

THEY are female, Malay, from the east coast of peninsular Malaysia and many of them hold degrees in the social sciences.

These women make up between 60 and 70 per cent of the unemployed graduates in the country.

Not that all of them cannot find jobs. There are jobs in the west coast but these young women are reluctant to move away from familiar surroundings.

During interviews at job fairs across the country, the Manpower Department found that their reluctance was due to parental fears caused by media reports about the rape and murder of women on the west coast.

"The parents are afraid to let them go to the west coast," says Datuk Ismail Abdul Rahim, the director-general (peninsula) of the department.

"They read about girls being raped and killed when they go to Kuala Lumpur."

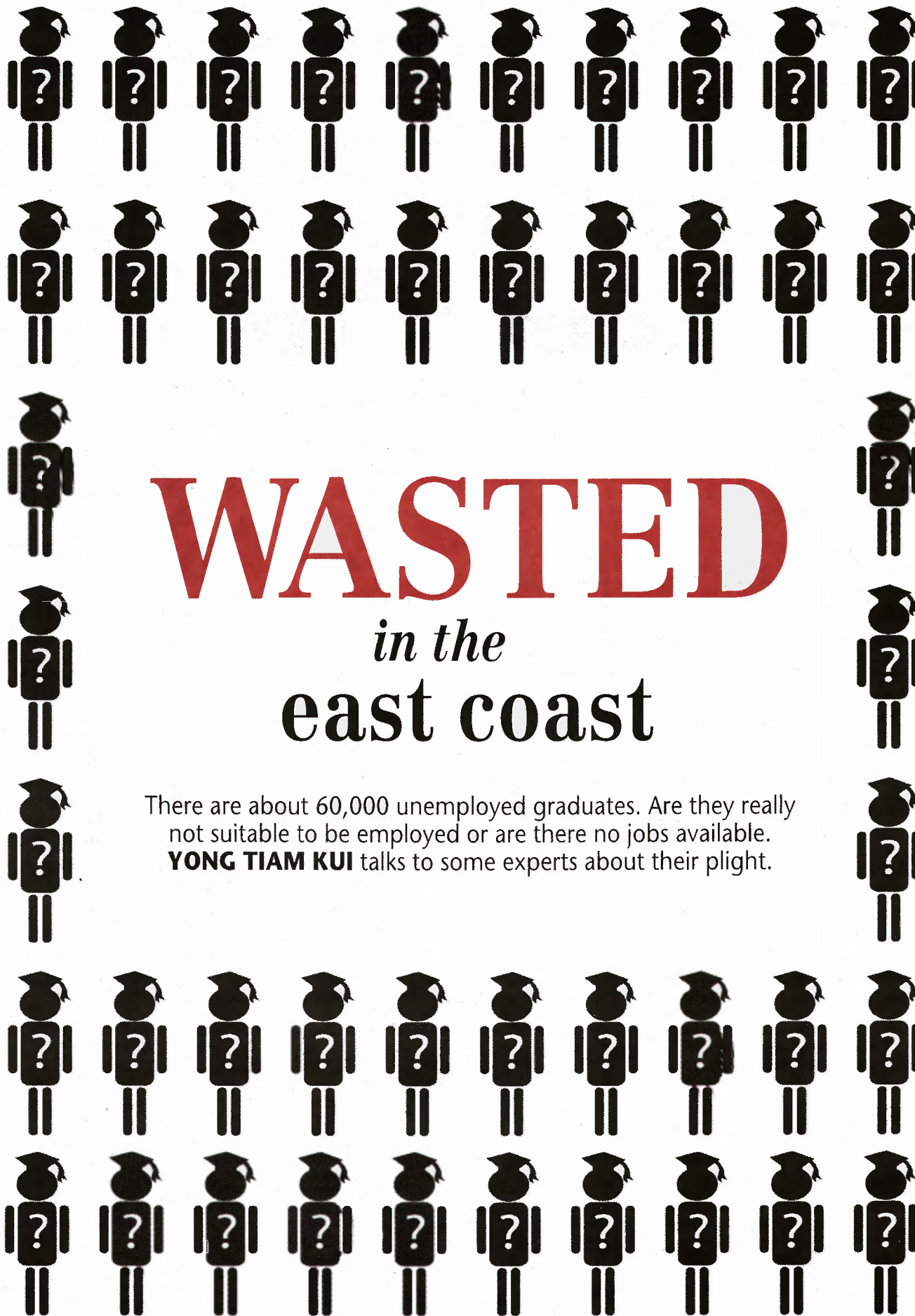
There are other reasons beside fear.

Ismail says many graduates were also unwilling to take on jobs that are 'less prestigious' or pays less than what they expect to get.

This attitude is often reinforced by parents who feel that it is demeaning for their children to start at low level positions.

"They say: 'My daughter is a university graduate. Why should I let her work in a factory for RM600 or RM700? It is better for her to stay at home'."

The department is looking into the possibility of making more jobs available to Malaysian graduates by introducing stricter controls on private sector recruit-



WASTED

in the
east coast

There are about 60,000 unemployed graduates. Are they really not suitable to be employed or are there no jobs available.
YONG TIAM KUI talks to some experts about their plight.

ment of foreigners for vacancies in supervisory, executive and technical areas.

However, Ismail stresses that this has to be done in a careful and balanced manner to maintain the country's business-friendly climate.

Ismail says the government also wants to encourage unemployed graduates to look for employment overseas. Noting that most Malaysians who are working overseas are of Chinese descent, he says he would like to see more Malays doing that.

"There are 80,000 Malaysians working in Singapore and 30,000 in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. But, most of them are Chinese. I would like to see more Malays consider the option of working overseas.

"If you work for a hotel in Britain, for instance, you can make £5 an hour."

Ismail points out that during the department's job carnival, graduates were asked if they were prepared to work overseas.

"Out of 5,000, only 200 said yes. The majority of these graduates said they wanted to work in Singapore or Brunei. Very few said Britain or Dubai. We have to change the mentality of job seekers."

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan says government programmes that provide training in English, ICT, grooming and other skills have definitely made a difference because 80 per cent of unemployed graduates who went through these courses found jobs.

He says entrepreneur-

'Varsities must produce thinking grads'

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ship skills should also be taught so that graduates can strike out on their own if they can't find work.

Shamsuddin is happy some universities are consulting private sector organisations before they start new programmes to ensure that they produce marketable graduates.

But, he adds, it takes about five years for new programmes to get from the drawing board to implementation.

"It takes another three to four years for the first batch of students to complete the

programme. By that time, what is thought to be current may be obsolete."

Existing legislation, says Shamsuddin, should be reviewed to allow "cross-fertilisation" between universities and the private sector.

"People in the private sector who are experts in their fields but do not have formal qualifications should be invited to lecture in universities.

"University lecturers should also be attached to companies to get real-life experience.

"Internship programmes in the private sector should be made compulsory so



Shamsuddin is glad some varsities are consulting the private sector



Ismail says jobless graduates should seek employment overseas

that students would know what is expected of them in the working environment."

Ismail says the government is looking at more ways to fix the mismatch between local universities and the private sector.

"There's no point in producing graduates who are not employable."

However, not all academics share the view that universities should produce employable graduates.

The dean of the Science faculty at Universiti Malaya, Prof Mohamed Abdul Majid says: "The politicians have got it all wrong. We are not polytechnics. Universities

should not be training people for jobs, unless you are in the medical or dental faculty."

Mohamed says the primary responsibility of universities is to produce graduates who are capable of thinking for themselves.

"We are here to produce people who can think and generate new ideas. That's what we should be doing.

"Once I overheard a student saying he wanted to study geology. He wanted to know about job prospects. The lecturer said: 'Well, one student who graduated last year is now making curry powder'."