



**KEMENTERIAN
PELABURAN, PERDAGANGAN DAN INDUSTRI**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

**YB SENATOR TENGKU DATUK SERI UTAMA ZAFRUL AZIZ
MINISTER OF INVESTMENT, TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

**AT THE
JS-SEZ BUSINESS & INVESTMENT FORUM**

**PERSADA JOHOR INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
CENTRE**

21 APRIL 2025 (MONDAY)

YAB Dato' Onn Hafiz Ghazi, Menteri Besar of Johor

His Excellency Gan Kim Yong, Deputy PM and Minister of Trade & Industry, Singapore

YB Tan Sri Dato' Dr. Haji Azmi Bin Rohani, Johor State Secretary

H.E. Manu Gopala Menon, Singapore High Commissioner to Malaysia

H.E. Dato' Dr. Azfar Mohamad Mustafar, High Commissioner of Malaysia to Singapore

YBhg. Tan Sri Dato' Sri' Ir. Zamzamzairani Mohd Isa, Chairman of Maybank

CEOs of our Strategic Partners, Dato' Khairussalleh Ramli and Mr. Novan Amirudin

Members of the Media

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning and Salam Malaysia MADANI.

1. I want to welcome everyone to the Inaugural **Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ) Joint Business and Investment Forum**. My thanks to everyone who helped to make this gathering possible, especially our colleagues in the Singapore and Johor State Government.

2. First off, I would like to thank the Johor Menteri Besar, Dato' Onn Hafiz and Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Trade, His Excellency Gan for making the time to be at this forum today.
3. Thank you, Dato' Onn, for your kind words - yes, I highly value the friendship with HE Gan and other Singaporean friends, but I will always be a Malaysian, and will serve Malaysia first, no matter what.
4. I would also like to thank our **Strategic Partners** who have made this oversubscribed event a reality – the **CIMB Group and the Maybank Group**. To the **Media Partners** for this event – **Bernama and Awani** – our heartfelt gratitude for your excellent, dedicated coverage of today's forum.
5. A special mention goes out to the **UOB Group** for supporting the special dinner in conjunction with this JS-SEZ forum tonight.
6. I must also thank all the agencies that have made this forum, and most importantly, facilitating investment, a huge success – the 1Q2025 investment number for JS-SEZ and Johor, as shared by YAB MB, speaks for itself. Thank you, the **Johor State Government, Enterprise Singapore (EnterpriseSG), Economic Development Board (EDB), MIDA, IRDA and Invest Johor**, as well as the **JB City Council, Iskandar Puteri City Council, Pasir Gudang City Council and the Kulai Town Council**.
7. The theme of this Forum, ***BRIDGING ECONOMIES, STRENGTHENING SUPPLY CHAINS (BUSINESS. INVESTMENT.***

SERVICES. TRADE) fits nicely with the JS-SEZ's aspiration. It aims to jointly promote and attract investments into the JS-SEZ, not only for the benefit of Malaysia and Singapore, but also ASEAN as a region and broader community.

8. For many decades, **the heart of the Malaysia-Singapore relationship** lies in the fact that **our two countries are at our best when we work together**.
9. In 2024, Malaysia was Singapore's 2nd largest trading partner, while Singapore was Malaysia's largest export destination and 2nd largest trading partner globally. Our trade in 2024 was a robust USD86.69 billion, driven by E&E products, petroleum products, machinery, equipment & parts, other agricultures and optical & scientific equipment.
10. The JS-SEZ is hence the next milestone in what has been a long, storied and mutually beneficial journey. If we can get it right, the road ahead will lead to better things for both our countries—and Johor.

TARIFFS MUST BE RESOLVED DIPLOMATICALLY

11. Before I continue, allow me to briefly talk about the “**Liberation Day**” **tariffs**. Tonight, my colleagues and I are heading to DC – we are scheduled to meet the **US Trade Representative** and his team on 24 April 2025, as well as other American stakeholders, to discuss the way forward.

12. Malaysia is fully committed to securing a favourable resolution that preserves vital market access and supply chains, attracts continued foreign investment, and supports the well-being of our workers and businesses.
13. It bears repeating that alongside our ASEAN colleagues, **Malaysia will not introduce retaliatory tariffs**. From ASEAN's perspective, **retaliation is counterproductive**. Rather, the region seeks to engage constructively with the US in a forward-looking manner to strengthen economic ties and address shared challenges.
14. Many see **the tariff issue as a test to ASEAN's unity and centrality**. "Liberation Day" renews and heightens the debates over how appropriate the ASEAN Way of regional integration is. But so far, the sense of togetherness on this issue I've seen from my colleagues has been encouraging.
15. We **must and will find a mutually acceptable, fair and equitable solution to this issue**, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The process will be long and certainly complex, but we will do our best.
16. Domestically, the Malaysia Government understands the concerns and difficulties the tariffs are causing to our workers, manufacturers and businesses. We affirm our determination to overcome and adapt to this challenge as a nation.

17. “Liberation Day” is also a reminder that **in the face of geoeconomic and geopolitical certainties, we must accelerate reforms**. So, while we are still studying the full impact that the tariffs will have, the **need for the JS-SEZ and our countries’ economic interlinkage is greater than ever**. Indeed, the current scenario should spur us towards closer collaboration.

HOW MITI IS SUPER-CHARGING THE JS-SEZ

Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. The JS-SEZ’s journey started last year through the signing of an **MOU** between Malaysia and Singapore, followed by the exchange of the **JS-SEZ Agreement** on 7 January this year, during the 11th Malaysia-Singapore Leaders’ Retreat.
19. JS-SEZ initiative is set to **roll out 50 projects in its first five (5) years, scaling up to a total of 100 projects within a decade**. This ambitious growth strategy is projected to drive economic expansion in both Malaysia and Singapore, **creating 20,000 skilled job opportunities**.
20. The key economic sectors to be promoted under JS-SEZ include **logistics, manufacturing, financial services, business services, digital economy, tourism, food security, education, health, energy and the green economy**. They have been carefully selected

to ensure both sides can leverage on the complementary value propositions of each Party. It is also aligned with Malaysia's industrialisation agenda via the **New Industrial Masterplan (NIMP 2030)**, **National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR)** and others.

21. I would like to highlight that the scale of our JS-SEZ ambition is being matched and powered by a **whole-of-government approach**. Whether nationally or state-wide, we work in close collaboration with stakeholders from businesses and civil society.
22. MITI is among the key ministries involved directly in JS-SEZ. We lead the **Working Group for 'Ease of Doing Business'** and participate in others like the Economic Sector (which is led by the Economic Ministry), Movement of Goods (led by the Royal Malaysian Customs Department) and Talent (led by Ministry of Human Resource).
23. In fact, tomorrow's **Business Clinic Programme** will also be participated by various key agencies. Apart from **MIDA, IRDA and Invest Johor**, we also have Johor PBT Fast Lane of the **JB City Council, Iskandar Puteri City Council, Pasir Gudang City Council and the Kulai Town Council**.
24. The Ease of Doing Business Working Group led by MITI, among others, **has executed and will execute several quick-win JS-SEZ initiatives**.

25. For instance, the official opening of the **Invest Malaysia Facilitation Centre Johor (IMFC-J) in Forest City** on 18 February this year, represents a significant milestone in **streamlining investment processes for the JS-SEZ**.
26. For tomorrow's **Business Clinic**, true to its facilitative DNA, the IMFC-J will be coordinating the presence of representatives from the **Royal Malaysian Customs Department, Immigration Department, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), the Department of Environment (DOE) and Ranhill SAJ**.
27. We have also **co-organised joint events to promote trade and investment into JS-SEZ**. This includes our current gathering with its forums and **networking opportunities across key sectors**, bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, and businesses from both countries to explore partnerships, and drive mutual prosperity. I am happy to share that for tomorrow, **several companies** have agreed to participate in the **Business Matching Programme**. They are **Super Micro Computer Malaysia, Ferrotec Power Semiconductor Malaysia, Byte Precision (ByteDance), Cape EMS, Insulet, AirTrunk and Hershey Malaysia**.
28. To all these companies, **thank you for having faith in our economic reform policies**, and in **what we are trying to achieve through the JS-SEZ**.

JS-SEZ INCENTIVES

29. Besides this, following the historic signing of the JS-SEZ, the Government of Malaysia through the **Ministry of Finance (MoF)**, on 8 January this year, **announced various incentives for JS-SEZ**. These have been deliberately designed to drive high-value investments into Johor, tailored to meet the evolving needs of global and domestic investors.
30. Effective 1 January 2025, investors in the JS-SEZ are eligible for a suite of incentives. We also have additional tailor-made incentives allocated to businesses operating in certain flagship areas in JS-SEZ.
31. All these incentives complement the **New Investment Incentive Framework (NIIF) announced in Budget 2025**, which aims to propel **investments in high-growth, high-value and sustainable industries** to stimulate economic development across Malaysia.

UNITY OF PURPOSE

32. But of course, arguably the best features and ‘incentives’ of the JS-SEZ are its **unbeatable strategic location, its connectivity, rule of law, the availability of land and human capital as well as the unity of purpose and effort between the governments involved: Malaysia, Singapore and Johor**.

33. Again, it is **no accident that this is a JOINT Investment Forum**—highlighting that all three parties remain more committed than ever to its success.
34. I would also say that we are **determined to continue to both innovate and expand the scope of the JS-SEZ**. For instance, the Federal Government supports what the MB Johor said earlier, **the proposed regulatory sandbox initiative, located at Ibrahim Technopolis (IBTEC) Kulai and Ladang Air Manis, Kulai** which will be instrumental in unlocking new waves of sustainable, high value investments that benefit both local stakeholders and international partners.
35. Capitalising on the **ASEAN network**, MITI likewise welcomes **the idea of the establishment of an ASEAN/RCEP Industrial Park within the JS-SEZ**, which will contribute towards improving regional economic integration and attracting high-value investments. We hope to get MTI's support on this as well.
36. The proposed industrial park, with the addition of its dialogue partners, aligns with ASEAN's aspiration to enhance supply chain efficiency and resilience.
37. So really, ultimately, we want the **JS-SEZ to be more than just a bilateral framework. It is a value proposition for the whole of ASEAN**. Yes, we need to get the foundations right. But we must continue to be ambitious and always strive to move onwards.

Competition will be fierce and so we will need to also stand out rather than simply deliver.

38. I would like to share a Chinese proverb also, that **speaks aptly of Malaysia and Singapore's complementary strengths vis-à-vis the JS-SEZ**. One mountain cannot accommodate two tigers, but the JS-SEZ has proven that two tigers can work together.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

39. In conclusion, no one denies that we are in for challenging times economically. But despite uncertainties on the global stage, we are determined to realise the JS-SEZ ambition, and to see it thrive – in fact, it is needed now more than ever.
40. We hope for the support of the private sector and public not only in the region and our two countries, but across ASEAN and beyond.
41. To this end, we will continue to engage and listen and if needed, act quickly to ensure the JS-SEZ remains open and nurturing for business and innovation. Although we must be realistic, we must also guard against undue pessimism.

42. The need for the JS-SEZ is obvious. So, we will continue to go all-out to ensure its success. Watch this space and we hope investors will also choose to come to this space. Thank you.