 outcome documents for the year, Malaysia stressed that true success must be defined by tangible improvements in livelihoods, social protection systems and the overall well-being of communities across ASEAN.

Malaysia also welcomed **Timor-Leste** to its first ASCC Council Meeting as the 11th Member of ASEAN, describing this milestone as a significant step toward strengthening regional solidarity and inclusiveness. To advance the socio-cultural agenda, **Malaysia proposed four strategic levers to complement the ASCC 2026 priorities and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 trajectory:**

- (i) **Augment AI integration** across all sectors, particularly in education, healthcare and social protection systems;
- (ii) **Advance youth-led innovation** to drive regional progress;
- (iii) **Accelerate climate action** and resilience-building efforts; and
- (iv) **Enhance governance and transparency** through data-driven policymaking.

Malaysia raised the concern of the declining population growth rate in ASEAN's demographic trends, leading to an increase in an aging workforce. ASEAN not only needs to address challenges of aging but also harness the opportunity through championing environments that will **empower older persons to remain active contributors to society** through lifelong learning, flexible employment pathways, entrepreneurship and volunteerism.

Malaysia reaffirmed its role as a constructive, principled and committed partner in strengthening a cohesive, resilient and people-centered ASEAN Community. These efforts remain guided by the values of **Malaysia MADANI** and a shared aspiration for regional unity and sustainable prosperity.

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