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Fong reiterates pledge to help retrenched SMET workers

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HUMAN Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn yesterday reiterated his promise to help retrenched workers of defence equipment manufacturer SME Technologies Sdn Bhd (SMET).

He said the ministry will conduct a full investigation into the matter as the SME Technologies Workers Union had filed a notice of wrongful dismissal under Section 20 of Industrial Relations Act 1967.

"The workers should not worry. We will help them," he told a news conference officiating Maxis Academy in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

Fong said in any dismissal, employer have to follow the conditions stated in the collective agreement with the union.

He said the ministry will investigate whether there is any deviation from the terms in the collective agreement when the workers were given their retrenchment notice.

A total of 202 SME Technologies Sdn Bhd (SMET) workers had been laid off in two stages - one group on January 31 and another on February 28 - when the company ceased operation due to the termination of the RM350 million contract for 106,000 Steyr guns by Defence Ministry.

According to SMET Workers Union president Mohamad Hassan Othman, the non-bargainable staff had been offered jobs at either SME Aerospace Sdn Bhd or SME Ordnance Sdn Bhd but 180 bargainable workers were only told to apply for jobs at these two firms.

SMET, together with SME Aerospace and SME Ordnance are the subsidiaries of SME Industries, which is owned by Khazanah Holdings Bhd.

He said there are reports saying that the three government companies are being restructured and will be absorbed into another entity.

The union has planned to picket next Monday if the Government does not respond to their situation.

Apart from filing notice of wrongful dismissal at Industrial Relations Department, the union had written to Defence Ministry and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

However, Mohamed Hassan said so far, they have not receive any response.

On another development, Fong said the ministry encourages employers to provide special allowances for female workers to enhance their productivity.

He cited the RM500 reimbursement given by banks to female staff for delivery charges up to two deliveries, which was included in the collective agreement signed between the National Union of Bank Employees and the Malaysian Commercial Banks Association on Wednesday.

"We also encourage employers to set up childcare centres at the company premises so that the productivity of the working mothers can be increased.

"The Government wants female workers to contribute actively to the country," he said.

Fong also said that the feedback he got from the Nube and MCBA shows that both sides can handle the possible redundancy resulting from the on-going merger process in the banking industry.

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