

MTUC upset over work-from-home 'double standards' and confusion

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Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) Selangor and Federal Territories secretary Mohd Faisal Husin has blasted the government's work-from-home (WFH) directive.

He said the directive has glaring weaknesses and that stakeholders such as employer groups and worker representatives were not consulted before the regulation was imposed.

"While we can understand the rationale for the WFH rule under the circumstances, what is unacceptable is the discrimination practised by the government.

"The net effect of this policy appears to be that the health and lives of managers and supervisors are more important than other staff," claimed Faisal.

"If it is aimed at reducing the chances of Covid-19 spreading, there should not be

this form of discrimination in the first place."

Calling the government's directive a case of "double standards", he said the owners and operators of businesses should have been given the discretion to choose which of their workers are best suited to working in the office or from home.

"They know the situation on the ground better than the government.

"If the intended aim is to reduce the number of people at workplaces, leave it to businesses to decide which of their staff needs to work in the office or work from home, whether they are managers or not," he added.

Commencing today (Oct 22), the government will enforce work-from-home rules for employees at the management and supervisory levels across the private and public sectors in the Klang Valley, Sabah, and Labuan.

Senior Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the work-from-home rule which is expected to involve 800,000 private-sector workers and 200,000 civil servants will last until the end of the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) in those areas.

Although Oct 27 is the date the CMCO was supposed to end, the minister said it may be extended, depending on the Covid-19 situation.

In a follow-up statement yesterday, International Trade and Industry (Miti) Minister Azmin Ali (photo) said they allowed a maximum of 10 percent of those in management and supervisory posts to work onsite.

He said this could cover tasks such as accounting, finance, administration, law, planning as well as information and communications technology (ICT). However, they will only be allowed at their workplaces for four hours from 10am to 2pm, for three days in a week.

Faisal said worker representatives were unhappy at the confusion created by the government's order.

"Instructions that managerial and supervisory staff must work from home which was later amended to only 10 percent of them needing to do so is both vague and difficult to follow.

"It is time the National Security Council (NSC) and the ministers involved get their act together. They must stick to one set of SOPs and issue them without going back and forth," he said.

He said based on what was announced, the government's instructions lacked clarity and therefore has generated much confusion among workers, including bank workers. Managements also seem to be confused over how to implement the government's orders, he added.

Faisal that employers in industries and banks, which are considered essential services in areas under CMCO, must be given clear protocols to follow, not ambiguous regulations.

"The latest requirement of swab tests for workers from red (zones) is one such example of ambiguity, raising several questions," he said.

Yesterday, Ismail announced such tests were "highly recommended" after previously declaring them mandatory.

"The latest 'amendment' to the swab test will now require workers from red areas only to voluntarily undergo the Covid-19 tests.

"We question the practicality of this measure as those who show symptoms should not be even on the road let alone turning up at their workplace," said Faisal.

He said MTUC Selangor/FT suggests that those who do not have symptoms but are from red zones must undergo mandatory tests periodically at clinics mandated by Socso and paid for by their employers.

"This would be a more effective way to avoid new clusters without disruption to the workplaces.

"The authorities should have put in efforts to find out whether these areas have enough clinics and labs to run the tests.

"And also how long will the validity period of an initial negative result be for practical purposes? For as we know, people can contract the coronavirus soon after undergoing the tests. In such instances, the results will be absolutely misleading, inaccurate, and can be dangerous," Faisal added.

The unionists said all questions must be answered by Ismail (photo) and Azmin.

Yesterday Ismail chuckled over the public's confusion over the government's work-from-home order, remarking that perhaps many are too impatient to wait for further details from relevant authorities.

The minister said although he already specified that the director-general of

public service and MITI will furnish further details of the order, members of the public appeared confused and were seeking more information.

"I saw since last night the whole country was in chaos. Many were confused although I already said yesterday the announcement was a general announcement that we agreed to issue a work-from-home order," he said.

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