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'Make it easy for WFH staff'

Govt and employers urged to provide comparable facilities

PETALING JAYA: The Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) has called on the government and private sector employers to provide facilities such as Internet access and laptops to staff who are working from home.

Its president Adnan Mat said facilities similar to what employees enjoyed at the workplace should also be provided at home.

"This is to ensure that the work from home (WFH) arrangement will produce the desired outcome and productivity," he said yesterday.

The government had said its WFH directive remained in force for now although the movement control order status in several states had been lifted and replaced with the conditional MCO since March 5.

On March 8, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Human Resources Ministry and Public Service Department had been asked to look into expanding WFH facilities, with full pay, to women taking care of family members who were aged and ill.

The Prime Minister said WFH facilities should also be given to men with newborns so that they could support their wives.

According to a government circular dated Jan 12, the WFH directive still applied to civil servants in

states placed under the various MCO.

However, the circular noted that it is up to the heads of department to determine the number of staff members allowed to be present at a time.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress deputy president Mohd Effendy Abdul Ghani said it was supportive of the WFH concept but not all sectors were suited to it.

"We need to look at the details of the sort of protection for workers while they are at home. All related parties need to sit down and discuss it properly," he said.

Meanwhile, labour and employment law expert Datuk Thavalingam Thavarajah (*pic*) called for the concept of flexible work to be maintained in the present circumstances.

"There is no doubt that there are certain tasks that have to be undertaken at the workplace by the very nature of the job.

"But for many, the home is now the office with a less formal setting," he said, adding that technology made WFH easier and more efficient.

"Virtual meetings are now the order of the day and has proven to be an effective and productive



means of communication.

"In fact, even court proceedings are now done virtually and have been welcomed by all," he said.

To achieve this, he said many employers put in place operating procedures that were easily understood and applicable.

"Employers have taken steps to ensure that Internet access and WiFi connectivity are easily available. This comes in the form of providing laptops and paying for telco, Internet and WiFi bills with a reasonable capping for employees working from home," he said.

He said there were also employers who negotiated with their employees to substitute the travel and parking allowances that became redundant during the WFH period with Internet and data allowances.

"This results in a win-win situation for both the employer and employee. To an extent, WFH can minimise running overheads in the form of utility costs.

"It also ensures some form of social distancing, which certainly helps to curb the spread of the virus," added Thavalingam.

Businesses, meanwhile, are adapting to the latest norm through a combination of flexible working arrangements as the government eases up on Covid-19 restrictions.

Many companies, although continuing the government-encouraged WFH concept introduced during the height of the pandemic last year, are slowly getting more employees to return to work.

Hap Seng Consolidated Bhd group human resources director Simon Sim said as the company ran diversified operations, it required a combination of WFH and on-site work to ensure everything went smoothly.

At the moment, as directed by the government and depending on business requirements, he said 30% of those in management capacities were WFH.

"With regards to support staff, with the lifting of the MCO, we require all frontliners to be back in the office," he said.

He added that Hap Seng was complying with the government-prescribed SOP in the best interest of its workers.

"We have a comprehensive SOP for the safety of the employees, but we also continue to expect performance and accountability from them," Sim said.