

Putrajaya brushes aside Hassan Marican's Singapore appointments
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, March 27 — Putrajaya dismissed today concerns that Tan Sri Hassan Marican's move to Singapore was an indicator of Malaysia's failure to address its "brain drain" problem, saying "there are no indispensable people in the world".

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop told Parliament this morning that in the current era of globalisation, the government could not stop individuals from migrating abroad for better job opportunities but could do its best to reap benefits from the phenomenon.

Hassan has gone on to join the boards of several Singapore energy firms since leaving Petronas. — Picture courtesy of Sembcorp

He said Hassan's acceptance of top positions in firms outside Malaysia should instead be revered as an honour to the country as it shows the abundance of high-skilled human capital available here.

"This, to me, is a sign of appreciation to him and at the same time, of Malaysia, which we should be proud of.

"This shows that Malaysia has high-skilled human capital of global standards... the country is proud that one of our own has earned international recognition," he said during Question Time.

The federal minister was responding to a question by Lim Guan Eng (DAP-Bagan) who had asked why Malaysia had released Hassan, the former CEO of Petronas, to a Singapore company and whether this loss would be a blow to the government's efforts to plug the country's talent leak.

The Malaysian Insider cited a report on February 15 by news portal Energy Asia revealing that Hassan is set to become chairman of Singapore Power Limited in June, succeeding Ng Kee Choe who will retire on June 12.

Hassan, who left the national oil company at the beginning of 2010 allegedly due to friction with the Najib administration, has been accepting several director positions with several foreign firms in the energy sector.

Among them are Singapore government-linked companies including SembCorp Industries Limited, SembCorp Marine Limited and Singapore Power, which he joined on February 15, 2011. He is also a director at Sarawak Energy Berhad and US oil and gas giant ConocoPhillips.

When asking a supplementary question, Lim pointed out that Malaysia was not only losing her best talents to countries abroad but was also "exchanging" them with unskilled labour

from countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia.

"I agree it is a sign of respect to our country (Hassan Marican's appointment) but wouldn't it be more meaningful when our talents continue to serve the country rather than have their services appreciated abroad?" he asked Nor.

"It is true that he (Hassan) performed well in Petronas and now he has gone elsewhere... but someone has replaced him.

"There are no indispensable people in the world, in Malaysia.

"So we do admit that Tan Sri Hassan is someone who has offered very good service but now he has gone global and we are very proud of that," the minister replied.

He added that Hassan's latest appointment could help foster better bilateral relations between Malaysia and Singapore.

Hassan, 58, was part of the board that had appeared to have clashed with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak back in late 2009 over the appointment of a former senior aide as a Petronas director despite the prime minister having absolute powers in board appointments.

He was widely credited with turning Petronas into the only other state-run major international player in the oil and gas space apart from Norway's Statoil.

The former Petronas chief from 1995 stepped down on February 2010 after 15 years with the company and was appointed a director of Sembcorp Industries by June.

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