

PERSPECTIVES

FROM INDEPENDENCE TO INCLUSIVITY. REFLECTING ON 68 YEARS OF LABOUR MILESTONES

In 1957, as the cry of “Merdeka!” echoed throughout Stadium Merdeka, a new nation was born. A nation with dreams of unity, prosperity and fairness. Just six years later, in 1963, Malaysia came together as a federation, marking the beginning of our shared identity and progress.

As we commemorated Malaysia Day on 16th September, it was a moment to reflect on how far we have come as a nation in the evolution of our employment laws. From humble beginnings to the modern workforce of today, these 5 landmark milestones have formed the tapestry of our Malaysian workforce that have shaped the lives of millions over the past 68 years.





1. The Foundation. The Employment Act 1955.

This Act laid the foundation for employer-employee relationship by setting minimum standards of wages, working hours and leave entitlements for the group of individuals who needed it the most. It provided a structure where none existed. The Act protected among others, manual labourers, supervisors to manual labourers and employees who were operating machinery propelled vehicles, the backbone of a young developing nation at that point of time. This was more than a law; it was a promise of fairness in the workplace.

2. Building Security – The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme

Financial security became a national priority from its inception. The Employees Provident Fund Act 1991, though introduced in 1951 before Malaysia's Independence, gained prominence post-independence as a means to protect workers' futures. Over the decades, contribution rates and withdrawal rules have evolved to match economic realities. The EPF scheme remains one of the pillars of financial stability for Malaysian workers.

3. Empowering Families Towards Equal Parenting Rights.

Once upon a time, maternity leave in Malaysia was minimal. Today, we've taken a significant leap forward. Working mothers now enjoy 98 days of paid maternity leave, as a result of progressive amendments to the Employment Act.

But the conversation is no longer just about mothers. Recognizing the shared responsibility of parenting, Malaysia very recently in 2022 introduced 7 days of paid paternity leave. A milestone that signals growing support for gender equality in caregiving.



4. A Historic Shift. Universal Coverage under the Employment Act.

After 65 years, the 2022 amendments to the Employment Act marked a defining moment in Malaysia's Labour history. For the first time, the law extended its protection to all employees, regardless of income level. This monumental change reshaped the foundation of worker's rights, bringing millions under the Act's umbrella and strengthening social justice in the workplace.

5. The Elevation of Sabah & Sarawak. Harmonising Labour Rights Nationwide.

For decades, Sabah and Sarawak operated under separate Labour Ordinances, distinct from the Employment Act in Peninsular Malaysia, creating disparities in worker protections. The 2025 amendments to the Sabah and Sarawak Labour Ordinances effective 1 May 2025, represents another historic step toward harmonising labour rights across the nation. Though still operating under 3 different laws, this harmonisation not only levels the playing field for workers in East Malaysia but also reinforces national unity by ensuring equal rights and protections for all Malaysians, regardless of geography.



Looking Ahead – The Gig Workers Bill 2025

Despite the historic shifts in recent years, Malaysia is already looking ahead with a massive transformation in its labour landscape. On 28th August 2025, Dewan Rakyat passed the Gig Workers Bill 2025, creating a distinct class of labour that had never been formally recognised before in Malaysia. This landmark law provides legal recognition, social protection and fairer working conditions, impacting millions of gig workers and setting the stage for a more inclusive and forward-looking workforce.

The Journey Continues

Throughout the past 68 years, our labour laws have grown with us and are paving the way for a future-ready workforce. As we reflect on our growth as a nation, one truth stands out. Our strength lies in people and the partnerships that drive progress. Just like the evolution of our labour landscape, success happens when employers and employees move forward together, adapting, innovating and shaping a better future for all.

Selamat Hari Malaysia! Here is to building stronger partnerships and workplaces where every Malaysian can thrive.