CHR, DoLE roll out program for workers facing labor abuses


REUTERS

THE Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DoLE) on Thursday rolled out an economic assistance program designed for workers impacted by labor rights violations.

The new Labor, Intervention, Financial, and Economic (LIFE) Assistance Program, launched as the country celebrates Labor Day, offers support to both workers and their families.

This includes livelihood aids, scholarships, internships, skills training under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and referrals to relevant government services, the CHR said in a statement.

"CHR and DoLE affirm their joint commitment to ensure that Filipino workers and their families can live with dignity — free from fear and empowered to claim their rights," it added.

The initiative specifically targets individuals who have faced threats, violence, or retaliation linked to labor organizing and rights advocacy. It is designed to meet their immediate economic needs and provide long-term recovery support.

The LIFE Assistance Program reflects broader government efforts to address international labor rights concerns and improve worker protection.

It builds on the Memorandum of Agreement and Data Sharing Agreement signed between CHR and DoLE in October 2023, which forms part of the Philippines' response to observations made by the International Labour Organization's High-Level Tripartite Mission.

Under the program, CHR is expected to submit a nationwide list of investigated labor-related cases for DoLE's review.

Eligible beneficiaries will be identified based on this list and formally recognized during the ceremonial awarding on Labor Day.

The joint program also aligned with Executive Order No. 23, signed in 2023, which reinforces the state's obligation to protect workers' rights to organize. It also mandates coordinated responses among government agencies.

Labor rights protection has been identified as a key priority of the CHR's sixth Commission en banc. It reiterated that economic security is integral to the full realization of human rights and expressed support for more responsive, rights-based interventions across government. — **Chloe Mari A. Hufana**

OPINION

Hiring an applicant endorsed by the CEO

IN THE WORKPLACE
REY ELBO

We in the human resource (HR) profession think hiring must be based on an objective process. However, sometimes, we can't do it, like when a chief executive officer (CEO) "forces" us to hire someone without passing through an established evaluation system. How do we handle the situation? — White Linen.

There is no known cure for the allure of subjectivity, except for objectivity when an individual or an organization must follow established rules and procedures to counter the so-called "invisible hands." As Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790) said, the "invisible hands" are deeply woven into the fabric of our society.

Usually, we encounter this happening in a small, family business. So, what can you do?

It depends much on the specific job of this case, the rank and job title, and the reporting responsibility of the person being recommended.

You can't do much if the job requires unparalleled trust and confidence by the CEO in the person who is about to be hired. It's their prerogative to hire anyone whom they can trust, like an executive secretary, administrative assistant, bookkeeper, or accountant, among other related jobs.

The issue could become complex, say when the CEO insists on hiring a college undergraduate for a job that requires someone with a bachelor's degree or with at least three years of corporate experience.

MANAGING THE SITUATION

My solution to this is to view all circumstances in their proper context. For example, when the CEO is being constrained by a "friendly request" from an official of a government regulatory agency or an elected official within the local government unit. If that happens, you have to manage the situation with professionalism, cold neutrality, and the highest form of diplomacy:

One, write a formal letter to the job applicant. Depending on the nature of each job, the letter must be signed by the highest-ranking HR official and the CEO. Emphasize the company's objective process that if violated may result in an unfair situation and bad precedent. Use courteous language.

Two, document and observe the objective hiring process. Refer to the organization's policies on objectivity, and commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion, if not integrity. Stay neutral. Explain that the process is by established criteria that if violated would result in an ethical breach with stockholders or other stakeholders, including a labor union.

Three, suggest an off-the-grid alternative process. If it has become difficult to decline such a job application, arrange for the involvement of other department heads or other executive panel for a regular post. If not, offer a time-based project employment contract that may not exceed six months.

Four, recommend the job applicant to the company's affiliates. If not, pass it on to a manpower agency or employment cooperative if the job is for a non-management position. It's an easy and fast-track approach, assuming that the applicant is not the snobbish type.

Five, assess its legal implication. Seek the advice of lawyers if there's a possible breach of equal employment laws or a potential legal issue on nepotism or employment discrimination that could be filed by current employees or the union who may cry foul about the process.

Six, conduct a background investigation. If you can't decline the application, the least that you can do is for the applicant to undergo a "strict" background check. Require them to submit the established pre-employment documents, including a clearance from the court of law, police, and the National Bureau of Investigation.

STAYING DISCREET

The HR department cannot disobey the CEO. However, HR can solve this issue without lifting a finger by emphasizing in so many discreet ways the need to uphold organizational integrity. HR can do this by sending an e-mail with a respectful tone to the CEO about the situation and the organizational predicament.

Reinforce that HR's actions are objective and process driven. If it is done properly, the CEO may no longer force the issue given HR's concerns. But again, let the CEO decide on the alternative options depending on the nature of the job being offered and the personality of a government official who is making the recommendation.

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Japan factory activity shrank on US tariff worries, PMI shows

TOKYO — Japan's factory activity shrank for the 10th straight month in April on weaker overseas demand and worsening concerns about US tariffs, a private-sector survey showed on Thursday.

The final Jibun Bank Japan manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) edged up to 48.7 in April from 48.4 in March, indicating a modest contraction in business conditions.

The index was slightly higher than 48.5 in the flash reading while it stayed below the 50.0 threshold that separates growth from contraction for the 10th straight month.

"Business conditions continued to weaken across Japan's manufacturing industry in April," said Annabel Fiddes, Economics Associate Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence, which compiled the survey.

The index of new orders shrank at the fastest pace since February 2024. Firms in the survey mentioned subdued customer spending and lower demand for products such as semiconductors and machinery equipment.

Manufacturers also cited lower demand among key export markets such as China, Europe and the United States, which sent the index of new export orders falling at the fastest pace since last October.

US President Donald J. Trump's tariffs on a wide range of products including automobiles, Japan's key export, have fanned concerns about global trade. Japan's top trade negotiator Ryosei Akazawa, who will hold a second round of talks with Washington this week, is seeking full removal of US tariffs.

Business confidence weakened to its lowest level since June 2020 on concerns about global prospects and tariffs.

"Firms are likely to struggle to see a recovery in conditions unless there is a noticeable improvement in demand both at home and overseas," Ms. Fiddes said.

Input costs rose at the softest pace in a year, but they remained a burden on firms as prices rose among various factors such as transport, fuel, labor and raw materials. — ***Reuters***

Microsoft sees strong growth for Azure cloud business

MICROSOFT forecast on Wednesday stronger-than-expected quarterly growth for its cloud-computing business Azure after blowout results in the latest quarter, calming investor worries in an uncertain economy and lifting its shares 7% after hours.

Microsoft's results, which follow similar outcomes from Google last week, could ease concerns about a potential slowdown in artificial intelligence (AI) demand, after some analysts pointed to canceled data-center leases at Microsoft as a sign of excess capacity.

Investors had also been worried about the fallout from sweeping US tariffs that are prompting businesses to rein in spending, but robust advertising sales at Meta Platforms suggested that is so far not happening.

The rise in Microsoft's shares set it on course to add more than $200 billion to its value.

Microsoft said revenue at its Azure cloud division rose 33% in the third quarter ended March 31, exceeding estimates of 29.7%, according to Visible Alpha. AI contributed 16 percentage points to the growth, up from 13 points in the previous quarter.

The company also forecast cloud-computing revenue growth of 34% to 35% on a constant currency basis for the fiscal fourth quarter to between $28.75 billion and $29.05 billion, well above analyst estimates, according to data from Visible Alpha.

Commercial bookings growth — which reflects new infrastructure and software contracts signed by business customers — rose 18% in the fiscal third quarter, driven in part by a new Azure contract with ChatGPT creator OpenAI. Microsoft declined to comment on the size of the deal or what role it played in overall Azure sales growth.

However, Amy Hood, Microsoft's chief financial officer, told investors on a conference call that the AI contribution to the cloud computing business was in line with the company's expectations, while "the real outperformance in Azure this quarter was in our non-AI business."

"So the only real upside we saw on the AI side of the business was that we were able to deliver supply early to a number of customers," Ms. Hood said.

The company's Azure results came after a number of Wall Street analysts had lowered expectations as research reports said Microsoft had ended some data center lease obligations.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Satya Nadella said on a conference call that Microsoft has a long history of constantly adjusting its data center plans, but only in recent quarters had analysts started closely scrutinizing those moves.

"The numbers were skeptical going in, giving them the room to beat pretty heavy. The beat wouldn't have been this big if we didn't have all these problems," said Dan Morgan, senior portfolio manager at Synovus Trust, referring to tariff uncertainty.

SPENDING RISES FOR SHORTER-LIVED ASSETS

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft reported a profit of $3.46 per share in the quarter, topping expectations of $3.22 per share.

Revenue rose 13% to $70.1 billion, with the Intelligent Cloud unit, which houses Azure, contributing $26.8 billion.

In the third quarter, Microsoft's capital expenditures jumped 53% to $21.4 billion, however the proportion of longer-lived asset expenditures fell to about half of the total.

Ms. Hood told investors that in the company's fiscal 2026, which will begin in July, capital expenditures will continue to grow, but at lower growth rates than for the current year and with more of an emphasis on shorter-lived assets.

That reflected a shift in Microsoft's spending on assets such as data center buildings toward assets such as chips, said Jonathan Neilson, Microsoft's vice president of investor relations.

"You plug in CPUs and GPUs, and then you can start recognizing revenue," Neilson said, referring to categories of chips made by Intel, Advanced Micro Devices and Nvidia, among others.

Microsoft, which has repeatedly said it is capacity constrained on AI, has been pouring billions into building its AI infrastructure and expanding its data-center footprint.

A pullback in Big Tech's AI spending would have big implications for suppliers such as chip giant Nvidia, as well as the US economy. JP Morgan analysts estimated in January that data-center spending could contribute between 10 and 20 basis points to US economic growth in 2025-2026. — ***Reuters***

US judge rules Apple violated order to reform App Store

APPLE violated a US court order that required the iPhone maker to allow greater competition for app downloads and payment methods in its lucrative App Store and will be referred to federal prosecutors, a federal judge in California ruled on Wednesday.

US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers in Oakland said in an 80-page ruling that Apple failed to comply with her prior injunction order, which was imposed in an antitrust lawsuit brought by *Fortnite* maker Epic Games.

"Apple's continued attempts to interfere with competition will not be tolerated," Ms. Gonzalez Rogers said. She added: "This is an injunction, not a negotiation. There are no do-overs once a party willfully disregards a court order."

Ms. Gonzalez Rogers referred Apple and one of its executives, Alex Roman, vice president of finance, to federal prosecutors for a criminal contempt investigation into their conduct in the case.

Roman gave testimony about the steps Apple took to comply with her injunction that was "replete with misdirection and outright lies," the judge wrote.

Apple in a statement said "we strongly disagree with the decision. We will comply with the court's order and we will appeal."

Epic Games Chief Executive Tim Sweeney called the judge's order a significant win for developers and consumers.

"It forces Apple to compete with other payment services rather than blocking them, and this is what we wanted all along," Sweeney told reporters.

Sweeney said Epic Games would aim to bring back *Fortnite* to the Apple App Store next week. Apple in 2020 had pulled Epic's account after the company let iPhone users navigate outside Apple's ecosystem for better payment deals.

Epic accused Apple of stifling competition for app downloads and overcharging commissions for in-app purchases.

Ms. Gonzalez Rogers in 2021 found Apple violated a California competition law and ordered the company to allow developers more freedom to direct app users to other payment options.

Apple failed last year to persuade the US Supreme Court to strike down the injunction.

Epic Games told the court in March 2024 that Apple was "blatantly" violating the court's order, including by imposing a new 27% fee on app developers when Apple customers complete an app purchase outside the App Store. Apple charges developers a 30% commission fee for purchases within the App Store.

Apple also began displaying messages warning customers of the potential danger of external links in order to deter non-Apple payments, Epic Games alleged, calling Apple's new system "commercially unusable."

Apple has denied any wrongdoing. The company in a court filing on March 7 told Ms. Gonzalez Rogers it undertook "extensive efforts" to comply with the injunction "while preserving the fundamental features of Apple's business model and safeguarding consumers."

Ms. Gonzalez Rogers suggested at an earlier hearing that changes made by Apple to its App Store had no purpose "other than to stifle competition."

In Wednesday's ruling, Ms. Gonzalez Rogers said Apple is immediately barred from impeding developers' ability to communicate with users, and the company must not levy its new commission on off-app purchases. — ***Reuters***