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PM revisits Look East Policy

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30TH ANNIVERSARY: Policy also awakens Japanese industry to Malaysia's potential, says PM

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Over the past 30 years, many young Malaysians have travelled to Japan and South Korea to attend universities, complete training courses and go on secondments.

Many have returned home to join businesses or start out on their own. All have brought back with them skills, knowledge and experience, in turn enriching the Malaysian economy.

Take Akmal Abu Hassan, a halal food industry entrepreneur, for example.

After graduating locally, Akmal continued his studies in Japan, before joining the Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi. There, he learnt about the Japanese and international business environment, before working at Malaysia's Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

"Today, Akmal runs companies in Japan and Malaysia, passing on the lessons and business practices he learnt from the Look East Policy," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said in his keynote address at the "Look East Policy — A New Dimension" and Majeca-Jameca 31st joint conference



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak chats with halal food industry entrepreneur Akmal Abu Hassan after delivering his keynote address yesterday. Pic by Effendy Rashid

held here yesterday.

The prime minister was sharing some insights into the success and outcome of the Look East Policy with conference participants. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the policy.

"I was told that we can now enjoy halal wagyu beef in certain restaurants in Japan as a result of this effort," he quipped.

During the conference, Najib also

highlighted the success of Lim Wee Kee from Kedah, whose software company won the prestigious "Researcher of the Year" award from the Japanese government, the first foreign-owned company to receive the award.

Lim, who graduated from Fukuoka's Institute of Technology, had worked for a Japanese corporation before setting up his own software company.

Five years ago, his firm won the researcher award from the Japanese government for its contribution to innovation.

Today, Lim's company employs Japanese, Malaysians, Indonesians and Filipinos, providing jobs and experience to the next generation of young information technology professionals.

Najib said the Look East Policy made these successes possible,

just as it did for thousands of other Malaysians, but it was always about more than individual opportunities.

"Yes, a prime objective was to ensure Malaysia's young people absorbed the skills and work ethics of their Eastern counterparts. But the Look East Policy also awakened Japanese industry to Malaysia's potential," he said.

Najib said over the past three decades, Japanese investment supported 2,360 projects in Malaysia, with major companies such as Mitsubishi, Honda, Sony, NEC, Toyota and Matsushita putting down their roots in the country, and have since expanded and diversified their operations.

"Initial forays into petroleum, chemicals and metals led to more advanced electronics manufacturing and services.

"But if the investment of the past 30 years tells the story of Malaysia's industrial modernisation, then the investments under way now tells us something about Malaysia's future.

"Today, Japanese investors continue to respond strongly to our initiatives to promote new and emerging technologies, high value-added industries and sectors with significant research and development opportunities," he said.