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MTUC eyes minimum wage of RM600-RM1,200

Hamisah Hamid

THE Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) will continue to push for the implementation of a minimum wage although the quantum may be less than RM1,200 a month.

MTUC president Senator Zainal Rampak said the union has set up a special committee to determine an appropriate amount of minimum monthly income in the range of RM600 and RM1,200.

He said the committee, after getting feedback from all workers, will recommend the amount to the MTUC General Council before a memorandum is submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We want the Government to implement the minimum wage as a legislation and not a policy," he told a news conference after a Workers Day rally in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

The MTUC leaders received the mandate to go ahead with the National Minimum Wage Campaign from some 4,000 workers and their families who attended the rally.

Dr Mahathir, in his Workers Day Message, had said that a minimum of RM1,200 a month is beyond the affordability of the Government and the private sector. He said the economy would be affected and subsequently cause hardship to the workers if the Government accepted the MTUC's proposal.

Zainal urged the Government to agree on a reasonable level of minimum income if many parties feel that RM1,200 a month is not practical.

"Is RM350 or RM400 a month (which low-income workers are earning now) practical?" he asked, adding that minimum wage is not a privilege but a worker's right.

Asked about the Prime Minister's concerns on the implications of minimum wage when workers from all levels would demand the same quantum of pay rise, MTUC secretary general G. Rajasekaran, who was also at the news conference, said:

"When we talk about the minimum wage, we certainly mean for all workers. Workers from all categories and levels will get the same increase."

Zainal said the MTUC leaders will go on a nationwide roadshow to get support from the workers on a minimum wage and gauge their views on the suitable quantum.

"After today's launch of we will go to Johor Baru, Penang, Perak, Sabah, Sarawak and other states," he said.

Zainal said the MTUC affiliates have been told to come out with memorandums on priority issues, including minimum wage, the National Retrenchment Scheme, recognition of trade unions and the setting up of childcare centres at company premises, to be submitted to the Prime Minister.

If all the efforts to get the Government implement minimum wage legislation fail, he said, the MTUC will go on a nationwide picket. This was agreed to at a two-day symposium on minimum wage held last month, he added.

Zainal told the rally earlier that the fixing of a reasonable minimum wage for workers will help prevent their children from being involved in undesirable activities.

"This is because low-paid workers can afford to spend more time at home with their children rather than spend hours working to make ends meet," he said.

During the rally, Zainal launched the Women 2000 Campaign which, among others, seeks three-month maternity leave, paid maternity leave without a limit on the number of children, employers bearing full cost of maternity treatment and the setting up of childcare centres at the workplace.

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