

# DR M WANTS MORE TO BE SENT TO JAPAN

'Let students and government officials go for further studies, training under Look East Policy'

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**F**ORMER prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants more students and government officials to be sent to Japan for further studies and training under the Look East Policy.

The two-time former premier also called on the government to develop a more comprehensive approach towards education under the policy.

The approach, he said, should focus on the Japanese education system, starting from preschool to university levels.

"With the help of the Japanese government, we initiated programmes to send students and government officials to Japan for further studies and training.

"When I left office in 2003, there were more than 10,000 Malaysians sent to Japan under the Look East Policy programme. To date, the number has grown to over 26,000 Malaysians.

"I am proud that this concept

has been a success. Many Malaysians sent to Japan have done tremendously well upon returning home.

"Yet, the number of Malaysians sent to Japan today is a far cry from what it should be.

"I believe we can and should do better," he said, during his keynote address in a webinar yesterday.

The webinar was organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) yesterday to mark the 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy.

The policy, that was introduced by Dr Mahathir in February 1982, at the Fifth Joint Annual Conference of the Malaysia-Japan Economic Association (MAJECA-JAMECA), highlighted Japan as a successful economic model for Malaysia to emulate.

Dr Mahathir, in reminiscing his brainchild, described Japan as a "rising phoenix" that rebuilt its war-ravaged economy and demonstrated impressive growth in development and industrialisation.

"I was always asked on why did I choose to "look East" and not West, a practice perceived to be the convention of Malaysia and my 'predecessors post-independent.

"By any measure, it would have been easier to look West given the colonial legacy that was pervasive in Malaysia, be it our administration, education, economic endeavours and social



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**TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD**  
Former prime minister

conditioning.

"Our professionals and top administrators, were Western-trained and educated making everything West a matter of familiarity if not their ethos. As such, introducing the Look East Policy went against the grain and the accepted norms.

"However, much as looking West would have been a natural progression for me as was with my predecessors, I was, however, very much aware that the West was then sliding.

"Their industries were not as competitive due to work ethics and labour practices. They seemed to suffer from a derailment from their progress making them somewhat unappealing as model nations for an ambitious third world nation.

"It was, however, different with the East, with Japan. It was an exciting period as we had then witnessed how Japan was like the proverbial rising phoenix.

"Given its ability to rise from such destruction, surely, Malaysia, which was not in such a tragic condition and in fact, blessed with numerous natural resources would be able to emulate such success.

"All Malaysia needed was a policy shift and adopt a nation or nations that could be used as models in charting its progress and economic pursuits," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was also impressed by the work ethics and national pride displayed by the

Japanese people.

"To them, failure to deliver and perform is something to be deeply ashamed off.

"That had made them perform well in their tasks as well as made them strive for perfection. With such attitude in everything they manufactured and produced, Japan is then associated with efficiency and quality and it was only a matter of time they overtook the West.

"We decided that the best way to learn and emulate the Japanese work ethic is through education, making education the heart of the Look East Policy," he said.

The Look East Policy, he said, has also been instrumental to Malaysia's industrialisation efforts and significantly contributed to the country's economic development.

"Malaysia saw the benefits of hosting the Japanese multinational corporations, especially in terms of employment creation and we sought to capture the investment opportunities by highlighting the Look East Policy as part of investment promotion missions to Japan.

"Today, there are close to 1,500 Japanese companies operating in Malaysia, employing over 400,000 Malaysians."

Dr Mahathir said the Look East Policy can also be a convenient platform to chart new possibilities and platforms in a post-pandemic world.