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MTUC-Wages

IMPLEMENT MINIMUM WAGES NEXT YEAR, GOVT TOLD

PETALING JAYA, April 29 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) today urged the government to implement minimum wages for workers, an issue which it has been fighting for the past 50 years.

Its president, Senator Zainal Rampak said the time has come for workers in the country to receive minimum wages and not wages based on market forces offered by employers.

"MTUC has been fighting for this since its inception in 1949. The question of market forces is not relevant because workers are not commodities...they need fixed income because of the sky-rocketing cost of living," he said at a news conference here.

Zainal said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had in his meeting with MTUC last year said that the government would implement minimum wages of RM1,200 once the economy had improved.

"There are signs that the economy is improving...with growth expected at one per cent this year and three to four per cent next year...so it's high time to implement it," he said.

Zainal said the excuse that Malaysian goods would lose its competitiveness in the world market if the minimum wages were to be implemented could not be accepted.

Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and many others had implemented minimum wages and their goods were no less competitive, he said.

"The country must improve the quality of its products to be competitive. The Human Resources Development Fund of RM450 million has not been fully utilised to train workers because employers don't want to lost productivity if the workers go for training," he said.

Zainal said the minimum wages would increase buying power of the workers which would naturally boost the business sector as well as serving as an incentive to workers to work in sectors facing shortage of workers such as plantations.

"Malaysian workers are said to be chosy about jobs which is not true. If the wages are good, I'm sure many will be interested even if the jobs are tough," he said.

Zainal said that the important thing is a change of attitude among employers who should also diversify their business, instead of relying on just rubber and oil palm.

On the national retrenchment scheme, he said the MTUC had written to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) asking it to provide free technical assistance to the Malaysian government to implement the scheme.

"I've written to ILO director-general not to charge its service. It's the responsibility of the ILO to provide such assistance," he said when asked to comment on statement by Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek that the world body was demanding US\$10,000 (RM38,000) for its technical assistance.

Zainal also said the MTUC had written to Dr Mahathir for a meeting with trade unions to discuss several issues.

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