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Knowledge not from closet

THE acquisition of knowledge and skills is a life-long process that requires discipline and commitment. Those who are fortunate enough to continue their tertiary education soon after completing secondary school should use this opportunity to excel academically as well as to hone their inter-personal skills. For those studying abroad, it is a golden opportunity to mingle with people of other cultures and to gain new knowledge useful to themselves and to their fellowmen.

This is a mission students studying abroad must accomplish, and it is not mission impossible if they retain their good old Asian values. It is fine for them to think of gaining fame and fortune for themselves, but they must also use the knowledge gained for the good of the country. More so in the case of individuals who have the benefit of further schooling, thanks to the award of scholarships to them.

Advising these lucky students on his recent four-day visit to Japan, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reminded them that the Government spent one-fifth of its Budget on education and some of this is used to send students overseas for tertiary studies.

A timely reminder indeed, for such an investment must not be allowed to go to waste. The country needs them to return home to help Malaysia become a developed nation even though this may take time. Countries which emphasise education and training have always developed and progressed faster than their neighbours. South Korean and Taiwanese students who return to their homeland after pursuing an overseas tertiary education have proven that they not only help to increase productivity, but put to good use their different approaches to knowledge and ideas to enable their countries to prosper.

More importantly, students must be equipped with multiple skills so that they will be in a better position to stand head and shoulders above their competitors. Lest some fail to realise it, globalisation will alter employment patterns in the country.

As countries race against each other to empower themselves with knowledge, the quest takes on more urgent proportions as none of them wants to end up as dinosaurs in a knowledge-hungry world. As such, it is disheartening to learn that some Malaysians are still in slumber about the importance of mastering the English language which is universally used in communication.

A good command of the English language forms part and parcel of a person's survival kit. It will enable Malaysians to be more widely read in the Information Age and, in the process, complement the use of the national language in the long term. Malaysians who have mastered these two languages will be able to contribute to the translation and development of resource material in Bahasa Malaysia for their fellowmen.

A skilled and educated population will empower a country to be economically self-reliant and hold its own in an increasingly competitive world in which globalisation dominates. The drive to succeed will always be there if the spirit is willing.

A positive attitude must prevail and sacrifices may have to be made in widening our horizon. The best in life does not come on a silver platter. As knowledge is not acquired in a closet, let us not take things for granted. Knowledge advances us in the dignity of thinking beings.

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