

'We'll look at all options to strengthen Icon Offshore'

KUALA LUMPUR: Ekuiti Nasional Bhd (Ekuinas), which is looking at strengthening the balance sheet of its 42.3%-owned loss-making Icon Offshore Bhd, is not dependent on listing companies via initial public offerings (IPO) as an exit strategy, preferring a clean exit to realise its investments.

"IPO is the least preferred option because you still have to deal with the rest of your assets. We like to see that (IPO) as an option but not preferring it. A clean exit of the entire stake we own in the company is a better option than IPO," CEO Syed Yasir Arafat Syed Abd Kadir told a press conference after unveiling the Ekuinas Annual Report 2017 yesterday.

He said Ekuinas is exploring all angles for ailing Icon Offshore and needs to look at the market itself to see whether is it the right time to sell the vessels.

"The best option is to dispose of the vessels but the market is also very depressed. We're looking at all options for Icon Offshore to strengthen the balance sheet, restructure it to ensure it's on stronger footing."

Syed Yasir said Ekuinas is also exploring all possibilities for Cosmopoint College and Kuala Lumpur Metropolitan University College (KLMUC), which could include a merger.

"Divestment won't happen so soon, but we're exploring strategic collaboration or merger with other education groups. It's too soon to explore divestment for KLMUC and Cosmopoint. That's a lot of value that can be gained from that investment."

On ILMU Education Group, which is the holding company for Ekuinas' portfolio of education companies, Syed Yasir said its initial intention was to list

ILMU but from the depth of the market and the valuation perspective, it will only go by a partial exit.

Icon Offshore, Cosmopoint Group, Unitar and Revenue Valley are four portfolio companies that are transferred to the Ekuinas Direct (Tranche 3) Fund from Ekuinas Direct (Tranche 2) Fund as it is being deployed.

"The landscape of the education sector has changed tremendously. It took us a long time to clean up the organisation. We've transferred it to Fund 3, give us some leeway to deal with these assets. We've seen the bottom of it, we're confident of taking it to the next phase," Syed Yasir said.

"We just want to ensure that whatever opportunity ... it's bought at the right value and opportunities within the sector are interesting enough for us to grow the business." – by **Ee Ann Nee**