Youth of the nation

NATION

Sunday, 16 Jun 2019
By Yuen Meikeng

THE world is your oyster, or so people say when you are young and fresh out of school.

And for our Malaysian youths, they are a hopeful bunch, brimming with faith in a bright future ahead of them.

They are also more confident than youths from several developed nations.

Most or 58% feel confident about achieving desired opportunities, career advancement and growing their own business, according to exclusive findings from the LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2018 made available to Sunday Star.

These young Malaysians aged between 18 and 29 are even more confident in fulfilling such goals compared to their peers in developed countries like Australia (49%), Singapore (42%), China (41%), Japan (31%) and Hong Kong (24%). And such conviction and optimism will help them through the current sluggish economy and uncertain job market in our country.

Currently, employers are being more prudent about hiring, given weaker market forces across nations and Malaysia is no exception.

The slower job market in Malaysia may last until 2023 based on projections, says the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF).

Nevertheless, LinkedIn communications head (South-East Asia and North Asia) Linda Lee shares that 67% of young Malaysians are strongly positive about their future economic outlook.

“Some 70% are also strongly positive about their personal finances, optimistic about having more money in the next 12 months,” she tells Sunday Star.

About half or 48% were confident in finding better opportunities than today.

Such opportunities that Malaysian youths desire are jobs offering good work-life balance and chances for a financially rewarding career.
“The data supports the conclusion that most or two-thirds of this age group, including graduates, are optimistic about their economic outlook and financial situation moving forward.

“We encourage young graduates to start building a community – supporting and guiding them towards their desired opportunities, be it advancing their career or growing their own business,” says Lee.

The survey, held among 11,000 people in nine countries in Asia Pacific, including Malaysia, aimed to better understand the kinds of opportunities that are important to communities and the common barriers that hold them back from accessing them.

Based on the findings, it was consistent that young Malaysians desired good-work life balance, with the data linking the importance of “a job that I love” and age.

“This aspect of a good life resonated most strongly with the 18 to 29 age group across all markets.

“This may signal an expectation or desire among the younger generation for their passions to feature heavily in their livelihoods or professions of choice,” read the survey.

As for older respondents, the importance of “a job I love” started to decline in relative terms until it was overtaken by home ownership at the 40-year-old mark.

“Among those in their 30's and 40's, good health starts taking on a bigger role as a definition of good life but financial independence and children also become part of what it means to have a good life,” the survey says.

But for young job seekers, MEF executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan advises them not to be disheartened if they come across challenges in securing jobs or permanent employment.

“More employers are offering jobs based on short-term contracts instead of permanent placements.

“Such contract-based job offers may not inspire confidence in job applicants to take them.

“It can be hard to start a family or apply for housing or car loans with such a scenario.

“But don’t reject such offers because of this. Gain as much experience first to help you grow.

“If you prove yourself to be valuable, your employer would want to keep you around,” he says.

Shamsuddin says the high confidence among Malaysian youths could help them weather through obstacles.

As many youths do express plans to start their own business, he says this could be linked to entrepreneurship subjects taught in universities and colleges, contributing to their strong faith in charting their future.

“They should start small first, and consider the costs of doing business today.

“While times can be difficult, there are opportunities in every challenge,” Shamsuddin says.
Perhaps it also helps that Malaysian youths aren’t asking for much nor are they choosy about jobs, based on the recently released Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) “school-to-work transition survey”.

The survey, in reports, said young Malaysians did not necessarily prioritise high wages.

Concurring with LinkedIn’s findings, the KRI survey listed the most important goals in life for 15- to 29-year-olds to be successful at work (33%), having a good family life (25%), having different experiences (11%), having clear career goals (10%), contributing to society (7%), followed by being wealthy (6%).

On the flip side, employers ranked soft skills and work experience above academic and professional qualifications when hiring.

When hiring skilled or professional workers, the most important characteristic to employers was being honest and hardworking (40%) and discipline and commitment (18%).

This was later followed by technical or professional skills (16%), communication skills (9%) and academic qualifications (8%).

But rather than just dismissing some young graduates as “unemployable”, the KRI survey urged employers to be aware of what they can do to engage with youths to create workforce skills that are needed.

Among some of the measures suggested by KRI are for employers to serve on university boards, visiting schools for career days and taking part in job fairs and recruitment drives.