

Speech by Youth and Sports Minister YB Khairy Jamaluddin
MJIT Leadership Lecture Series 17
“Building a Strong Malaysian Brand: Rally for the Malaysian Youth”
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Yang Berbahagia Prof. Datuk Ir. Dr. Wahid Omar, President of UTM

Yang Berbahagia Prof. Datin Dr. Rubiyah Yusof, Dean of MJIT

Yang Berbahagia Mr. Masanori Takahashi, President of Perodua Auto Corporation.

Yang Berbahagia Mr. Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, Vice-President of Perodua Auto Corporation.

Assalamualaikum WBT and a very good afternoon to all.

1. First and foremost I would like to thank the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology for inviting me to speak at the MJIT Leadership Lecture Series. I am indeed honoured to be given this privilege and I commend this Leadership Lecture Series which is in its 17th edition. The organisers have consistently focused on *building a strong Malaysian brand* through innovation and engineering excellence - a crucial element of the current knowledge economy - and I believe that this is fitting given our current global climate.
2. Let's face facts. While global long-term growth is expected to pick up modestly, medium-term prospects remain weak. Emerging economy prospects especially have continued to deteriorate due to China's slowdown and rebalancing, lower commodity prices, supply bottlenecks, tightening financial conditions, decelerating credit cycles and policy uncertainty. All this while trying to balance national growth with equality, with an ageing population thrown into the mix. However not all on the horizon is tinged with doom and gloom. Asia remains the major mover of the world economy contributing two-thirds of global growth. The future is still very much in Asia.
3. Why is this the case? We don't have to look far to attribute this to the high-productivity Asian workers as well as strong leadership and regional stability -- all of which contributes to conditions necessary for future sustainable growth that is more equitable and inclusive. We have seen the success stories of Japan, Korea and Singapore. We marvel at the breakneck

speed of growth of China and India. We see the potential of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. We are in fact living in exciting times in a world full of possibilities but not without equally great challenges.

4. The challenges of our times are manifold but among the most pressing are extremism, climate change, economic inequality, and displaced families and individuals due to armed conflict. We must continue in finding solutions to these challenges either as individual nations or collectively. I'm a firm believer that for every man-caused problem there is also a solution to be found in the ingenuity of man. Ideas to alleviate poverty through micro-financing, or one-stop information mobile app for refugees are not born from machines or supercomputers. It takes a person or collective, in this case Muhammad Yunus or Shelley Taylor, CEO of Trelyz, to dig into the recesses of their minds in coming up with solutions to make the world a better place.
5. Nations that are willing to create an environment that values entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity will see its ability to succeed increase multi-fold. A successful nation is not merely one with ever-increasing GNI. It is a nation where every citizen despite the socioeconomic station that he or she was born into can through hard work, education and access to capital change for the better. It is a nation where those with ideas and dreams will have every opportunity pursuing them to its fullest potential.
6. In this respect the establishment of The Malaysia Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIT) could not have come at a more pivotal moment for Malaysia as we are transitioning from an upper middle income nation to a high-income nation. The establishment of this Institute in 2010 is a testament to the enduring ties between Malaysia and Japan; and our conviction that our relationship is based on the premise that the best days have yet to come and that the past is only a prologue.
7. Malaysia-Japan relationship has spanned for nearly sixty years growing from strength to strength. From the Look East Policy first initiated in the early eighties under the aegis of which saw the establishment of the MJIT to the LEP 2.0, followed by Japanese investments that created jobs and a vibrant export economy, Japanese expertise and technology transfer and also our first bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in the form of the Malaysia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement.

8. We have continuously built upon this relationship. I'm glad that over the years we have maintained a close collaboration with Japan through continuous knowledge and technology transfer. This move has clearly benefitted Malaysia in our quest to achieve high-income status but it also has clearly brought dividends to Japan. Through the MJIT collaboration we are now opening a new chapter in our strong relationship to train future generations to further push the frontiers of technology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. Every great and successful nation is identified for something that they do exceptionally well. It is their badge of honour, their national brand. In some cases their *raison d'être*. In the United States of America, you have the American Dream, an idea that you can rise above your station in life to achieve anything through hard work, determination and initiative. In Germany, you have the idea of teutonic efficiency and proficient productivity. Japan, the *Land Of the Rising Sun* is well known for its efficiency and unparalleled work ethic. Where the trains ALWAYS run on time. The country is well known for creating cutting-edge technologies with strong business ethics and principles emulated by other companies and industries around the world.
10. Malaysia must also seek to do likewise. If the French are known for their cuisine, the Germans their engineering precision, and the Japanese for their work ethics, why can't Malaysian services and hospitality be branded and universally known? We need to set ourselves apart from economies where there is an abundance of cheap and low-skilled workers, and instead be a destination of choice that is high in productivity and yet reasonable in cost. Malaysia needs to be branded positively. It's not like this hasn't been done before. Companies like Petronas, Maybank, CIMB, AirAsia and Top Glove are looked upon with envy both regionally and worldwide.
11. Despite that, there is much more that we can learn from Japan -- the world's third largest economy. Chief among them is that a large part of their success was contributed by the strong research and development culture inherent in their industries. There was a time when Japanese consumer goods were considered inferior in quality and technology. This is no longer the case. Japanese goods are now known for their quality, creative content and innovation. It proves that change of the quantum leap kind can be done within record time. Malaysia more than any

country should be able to glean the secrets of why Japanese goods are associated with quality and how Japanese high speed trains can always run on time.

12. All of you here play a role in positively branding the Malaysian economy. How do you do that?
By being the best versions of yourself. As students you must learn to be passionate whatever your fields of chosen endeavour are, be ever inquisitive and always strive for excellence. Strive to change not only your station in life but also seek to change the world for the better. Believe that you will be able to touch someone's life with your actions, inventions and innovations; and that today is an improvement compared to yesterday and that tomorrow offers limitless opportunities. In continuously building our competitive edge we need to inculcate a culture of excellence, of continuous improvement (Kaizen) and of getting it right the first time.
13. The government is cognisant of this, and wants you to be the best versions of yourself possible. For too long we've concentrated on a university degree at the expense of technical education. I strongly believe that one of the pathways to success and opportunities has always been skills training. Malaysia, under the Economic Transformation Programme has now put a premium on Technical and Vocational Education in our quest to create a competitive and robust economy. In the 11th Malaysia plan or RMK-11 launched by the government included *accelerating human capital development for an advanced nation with focus on industry-led Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET)* among its key thrusts.
14. Malaysia must produce the right workers for our changing economy. The industries are currently demanding work-ready TVET graduates who are competent and multi-skilled. There must be an effective balance between theoretical knowledge and hands-on skills. This is to address the issue of lack of practical skills and industrial exposure among our graduates. In my ministry, there are 20 National Youth Skills Training Institute (IKBN) and all of them have undergone a much-needed transformation process to ensure that the output is 100% industry-driven. And now I am pleased that those who graduate from our IKBN have a higher employability rate than even some public universities with 91.4% of them finding gainful employment within six months.
15. In mainstreaming this TVET agenda, the government is working on better collaboration between public and private institutions as well as the industry players by getting them to participate actively in providing opportunities across institutions. The long-term goal is to produce future

technological workers with a higher tempo of professionalism who are in turn able to attract higher wages. I am certain that there is much to learn from Japan in this respect.

Ladies and gentlemen,

16. Through strong and focused policies from both governments, we have seen the increase of Japanese investments in Malaysia through the setting up many Japanese manufacturing entities. However among their chief concern is on the shortage of engineers who are able to work with them.
17. The establishment of MJIT is a good opportunity to venture into building a strong research and development culture in Malaysia and at the same time to upskill the students to become graduates with high employability. In this day and age, engineering should not be treated as a one-dimensional discipline on its own. Engineers today must be equipped with a multi-discipline perspective. Entrepreneurship skills for example are relevant for self-employment and graduate resilience upon entering job market.
18. If you are an engineer today who merely relies on the “conventional school of thought” in identifying a problem, generating ideas in solving it and providing an optimal solution it is not enough. You must be able to approach a problem through an out of the box perspective with a view towards maximum innovation.
19. Be ready to enter the workforce running. You must continuously hone your competitive and survival skills. Never rest on your laurels continue to learn, be prepared to unlearn and relearn, always upskill. Our fate as a nation depends on our future workforce. As a nation the price of failure is hardship for our citizens for no nation on earth will stop or slow their progress to wait and play catch up. A successful admired country today can easily turned into a failed state tomorrow, so we must continue to keep up even better to be ahead of the curve.

Ladies and gentlemen,

20. Upon completing your studies you will find yourself venturing into all sorts of profession, either as engineers, entrepreneurs, academics or maybe something that is completely unrelated to your studies. Whatever the environment that you choose to be in, it will transform you.

Therefore, I encourage you to learn as much as you can during the industrial training and attachment programmes for this is a window that will give you a preview of practical aspects of your industry and more importantly of the real world. Done right it can only give you an added advantage and thus increase the marketability of your talent upon your graduation.

21. As a professional in a developing nation there is a greater degree of opportunity to contribute and a greater degree of responsibility. Malaysia has successfully navigated the transformation from an agrarian nation to an industrialised nation. Malaysia cannot afford to get caught again in the middle-income trap that we successfully moved from through much hard work. The easiest route to this slippery slope is if we succumb to the Dutch Disease of over dependence on natural resources and continuing unabated in our dangerous addiction to cheap low skilled labour.
22. Our work does not stop here for we need to continue our endeavour to find our rightful place in this world. Building a strong Malaysian brand is a constant work in progress. We'll need to build a brand that stands out. That builds on our strengths. And that involves all of us. This begins with all of you here in this room.

Thank you.