

Don't blame them

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BALI: It is wrong to brand all students who do not return immediately after their studies overseas as unpatriotic, said Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister accepted that many students stayed back to further their training and specialise in the fields they had chosen, while some remained to gain work experience before returning.

Abdullah told Malaysian medical stu-

dents here that the issue was being hotly debated following the Higher Education Minister's statement that students should have "a strong sense of nationalism and patriotism, and should return home to serve the country after com-

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pleting their studies."

Datuk Mustapa Mohamed made this remark when he met Malaysian students in Ireland early this month.

Abdullah said student groups and parents had responded to Mustapa's statement.

"They explained that the facilities for the students chosen fields are easily available abroad and a longer duration is required to become specialists.

"This reason is *munasabah* (logical). So under the circumstances we cannot say that these students are unpatriotic," he told about 70 Malaysian medical students from the Udayana University here during a dialogue yesterday.

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on the "unpatriotic Malaysians" label given to non-

returning students and what steps the Government was taking to lure them back to serve the country.

Abdullah said the bigger concern for the Government was students who failed in their studies and yet did not return.

"They are ashamed to come back. These students will also lose their scholarships.

"So they take the easy way out by not returning. They look for employment and some continue their studies on their own later. This is indeed frustrating."

This group of students might not be big, he said, but it was still a loss not only for the nation but also their parents.

That is why the Government keeps urging students abroad to work hard and be exemplary, he said.

The Prime Minister said the

doctor-to-population ratio in Malaysia was still not satisfactory when compared to that in developed countries.

"This may affect efficiency and the quality of healthcare. So when we send you abroad, we expect you to come back and serve the citizens who have funded your education. Even those who go abroad on their own will have a place," he said.

He also advised medical officers sent to rural areas to accept the postings, as Malaysians in those areas needed quality healthcare, too.

Abdullah urged Malaysian students in Indonesia to learn and understand the local culture and respect the law.

"Don't get involved in activities that create suspicion. Don't give reason for the authorities here to accuse you of anything."



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