



SPEECH TEKS

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Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh, salam sejahtera, and a very good afternoon to all.

Salutation

1. Ladies and gentlemen, and most importantly, our entrepreneurs, founders, educators, policymakers, ecosystem builders, and future leaders who have been with us throughout today's symposium.
2. Alhamdulillah, with gratitude to Allah SWT, we have now come to the closing of the International Entrepreneurship Symposium 2026, themed "Future-Ready Entrepreneurship: Thriving in the Borderless Economy." It is my honour to deliver these closing remarks on behalf of MARA.
3. At the beginning of the day, we came together with one purpose: to understand how entrepreneurs can prepare themselves for an economy that is becoming more connected, more competitive, more digital, and more demanding.

Current Global Reality

4. Ladies and gentlemen, The environment we are operating in today is moving at a very different pace compared to even five years ago. Business models are evolving faster. Customer expectations are shifting quickly.
5. Competition is coming from places we did not expect before. Technology, sustainability, and global access are shaping decisions at the same time, not separately. Let us ground this in reality.
6. Malaysia is targeting the digital economy to contribute about 25.5 percent to our GDP, which shows how central digitalisation has become to our national growth. At the same time, digital adoption among SMEs is still uneven, especially when it comes to more advanced tools such as AI.
7. Globally, the numbers are equally striking. The IMF estimates that almost 40 percent of jobs worldwide could be affected in some way by AI. McKinsey's surveys show that more than half of

organisations now use AI in at least one part of their business, and many are moving from small experiments to full implementation.

8. Within ASEAN, our digital economy is projected to reach around 1 trillion US dollars by 2030, which means the region will become even more attractive, and more competitive, in the coming years. From a workforce perspective, the World Economic Forum estimates that close to 44 percent of core job skills will change within just five years. These are not distant projections.

9. They are already shaping how businesses compete, how decisions are made, and how value is created.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. The theme of IES 2026, “Future-Ready Entrepreneurship: Thriving in the Borderless Economy”, is not just a slogan; it reflects exactly these realities. This symposium is designed to expose participants, especially those who are involved in entrepreneurship development activities, to the shifts that are happening and

to the capabilities our ecosystem needs to build.

11. From today's sessions, one message comes through very clearly: awareness is already there. Most entrepreneurs understand the importance of digital tools. They know sustainability is no longer optional. Many are interested in expanding beyond local markets. The gap we need to close now is execution.

12. So in this closing, allow me to leave you with five practical takeaways, five questions we must answer together if we want to be truly future-ready.

Takeaway 1 – Ecosystem Readiness, Not Solo Heroism

13. First, future-ready entrepreneurship is not about the “hero entrepreneur”; it is about how strong our ecosystem is. We heard this morning that successful ecosystems share a few common features: clear pathways from idea to market, strong links between agencies, universities, investors and industry, and support

that follows entrepreneurs from start-up to scaling.

14. At MARA, we have been strengthening our approach through more structured programmes. We are moving towards a more coordinated model that combines capacity building, advisory support and performance tracking in a systematic way. The intention is not simply to provide training as a one-off intervention, but to guide entrepreneurs progressively as they improve, stabilise and move towards growth.

15. So the first question for all of us is: are we really designing a connected ecosystem, or just running many good programmes in parallel?

Takeaway 2 – AI As Basic Capability

16. Second, AI has to move from being a buzzword to being a basic capability. The data we saw today is clear. Globally, AI is already embedded in how companies sell, plan and operate, not only in large technology firms, but in everyday functions like marketing, logistics

and finance. Recent analysis also shows that AI is reshaping many more jobs than it simply replaces, changing the way work is done and the skills required. If our entrepreneurs hesitate for too long, we risk a competitiveness gap.

17. For many SMEs, AI can sound intimidating. In practice, it often begins with simple, concrete steps using AI-based tools to understand customer behaviour in new markets, using AI to forecast demand and manage inventory more efficiently, or using AI to support financial management, from invoicing to cash-flow monitoring.
18. The question for us is this, in the next 12 months, how many of our entrepreneurs will move from hearing about AI to actually using one or two AI tools in their business? And how can agencies, universities and advisory centres make that journey easier, safer and more practical?

Takeaway 3 – ESG And Carbon As Opportunity, Not Burden

19. Third, ESG and the carbon economy must be seen as an opportunity, not just a compliance burden. We have discussed today how regulations, investor expectations and even consumer choices are changing. Buyers are asking how products are made, how energy is used, and how companies treat their workers and communities. The concept of a carbon economy may sound technical, but for our SMEs it has very real implications, it can influence the cost of doing business, access to export markets, and the willingness of banks and investors to provide financing.

20. The key is to make ESG practical. When an entrepreneur improves energy efficiency, upgrades packaging, or obtains relevant certifications, it should translate into stronger reputation, easier access to markets and better terms from financiers. This is the kind of ESG journey we must help our entrepreneurs to take, realistic steps that clearly strengthen their business.

21. So the third question is: how do we make ESG practical and rewarding enough that entrepreneurs choose it not because they are forced to, but because it obviously supports their competitiveness?

Takeaway 4 – Scaling Beyond Borders With Capital And Capability

22. Fourth, thriving in a borderless economy requires both capital and capability. We say we want more Malaysian and MARA-linked entrepreneurs to expand across ASEAN and beyond. To do that, they need the right kind of capital, not only funding, but investors and partners who can open networks, bring expertise, and stay with them through the ups and downs of scaling.

23. They also need internal capability: governance that investors can trust, financial records that are transparent, teams that can operate across languages and regulations, and digital systems that allow them to manage multiple markets.

24. So the fourth question is, are we as an ecosystem, equipping our entrepreneurs early for cross-border growth, or only thinking about it after they are already big?

Takeaway 5 – Shared Responsibility For The Next Few Years

25. Finally, all of this, ecosystem, AI, ESG, and cross-border scaling, comes down to shared responsibility. A strong ecosystem without capital struggles to move firms to the next level. Capital without good governance and ESG can be short-term and fragile. AI without people who know how to use it responsibly can create risk instead of advantage. So who must act?

26. For officers and agencies: your role is to reduce friction. Look at your programmes and ask, “Where can we make it easier for entrepreneurs to adopt AI, to improve ESG, and to reach regional markets?”

27. For academics and educators: you shape the next generation. Embedding AI,

sustainability and cross-border thinking into your curriculum and research will influence thousands of students over time.

28. For entrepreneurs: you are at the front line. My challenge is simple, choose one concrete change you will make in your business in the next 12 months to become more future-ready.

29. If each of us leaves today with one clear action, and we actually follow through, the combined impact over the next three to five years will be significant.

Closing And Appreciation

Ladies and gentlemen,

30. In this 60th anniversary year of MARA, IES 2026 is not just another event on the calendar. It is part of a longer journey to move our entrepreneurs from being comfortable locally to being competitive globally.

31. Thank you to all our distinguished speakers and panellists for sharing their insights. Thank you to our partners and the organising team for their commitment and hard work behind the scenes. And thank you to all of you, our participants, for your attention, your questions, and your willingness to learn and collaborate today.

32. As we leave this hall, my hope is that we do not just carry notes and slides, but a renewed sense of urgency and possibility. The borderless economy is already here. The question is not whether it will change us, but whether we are ready to shape it together.

33. With that, I officially close the International Entrepreneurship Symposium 2026. I wish you all a safe journey home, and I look forward to seeing the partnerships, innovations and successes that will grow from what we have started here today

Thank You