

**What Bumiputera discrimination? Shopping's a money game – business experts**  
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Several business experts have refuted an allegation this week by two Malay groups that shopping malls were discriminating against Bumiputera businesses.

"In business, the main issue is never about race. It is about profit and loss and keeping the business alive," said Dr Yeah Kim Leng, the group chief economist at credit advisory firm RAM Holdings, told The Malaysian Insider.

On Monday, the Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia and Malay rights group Perkasa accused major shopping malls of refusing prime space to Malay businesses and called for more lots to be reserved for Malay retailers.

The chamber's secretary-general Hanafee Yusoff said high rentals at these malls made it difficult for Bumiputera traders to compete with international brands.

This drew a response from the Malaysia Shopping Malls Association (MSMA), which said malls do not have a racial quota policy on the sale or leasing of lots.

Yeah said while such a policy can be introduced, it may not encourage businesses to grow.

"We can prepare the space and everything but if the business is not sustainable, losses would still be made. We have to take into account the commercial value of such a practice," said Yeah.

When met by The Malaysian Insider, academics in business schools in Kuala Lumpur echoed the view.

"At the end of the day, it's just business. If there is a demand, from the business point of view, they would sell it to the highest bidder," said associate professor Dr Che Ruhana Isa, dean of the Faculty of Business and Accountancy in Universiti Malaya.

"Owners of malls would definitely look at those who can meet the requirements they want," she added.

Dr Suhaimi Sarif, who heads the International Islamic University's business administration department, agreed. He said while the groups have a right to voice their grievances, they should understand that it is a free market out there.

"The perception that Bumiputeras have is that they should receive special rates. This is the mentality of those who want subsidies," he said.

"They feel discriminated due to the high rental rates but when you look at Suria KLCC, the rates there are definitely high due to its location," he added.

Suria KLCC in Kuala Lumpur was singled out by Perkasa information chief Ruslan Kassim for preferring "outside traders" over Bumiputera businesses.

In its defence, MSMA said retailers were selected based on their financial strength.

"We are colour-blind. Discrimination does not come into our vocabulary. This is business, not politics," said the association's president, H. C. Chan. – September 12, 2013.

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