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`Zainal's appointment as senator a recognition of trade unionists'

PETALING JAYA, Thurs. - The impending appointment of Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Zainal Rampak as a senator shows the Government is willing to accept ideas or criticisms from trade unions, especially on labour-related matters.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek said this also showed the Government recognised the contributions of trade unionists who played an important role in preserving industrial harmony.

The MTUC is the biggest labour movement in the country with close to one million members.

"Zainal's appointment shows that the Government recognises the contributions of the country's labour movements and has always given due attention to their recommendations," he said.

Zainal, who was also present, will be sworn in as senator on Monday.

Lim was speaking to reporters after opening the International Labour Organisation-Asean Trades Union Council workshop on "Trade Unions and Environmentally Sustainable Development" here.

Also present were the Ministry's Secretary-General Datuk Zainol Abidin Rashid, ILO (Geneva) Workers' Activities senior specialist Michael Sebastian and ILO (Bangkok) Workers' Activities senior specialist Kimiyo Takagi.

Twenty trade union leaders from Asean countries are participating in the three day workshop.

Zainal will become the second unionist to be appointed to Dewan Negara. The first was Saiful Nathan, also a former MTUC president, who had served one term beginning 1963.

Lim said he believed that Zainal, as a seasoned unionist who is also in ILO's governing body, would be able to utilise his expertise in labour-related issues for the benefit of workers.

"I hope Zainal's appointment will spur others to work harder for their unions and not pay mere lip service to their members," he said.

Zainal, when asked to comment on his impending appointment, said: "I thank Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for recommending my appointment to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

"As the law does not allow unionists to play an active role in politics, I believe that a seat in the the Dewan Negara will provide me an avenue to discuss issues, especially those affecting workers, more effectively," said Zainal who has been MTUC president since 1985 and an active unionist for about 40 years.

Zainal, who was a former supreme council member of the defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46, gave up politics in 1995 when he was warned by the Trades Union Department director-general that he had to choose between politics and trade unionism.

Earlier in his speech, Lim said industrial harmony was one of the important prerequisites to a sustainable economic growth.

He said to maintain industrial peace, there should be good understanding and co-operation between the Government, employers and trade unions where labour issues should be discussed before implementation for the benefit of all.

Takagi in her speech earlier said among others the objective of the seminar was to help unionists participate fully in decision-making bodies to implement measures aimed at environmental protection and sustainable

socio-economic development.

"This workshop is held to help workers and their trade unions to better understand the linkages of various issues to environmentally sustainable development, and to outline priorities based on the needs of ATUC and its affiliates."

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