

Holiday blues

Employers to feel the brunt with workers taking long festive breaks

By **P. ARUNA** and **ISABELLE LAI**
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The year-end holiday season may be over worldwide but not in Malaysia where the festive mood continues as a second wave of public holidays looms.

Employers are bracing for a hit in

productivity as huge numbers of workers are expected to take long breaks in January and February.

Malaysians enjoy over 50 national, school and state holidays a year and ranks in the top 10 countries with the most public holidays. This is apart from the minimum of 14 days of annual leave a worker is entitled to.

Worse for employers this year, various state and national holidays come on the heels of Chinese New Year, which falls on Jan 23.

These include Federal Territory Day (Feb 1), Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Feb 5) and Thaipusam (Feb 7).

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Workers deserve their holidays, says MTUC

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Also, it is a common practice among Malaysian workers to take their annual leave, before and after a festival, to enjoy an even longer break.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers small and medium industries committee chairman Tan Sri Soong Siew Hoong said the many public holidays affect the ability to remain competitive in business and "make employers cry".

"I think there are too many paid public holidays for the private sector. And yet various sectors still want to lobby for more holidays," he said.

Soong also expressed his unhappiness that public holidays were brought forward to weekdays if they fell on weekends, deeming this unnecessary.

He suggested that religious holidays be declared a personal choice so employees could celebrate on their own while colleagues of other faiths work as usual.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said productivity would be affected during the holiday period with working days in between.

He said companies would not be able to operate at optimum levels as many workers would be taking leave.

"The alternative is for them to declare a shutdown through the whole period as the overhead costs will be very high. If they can't stop work, then they have to absorb the impact," he added.

Shamsuddin said the Special Task Force to Facilitate Business had suggested that MEF and the Malaysian Trades Union Congress come up with a formula for employers to "buy back" annual leave days.

Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia economic research committee chairman Kerk Loong Sing said the large number of public holidays would "naturally result" in higher production costs.

"Of course, too many holidays are bad. It will affect productivity, especially for industries which cannot afford to stop production. Employers also need to pay higher wages during public holidays," he said.

However, MTUC vice-president Mohd Roszali Majid strongly disagreed that the number of public holidays be trimmed down as "employees deserve their holidays".

"It doesn't affect productivity because they can work on public holidays if they want to. Employers can also convert their unused annual leave to cash and increase their income," he said.