

## Work-from-home: 'Iron out details'

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Marketing executive A'dilah Zafirah Zainal, 26, working from her home in Bangi yesterday.  
-NSTP/MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) described the recent guidelines issued by the International Trade and Industry Ministry on the work-from-home order as confusing.

MEF director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said the ministry should have just used the previous guidelines as having variations would cause confusion among employers.

At press time, the ministry has allowed 10 per cent of management and supervisory-level staff to monitor the workplace while the rest must follow the work-from-home directive.

"What about a small company that has five employees? One employee there represents 20 per cent of the workforce and that is not allowed under the ruling. There are many micro-companies with a small number of employees.

"For those allowed to come to the office, is it really worth it just for four hours, three days a week? This is because productivity will be severely compromised," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Shamsuddin said detailed clarification should be given as soon as possible, given the fact that the work-from-home order will start today.

"There has been confusion following the statement. Does it mean offices will operate three days a week, or are they encouraging employers to alternate their workers to come to the office, with three days maximum for each person?"

"These are important details that have not been addressed."

Shamsuddin also suggested that incentives be given to workers placed under the work-from-home order.

"Working from home is yet to be part of our working culture. We believe that having a dedicated workstation at home is important to maintain productivity and eliminate distractions. That's why we feel that incentives for employees should be granted."

The Congress of Union of Employees in the Public and Civil Services president Adnan Mat said employers or heads of departments should come up with an efficient roster system to allow workers to come in to the office or work from home on specific days.

"Whatever the decision is, employers should be optimising 30 per cent of office attendance.

"Even with a reduced 70 per cent office attendance, this should not affect the employees' productivity, especially those in the government sector as they have already adapted to this working arrangement since the Movement Control Order took place on March 18," he said in a statement yesterday.

Adnan also called on the public to make the necessary arrangements to go to government offices only for important matters to avoid overcrowding.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Datuk Abdul Halim Mansor said employers should adhere to social protection acts, such as the Employment Act 1955, Industrial Relations Act 1967, Social Security Act 1969 and the Employees Provident Fund Act 1991, to ensure the welfare of their staff.

"These acts cover important areas for a working person, including on having a scheduled working time and the concept of working from home.

"Among others, it includes the requirement for the office to provide the staff with tools needed to work from home, including having the infrastructure provided by the government like a stable Internet connection."

Halim also said that even when people were working from home, the social protection acts should be able to protect them during the pandemic.

He reminded employers to fulfil their obligation such as paying salaries at least a week before the end of every month as there had been an issue in the past where employers breached the terms and conditions of the employees' benefits.

"It is also important for the employees to remain 'on-duty' during the working hours and make sure they are available online whenever it is necessary.

Halim said the work-from-home directive would allow better opportunities for those who had to leave their jobs to take care of their families.

"We hope that it will involve more people in the workforce, as they are now able to juggle both work and family from their homes."

Halim also hoped that companies and the employees, via their associations, would amend the existing social protection acts, in line with the current situation and the technology available in the country.

"Maybe one day, working from home will be the way forward in the country, where the focus of employers is to have their employees working from home for various reasons.

"Many developed nations have already adopted this," he said.