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Struggle for a minimum wage to go on, says Zainal

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PETALING JAYA, Tues. - The Malaysian Trades Union Congress will continue its struggle for a national minimum wage law that covers all sectors of the economy, its president, Senator Zainal Rampak, said today.

"The call for a minimum monthly wage of RM900 is not something arising from our imagination as some employers think," he said, adding that the MTUC had done a detailed study on it and was convinced the amount was a fair monthly minimum wage.

"The national poverty income line is RM425 in Peninsular Malaysia, and RM601 and RM516 in Sabah and Sarawak respectively.

"A minimum wage of RM900 will enable a worker with three or four dependants to live at least in minimum comfort.

"When workers live comfortably, they will be more productive, and will have more purchasing power," he said in his address at the MTUC's 35th Special Triennial Delegates' Conference at Civic Centre.

A total of 584 delegates from the MTUC's 112 affiliated unions are attending the two-day meeting.

Tomorrow, elections will be held for principal office bearers including that of the president where Zainal is being challenged by Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud, the executive secretary of the National Union of Transport Equipment and Allied Industry Workers.

Zainal said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had agreed in principle on the merits of the MTUC proposal when met on Dec 8, last year. What needed to be done was to identify the quantum of minimum wage, he added.

He said MTUC had proposed the setting-up of a committee to study the matter.

On MTUC's proposal for a National Retrenchment Scheme, he said it had submitted a memorandum to Dr Mahathir in 1988 and he had agreed to establish it. But the employers were opposing the scheme, he added.

However, he said on Jan 8, an MTUC delegation met Dr Mahathir and suggested the scheme be managed by the Social Security Organisation as a third fund, the first two being medical benefits and disability pension.

The Prime Minister, Zainal said, agreed to consider the suggestion and wanted the scheme to be established as soon as possible.

On the increasing number of cases awaiting settlement in the industrial court, he urged Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn to help bring about a speedy and amicable settlement to the disputes.

Zainal also said the MTUC was closer to achieving its aim of having an institute of labour studies. He said the Negri Sembilan Government had agreed to give the MTUC an eight-hectare site in Rembau for a premium of RM1.8 million to build the institute.