

'Bad time' for new law on workers' housing, say bosses

By **Robin Augustin** - September 6, 2020 10:00 AM



Human Resources Minister M Saravanan (in white) and senior minister Fadillah Yusof (in blue) inspecting workers' sleeping and bathing quarters during a visit in July to a workers' hostel in Bangsar South.

PETALING JAYA: The country's largest employers' group has urged the government not to enforce a new law on workers' accommodation, saying bosses already facing cash flow problems had not been given sufficient time to ensure compliance.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan told FMT that enforced compliance with the amended Workers' Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act 1990 may leave bosses with little choice but to resort to cost-cutting measures, including retrenching workers.

He said the cost of compliance was high, "It's a bad time to enforce costly regulations. Employers are having cash flow problems to the extent of relying on the Wage Subsidy Programme to keep afloat."

Shamsuddin also said the regulations for the law, which provided specific requirements for employers to comply with, were only published on Aug 28, less than a week before the amended law came into force.



Shamsuddin Bardan.

"The law was passed last year but the details were not available earlier. This includes specifics like the thickness of an employee's mattress needs to be four inches.

"So, if you had bought a new mattress for your employee a few weeks ago and it was only 3.5 inches thick, you would not be complying with these new regulations.

"To expect employers to comply with the laws within days borders on the ridiculous."

He said the government did not discuss or share with employers these specific regulations under the law despite the fact that the amendments were passed last year.

"There are a lot of 'unfriendly' details, like charging employers processing fees. What is the point of having an administrator (the government) who charges fees for processing applications from employers? The government shouldn't be charging to process applications from employers."

Shamsuddin also said it made no sense for the government to enforce laws which are costly to employers at a time when they are rolling out initiatives like Prihatin and Penjana to help companies.

"What we need is time to comply and this would depend on the economy.

"Not all employers house their workers in poor living conditions. Apply some discretion. Just because the living conditions of some do not meet the specific regulations, it doesn't mean they are unliveable."

What was important was that workers' accommodations were not hazardous or dirty, were equipped with the basic amenities and would allow for Covid-19 SOPs to be adhered to, he said.

Previously, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) had called on the authorities to "swiftly enforce" the amended law, which came into effect on Sept 1.