# Extend retirement age, urges MTUC

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By OUR REPORTER

THE Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) reiterated its call to extend the retirement age for civil servants to 60 despite reports that the Cabinet has decided not to extend the statutory retirement age from the present 55.

MTUC president Senator Zainal Rampak said he will continue making submissions on the issue in the Senate as well as all policy-making bodies in which MTUC is represented.

"There has to be correlation between average life expectancy and retirement age. In Malaysia, the average life expectancy is 72 years (75 and 69 years for women and men respectively) which is way past the current retirement age of 55," he said in a statement yesterday.

He pointed out that under current laws, Malaysian workers are required to retire when they "reach", not "complete" 55 years, thereby forcing them to leave the service at 54 itself.

Only judges are allowed to serve until 65.

Zainal noted that neighbouring countries have long taken cognisance of increased life expectancies in the region as a result of better living conditions and improved healthcare, and have made appropriate extensions to the retirement age of their citizens.

"We are surprised that Malaysia has yet to come terms with the changed needs of our workers in such a dynamic and progressive socio-economic scenario," he said.

As national literacy levels increase, job seekers will be entering the job market much later. Late job entrants, coupled with better health conditions would be supporting growing families even at 55 years, he said.

As a result of "outdated compulsory retirement age laws", many healthy, skilled and experienced workers are forced out of the job market. Most of the retired workers also end up being exploited as odd-job or unskilled workers as employers often prefer hiring younger workers at lower wages.

"The stated rationale that serving government servants should retire at 55 to ensure sufficient jobs are available for fresh graduates and school leavers who enter the job market annually is not tenable," he said.

He added that statistics indicate that it is the private sector and not the public sector that takes a leading role in job creation in the country.

"The private sector therefore absorbs the major portion of available manpower, be they school leavers or fresh graduates with the public sector only playing a complementary role in job creation," he said.

While in developed countries retirement is often considered as the start of a new phase in a person s life with adequate social safety nets to sustain their quality of life, in Malaysia retirement is often attended by financial misery.

Zainal pointed out that workers also feel vulnerable and helpless on retirement as they fear that it will mean increased financial hardship.

At present living costs, their meagre monthly pensions ranging from as low as RM180 and averaging at RM300 for retired low and middle-level government servants cannot provide a quarter of their basic household needs.

**DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that he is willing to meet Cuepacs on its proposal to extend the mandatory retirement age for civil servants from 55 to 58. The Prime Minister said the Cabinet had fixed 55 as the retirement age for government employees based on specific reasons.**

**"But if people can give other reasons which the Cabinet did not consider, we are prepared to listen. Whether or not we will be influenced by these other views is another matter," he said.**

**Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Cuepacs president N. Siva Subramaniam's statement yesterday that the umbrella body for public sector unions wanted to meet him to discuss that proposal. — Bernama**