

No place for the unskilled in high-income world
Malaysiakini.com
March 3, 2011

In order to fulfill its mandate to provide talent to drive the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), Talent Corp CEO Johan Mahmood Merican admitted that the agency must leave those unskilled behind.

"We cannot afford to have unskilled Malaysians for we have to compete not only with unskilled foreigners in the country. We are in a globalised world, if you are unskilled you compete with all the unskilled in the world." Unless we are able to bring the entire population up the trajectory with the country (we will be left behind)...

"Unfortunately we have no choice, compete or die," he told Malaysiakini in an interview last week.

He cautioned that the job market will be a harsh and brutal one as Malaysia begin to move up the value chain.

"We need to move up the value chain. That is the harsh reality of globalisation. We are a middle-income country. The way forward is to go high-income and you can't go high-income without being highly-skilled.

"If we don't focus on how to get this country up the value chain, then all of us will be poor," argued the chartered accountant.

Unfortunately, he admitted, Talent Corp will have to focus on those high-skilled who can help the country move up the value chain and drive the transformation.

"Hopefully once we go up the value chain there will be a trickle-down effect to the rest. Until then, we will have to pull everyone along with us," he reasoned.

'Be cruel to be kind'

The Cambridge graduate likened Talent Corp's hard but necessary choice to that of a parent who only wants the best for their children.

"My mum tells me she has to be cruel to be kind. That is true as a parent. You cannot let your kids to not do their homework and not have any ambitions." If you do that, you are not doing them any favours," Johan stressed.

But other than it's own 'children' the highly-skilled talents that Talent Corp sought is not necessarily local nor Malaysian.

"We have to look at whatever source of talent required to fill the economy. We look at the diaspora, we look at foreign talent and we are also getting Malaysians in Malaysia."

He contend that retaining talent is a two-pronged effort.

Firstly is to create an environment of economic opportunity to attract the talents in the first place, the second to create a situation where the talent will then want to remain in-country.

'I can't solve all problems'

However the newly appointed CEO was evasive when asked about how he is going to handle the other 'non-economic' reasons that led to many Malaysians leaving and kept foreign talent from staying, though admitting he is aware of other issues of concern.

Some parties have pointed to issues as diverse as political persecution, social conditions and the declining state of public education in Malaysia as reasons why many have fled and others wary of coming to our country.

I can't pretend to be able to solve all problems. Talent Corp has its ambit (which is economic opportunity). I can't solve every single problem (holding back talents from coming to Malaysia).

I hope what is within my scope I can make a difference. I am confident that others in the government, in Pemandu, for example, will do their job as well," assured Johan.

Johan also agreed that he "is in the hot seat" as the challenge before him and his fledgling agency is a major one.

Announced by the PM in January, Talent Corporation Berhad was tasked with attracting, retaining and developing talent to fulfill the talent requirements of the ETP in changing Malaysia from middle-income to a high-income nation.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/157567>