

12 APR 2001

MTUC-Picket

MTUC PICKET NOT POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, SAYS SEC-GEN

KUALA LUMPUR, April 12 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Trades Union Congress' (MTUC) decision to picket on May 12 is not politically motivated nor is it planned to coincide with the Asean Labour Ministers' Meeting to be held in Kuala Lumpur during that period, its secretary-general G. Rajasekaran said today.

He said the decision by the private sector umbrella union body to stage the picket was taken on April 6 at its General Council meeting.

"The General Council wanted to set the date for the picket one month after April 6 and since May 6 is a Sunday and the next available Saturday falls on May 12 it was decided that this would be the day when we would carry out the picket," he said in an interview.

He also denied allegations that the MTUC wanted the picket to coincide with the Asean Labour Ministers' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur from May 8 to May 11.

"We actually set it a month from the last General Council meeting because we wanted to give time for the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) or the government to try to settle differences between us," he added.

The MTUC, which has a membership of half-a-million workers, had lately been dissatisfied with certain decisions taken by the EPF. The issues which top the agenda but have yet to be resolved are the reduction in EPF dividends paid out to employees, the annuity scheme (retirement scheme) and the reduction in EPF contribution by workers.

Last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when tabling the government's plan to soften the blow from a US economy slowdown in the Dewan Rakyat, announced that workers need not pay 11 per cent of their monthly income to the EPF but only nine percent.

This was opposed by the MTUC, which said that private sector workers would only have their EPF contributions to fall back on upon retirement and that the reduction would mean that the amount they would get on retirement would be reduced.

Dr Mahathir subsequently called on the trade union to call off its plans saying that this was not the right time to take such drastic action as the country is still embroiled with economic problems.

Yesterday, Human Resources Minister Datuk Fong Chan Onn advised the MTUC not to be influenced by the opposition by going on with the picket as it would tarnish the country's image as hosts of the international meet.

Rajasekaran said the MTUC still planned to stage the picket and that it would only be confined to the EPF headquarters and not nationwide as feared by many.

He said the issue would become political only if the MTUC failed to take some drastic action as some political parties might want to exploit the situation by championing the rights of workers.

"We don't want to open our doors to politics...this was our decision and we will handle it very carefully," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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