

**SPECIAL KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY YAB PRIME MINISTER :
NIKKEI FORUM MEDINI JOHOR**

By : DATO' SERI ANWAR IBRAHIM

Venue : SUNWAY HOTEL BIG BOX, ISKANDAR PUTERI, JOHOR

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YAB DATO' SERI ANWAR BIN IBRAHIM

PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

FOR

NIKKEI FORUM MEDINI JOHOR 2025

19th JUNE 2025 (THURSDAY) | 1300 HRS

SUNWAY HOTEL BIG BOX,

ISKANDAR PUTERI, JOHOR

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh dan salam Sejahtera.

Konnichiwa

Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Onn Hafiz bin Ghazi,

Menteri Besar of Johor;

Yang Amat Berbahagia Tun Musa Hitam,

Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia;

His Excellency Noriyuki Shikata,

Ambassador Japan to Malaysia;

Mr Hidenaka Kato,

Managing Executive Officer, Global Conference, Nikkei Inc;

Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Utama Ir. Hasni bin Mohammad,

State Economy Advisor;

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Amirul Feisal Wan Zahir,

Chairman of Iskandar Investment Berhad; dan

Keluarga IIB dan semua yang hadir.

1. Terima kasih atas kesempatan ini dan sepertimana yang kita ikuti dan dengar dari ucapan awal tadi, Johor telah meningkat sebagai satu wilayah yang segar pertumbuhan ekonominya dan rancak kegiatannya. Dan kita lihat kepesatan perubahan termasuk kelulusan yang sangat membanggakan. Jadi saya ucap tahniah kepada Menteri Besar, IIB kerana keupayaan mereka dan kesedaran bahawa dalam dunia yang tidak menentu dari sudut hala tuju dan keputusan-keputusan yang mengejutkan termasuk tarif oleh Presiden Trump dan pergolakan sengit Iran-Israel sekarang, dan sebelumnya Gaza, Ukraine. Tumpuan kita di Johor, Malaysia dan ASEAN adalah

membina kekuatan baru berdasarkan pertumbuhan ekonomi dan kerancangan pertumbuhan.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

2. Of course, it gives me great pleasure to be associated with Nikkei Forum, which I did participate last year. And I did apologize for not being able to attend this year, which coincides with our series of ASEAN meetings. But it is a great pleasure to be there at that time also with Prime Minister Kishida and now very strong bilateral relations with Japan with Prime Minister Ishiba, who was here and constantly on telephone last month too, in his call, he did mention surprisingly, other than the Japanese's interest to enhance not only bilateral relations but to increase volume investments by the private sector is refer to specifically the Sarawak Green Hydrogen initiative. And he did mention Johor-Singapore JSSEZ. It's interesting for a Prime Minister of Japan to now refer not only to Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya but also to Johor.

3. But as a small digression which I need to emphasize and remind us. You see the strong bond of relations comradeship between Malaysia in Japan has been referred to and have been a long-standing-operations. I've always encouraged normally in terms of educational, technological, investments and trade to be further enhanced, but also to appreciate the need to understand values, ethics and culture. Because that would strengthen and fortify our strong born relationship. That's precisely the reason when I visited Japan, an official visit recently, I made it a point to go and speak at Keio

University, which has produced an outstanding philosopher by the name of Toshihiko Isutsu. Some his work like “God and Man in the Quran”, brilliant translation of Quran into Japanese language and also Sufism and Taoism.

4. You see, it's quite unheard. So, I encourage some of the Japanese companies to show who is that you have produced great scholars, great minds, great sages and philosophers that not only understand Taoism and the Japanese culture, but also made very serious attempt to study and deepen the understanding on Islam.
5. In his epistemological study, I know many of you a corporate leader including Dato' Amirul Feisal will get very bored, but please do give some attention to this, (aspect in joking term). Epistemological study would refer to the changes are taking place, the values and ethical principles in Taoism which had so much in common with Islamic spiritual depth. When referring to Islam and Islamic contribution, Toshihiko Isutsu referred to the very compelling argument, precisely saying that never before in the culture, in the history of mine that you have a very strong formidable moral position. Unshackled with power, wealth and time, a morally coherent sustainable system, a moral principle of Islam. And this comes from a great Japanese philosopher who has a mastery of understanding of Japanese culture and civilization and particularly Taoism.
6. While I'm making a slight departure from a talk about trade and investments just to showcase that this bond could be could be further fortified. Because this will be a guarantee there will be a lasting sense

of friendship and trust. Particularly in these days where in politics and governance and business, there's clearly a deficit of the spirit, humanity, human values, justice and ethics.

7. Decisions are made, be it in trade or politics or geopolitical arrangements, purely by the arrogance of power, might of military strength and prowess, and greed.
8. So, it is important that we educate our young to understand and appreciate that after all this Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ), Forest City, the fast pace of development in Johor and Malaysia is finally for the people, and people means the elements of humanity. Humanity means better livelihood of course, better education, health, technology or new technology, or Artificial Intelligence (AI). But, at the same time, the principles tied to values, ethics, and humanity. That isn't so far as culture and civilization is concerned.
9. Bear with me a bit, don't feel bored, because I think there is a strong case, a compelling case to urge the present generation, to focus on of course new disciplines but must be grounded on values, culture, and civilization. All our education institutions, we need to promote that. We will be left behind if we do not master new technology, if we do not upskill and reskill our students, if we do not grasp and have better understanding of digital technology and artificial intelligence, but that's not end all. It must be grounded on our language, our culture, our literature, our civilization, on our ethics and morality.

10. I made it a point whether you like it or not because I've been given this trust. I will never break from that focus or principles or policies that will push Malaysia and ensure that we not only grow but excel as an important country economically, technologically, but never to ignore the importance of our roots, our culture, our civilization.
11. Back to Nikkei Forum, you know the strength of this region and do not underestimate the importance of JS-SEZ. ASEAN happens to be one of the most peaceful regions in the world, vibrant and dynamic economically and the bilateral relations, multilateral relations, and regional cohesiveness is rather unprecedented.
12. I was at the ISIS Forum this morning. Of course, people say, "well, thank you, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim for the success." I said, even engagement with Myanmar leaders, both the Military Junta, Prime Minister and the National Unity Government Prime Minister. I said credit goes to the ASEAN leaders. They gave me the mandate, they gave me the support, and our relationship is excellent.
13. Look at this region, this JS-SEZ. It would not have happened if the two governments, the two systems, do not share the common interests of uplifting both these countries. This is not an ordinary SEZ. You name me any economic zone that involves two countries based on total trust and working together as a team, fundamental team to uplift both societies and countries. And therefore, I give credit not only to Malaysian leaders and Johor but also Singaporean friends who have been articulate and support this issue.

14. Precisely because of that, you can see so much interest. I mean, the Japanese are here, the Chinese, the Koreans, the Europeans, and JS-SEZ is now known internationally, globally, as a new dynamo. Why? Because of this collaboration, because of the infrastructure in place. That means, politically, it is stable and there's clarity of policies.
15. We were told that sometimes we need new instruments. Invest Malaysia Facilitation Center (IMFC). I mean this is Johor, it is not easy. Every meeting, they make new demands, and if they fail at the state level, they use someone up there, I mean of course for a good cause. So, this facilitation center clearly becomes a major focal point to accelerate the process of approvals, which is unprecedented again. And this becomes therefore, a facilitation center both at Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry (MITI) and Johor, as a showcase for other state authorities and some other federal agencies to emulate and progress.
16. You may have a politically stable system, you may have clarity of policies, brilliant minds working, but you must have this pace of approvals, the commitment of both bureaucrats and executives in the field. And so, thank you very much for those who have played their role and have seen the capacity and ability of JS-SEZ through Iskandar Investment Berhad (IIB), KHAZANAH, and the state government working together to enhance and showcase their ability and capability of SEZ.
17. So, it is a great story. I mean, I was in Davos, and in one of the questions raised about potential development, I mentioned JS-SEZ.

Not only in terms of a new project to attract investments and to provide incentives. Many countries give better incentives than JS-SEZ. And I happen to be holding the fort at the Ministry of Finance. I'm not interested in giving new incentives, enough. But then, you don't have that many countries with a politically stable system, a strong coalition, a two-thirds majority in Parliament, and using that to accept and acknowledge some of our blunders and excesses of the past, of endemic corruption, of abuse of power, of laxity and have understanding that decide to embark on very clear policies for the government: on industrial master plan and roadmap, on energy transition, on digital transformation, on semiconductor strategy. Because this is important.

18. Malaysia now is a hub for data centers, AI, and semiconductor. But the challenge is, of course, efficient, execution of these decisions. If we can do it in two weeks, why must we wait for two months? I always ask this staff: is there a compelling reason why you must delay? Because it's a weekend? Because it's holidays? Because you have to refer to so many committees and subcommittees? We have, therefore, to change.
19. So, this is a good story, of course. And we are fortunate, again, to be in ASEAN and to have that sort of very, very close relations with Japan. Thank you very much. You know, I had this opportunity to meet Prime Minister Kishida a number of times and become now good friends, and finally persuaded him to be really, what do I say, tight. He and his wife are all durian addicts, and the first time he had durian was serve during lunch. And now Prime Minister Ishiba. Not

only the formal relations, but the trust and the focus and the continuous exchanges.

20. Now we are having this to deal with this issue of the Trump tariffs. As a country, as a region, we are for rules-based multilateral arrangements. We do not share this or do not endorse or support or condone any unilateral action. It does not matter from many country. We promote peace, and we stand firm. Despite the fact that we are relatively a small country, we do not fear to express our views — be it on the Israeli aggression and colonization of Gaza, or provocation to Iran. We stand firm, and we are prepared to face whatever issues raised. But at the same time, we observe the principle or adopt the principle and policy of centrality.
21. Nobody can dictate that we should be too friendly to Japan or China or the United States. We are a trading country. We are an open trading country, and the policy must be to protect the interests of this nation and our people. You know, the United States is still, cumulatively and presently, the greatest investor and trading partner with Malaysia. You have E&E here, semiconductor — you know that 60% of our export is to the United States. Which means our relations with the United States, notwithstanding our differences in many of the foreign policy issues or this unilateral decision on tariffs — our relations with the United States must remain strong. Which means we must continue the engagement.
22. I just received the note from Minister Tengku Zafrul this morning about the series of meetings with the Commerce Secretary, with the

US Trade Representative progressing very well into the negotiations on tariff.

23. But at the same time, we also represent ASEAN interests and Prime Minister Ishiba, for example, when he called, he agreed that the Commerce Secretary or Minister of Japan should then coordinate. Today we take an ASEAN position, we work with Japan, Korea and China to engage with the United States. Why? to ensure that trading investments remain paramount and must be based on a multilateral arrangement.

23. So, there is some other issues. Of course, we take a very strong position against the provocative actions by North Korea, which is affecting, of course, the security of the region of South Korea or Japan and we take position very clearly. We in ASEAN had the consensus because we also have to deal and grapple with the issue with the South China Sea but our relations with China is very close. Not many countries can record that a month earlier we had President Xi Jinping on an official visit here, and the following month we had Premier Li Qiang which could not have happened if our relations with China is not extremely close.

25. Why? Because first, the principle of centrality. Secondly, because we are a trading nation. We need all the investments, support, training, transfer technology that China can offer, as the Japanese have offered for decades in the past. That's why I think our task is to make sure that we provide all the first incentive, but more so the infrastructure and the environment necessary.

26. I mean you are fortunate in the sense that you have Pengerang which has become a major hub oil and gas in the region and major players of course Aramco. Yesterday, the Chairman, President of Conoco Phillips, one of the greatest and biggest oil and gas American company was here in my office and committed to expand their investments in Sabah, huge investment into Sabah, which shows that if you continue to be pragmatic and our policies friendly to all countries and utilize the relations for the betterment of both our countries or our countries in the region, we have the capacity and can certainly excel.
27. It's important not only for the business community because you have you can see for yourself. I told, I mentioned Pengerang, a great massive oil and gas hub and the Japanese are coming in for the CCUS even and we have passed the legislation. We were told it's not enough just to give this technical approvals. They need a clear legislation and we did pass in a very short space of time.
28. And then we have one of the most dynamic ports in the Johor, PTP, extremely efficient and very competitive and we have airport and of course every time I meet the chief minister, he would still ask me a few Billion Ringgit more. I say, you contribute first, then we think about new projects.
29. So, I join you here mainly to say that we are committed to this program and project to ensure not only that you invest, but you benefit.

30. And now withstanding what I have said so confidently now with humility I would say after listening to you getting the recommendations, we will make all the necessary adjustments within our parameters if absolute necessary to make sure that we become a really and a very attractive destination for foreign investments.

31. Which means we are prepared to share your experiences and learn from you, your criticisms, your suggestions through state government or Khazanah and through IIB. And we will, I can assure you that my Cabinet, my team have that humility to acknowledge and accept that we are not living in the perfect world. We should be very dynamic and make adjustments wherever necessary. Thank you very much.

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