

World Bank in its recent East Asia and Pacific Regional report 'Live Long and Prosper', highlighted that just as important as mitigating quantity of workforce declines, efforts to enhance worker quality is essentially important.

A testament to the success of Malaysia's government in boosting and enhancing the nation's human resource, World Bank had pointed out that East and Southeast Asia have a positive starting point in terms of the massive expansion in secondary and higher education in recent decades.

It said, these efforts will flow through into the labour force in coming decades and at all income levels, each generation of future East and Southeast Asian workers will be significantly more educated than the last.

According to Ang Weina, Global Employer Services leader at Deloitte Malaysia, based on Deloitte Malaysia's experience as a professional services firm and its interactions with the respective agencies, there have been positive support and changes made through initiatives by the government that have led towards the encouraging growth in productivity level.

"For example, the game changer undertaken by the respective chief executive officers (CEOs) of the Inland Revenue Board and Talent Corporation Malaysia (TalentCorp) in technological advancement for processing of tax and immigration matters shows that it is possible to walk the talk with drive, support and investment from the top.

"More importantly, the initiative to improve productivity is cascaded from the top to the operational team where significant turnaround time in processing applications and resolution of issues are noted," Ang said in an email interview with BizHive Weekly.

She further opined, it is reassuring to note that the government acknowledges the significance of human capital development. She also commended the strategies introduced in Budget 2015 and Budget 2016 especially, given the programmes initiated in regards to the role of women in the workforce.

Ang commented, "Given a personal involvement with some of the programmes in upholding the role of women in the workforce, we can see the level of commitment and cooperation



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Johan Mahmood Merican, TalentCorp Malaysia CEO

# Building and enhancing Malaysia's human capital



tion from both the public and private sectors in wanting to ensure success in these programmes."

Of note, World Bank has also emphasized in the labour market of countries as diverse as Japan, Malaysia and Fiji, women should be encouraged to join the labour force, especially through childcare reforms.

Some of the key measures that were introduced by the government to improve Malaysia's workforce is the development of industry-ready graduates.

In line with that, TalentCorp, an agency established under the Prime Minister's Department to formulate and facilitate initiatives to address the availability of talent in line with the needs of the country's economic transformation, has introduced various programmes and developments to improve the employability of Malaysia's graduates.

TalentCorp Malaysia's chief executive officer Johan Mahmood Merican told BizHive Weekly, "As reflected in Budget 2015 and Budget 2016, the government continues to be proactive in improving Malaysia's human capital and in line with this, TalentCorp focuses on ensuring the availability of local talent, particularly our young graduates

who are the primary source of talent for many of Malaysia's priority sectors."

He added, "Thereafter, TalentCorp introduced the Industry Engagement Zone, or Ind-E-Zone, career services centres to enhance graduate employability by bridging the gap between employers and universities.

"I'm happy to say that Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) is one such institute where an Ind-E-Zone centre can be found, and we aim to establish a total of 11 centres throughout Malaysia by the end of this year."

More recently, he pointed out that several announcements were made to enhance graduate marketability through greater academia and industry collaboration, including the establishment of an academia-industry collaboration task force jointly chaired by Datuk Seri Haji Idris Jusoh, Minister of Higher Education from the Ministry of Education Malaysia and Senator Datuk Seri Wahid Omar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department to drive implementation of industry academia collaboration towards ensuring graduates meet industry needs and to create a more market-oriented university curriculum; and

the CEO Faculty programme, through which CEOs of Government-linked companies (GLCs) will adopt faculties in selected universities, give their commitment as adjunct professors, and engage with the varsities on academia-industry collaboration.

"More talent development measures were introduced in Budget 2016, including the establishment of an Industrial Skills Committee by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) to coordinate technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes in collaboration with industries; allocating 30 per cent of the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) to implement training programmes to meet the needs of local industries in Sabah and Sarawak; and training an additional 15,000 participants under the 1Malaysia Training Scheme (SLIM).

"Also, the government will continue to monitor the achievement of at least 30 per cent participation of women in decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, including at the board of directors level," Johan added.

Ang also noted that there have been exemplary programmes rolled out and also notable funding allocated for human capital development, for example the School Improvement Specialist Coaches and School Improvement Partners programmes, the setting up of more Trust Schools, extending the eligibility of the MyBrain15 programme, implementation of the Dual Language programme and Highly Immersive programme to uphold Bahasa Malaysia and to strengthen the English Language.

However, she pointed out that it is equally important for the rakyat to see the progress and results of these initiatives through an assessment by an independent agency, similar to that of the AG's office.

# Transforming Sarawak's workforce

Over in Sarawak, under the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE), the state has seen a massive expansion in its job market.

With the development of projects as Samalaju Industrial Park in Bintulu, the Halal Hub in Tanjung Manis and various other projects, SCORE has not only opened up opportunities for foreign direct investments (FDIs) but job opportunities as well.

Nevertheless, while quantity is greatly needed to ensure that these projects are initiated promptly and smoothly, the quality of the workforce is equally important in ensuring that these projects are executed properly.

During a recent 'Latest Development for The Sarawak Workforce Seminar 2015' organised by the Workforce Development Unit in the Chief Minister's Department and the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers, Datuk Len Talif Salleh in his speech had highlighted that main factors that have a significant impact on whether West Malaysia and Sarawak can achieve its goals is the quality of the workforce.

"Although Sarawak has until 2030 to become a developed and high income state, we cannot take things easy as we must ensure all our efforts and energies are synchronised

and synergised so that the 11MP will successfully catapult the nation towards the goals," he advised.

Len had also emphasised that the competition for qualified manpower would increase and therefore, all companies are advised to take steps to develop its people's skills capacity.

One of the programmes, he advocated was the National Talent Enhancement Programme or NTEP, of which, he pointed out, was to increase the employability of graduates by providing on-the-job experience and industry-relevant training.

Meanwhile, Johan concurred with Len's view and said, "What we often hear through our engagements with employers across all the key economic sectors is that it's becoming increasingly difficult to find the right talent, which suggests there continues to be a mismatch between talent supply and demand."

He noted that based on the Economic Monitor June 2014 survey by World Bank and TalentCorp, employers would like to see more fresh graduates with the ability to think critically and creatively, and to communicate and work independently.

"However, graduates from Malaysian universities seem to be lacking in these

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Ang Weina, Deloitte Malaysia Global Employer Services leader



areas. Addressing this issue calls for greater industry-academia collaboration, as well as industry participation in the academic space," he highlighted.

As such, TalentCorp had expanded its programmes into Sarawak, to offer its people the opportunity to improve their employability as well as human talent and skills.

Johan noted that TalentCorp recently exchanged a Letter of Intent (LOI) with the Sarawak Skills Development Centre (SSDC) on October 6 to give students in Sarawak access to TalentCorp's Structured Internship Programme (SIP) and Graduate Employability Management Scheme

(GEMS). "The SIP provides undergraduates with the opportunity to develop industry-specific knowledge and skills.

"More importantly, it creates a win-win situation for the demand and supply sides, wherein SIP-endorsed companies benefit from a double tax deduction incentive for training-related expenses incurred, while interns get to experience a high-value internship experience.

"GEMS, meanwhile, is an initiative which equips fresh graduates who are unemployed with industry-required skills," he explained.



# English language key to enhancing human capital

Proficiency in the English language has also been touted as a vital skill to improve one's job employability and an employee's skills.

In a recent survey, JobStreet.com had highlighted that the English proficiency levels in Malaysia continues to be of concern as based on its survey, 64 per cent of the respondents said that poor command of English was the second reason behind unemployment of fresh graduates.

It pointed out, being the main language of business communication, more employers are taking into account the importance of hiring candidates with a good grasp of

English.

Therefore, Chief Minister Tan Adenan Satem's declaration of the usage of the English language as an official language in the state, besides Bahasa Malaysia, has overall been viewed positively by Sarawakians.

Of note, Adenan had recently declared the usage of the English language as one of Sarawak's official language in order to improve the level of English proficiency among Sarawakians to match demands in the job market.

Meanwhile, Ang commended the government's initiatives such as the Dual Language programme and Highly Immersive programme to enhance Bahasa Malaysia and

to strengthen the English Language.

However, there is still more that needs to be done to improve the language proficiency level in the nation. She commented, "As much as we can introduce innovative and critical thinking in primary and secondary school curriculums, the crux of the matter is to start the change from within the system."

Ang further stressed, "We cannot compromise with the level of language proficiency we seek to achieve. However to start, we can at least assess to where we are at the present.

"For example, a review of competency levels of the teaching fraternity, the teaching

facilities and other key areas that need to be taken into account for a holistic assessment.

"This together with external support will lead us to the desired results."

She also highlighted that there is a need to have an independent assessor to ensure that there is progress in the initiatives introduced by the government. She added, there must be baselines to start with and benchmarks to aspire to in assessing the extent of our progress.

"An independent assessor from the private sector can be a game changer, especially in providing different perspectives," Ang suggested.