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Wages Council to cover 2 more sectors

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THE Wages Council mechanism to ensure fair remuneration and employment conditions will be extended to cover non-unionised workers in the agriculture and services sectors.

A commission of inquiry, comprising independent parties, for each of the two sectors will be interviewing employers and employees to determine the exact working conditions, said Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn.

Their findings will be contained in reports and submitted to the councils together with recommendation of appropriate wage levels, he said at a news conference after chairing the ministry's weekly post-Cabinet meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"The decision (on minimum wage level) of the Wages Council will have force of law," Fong said, adding that the situation of non-unionised workers in the two sectors have been identified by the Government as of particular urgency in respect of securing fair employment conditions and wages.

So far, wage councils have been established under the Wages Council Act 1947 for only port, cinema and sundry shop workers.

Asked about the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC)'s proposed minimum wage of RM900 a month, Fong said the Government is not against the idea but it is difficult to implement a single minimum level for all workers.

The Government recognises that certain categories of workers that have no union representation should be protected, he said.

"But we have to consider the consequence (of standard minimum wage) to the economy as a whole, and also its impact on the creation of new jobs."

Fong said he is prepared to meet with MTUC officials to explain the Government's position.

The MTUC had earlier proposed a minimum wage level of RM1,200 a month, and then revised it lower upon feedback from its members nationwide.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said the country cannot afford to implement a RM1,200 minimum wage as it would lead to increases for all levels of employment.

Fong said the Government prefers a free market mechanism for wage determination, meaning allowing workers to negotiate with employers.

On the proposal by unions that foreign workers be excluded from any statutory minimum wage, the minister said the Government's policy is for all workers, foreign and local, to be treated alike.

"We cannot deny that foreign workers are here to take up jobs that locals do not want anymore," he said, noting that Malaysia will be criticised by other countries if it discriminates against foreign workers.

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