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Consumer groups caution against haste in 'local cooks only' policy

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A comprehensive study needs to be done before a directive is issued to compel restaurants in the country to hire only local cooks, says consumer rights groups. File pix

By Bernama (/authors/bernama) - June 24, 2018 @ 6:49pm

KUALA LUMPUR: A comprehensive study needs to be done before a directive is issued to compel restaurants in the country to hire only local cooks, says consumer rights groups.

Malaysian Muslim Consumers' Association (PPIM) chief activist, Datuk Nadzim Johan, said while PPIM welcomed the emphasis placed on local talent, consultations should be done beforehand between the ministry and the industry players, such as restaurant operators and consumer associations.

"As a whole, restaurants now use foreign cooks. We see this in mamak restaurants, whose cooks are usually from India, while stalls offering East Coast dishes normally hire Thai cooks.

"Chinese restaurants, meanwhile, usually engage Chinese or Vietnamese cooks," he said.

He was commenting on a statement by Human Resources Minister M. Kula Segaran, who on Friday said that all restaurants nationwide must hire local cooks in their establishments effective Jan 1, 2019.

His statement met with criticism on social media. He later clarified that the directive was still at the suggestion stage and talks would be held with the stakeholders before any further instructions are made.

Nadzim said while the move would no doubt solve issues concerning hiring foreigners, the ministry should also take into account the wages required to hire Malaysians as well as other costs which must be borne by the restaurateurs.

"Of late, there has been some controversy over the standard of hygiene involving foreign cooks and this must be tackled by the authorities as it involves the safety of the public. Another issue that must be dealt with is the presence of foreign cooks who do not have passports or work permits," he said.

Consumers Association of Subang and Shah Alam (CASSA) president, Datuk Dr Jacob George, said the Human Resources Ministry should not have made a hasty decision without consulting those involved in the food and beverages industry.

"The issue of the overabundance of foreign cooks is not new. Many restaurants have been left with no choice but to hire foreigners as they are cheaper and have the necessary skills.

He said he ministry's proposal can be realised but should not be done hastily. This, he said, was because many locals are not interested in working in restaurants due to lower pay and the working environment.

Meanwhile, chief executive officer of Kayu Nasi Kandar Restaurant, Sirajudin Mohamed Mydin said the implementation of such a regulation should take into account the problems to be faced by local restaurant operators, especially to find replacements in a short time.

"It would not be easy for us (food traders) to find a good cook in a short period of time. Although, we can provide training for the new workers (locals) it takes time to develop a skilful cook," he told Bernama.

A local restaurant operator, Jemain Sakat, 54, said the suggestion was justified but should not be implemented without warning due to the lack of local manpower.

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