

Non-Malays shy away from govt skills training centres

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KUALA LUMPUR: Misconceptions have resulted in few non-Malays enrolling at the 21 state-of-the-art skills training institutes nationwide.

Only slightly more than 1,000, or five per cent, out of 20,000 trainees each year are non-Malays — which is a shame as the courses are provided free by the government.

Last year, for instance, there were only 800 Chinese trainees and 400 Indians. This is short of the target of at least 5,000 non-Malay trainees.

Several non-Malay parents interviewed said they were reluctant to send their children to the government institutions as they had been told by others that the medium of instruction was only Bahasa Malaysia and the trainees were not allowed to observe their own religious practices.

There were also claims that trainees were not allowed leisure activities and the quality of training was low.

A. Balachandran, 49, a factory supervisor whose two sons are studying at a private institution in Klang, said: "I know government institutes are free and have state-of-the-art facilities but I have been made to understand that the medium of instruction is only Bahasa Malaysia and the environment is not conducive to non-Muslims."

He said the private sector preferred workers who were

trained to cater to their demands including being able to read, write and speak in English.

To this, Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Dr Fong Chan Onn said although the medium of instruction was Bahasa Malaysia, English was also widely used.

"We are aware that English is the main medium of instruction in private institutions and some even teach in vernacular languages.

"At our institutes, we try our best to use English as much as possible because workers must be able to read instructions in the operating manuals which are written in English," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Fong assured parents that the language problem would be addressed so that more non-Malays could enrol in the institutes.

The ministry is also conducting a nationwide roadshow soon to highlight the programmes offered at the training institutes and dispel any fears about the learning environment.

Fong said officers would also be sent to schools to spread the message.

"When we hold talks, the attendance from non-Malay parents is overwhelming, but when it comes to application, they prefer to apply to private institutions despite the high fees," he added.

Fong also dismissed allegations that the government training institutes were not

conducive for non-Muslims and lacked leisure activities.

He said non-Malay students would be allowed to hold cultural activities at the institutes during festivals so that they would feel more at home.

"Non-Malay students are also allowed to practise their religions," he stressed.

As to allegations that the quality of training was low, Fong said the government institutes were well equipped with the latest equipment.

He added that the ratio between the number of students and equipment was as specified in the manuals.

Citing an example, he said, each student was given a computer when pursuing a programme which was in line with international norms.

Upon completion of the programmes, trainees are awarded the MLVK (Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan or the National Vocational Training Council) cer-

tificates.

Fong also pointed out that a large number of companies sourced workers from the institutes — giving trainees good job prospects.

"Our biggest challenge for this year is to get more non-Malays to join our training institutes and excel in the programmes offered," he said, adding that parents should get in touch with the ministry for more details rather than listen to rumours.