

# Putting 'Look East' skills to good use

Sun 06 OCT 1991

**I**N Japan, they refer to it as *toho seisaku*. According to officials of *Gaimusho* -- the Foreign Ministry -- and Japan International Co-operation Agency (Jica), the term is well understood among the Japanese.

To Encik Mat Samsuddin Abdullah and Encik Mohd Yusof Said of the Airport Unit of the Public Works Department, it meant an opportunity to acquire new skills and experience.

To the Japanese Government and its private sector, it was a challenge to prove themselves as conscious international citizens.

And to South Korea, it came as an unexpected bonus.

*Toho seisaku* is Japanese for Look East Policy.

Since the controversial policy was introduced a decade ago by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, its acceptance in Japan has been so widespread that it no longer needs introduction these days.

Statistics alone are sufficient to exemplify the success of the policy. So far, some 2,000 Malaysian trainees had attended diverse courses in Japan, and 80 per cent of Japanese companies participating in the various *toho seisaku* programmes are "repeats" and the number of trainees will be increased in the next Japanese fiscal year.

The Japanese Government took the policy so seriously that a special unit called the Look East Policy Unit was set up at Jica. The Look East Policy trainees are treated separately from students and trainees accepted into Japan under the normal Japanese Government programmes.

Mr Takao Mizobuchi, the deputy managing director of the Training Division of Jica said in Tokyo recently that from the next fiscal year (April 92-March 93), the

**Japan is taking the Look East Policy so seriously that it has set up a special unit to conduct the programme and plans to increase intakes next year. But the trainees still complain of shortcomings in the programme and the lack of opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills at home.**

**A. KADIR JASIN comments.**

number of Look East Policy trainees would be raised from 120 to 200.

The decision was the outcome of the April visit of Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu to Kuala Lumpur.

The officials said the success of the Malaysian programme had encouraged the Japanese Government to start a similar, but smaller, programme for South Korea three years later.

They said companies participating in the Malaysian Look East Policy programme were generally very happy with the learning ability and discipline of the trainees. So far, only one trainee was dismissed due to disciplinary problem.

However, several former Look East Policy trainees

many Japanese executives and supervisors are able to speak English, while in the larger companies and factories there are manuals in English.

But what worries many ex-trainees more is the lack of opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills once they returned to Malaysia.

Being alone or only a few in a department or plant, they are not normally noticed by their supervisors. Over time, the new knowledge and skills deteriorate due to lack of application.

It is perhaps a good idea for departments and plants to group them into special teams so that they can make use of their new skills, either to increase their own

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interviewed in Japan and Kuala Lumpur spoke of a number of shortcomings,

Most said they did not have sufficient command of the Japanese language despite having gone through six months of language course before leaving for Japan and another three weeks during the orientation period in Japan.

Some said the language problem was not so acute as

efficiency and productivity or to teach their fellow workers.

In some Government departments or units, there are already as many as 10 former Look East Policy trainees who can be organised into such units.

Alternatively, if Government departments and agencies are unable to make full use of the new skills and knowledge because of bu-

reaucratic impediments and lack of drive among department heads, future training places should all be offered to the private sector.

Encik Mat Shamsuddin and Encik Mohd Yusof said they looked forward to using the knowledge and experience gained during their four-month stint, which included the study of the new Kansai International Airport in Osaka.

The offshore airport, the first of its kind in the world, is being built on a man-made island in the Osaka Bay at an estimated cost of US\$7.6 billion (\$20.5 billion).

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About 120 years ago, Japan did the same. It looked East towards the United States to acquire new knowledge and skills.

When reform-minded Emperor Meiji set out to modernise Japan after his restoration in 1867, he implemented his own "Look East Policy".

In 1871, he sent Ambassador Extraordinary Tomomi Iwakura with a large number of officials and students to the United States and Europe to acquire new knowledge.

Novelist-historian Shumon Miura attributed the great success of Japan after its defeat in World War II to the changes in social value.

Before the war, a man's

position was measured by his nearness to or distance from the Emperor. If he was near to the Emperor, he was recognised as important.

So, while a Japanese artisan, be he a carpenter or an artist, might be good in his work, his position in the society would be affected by it unless he was close to the Emperor or the Imperial House.

After the war, with the position of the Emperor being reduced to a mere symbol of the State, the Japa-

ly successful in Japan.

"The habit of keeping the workplace clean and the tools properly arranged is not merely to ensure productivity and quality. It is the deep-rooted tradition of Japanese craftsmanship," said Mr Miura.

The other important aspect of the Look East Policy, therefore, is to understand the values that put the Japanese craftsmen ahead of their counterpart elsewhere in the world.

Without capturing these

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nese workers were judged on their own merits. Suddenly, there were skilled and innovative artisans everywhere.

The recognition, said Mr Miura, had spurred Japanese craftsmen to better their performance. Combined with the retooling of war-damaged industries, their skills and innovativeness led to the industrial boom of the proportion not seen anywhere else.

"Of course, the most important element is the discipline. It is the discipline of Japanese craftsmen that makes manufacturing high-

values, we may not be able to understand and to appreciate fully Japan's industrial success.

Dr Richard Schonberger, an American industrial engineer who spent 10 years studying the Japanese manufacturing system and the author of *World Class Manufacturing* and *Japanese Manufacturing Techniques*, said it all started with the habit of frugality of the Japanese

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Their motto, said Dr Schonberger in an NCR video programme Perspective, is "don't waste materials and don't waste space"