

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY YABHG TUN DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA**

**AT THE 40 YEARS OF THE LOOK EAST POLICY 1982-2022 BOOK LAUNCH AND THE
MALAYSIA JAPAN FORUM**

**ON 7th DECEMBER 2022 (WEDNESDAY) AT 10.45 AM
AT THE PULLMAN, KLCC, KUALA LUMPUR**

1. First of all, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to speak at the 40 years anniversary of the Look East Policy 1982-2022 book launch and the Malaysia/Japan Forum.
2. It is indeed an honour.
3. Before I proceed further, I would like to share a very recent anecdote which to my mind is the embodiment of my decision some 40 years ago to introduce the Look East Policy.
4. Two nights ago, Japan, nicknamed the Samurai Blue, lost to Croatia on penalties which effectively denied it a place in the quarter-finals of the on-going World Cup in Qatar.
5. It would have been a truly devastating loss for the hordes of Japanese fans who had travelled to Qatar and especially after witnessing their team beat the likes of pedigreed Germany and Spain in the group stage.
6. Not being much of a football fan, my story today is not about Japan's prowess in the tournament but rather on reports of how Japanese fans stayed behind at the stadium after their team's defeat and continued with their practice of collecting rubbish and help clean up the place.
7. To my mind, it would have been easy to discard the practice which had made Japanese fans admired the world over after facing such a painful defeat.
8. But their discipline, ethics, pride and honour did not allow them to succumb to their personal grief or sadness and remained steadfast to their value system.
9. I know I run the risk of being accused of over praising the Japanese by saying all this. Of course, the Japanese are not devoid of human failings as other races from whichever part of the world.
10. But their work ethics, discipline, pride and sense of shame when failing, are some the values that I wanted to be embraced by Malaysians when the Look East Policy was formulated and introduced.
11. When I introduced the Look East Policy as part of our national policy in December 1981, I was only in the 5th month of my Prime Ministership.
12. But the seeds of the policy had already started growing in me some 20 years earlier – in 1961 when I visited Japan for the first time with my wife.

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13. I saw the on-going construction of the Metropolitan Expressway in the city of Tokyo in preparation for the Olympics.
14. What was amazing was the rate of development that Japan was experiencing. And it occurred not too long after Japan had suffered massive devastation from war.
15. I have said this before and I will say it again - I concluded that the recovery of Japan is very much attributed to the Japanese culture and values - their discipline, hardworking attitude and commitment to responsibility and most of all their deep sense of shame if they failed in their duty.
16. In the Japan of today, the deep sense of shame is still an integral part of the Japanese way of life.
17. Another story regarding shame and honour that is worth repeating is how Japanese Railway staff would perform a mass apology ceremony to its passengers if the train is late even by a few minutes.
18. When I became the Prime Minister, I believed that if Malaysians have the same attitude, ethics and work culture, alongside the sense of pride in their work and sense of shame when failing, we would be as successful as the Japanese.
19. It was however not an easy task as Malaysia, like any other former colonies of European nations, tend to be more accustomed to treating the Western culture as superior.
20. Though it was not easy to supplant the culture of the former colonialists, we have managed to some degree, to successfully promote the policy.
21. Our students and workforce sent to Japan upon their return were testimony of this success and that the work ethics they adopted were worthy to be emulated by fellow Malaysians.
22. Of course the policy would not have been successful without the support and cooperation of the Japanese Government.
23. The Look East Policy has been one of the cornerstones of Malaysia Japan relations. Throughout the years, Japan had assisted Malaysia tremendously in its economic development endeavours.
24. Japan helped Malaysia build many of its world class infrastructures transferred technical knowledge and extended a helping hand during the Financial Crisis of 1997 and recent pandemic.
25. It is now four decades since the policy was introduced and I believe it is still a good and relevant policy for Malaysia and Malaysians.
26. After I stepped down in 2003 during my first stint as the Prime Minister, subsequent Malaysian governments after me continued to support the policy though the emphasis was not as strong.

27. During my second stint as Prime Minister, I was focused on the revitalisation of the policy. The late Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and I had then agreed that the Framework of the Look East Policy 2.0 must incorporate new trends in bilateral cooperation in order to remain relevant.
28. New global developments in particular the meteoric rise of China both as economic and military power, and the hostile reaction to this by the United States had impacted many of our foreign policies and international relations.
29. Asean faces a threat to its centrality and subsequently its relevancy from both external and internal forces.
30. Malaysia and Japan perceive the threats from these new realities differently. China's rise caused greater concerns in Japan leading it to align itself closer to the United States. Meanwhile China's growing prominence within the Southeast region threaten to overshadow Japan's presence.
31. Rather than integration and cooperation, the region is increasingly being divisive, pushed to choose sides. It is important for Malaysia and Japan not to lose sight of its long-standing good relations.
32. Albeit despite these new challenges and uncertainties, I personally and sincerely hope that the people-to-people interaction between the Malaysians and Japanese people would blossom into a strong and enduring bond and that it will be the glue that bind our two nations.
33. Before I end my speech, I wish to thank ISIS Malaysia, The Japan Malaysia Association, the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan for inviting me.
34. I truly hope the Look East Policy will continue for many more years and act as a balance to other cultures particularly those from the West.
35. It is also my fervent hope that the 40th celebration of the Look East Policy marks the dawn of a new era of Malaysia Japan relations.

Thank you.