

Despite Penang's success, Guan Eng says talents still leaving country
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PETALING JAYA, Aug 23 — Economic success and development in Pakatan Rakyat (PR) states alone will not be enough to keep local talent in Malaysia as many are still looking for greener pastures, says Lim Guan Eng.

The Penang Chief Minister said last night that the brain drain is very much a serious problem, and that Malaysia is still losing out to neighbouring countries who continue to recruit young Malaysian professionals in droves.

"Despite Penang's success, it is still difficult to attract people to stay back home.

"There has been aggressive head-hunting by our neighbours, especially Singapore. We are losing to them, even though we did not actually do anything wrong. We are losing out to our neighbouring countries," he told a DAP Selangor fundraiser here last night.

The DAP secretary-general's remarks were in response to a question posed about PR's plan in tackling the problem of brain drain.

He was barraged with questions last night, but each query carried a standard demand — many of those in attendance wanted to know details of PR's policy plans (education, financial management) should it assume federal power.

Lim appeared to have been caught off-guard with some of the questions, and did not directly answer them nor did he provide PR's solutions into tackling brain drain. Instead, he said that PR's policy plans would focus on maintaining a corruption-free environment as well as reform plans set out by the opposition's Buku Jingga manifesto.

"We will liberalise the economy, and establish institutions. We want institutions to follow the rule of law," Lim stressed.

In January, the Najib administration had set up Talent Corporation to revive to revive the nation's stagnating economy.

A brain drain is depriving Malaysia of talent, and accounts for a third of the country's one-million strong diaspora, according to the World Bank Economic Monitor.

Singapore alone has absorbed 57 per cent of these departing educated workers.

Only 23 per cent of Malaysia's current work force is highly skilled, with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak saying this number must rise to 37 per cent by 2015 if it is to become a developed nation by 2020.

World Bank senior economist Philip Schellekens recently said the number of skilled Malaysians living abroad has tripled in the last two decades with two out of every 10 Malaysians with tertiary education opting to leave for either OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries or Singapore.

The economist said Malaysian migration was increasingly becoming a skills migration with one-third of the one million-strong Malaysian diaspora made of graduates.

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