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Tycoons ask EPF for financial assistance, says MTUC chief

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IPOH, Mon. - Several corporate figures with huge cash reserves and assets worth billions of ringgit, have approached the Employees' Provident Fund for assistance to rescue their allegedly ailing companies.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) president Senator Zainal Rampak, who said this, added more than five applications were submitted to the EPF.

They included some with assets of up to RM1 billion.

Speaking to reporters after attending the Perak MTUC dinner in conjunction with Workers' Day celebrations here last night, Zainal who is an EPF board member, said he had informed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad of the matter.

"I have briefed the Prime Minister and he knows those who asked for the assistance (from EPF)," he said.

Zainal said the Prime Minister had also written to him saying EPF funds were not to be abused.

Zainal declined to name the corporate figures concerned but stated: "I know their identities ... and you too can find out."

Also present were Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali and State Youth, Sports and Human Resource Development Committee chairman Datuk Jamal Nasir Rasdi.

He said a monitoring committee to be set up by the MTUC soon would also look into these cases, apart from other issues. It will also keep track on the management of EPF funds to prevent abuse.

A report will be ready in three months after the formation of the committee which will comprise MTUC officials and economists, among others. He said the report would be submitted to the Government for its perusal.

On the Prime Minister's statement to increase non-Bumiputera representation in the civil service, he said, "the congress agreed with the call as a balanced racial composition would benefit the country in the long run."

Zainal said low wages were the main criteria for the lack of interest among non-Bumiputeras to join the civil service.

"This is why we are fighting for minimum wages for workers which can overcome these imbalance," he said, adding that the Government had agreed in principle with the system.

"We are now discussing on the quantum as the RM900 a month proposed by the congress from the RM1,200 earlier, had met with protest from the corporate sector.

"They want the market forces to be used as a yardstick to decide on the minimum wages."

He said MTUC representatives would meet the Prime Minister on June 25 as part of the regular meetings to raise several issues.

Zainal also said 90,000 workers in the electronics sector were expected to be retrenched by the end of the year in the wake of the slowdown in the United States.

He said some of them could be affected as several multinational companies may shift their operations to other countries to cut down costs, especially labour.

According to him, some companies had already shifted part of their operations to other countries while still operating in Malaysia.

Zainal asked the International Trade and Industry Ministry and the

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry to meet investors especially foreigners to convince them to maintain their operations in the country.

"Ministry officials must tell them of the benefits, especially political stability, industrial harmony and workers productivity," he added.