

Emerging Asia

Tariffs: ASEAN gets more deals

The US signed trade agreements with Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia that will expand the list of products receiving a zero reciprocal tariff rate. These agreements further reduce the urgency for further policy easing in Southeast Asia's more export-oriented economies, in our view.

The ASEAN Summit held over the weekend in Malaysia resulted in the US signing trade agreements with Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia – which most notably will expand the list of products receiving a zero reciprocal tariff rate for these economies.

These products, already listed in the agreements with Malaysia and Cambodia¹, appear to mainly come from the list of those currently subject to the 19% reciprocal tariff rate that US President Donald Trump set on both economies. By contrast, on the topic of sectoral tariffs, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim noted to the media that President Trump had said to him that semiconductor tariffs will be dealt with "at the appropriate time."²

While the list of Malaysian products that will be exempted from reciprocal tariffs under the agreement looks significant, most of these are subject to limitations – and the actual positive impact is likely to be relatively limited.

- We estimate that the entire list of 8-digit HS codes in Schedule 2 of the agreement would encompass USD11.9bn of US imports in Malaysia in 2024 22% of all US imports from Malaysia last year, equivalent to 2.8% of Malaysian GDP.
- However, our tally indicates that USD10.9bn of that USD11.9bn are subject to limitations –
 especially for a large number of items which will only receive a zero reciprocal tariff rate if
 they are related to civil aircraft, ground flight simulators or pharmaceuticals not patented in
 the US.
- This means that only an estimated USD1.0bn equivalent to just 0.2% of Malaysian GDP of US imports last year would receive a zero reciprocal tariff rate without limitations.

In return, these Southeast Asian economies have agreed to a slew of measures beneficial to the US, including tariff rate reductions; liberalisation of non-tariff barriers and restrictions on digital trade, services and investment; agreements to partner with the US on rare earths; and commercial deals.

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¹ The new exemptions have yet to be determined for Thailand and Vietnam.

² Bloomberg, "Anwar Says Chip Tariff Not an Issue for Now After Trump Meet", 27 October 2025

- The joint statement between Malaysia and the US "takes note of recent and forthcoming commercial deals" including: the procurement of 30 aircraft with an option to purchase another 30; an estimated USD150bn in purchases of semiconductors, aerospace components and data center equipment; up to an estimated USD3.4bn a year of liquefied natural gas purchases; USD204.10mn in purchases of coal and telecommunication products and services; and USD70bn of capital fund investments in the US.
- Likewise, the fact sheet for the agreement between Thailand and US highlights "forthcoming commercial deals" including: an estimated USD2.6bn a year in purchases of agriculture products; an estimated USD5.4bn a year in purchases of energy products; and USD18.8bn from the procurement of 80 aircraft.

The growing external-domestic monetary policy divide

From a monetary policy perspective, these trade agreements further reduce the urgency for further policy easing in Emerging Asia's more export-oriented economies, in our view, especially in Southeast Asia.

- The trade agreement for Thailand together with the unexpectedly stellar 19.0% y/y export growth figure for September, surging from 5.8% in August supports our view that the majority of the Bank of Thailand's monetary policy committee will likely remain reluctant to turn dovish so quickly after it recently voted 5-2 to leave the policy rate unchanged. While our base case for the BoT to stay on hold through 2026, maintaining the policy rate at 1.50%, is a close call with significant risks of a 25bp rate cut, to 1.25% we remain skeptical of whether the MPC would be dovish enough to ease all the way to 1.00% (see Thailand: BoT minutes New doves versus old (less-dovish) hawks, 22 October 2025).
- Likewise, we expect Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) to see little reason to return to cutting rates in the near term with Malaysia's export growth also jumping to 12.2% y/y in September from 1.7% in August and Q3 GDP growth surprising well to the upside at 5.2% y/y versus 4.4% in Q2. Our base case is for a 25bp rate cut to only materialise in Q1 26 but this is becoming a closer call and no further policy easing may in fact be forthcoming in this cycle if exports continue to hold up.
- With Malaysia being a key trading partner for ultra-open Singapore, we believe the Monetary
 Authority of Singapore (MAS) is likely also to remain reluctant against delivering further FX
 policy easing. Our base case remains for the MAS to ease in April but the growing risk is of
 the central bank also staying on the sidelines in 2026 (see Singapore: MAS Output gap still
 zero, still no change to slope, 14 October 2025).

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