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Employers should back pump-priming measures: Zainal

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EMPLOYERS should be a responsible social stakeholders and support the Government's pump-priming efforts, including creating employment, Malaysia Trades Union Congress (MTUC) president Senator Zainal Rampak said.

"They should not be quick to lay off workers but look at other options such as reduced working hours, redeployment to other divisions or department and retraining.

"They (employers) should realise that their profits are derived from consumers who are actually their own workers," he said in a statement to support the new RM4.3 billion stimulus package to spur economic growth announced last Tuesday.

He said such initiatives should be commenced in consultation with workers and their unions so that the socio-economic impact of an imminent global economic slowdown can be reduced.

Zainal said workers will be able to consume more goods and services, thereby contributing to the company's revenues, if they can hold on to their jobs and have adequate purchasing power through fair wages, consistent with the prevailing cost of living.

He said many companies have merely been paying lip service for education and training as there has been no visible and serious commitment on their part to conduct broad-based training courses for their workers.

He called on employers to better use of the Human Resources Development Fund by sending workers for training so that workers can acquire worksite skills which will make them more productive.

Zainal also said the MTUC-proposed National Retrenchment Scheme (NRS) assumes greater importance especially during the current difficult times.

"The establishment of social safety nets in the country has become critical, all the more so with growing uncertainty among the people, especially the workers, as regards their future as well as that of their families," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had suggested that employers and workers should contribute 50 sen each per worker per month, while the MTUC proposed that the scheme to be managed by the Social Security Organisation.

Zainal said although the Government has been supportive of the scheme, it is the employers who refused to cooperate.

He said on many occasions, proposals and suggestions supported by the Government, even if opposed by the unions, have been implemented by employers on the grounds that it is a Government's directive and therefore legally binding.

"We do not see why the same rationale cannot be applied now.

"We urge the Government, especially the Ministry of Human Resources, to be firm in its approaches by tabling a Bill in Parliament on the NRS and incorporate it as an amendment to the Social Security Act 1969," he said.

MTUC lauded the Government's RM4.3 billion stimulus package, especially the RM80 million annual allocation for welfare payments, RM150 million for the training of retrenched workers and the RM500 monthly allowance for unemployed graduates to acquire various skills.

Zainal said the temporary allowance for 10,000 diploma and university holders to learn information technology, mathematics and languages, is the first of its kind in Malaysia.

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