

Jenis Akhbar : The Star Online

Tarikh : 30/05/2026

Edisi / Muka Surat : <https://www.thestar.com.my/>

Tajuk : Co-op panel tapping into potential for regional trade

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By IMRAN HILMY imran@thestar.com.my Abdul Fattah chatting with delegates of business matching programme for the cooperatives sector in Penang. — ZHAFARAN NASIB/The Star

A NEW Cooperative Joint Committee (CJC) has been formed to give cooperative businesses an official voice within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT).

The committee formally integrates the sector into the IMT-GT structure, moving it from informal meeting of participants to an official economic driver across the three nations.

Angkatan Koperasi Kebangsaan Malaysia Bhd (Angkasa) and the ASEAN Cooperative Organisation (ACO) president Datuk Seri Dr Abdul Fattah Abdullah said the bloc held vast, untapped economic potential.

He said the sub-region boasted some 88,000 cooperatives representing over 16 million members and a consumer market exceeding 100 million people.

“Cooperatives can no longer afford to operate in silos or maintain a low profile.

“Instead, they must work collectively to seize opportunities across the region,” he said after chairing a roundtable discussion and business matching programme for the cooperative sector with the IMT-GT joint business council in Penang.

The CJC is expected to drive cross-border collaboration in trade, agriculture, halal industries, tourism, and cooperative development.

Abdul Fattah said CJC would also establish scheduled meetings two to three times a year to deliberate on business participation, policy matters, and operational challenges.

He said a primary focus for the new committee would be lobbying for regulatory flexibility.

He noted that smaller cooperative enterprises often struggled with complex cross-border trade compliance, unlike well-funded multinational corporations.

“We are not asking for special treatment, but for policies and regulations that recognise the nature and limitations of cooperatives,” he said.

“Cooperatives are generally smaller in scale and community-driven. They should not be treated the same way as large corporations with extensive professional resources.”

Abdul Fattah urged IMT-GT member countries to consider simplified customs and trade processes to allow smaller community enterprises to do business across borders more effectively.

The milestone event in Penang brought together 50 high-level participants, including 18 international delegates representing apex cooperative bodies from 10 ASEAN nations (excluding Laos), alongside corporate leaders from the Satun Chamber of Commerce and QEW Corporation.