

10/05/2001

MTUC cancels picket, EPF to study proposals

Hamisah Hamid

THE Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) yesterday cancelled its picket planned for Saturday after the Government agreed to consider its demands concerning the Employees Provident Fund (EPF).

Its president Senator Zainal Rampak said MTUC general council members had unanimously agreed to defer the picket for three months to allow the EPF to look into the union's proposals.

"The meeting took serious view of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's letter to MTUC," he said when contacted after the one-and-a-half-hour council meeting in Subang Jaya.

More than 180 members attended the "emergency meeting" prompted by Dr Mahathir's letter which, Zainal said, was handed personally to him on Tuesday by an official from the Prime Minister's office.

Zainal said Dr Mahathir had asked the congress to reconsider its decision to picket, indicating that the Government would defer the annuity scheme until the study by a consultant appointed by the EPF is completed.

The Government would also consider restoring the death and incapacitation benefit to RM30,000, as well as ensure that there be no doubts about the running of the pension fund among the contributors, Zainal added.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said the MTUC's decision was a good beginning.

"It demonstrates that Malaysia can get all parties to sit down and discuss all differences," he told Business Times when contacted in the evening.

The minister had earlier tried to play peacemaker between the MTUC and EPF.

Fong also said the decision reflects the country's harmonious industrial relations, which have been a key factor in drawing foreign investments.

He urged the congress to cooperate with the consultant appointed to look into the EPF issues so that recommendations acceptable to all parties could be made.

The Government, on its part, has shown its sincerity by agreeing to have the study conducted, the minister added.

"I hope the MTUC will send its representatives to the opening of the Asean Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) tomorrow... and also participate in the Workers Day gathering," he said.

The 500,000-strong MTUC had wanted to picket EPF offices nationwide on May 12, which is also the day set for a Labour Day gathering in Bukit Jalil.

Asean (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Labour Ministers who are in Kuala Lumpur for a meeting will be attending the rally together with about 10,000 people representing the Government, employers and workers.

There was talk that Opposition parties had been instigating the congress to proceed with the picket to protest against EPF over issues like the fund's annuity scheme; the low dividend of 6 per cent for last year; its decision to lend money to Time Engineering Bhd and the subsequent settling for 78.7 million shares in Time dotCom shares in lieu of a repayment; and the reduction of death and incapacitation benefits from RM30,000 to RM2,000.

Zainal said the MTUC will call off the picket altogether if the EPF study's findings are "favourable".

(END)