Employers deny there’s racial discrimination in job market

By Ainaa Aiman - May 25, 2019 9:15 AM

PETALING JAYA: Two groups of employers have defended their hiring practices against allegations of deliberate racial discrimination.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers vice-president Nathan K Suppiah and Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan told FMT their members would recruit employees on the basis of need.

They said any appearance of discrimination would probably be unintentional.

Suppiah said job applicants were usually assessed on their merits and attitudes.

"If there happens to be an inclination towards a certain race, it is normally attributed to the market focus of the particular company and not to the intention to discriminate," he said.

Shamsuddin, speaking of a hypothetical situation in which a recruitment exercise results in the employment of workers dominated by one race, said it would likely be caused by a company’s need to meet certain business requirements.

Education Minister Maszlee Malik recently said the racial quota for university matriculation programmes would remain until the government could overcome inequality in tertiary institutions and discrimination against Bumiputra graduates in the job market.

A think tank, the Centre for Governance and Political Studies, found in a survey last March that Malay and Indian job seekers were more likely to face discrimination than their Chinese counterparts.
Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Abdul Halim Mansor recently urged employers to ensure their work forces mirror the racial composition of the country. He also called for a law aimed at resolving the issue of racial imbalance in the job market.

Shamsuddin warned that business operations might get stifled if employers were required to tailor their hiring practices to the need to ensure a racially equal labour market.

Suppiah said the country needed a specific law to deal with discrimination in social and economic activities and in every other aspect of life.

Subang MP Wong Chen suggested an anti-discrimination law providing for an independent commission and tribunals to settle disputes.

"On the regulatory side, the government can provide tax incentives to employers who achieve racial diversity," he told FMT.

He also suggested the establishment of a body to fight race and sex discrimination in the hiring of workers.

In his statement, Maszlee accused some employers of discriminating against job seekers who don’t speak Mandarin and women in headscarves.

Klang MP Charles Santiago said headscarves should not be a basis for discrimination.

He said the government had a responsibility to ensure the end of discrimination and to educate employers to be open-minded.

He agreed with Wong and Suppiah that the country needed laws and policies against discrimination.

"In western countries, when you are called for a job, they won’t ask your age, religion or race," he said.

He foresaw a time when there would no longer be discrimination against Malay and Indian job seekers, noting that an increasing number of pupils from the two races were being enrolled in Chinese vernacular schools.