



CLOSING KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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

FOR

**ASEAN INVESTMENT CONFERENCE 2025
KUALA LUMPUR CONVENTION CENTRE**

TUESDAY, 8 APRIL 2025 | 5:15 PM – 5:35 PM

SALUTATIONS

YBhg. Datuk Johan Mahmood Merican,

Secretary General of Treasury, Ministry of Finance Malaysia

Dato' Mohammad Faiz Azmi,

Executive Chairman, Securities Commission Malaysia

Datuk Wan Razly Abdullah,

President & Group CEO, Affin Bank Berhad

Carol Fong,

Group CEO, CGS International Securities Group

Dato' Mohd Rashid Mohamad,

Group Managing Director, RHB Group

Your Excellencies,

Member of the Media – both domestic and regional,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening and Salam Malaysia MADANI.

1. Thank you for your presence, at the end of a packed, productive and inspiring first day of the ASEAN Investment Conference.
2. It is a true privilege for me to close today's discussions, particularly here, in Kuala Lumpur, as Malaysia chairs ASEAN in 2025.
3. Over the course of today, we've heard many perspectives. From finance ministers to founders, from regional policymakers to international investors. But beyond the panels and data points, there is a shared understanding that has come through clearly, **ASEAN is important and is at a pivotal moment that will determine its future prosperity for decades to come.**
4. Given the recent US tariff announcement, **how ASEAN response could make or break the steady growth trajectory that this region has enjoyed** in the past decade.
5. As Chair of ASEAN this year, **helping ASEAN to navigate such turbulent waters ahead is a huge responsibility** for

Malaysia. We take this responsibility seriously to ensure the continued economic prosperity and security of this peaceful region – we really need to continue what our forefathers had worked so hard to achieve.

6. Since April 2, many questions have been raised on ASEAN's future - Can **ASEAN continue growing? How will ASEAN continue to integrate economically given the potential global trade and supply chain** dynamics?
7. **Can ASEAN speak with a single voice?** Can we collectively **insist on a rules-based, transparent, open trade and investment landscape?** One that will secure a better, more inclusive and more sustainable world for ASEANs.

ASEAN MUST UNITE AND ENGAGE WITH KEY TRADING PARTNERS IN ONE VOICE

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Let me begin with the fundamentals: ASEAN is home to approximately **680 million people**, more than the EU, and third only to China and India. ASEAN's combined GDP reached **USD3.6 trillion last year**, making us the fifth largest economic bloc in the world.

9. We are also younger, digitising at a faster rate, and more urbanised than many developed regions. All these are strengths we can leverage on.
10. In terms of trade and investments:
 - a. **Trade in goods** stood at **USD3.8 trillion**;
 - b. **Trade in services** hit more than USD933 billion; and
 - c. ASEAN attracted **USD224 billion in FDI in 2024**, despite global headwinds.
11. As much as ASEAN would like to diversify its trading and investment partners, for better or for worse, **one relationship stands out and demands immediate attention** – which is ASEAN's economic ties with the United States.
12. In 2023, **ASEAN's exports to the US reached over USD269 billion**, from a total two-way trade of USD395 billion. That equates to a **trade surplus of almost USD126 billion**, in ASEAN's favour.
13. This is a testament to ASEAN's competitiveness, and ability to consistently deliver high-quality, cost-effective products that support global supply chains.

14. ASEAN's exports include advanced electronics, machinery, medical components, and digital services - goods powering industries of the future.
15. **Malaysia's contribution to those numbers** is sizable. In 2024 alone, Malaysia exported nearly USD45 billion (RM198.65 billion) to the US, out of a total bilateral trade worth USD73 billion (RM324.91 billion).
16. Our top exports mirror the sectors driving global transformation, from E&E and semiconductors, to medical devices and other manufactured products; all essential to global humanity's quest for a digital, modern and sustainable lifestyle.
17. **Today, ASEAN's future growth is at risk of being seriously derailed.** The recent US tariff announcement has rocked the markets and created uncertainty, particularly for **open trading nations and highly export-driven economies** like **Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines.**
18. So, **ASEAN must stand united.** As Chair of ASEAN this year, Malaysia will chair a **Special ASEAN Economic**

Ministers' Meeting on the day after tomorrow to craft a unified ASEAN response. Because standing united will help us engage more constructively, and most importantly, **with strength.**

19. **ASEAN is only as strong as its weakest link**, which is why we need to support each other to see the region through these trying times. This is also why, during the ASEAN Economic Ministers' Retreat in February this year, we already set up the **ASEAN Geoeconomic Task Force** – whose membership consist of all Deputy Trade/Economic Ministers within ASEAN – to look into **economic challenges at the regional level, including tariffs.**
20. Similarly, **Malaysia** – under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Anwar Ibrahim – **has activated the National Geoeconomic Command Centre (NGCC).** This is a whole-of-Government unit mandated to **assess exposure, coordinate inter-agency responses, and protect national economic interests** through **clear, data-driven strategy.**
21. So, while the global environment may be shifting, our resolve remains steady. **ASEAN Member States must**

remain calm and collaborative to prepare our region better for the turbulent times ahead.

CONTINUED INVESTMENTS, AND INDUSTRIAL REFORMS KEY TO ASEAN'S SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Ladies and gentlemen,

22. How can ASEAN countries prepare themselves? In our opinion, **continued investment and industrial reforms are key.**
23. Given our strategic neutrality, location and industrial capabilities, **ASEAN – with its members' complementary strengths – have developed well into a high-value industrial base and services hub** for the world.
24. Beyond ASEAN's neutrality and centrality, we are **serious about continuing to build ASEAN's industrial capacity.** On this, Malaysia will host the **ASEAN+3 Dialogue on Semiconductors and Strategic Supply Chains** later this year.
25. Malaysia wants to **drive collaboration on regional supply chain diversification, talent development, and**

innovation in next-generation semiconductor design and manufacturing.

26. The two core principles that our Chairmanship is anchored on – **inclusivity and sustainability** – will also help us translate these ambitions into real outcomes through four key strategic thrusts, and 18 Priority Economic Deliverables (PEDs).
27. Among the PEDs that are key to ASEAN's united front in facing US tariff challenges include:
 - a. **One, the upgrading of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA).** We are determined to advance negotiations on reducing non-tariff barriers, streamlining regulations, and creating a more efficient, transparent supply chains across the region;
 - b. **Two, we also aim to finalise negotiations on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA)** during Malaysia's Chairmanship year. This will be ASEAN's **first legally binding pact on the digital economy, covering data flows, cybersecurity, AI governance and digital inclusion;**

- c. **Three**, the **upgrading of ASEAN China FTA (ACFTA)**, as well as the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** will help us diversify and deepen ASEAN's trading relationship with both highly populous countries.
 - d. **Four**, ASEAN will also look to **fully utilising the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** with partners such as **Australia, China, Japan and South Korea** – representing 30% of global population, and 30% of global GDP.
28. I must add that all these agreements will mean nothing if our MSMEs – which make up over 97% of all businesses across ASEAN – are left behind.
29. **With the onslaught of US tariffs, there is even more reason to support MSMEs.** Aside from the establishment of the ASEAN Centre of Excellence for Green MSMEs, we **have to also look at other ways to empower smaller businesses with the right support for their survivability** in these trying times.

30. Malaysia itself is helping to reshape ASEAN's economic destiny and reinforce its position on the global stage in various ways:

a. **First, our economic transformation via our New Industrial Master Plan 2030 (NIMP 2030).** This is a broad strategy for deep, broad-based structural reforms – designed to elevate Malaysia's position in global value chains and align our economy with the technologies and industries of the future.

This is already gaining traction. In **2024, the manufacturing sector's value-added rose by 4.1% year-on-year, reaching USD86 billion** versus USD82.6 billion the year before – a tangible indicator of our industrial reform momentum.

Employment in the sector grew by 1.8% (+ 50,000 jobs), while the median salary increased by 5.4% (from USD586 in 1H 2023 to USD619 in 1H 2024).

31. Malaysia is also implementing targeted financing tools for the NIMP, including via the NIMP Strategic Co-Investment Fund (CoSIF). This is a **public-private investment platform designed to unlock growth for high-potential**

Malaysian companies. In fact, later this evening, I will meet 12 dynamic mid-tier firms and SMEs – each seeking to raise between USD3 million and USD30 million – to enable them to scale across borders, innovate and build regional competitive edge.

32. Alongside CoSIF, we have also scaled MyCIF, our public–private co-investment success story. Thus far, this has:

- a. **Invested USD270 million** (RM1.2 billion) in growth-stage enterprises;
- b. **Catalysed USD1.1 billion** (RM4.9 billion) in **private capital**; and
- c. **Supported >9,500 MSMEs across more than 70,000 campaigns**, leveraging **equity crowdfunding** and **peer-to-peer platforms**.

33. This is how we're translating policy into practice, and intent into impact. Malaysia's achievement is ASEAN achievement. We are open to share with other ASEAN Member States on how we have curated and implemented the NIMP2030 to get tangible results.

MALAYSIA'S ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP: DELIVERY OF RESULTS IN ALIGNMENT WITH AIC 2025

Ladies and gentlemen,

34. What I just shared are in alignment with the general objectives of today's Conference. **I look forward to receiving the findings of this conference** gathered from the views of over 600 esteemed participants from across the public and private sectors, development institutions, and investment communities.
35. Additionally, the launch of three catalytic initiatives at this AIC 2025 - the **ASEAN Simplified ESG Disclosure Guide for SMEs**; the **ASEAN Investment Challenge** and the **Fractional Shares Trading Platform** – will forward ASEAN's ambition as a preferred investment hub for the rest of the world.
36. All these could not come sooner, just as **ASEAN Member States need to unite more resolutely** – to forge ahead as **one body, one voice, one negotiating party** – with whoever is open and progressive enough to see **ASEAN's real value as a trading and investment partner**.

CLOSING: BUILDING TOGETHER WITH BOLDNESS AND FORTITUDE

Ladies and gentlemen,

37. So, where do we go from here? This conference will prove itself as a platform not just for conversation, but most importantly, for **coordination, capital, and commitment**. But the challenge ahead is huge. This is a test to see if our foundations, and unity spirit are strong enough to see us through these tough times.
38. I believe this is a test ASEAN will pass with flying colours, provided we stay the course, stick to our guns, and take proper ownership of ASEAN's collective future.
39. Malaysia is ready. ASEAN is ready. Let us not lose this momentum. Let us build the bright ASEAN future we firmly believe in, together.

Thank you.