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Government counter staff ill-mannered

By Philip H. Lee

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had fervently campaigned to woo overseas graduates to return. He gave an assurance that graduates with foreign spouses would be given leniency in immigration rules.

My wife and I sold everything we had, including our dream home in suburban Portland, Oregon, and both of us resigned from our posts to return to Malaysia in early 1997.

We ended up spending most of our Saturdays at the immigration office, to deal with matters regarding my foreign wife and my foreign-born child.

We encountered problems like Chop tak kena gambar, Pesuruhjaya Sumpah tak lengkap (stamp not on the picture, Commissioner for Oaths form not complete). Forms are given out one set at a time.

We have been given the run-around at the Kota Baru and Damansara immigration offices.

After six years, there is still no confirmation or set date when my wife (an American citizen) will obtain her permanent resident status in Malaysia.

We are here to invest and live. Why are we still bound by this excessive bureaucratic red tape? We have gone through many unpleasant experiences with the immigration and ill-mannered Customs officers.

I strongly believe that the way to recreate the sense of pride in a nation is not only through the tender school years. It must also be instilled in those who wear the badge of duty and the frontline men manning the government counters.

Either these people can make you feel proud to be a citizen of Malaysia or they can really make you turn blue in the face.

Our Prime Minister's effort is to continue to build a country that is strong and viable with its own bountiful natural resources. We cannot achieve this without upgrading our standard of living, our level of education and our sense of national pride.

But I seriously think we have a bunch of incapable officers carrying out frontline duties that help drive out more resources, leading to a brain drain.

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Kuantan