

# HIGHER ED

JOB INTERVIEW  
IN PROGRESS

## Handicapped and jobless

ROZANA SANI  
rsani@nst.com.my

**A** UNIVERSITY degree is often perceived by undergraduates as the ticket to jobs with a steady income and promising career advancement.

But with a competitive job market and unpredictable economic landscape, this is no longer the case.

For graduates with disabilities, the situation is even more challenging. With an uncer-

tain business climate, many organisations and companies prefer to employ graduates who they think can hit the ground running from day one. For them, graduates with disabilities may not match their expectations.

While there are persons with disabilities (PWDs) armed with university degrees who have gone on to become lecturers, lawyers, marketing executives, account executives, and administration officers, there are many who still struggle to gain employment.

And when they do land a job, it may not be a permanent one or have the pay packet

and job grade that commensurate with their qualifications.

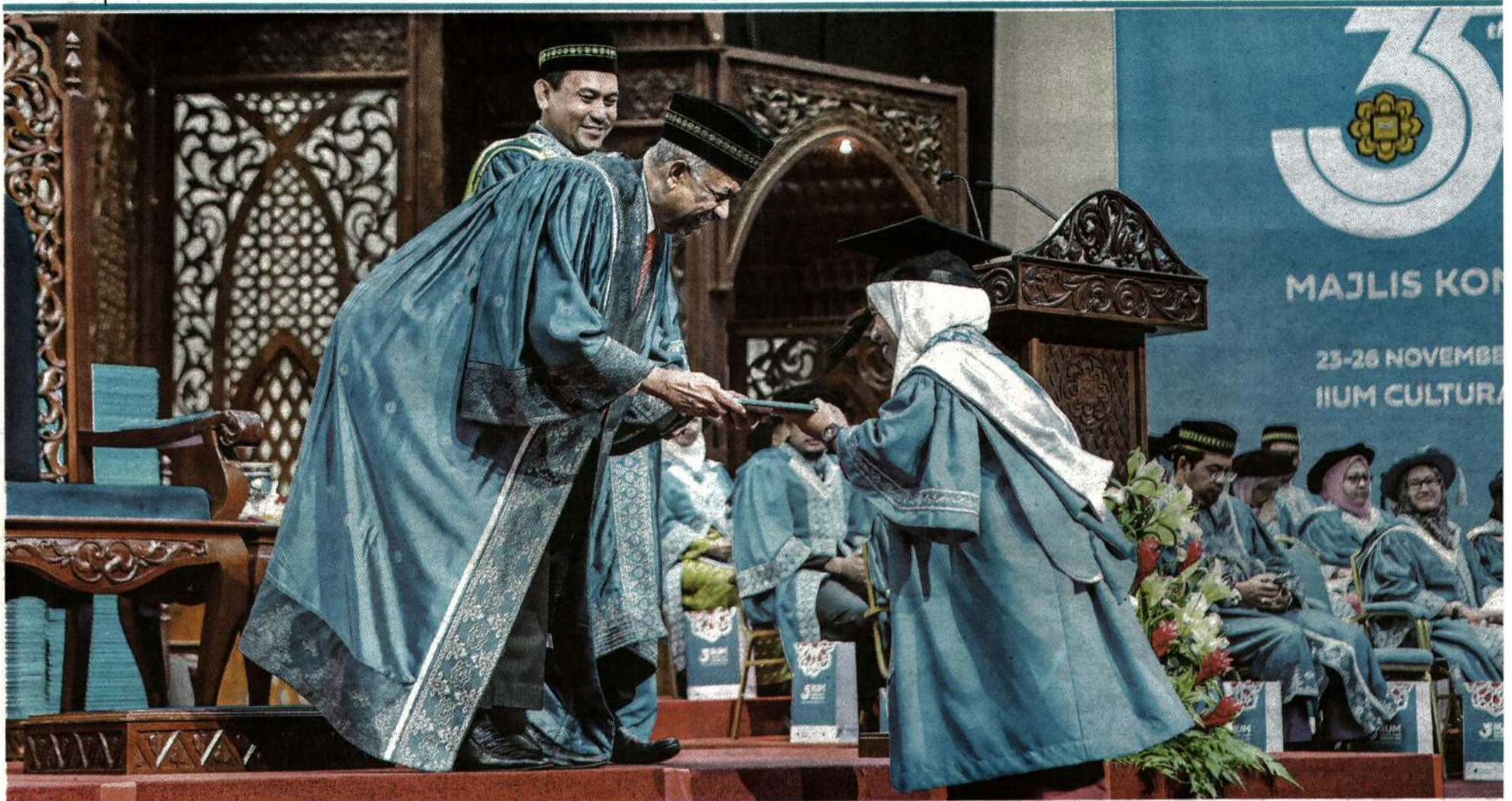
To address the issue of unemployment among the disabled, the government had some time ago introduced the one per cent PWD (OKU) employment in the public sector policy.

But as Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Hannah Yeoh pointed out in June last year, the policy has yet to gain traction despite the fact that its plus points include diversity in the organisation and making the workforce more inclusive.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan highlighted that the government's inability to fulfil the one per cent OKU in the public sector policy after more than three decades also reflects the situation of employment for PWDs in the private sector.

"From the employers' perspective, the employability of a graduate, including graduate PWDs, will depend on whether the graduate is able to perform the requisite tasks and has the right attitude and skills," he said.

**TURN TO PAGE 28**



A disabled graduate receiving her scroll at the 35th International Islamic University Malaysia convocation last year. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

## Hiring graduates with disability

FROM PAGE 27

According to Shamsuddin, there are internal and external factors that influence the employment of PWDs.

"Internal factors include lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem and inability to work, despite them obtaining degrees. External factors include support and facilities for PWDs to commute to the workplace and at the workplace itself.

"In the private sector, the job market is a level playing field. The PWD candidate needs to compete with normal candidates for the same job.

"With the incentives given by the government to employers of PWDs and the employed PWD, the PWD actually has an advantage over the other candidates. But there is still a lack of awareness among private sector employers of such incentives to the employers.

"As many employers are still unaware of such benefits, the institutions of learning and the PWD candidate should take it upon themselves to inform the prospective employers of such benefits and advantages," said Shamsuddin.

Dr Ruziah Ghazali, a member of the National Council for PWDs and an honorary adviser of the Little People National Organisation of Malaysia, said the lack of accurate information on PWDs — about dwarfism, for example — has led to unjust treatment by the public, resulting in PWDs being unnecessarily pitied, misunderstood and ignored.

Despite that, she said PWDs must be professional in approaching and dealing with employers.

"PWDs have to present themselves as reliable and highly professional — suitable for the position they are asking for. They must be well prepared before the job interview. PWDs have to be encouraged to think competitively and to promote their skills.

"Employment should be seen as a real, professional and economic occupation, which does not depend on charity," she said, adding that if disabled



**As many employers are still unaware of such benefits, the institutions of learning and the PWD candidate should take it upon themselves to inform the prospective employers of such benefits and advantages."**

**DATUK SHAMSUDDIN BARDAN**

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director

graduates could not get their dream jobs, they could still apply their knowledge to other fields of work and "most importantly, they must have a source of income for survival".

Ruziah emphasised that disabled graduates should be accepted as part of the workforce who could contribute to the development of a country.

"In fact, this effort will help the disabled to get out of poverty because the disabled are often associated with this issue."

### SUPPORT

One of the reasons why employers hesitate to offer a job to a PWD can be a concern about the unknown.

"Employers require quality in their work. They want to ensure that the employees' performance can be assessed and discussed. This refers equally to all employees, regardless of their possible disability," said Dr Ruziah.

She said employers should attend the Disability Equality Training which is supported by the Department of Social Welfare to have a better understanding of PWDs.

The government has also introduced an employment support service programme called Job Coach. The programme, provided by the department and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), focuses on coaching PWDs in securing employment.

"Furthermore, career service centres need to be established for the benefit of PWDs by providing knowledge, skills and a support system. These centres can initiate access to quality infrastructure that support PWDs and to enable access to world-class education, skills development and high-quality health systems."

Dr Ruziah said the programme should adopt

a multi-sectoral collaboration in addition to the involvement of the Office of the Deputy Minister of the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry and the Human Resources Ministry.

"The Career Service Centre will identify the list of experienced organisations in hiring the PWDs and the potential employers for PWDs to be corporate partners," she said.

### THE FUTURE

Shamsuddin pointed out that the workplace and the nature of jobs were changing, and many jobs were now being done by machines, or at home. For certain jobs, PWDs may even have the advantage over their normal peers.

"In anticipation of future job requirement for skilled workers, the government has identified TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) as a way forward for Malaysia," he said.

He said that the institutions of learning had a critical role in equipping the PWDs with the requisite skills and knowledge that could be enhanced through direct collaboration with industry, including in the field of research and development, internship,

training, equipment and recruitment.

"MEF is actively engaged at various national, regional and international platforms on the important subject of future jobs. We are currently an active member of the steering committee on Research on Employment Opportunity for PWDs in Malaysia under Institut Sosial Malaysia, a member of the National Council on Employment for PWDs under the Human Resources Ministry, and a member of the Department of Occupational Safety & Health TVET under the TVET Empowerment Cabinet Committee."



**Dr Ruziah Ghazali**