

Bosses better prepared this time

NATION

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Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan

PETALING JAYA: Employers in the Klang Valley, although inconvenienced by the two-week conditional movement control order (MCO), are now better prepared to adapt to workplace changes having been through the same situation before.

Some firms are able to move their entire staff to a work-from-home system while others opted for a rotational method whereby workers are divided into groups and take turns to work from the office and home.

New working patterns in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic also saw some workers being temporarily

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said this conditional MCO, bosses were armed with experience from the first round in March, which has since introduced a new normal for both employers and employees.

He said employers had anticipated the return of the conditional MCO, judging from the steady rise in the number of cases nationwide and also in the Klang Valley.

Therefore, when the government announced the conditional MCO would be put in place from Oct 14 to 27, many employers already had a plan laid out for their staff's working situation.

“With previous experience and clearer standard operating procedure (SOP) this time around, the government has made it upfront that companies and businesses can operate as normal, with strict adherence to the SOP.

“This is what we need to do as stakeholders to ensure that we break the chain of Covid-19 transmissions,” he said yesterday.

Shamsuddin said many employers decided to go on an alternate week system, whereby 50% of their staff work from home and another 50% work from the office.

“This applies particularly in situations where normally, workers have to work in a confined office space but of course not for all types of jobs, such as manufacturing.

“Reducing the number of staff members in confined office spaces is the best option for employers to enforce social distancing.

“It also ensures that not too many people are out on the street, public transport services can also have a lighter load,” he said.

Shamsuddin said even after infection rates fall to zero in the future, employers could look into extending the work-from-home feature for their staff as an extra precautionary measure.

However, he acknowledged that there would be a need for employers to facilitate a conducive working environment for their employees who are working from home.

“We need to improve connectivity for employees working from home and it is quite a challenge.

“They also need to be facilitated to set up their work station, otherwise they will be working in a non-conducive environment.

“We also need to have supportive policies or codes of practice when it comes to employees working from home so that everyone involved can be guided,” added Shamsuddin.

The MCO was first enforced on March 18 and during this phase, all non-essential businesses had to close, with many employees asked to work from home.

Malaysia entered the recovery MCO phase on June 10 and this has been extended until Dec 31.

However, the rising number of Covid-19 cases in the Klang Valley resulted in the government imposing a

conditional MCO for Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya for two weeks until Oct 27.

SME Association of Malaysia president Datuk Michael Kang said employers were readjusting to the conditional MCO better than in the previous round as they were now equipped with experience.

As the government had announced that all economic activities could operate as usual, this was helpful as small and medium enterprises (SME) need not close up shop and move their entire staff to work from home, he said.

“As for the current situation, the government has allowed businesses to continue operating as usual, so most SME workers are working in the office.

“This is because many SMEs are not ready to move to a work-from-home style as the majority of the staff don’t have the equipment.

“Those working from home are mostly administrative staff because it is impossible for those in industries such as manufacturing, retail or food and beverage to do so,” Kang said.

He admitted that one of the hindrances for SMEs to allow more workers to work from home was because many had yet to digitalise their businesses.

“Our digitisation assistance is super slow and too bureaucratic,” he said.

However, prior to imposing the conditional MCO, Kang said the government should have done better in its communications and prepare proper guidelines and SOP to avoid confusing businesses.

“I would suggest that the government meet with industry leaders from time to time to prepare the SOP just in case of any emergencies,” he said.