

Raw deal for local workers

ON THE OTHER HAND ...

BY HAFIDZ BAHAROM



THE Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) told *theSun* last week to expect 50,000 more retrenched employees this year. The sectors affected will be manufacturing, insurance, banking and retail, according to the federation. I would have thought the plantations industry would be involved, but apparently not.

MEF executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said this would be due to several factors: the foreign worker levy now imposed on employers rather than employees, the implementation of the Employee Insurance Scheme (EIS) and the increase in maternity leave from 60 days to 90 days.

This has riled me up a bit because it shows where the members of the MEF are in their mindset – they would rather fire Malaysian citizens rather than stop hiring cheap foreign labour, and they would rather female workers not take three months off to recover after giving birth to a child.

What kind of business environment have we created in Malaysia?

At a briefing at a plantation GLC some time ago, I was told the “3Ps” still remain “people, planet and profit” – but people always came first. So, I have to ask, when did our local business environment become toxic?

Are we suddenly so interested in profits that cheap foreign labour and not deducting the levies from employee pay cheques is now an acceptable reason to edge Malaysians out of the workforce?

Shouldn't manufacturers take advantage of the ability to take loans from the government to

modernise assembly lines and hire upskilled local personnel? Or are our local workers not interested in such jobs?

Perhaps the MEF would like to respond by listing why employers who are their members prefer foreign workers compared to locals and what can be done to change this beyond the scope of cheap wages.

Similarly, in retail, is the MEF saying that there will be fewer shops or more? Just last year, the

newspapers reported that there were too many malls popping up and this was putting pressure on retail to keep up. Does the MEF mean that retailers are now thinking of no longer opening new shops and thus not hiring new staff?

At the same time, if the Employee Insurance Scheme was a problem for employers, who are now thinking of firing some 50,000 employees, then perhaps it is a good thing that the scheme exists to give the affected workers RM600 monthly for three months while they seek new gainful employment.

Honestly, if times are tough and those retrenched decide to get a job doing ride sharing with their liability turned asset in the form of a car, wouldn't it be useful to have at least a guaranteed RM600 for three months while they start out?

After all, it was the members of the MEF who objected and fired them – to make way for foreign worker costs, no doubt.

And finally, the issue of maternity leave.

We are now living in times where women are getting medical leave if their menstruation cramps are unbearable. And yet, is the federation so hooked on productivity and costs that an extra month's maternity leave is a burden?

It seems even more awkward when the MEF lists banking as one of those sectors affected by this policy because a bank started the ball rolling on extra maternity leave. So, perhaps

there are banks that would like to say aloud that as members of the MEF, they would rather their female employees be not entitled to 90 days maternity leave because they are worried

Bleak outlook

DER SINGH
@thesundaily.com

RETILING JAYA: The job outlook for the country looks bleak, with over 50,000 Malaysians expected to lose their jobs this year.

Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive

> 50,000 MALAYSIANS expected to be LAID OFF this year

affected will be manufacturing. This is followed by the services sectors – insurance, banking and retail – and the construction sector, due to the economic situation.

play will hit the job market hard and make it more challenging. Some of the factors that will hurt the job market are the levy imposed on employers for hiring

“The increase in the 90-day maternity leave from 60 days, as well as the possible paternity leave will be a factor,” Shamsuddin said. A total 37,699 Mal employees were laid off while 38,499 lost their jobs in 2017. The number of job lost in the whole of 2017 “not av-

Flashback of theSun's front page report on Jan 4.

about the banks' profits.

In a decade or so, more issues will rise up where both parents get equal leave for having a child, employing foreign workers will get harder, and automation and other innovations will make hiring even local white-collar staff harder compared to vocational graduates.

So perhaps it is time to tell the MEF something – times have changed around the world, and that change is coming to Malaysia. Employers have to treat workers right.

Hafidz Baharom is a public relations practitioner. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com