

05/10/1998

`Include trade union reps in Apec meet'

Hamisah Hamid

THE Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) is confident of a positive decision from the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) leaders summit in Kuala Lumpur next month on the greater participation of trade unions on Apec's agenda.

MTUC secretary-general G. Rajasegaran believes that Apec will allow the trade unions to play a bigger role especially in the Apec human resource development (HRD) working committee.

Trade union leaders from Apec countries have called for the inclusion of trade unions' representatives in the Apec national consultative committees and when appropriate, in national delegations to Apec meetings.

Rajasegaran said he hoped for a positive decision from the Apec summit towards such issues, because the host country Malaysia has been more consultative with the trade union lately.

As such, he is hopeful that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would convince all the other leaders' at the meeting on the role of workers representatives in the decision-making process.

"We are hoping for changes this time ... the Prime Minister has taken a more consultative approach for the past six months ... MTUC president, Encik Zainal Rampak has been appointed to the National Economic Action Council," he said this when contacted in Kuala Lumpur.

Last week, trade union leaders from Apec countries met with Dr Mahathir to submit a trade union statement to the 1998 Apec leaders' meeting. The document was adopted at the end of the fourth conference of International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Asia Pacific Labour Network (APLN) recently.

Rajasegaran said about 20 people, including ICFTU general-secretary Mr Bill Jordan, went to see Dr Mahathir and had a one-and-half hour discussion with the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir and the high-level ICFTU and APLN delegation talked about measures to curb hedge fund activities, a need for greater transparency of the international financial markets and structural reforms of such a system at the meeting.

Rajasegaran said Dr Mahathir had responded "positively" to the explanation made by the delegation on their statement to the Apec leaders' meeting.

The statement, among others, urges the Kuala Lumpur Apec leaders' meeting to widen the recognition of trade unions involvement, alongside employers, not only in one part of the HRD work programme, but also on the whole gamut of issues covered by the Apec agenda.

It proposes for the establishment of regular contacts between the APLN and the Apec secretariat for the exchange of information.

The trade unions are asking Apec leaders and communities to take necessary action to develop regulatory mechanisms to control hedge funds, prevent speculation and stop undermining national currencies.

They also call for the November summit to reorient the Apec work programmes to address the social effect of the economic crisis as well as the setting up of a Apec Labour Forum to allow formal involvement of trade unions in Apec.

The trade unions believe that their meaningful participation in the Apec Business Advisory Council (Abac) is also necessary because trade unions represent over 30 million workers in Apec member economies.

Apec was formed in 1989 and groups 18 countries.
(END)