Employers group tells why workers can’t expect flexi-work options

By Vinodh Pilai - September 5, 2019 7:19 AM

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) has advised workers against expecting benefits such as flexible work arrangements, childcare services and long parental leave.

MEF executive director Shamsuddin Bardan claimed that Malaysian companies in general could not currently afford to provide such benefits.

“Employees may aspire for these, but they have to look at the reality and settle for somewhere in between,” he told FMT.

The human resources solution agency Randstad recently found in a study that 64% of respondents placed attractive salary and benefits as the most important factor in work. Nearly 50% said a healthy work-life balance was most important.

“People want to work for companies that can support their professional growth and care for their overall well-being,” said Randstad Singapore and Malaysia managing director Jaya Dass on Tuesday.

Shamsuddin, however, said this was not a realistic expectation in today’s challenging economic environment.

“Employers are currently not so keen on incurring high fixed costs,” he said. “So they prefer paying moderate salaries and giving additional incentives based on performance and productivity.

“These are in turn based on the performance of a company.”
Some companies throughout the world currently offer “flexi-hours” and “flexi-location” options for workers, allowing them to vary their work hours and to work from locations other than their designated offices.

This is aimed at reducing stress and fatigue and maintaining a better work-life balance, thus improving productivity.

But Shamsuddin said while a balance between a worker’s personal and work life was something that should be expected, it should not come at a cost to employers.

Referring to a proposed amendment to the Employment Act to include flexible work arrangements, he said it would be difficult to execute and gave the hypothetical example of all members of a large workforce in a big company asking for flexible work hours.

He complained that the proposed amendment was seeking to require companies to respond to each request within 60 days.

"If the request is not approved, then the employee will lodge a complaint with the Labour Department."

He also claimed that only government-linked companies could afford to provide childcare centres in their offices because their resources ran deep.

Having such centres would be wasteful if there were not enough enough employees to use them, he added.

"What would be more practical is having a community-run childcare centre in an area where most employees stay," he said and recommended that the government give tax breaks to such operations as a means of encouraging their establishment.

Shamsuddin also referred to the Randstad study finding that companies with a strong management team appealed to employees, with 44% of respondents rating it as an important factor.

He agreed that workers might get a sense of stability from leaders who were transparent with profitability and other information traditionally regarded as confidential, but he said this might work to a company’s disadvantage.

"Openly sharing confidential information, such as the financial standing of a company, can ruin the company," he said. "It can put the company in a difficult position as competitors will benefit from such information."