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New efforts on Malaysia Hall cheer campaigner

Cheah Chor Sooi in London

THERE was a glitter in the eyes of Datuk Yunus Raiss, the individual who has fought relentlessly to save Malaysia Hall, when he was told that last-minute efforts are being made to renew the lease of the landmark cafeteria in the building.

Last year, the principal of London's Sels English College took on the cause of "Little Malaysia in Great Britain" by engaging a well-known valuation expert and a solicitor at his own expense, only to be devastated by the news that the Education Ministry was not keen to extend the cafeteria's lease, which expires in September.

"I am over the moon really, but I will wait till it all happens. For as far as I am concerned, the lease of the two properties runs out at the end of the summer. This leaves very little time to negotiate a successful deal," he said in an interview.

Yunus, who has lived in Britain for 40 years, was responding to a recent Bernama report quoting the Malaysian Students Department director Dr Kamaruddin Md Nor as saying that "last-minute attempts are being made to extend the lease of the cafeteria" housed in the basements of 44-45 Bryanston Square.

"Portman Estates, the landlords, were willing to extend the lease on a commercial basis for up to 25 years at a rental value of around STG250,000 (RM1.37 million) a year, provided the leases of all four buildings were coterminous," said Yunus.

"Sadly, for lack of action earlier, the landlords had served a notice of dilapidation (repairs) of about STG450,000 in anticipation of non-renewal of the lease."

Asked how he would improve the Hall, the 67-year-old educationist said:

"There is a host of things that could be done for the comfort of all Malaysians, for example, re-instating the lounge, the library, a reading room with newspapers, and a warm welcoming reception with information facility.

"And, of course, a public coin telephone box, which has been removed for some reason only known to some people."

Regarding the Government's concern about student movements, Yunus said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent drive to get Malaysian missions abroad to get close to the students to explain to them the Government policies would be greatly assisted if students had a decent place for their use when they were in the British capital.