

More maternity, paternity leave will burden bosses, says MEF

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Malaysian Employers Federation chief Shamsuddin Bardan says maternity leave for civil servants capped at 300 days for up to 5 children, which translates to 60 days per child.



PETALING JAYA: The recent request for 90 days' maternity leave for mothers and one month's paternity leave for fathers will only serve to further burden employers.

“We are very much stretched now in that the number of working days for an employee in Malaysia is already quite low,” said Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director Shamsuddin Bardan.

He said just one day's wages in the private sector is estimated at RM600 million and employers were not in a position to consider more holidays.

He was commenting on two separate reports, one that global furniture retailer IKEA had offered a month-long paternity leave to Southeast Asia employees and another on a Maybank employee suggesting that 90 days' paid maternity leave, given to civil servants at present, be extended to private sector staff.

“Many private sector companies give two or three days' paid paternity leave to fathers. That is still the practice.

“I don’t think we are ready to grant up to one month’s leave, like what is practised by some international companies like IKEA.”

On the matter of maternity leave, he explained that many had misunderstood the current practice in the public sector.

He said that the entitlement is about the same as in the private sector.

“The maximum entitlement is only 300 days for the total duration of service. This comes to about 60 days each for a maximum of five children.

“These 300 days can be taken up to 80-90 days, according to the employee’s wishes.

“If the employee decides to have 90 days for three consecutive births, then she would have taken 270 days, which means she is only left with 30 days.

“For the fourth birth, the employee can only get 30 days. For her fifth child, there will be no maternity leave.”

Shamsuddin stressed that the matter of maternity leave had actually caused confusion and misunderstanding in several quarters as they felt the government is granting better paid maternity leave to civil servants.

“In the Employment Act, it talks about the number of living children that a family has while in service.

“If an employee has given birth to six children but only four are still alive, for the next birth, the employee is entitled to 60 days’ maternity leave. This way, it is possible for her to have more than 300 days’ leave.”

He also cited the practice in Singapore where the maternity leave was increased from 60 days to 82 days. The government foots the bill from the 60th to 82nd day.

This is evidently being done to encourage parents to have more children because of the ageing population in the republic.

Shamsuddin said if the government were to share the costs with the companies, this same system could be practised in Malaysia.

“But currently there is no such cost sharing.

“In Malaysia, the paternity leave is fully borne by employers. In more developed countries, the paternity leave is paid through social insurance,” he said.