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Saturday May 6, 2006

We are not mercenary, say Malaysian students

By **CHOI TUCK WO and NG CHENG YEE**

LONDON: Don't get us wrong. We are not mercenary. Money is not the main reason why Malaysian professionals and students choose to remain in Britain.

That is UK Executive Council for Malaysian Students chairman Wan Mohd Firdaus Wan Mohd Fuaad's reply to Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed's advice to Malaysian students that money was not everything and that they should return home after their studies.

On Tuesday, Mustapa said Malaysian students must have a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism.

Firdaus said there was a host of other factors coming into play, including work culture, environment and exposure as well as job challenges and prospects.

"The Government should look at the bigger picture," he said.

He said Malaysia could be competitive where money was concerned but the powers that be must make a greater effort to attract the students home.

"The Government cannot just expect these people to be nationalistic and patriotic and return to Malaysia when the time comes," he said.

Firdaus said that from his discussions with Malaysian professionals such as investment bankers and doctors, money constituted only 30% of the pull factor.



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He said for instance, an investment banker earning about £50,000 (RM325,000) a year in London would probably get about RM240,000 back in Malaysia.

“Let’s face it. Malaysia is not their turf as they have already established their network and contacts in Europe and the United States.

“However, if they are made to feel wanted back home and to contribute their expertise to improve the country’s economy, they are prepared to sit down and look at the options available,” he added.

In this regard, Firdaus said government-linked companies including Khazanah Holdings and Danaharta and corporations like Tenaga Nasional could be more proactive.

He said that so far, more than 100 professionals and mainly medical students have responded to the survey conducted by the council, which represents 58 Malaysian student societies or about 80% of the 12,000-strong student population in Britain.

“We hope to compile the final report and submit it to Deputy Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Kong Cho Ha by the end of next month,” he said.

London Umno Club chairman Dzariman Ibrahim agreed that work experience, exposure to the latest technology and access to the European market were among the pull factors.

While money was an issue, it was not the main reason for not returning home, he added.

In Petaling Jaya, MCA international affairs bureau chairman Datuk Lee Hwa Beng said self-sponsored students should not be blamed for not returning after completing their studies overseas.

“Those whose studies were financed by their parents will be thinking about returning the money when they graduate.

“You cannot blame them. These people have spent a lot of money to get a degree and they need to earn it back,” he said. However, he said government-sponsored students were bound by their scholarships to return and work in the country.

“It is their responsibility to serve the country which financially supported them. And they should be prosecuted if they do not come back,” he said.

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MCA Club Australia president Chan Wei Ming said verbal encouragement alone would not be enough to draw home those working overseas.

“Patriotism alone will not feed, support or motivate local doctors. You need better opportunities, respect and a better public healthcare system,” he said.

He added that many graduates remained overseas to gain more experience and resources in the hope that they would excel one day in their home country.

Chan said the Government had to do more to attract the brains home.

“A simple speech on nationalism and patriotism without any positive action is akin to baiting sharks with worms,” he said.



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