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MTUC-Picket

MTUC TO GO AHEAD WITH PICKET ON MAY 12

PETALING JAYA, April 20 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) has decided to go ahead with a nationwide picket on May 12 to protest against the management of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF).

This decision was reached at the MTUC general council meeting at the union's headquarters in Subang Jaya today.

MTUC president Senator Zainal Rampak said 130 out of the union's 230 affiliates attended the meeting and they unanimously agreed to stage the picket.

"We are standing by our decision to picket on May 12 as decided by MTUC's central working committee which met on April 6," he told reporters after the meeting which lasted about 90 minutes.

"This is because the country's entire workforce is worried about actions by the EPF in handling workers' funds," he said.

He said the picket would be held peacefully in front of all state EPF offices.

Zainal also said MTUC's principal office bearers had been invited by EPF for a meeting on April 27 which would be chaired by EPF Chairman Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali.

Asked if MTUC would call off the picket if EPF agrees to its demands, Zainal said: "We will see when we cross the bridge."

MTUC secretary-general G. Rajasekaran, who was also at the press conference, said there was no reason for the 600,000-strong congress to picket if the EPF could guarantee that the problems raised would be solved.

MTUC, the country's largest private sector union organisation, is unhappy with the EPF over several matters.

Its grouses against the EPF, which has some 9.7 million contributors, include:

- * privatisation of workers' retirement scheme through the annuity scheme run by several private insurance companies;
- * reduction of death and incapacitation benefits of workers from RM30,000 to RM2,000;
- * payment of low dividends (the 6 per cent dividend for last year was the lowest in 26 years paid to workers);
- * reduction of workers' contributions to the EPF from the present 11 per cent to nine per cent; and

Zainal said MTUC would prepare a comprehensive memorandum on these matters for submission to the EPF management at the April 27 meeting.

Zainal said the general council felt that the reduction in EPF contributions as announced by the government was not provided for in the EPF Act.

The decision to reduce workers' EPF contributions from 11 per cent to nine per cent of their monthly salary was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad early this month as a measure to stimulate the economy through public spending.

"The EPF Act does not allow this...the Act only allows the Human Resources Minister to increase contributions up to 15 per cent. It does not provide for any reduction," he said, adding that workers should inform their employers to maintain the 11 per cent cut.

Asked about the fact that the date of the picket would clash with Workers' Day celebration and the Asean Labour Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur, he said the MTUC did not know of these events when it fixed May 12

for the picket.

Asked if people would construe MTUC's action as going against the government, Zainal said: "We are not politically aligned to any party...so it is clear this is done with the welfare of workers at heart."

-- BERNAMA

SR NHA YBY