

MTUC: Childcare centres crucial

PETALING JAYA: Family responsibilities and raising children are keeping women away from the country's workforce. So say both management and labour.

"Only 46 per cent of women in the country are employed," said Malaysian Trades Union Congress general secretary G. Rajasekaran.

Women's limited participation in the country's workforce is due to family responsibilities and commitment, he said, adding that a large part of their responsibility is caring for their children.

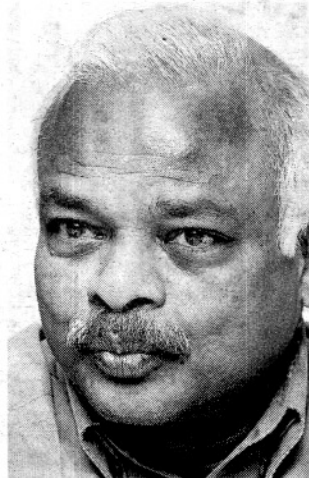
Rajasekaran said one way this problem could be addressed is by establishing childcare centres at the workplace, especially in the private sector.

He said surveys have shown that there were no proper childcare centres or creche for employees in the private sector compared to the public sector where these are provided.

"Yet, based on employment records, 90 per cent of women workers are in the private sector," he said.

Rajasekaran suggested two approaches to deal with the provision of childcare centres in a bid to encourage married women to return to work.

One is to establish such centres at a strategic location in an industrial area.



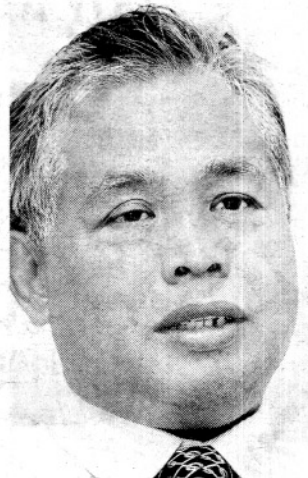
G. Rajasekaran says there are no proper childcare centres or creches for employees in the private sector

The other is to set up compulsory creches in housing areas, particularly in new housing developments.

"These are practical approaches which are not prohibitive and which could also see parents contributing financially."

Rajasekaran said these were some of the steps which must be taken to attract women to return to work. This would also go towards reducing the dependence on foreign workers.

The Malaysian Employers



Samsuddin Bardan says community childcare centres should be set up to help women

Federation said many single women quit working when they get married.

"Once women get married and have children, they quit the labour force completely.

"And when women quit, they quit forever," said MEF executive secretary Samsuddin Bardan.

He said this trend is worrying because more than 50 per cent of tertiary students who graduate are women.

"If this is translated into the country's workforce, then women make up 46 per cent of

the workforce. There is a big loss here."

He said calculations by the MEF showed that if qualified women were to re-enter the country's workforce, it would see the country having an additional 1.2 million workers.

He said attracting this number would go a long way towards addressing the country's dependence on foreign labour.

Samsuddin agreed with MTUC that one way to attract and encourage women to re-enter the country's workforce was by providing avenues and facilities for them to manage their family life, in particular their children.

He said currently for women to enter the workforce, they would have to either leave their children with a babysitter or hire maids.

Neither option is cheap and would actually defeat the purpose for them to work.

Samsuddin sees the need for creches for working mothers.

"MEF suggests that community childcare centres be set up," he said, adding that these should not be profit-orientated and must be managed in a semi-public manner.

Samsuddin said reasonably priced childcare services would go a long way towards encouraging women to return to the work force.