

**Syed Shahir: Time to demand workers' rights**  
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With the general election just around the corner, outgoing Malaysian Trade Unions Congress (MTUC) president Syed Shahir Syed Mohamud said that it is time for the union to demand for workers' rights.

"Overseas, before elections, trade unions will meet with opposing political parties to table their demands in exchange for support," he told reporters after delivering his keynote speech to the 552 delegates who attended the MTUC congress in Petaling Jaya today.

He believe that it is high time that the same practice comes to Malaysia.

"We are 500,000 strong, we may be from differing political parties but in the workers' struggle, we are one and we are all voters," stressed Syed Shahir (left).

The veteran trade unionist added that the congress will throw their support to whoever pledges to or fulfills measures to improve the lot of workers in the nation.

"The next leaders of MTUC must be firm in this regard," he said.

In relation to this, the outgoing president said that he is confident the minimum wage policy, for example, will be implemented before the general election.

"I don't know if it is a sweetener to win over workers or not, but I am sure it will be soon," he said when asked if any move by the government to implement the minimum wage would be an attempt to win their favour.

This begs the question whether the workers' movement would support the government should it implement the minimum wage policy.

Among the demands that Syed Shahir said the movement, which comprises some 260 trade unions, should bring to the bargaining table in addition to minimum wage are a retrenchment fund, 90-day maternity leave and retirement age.

**No social safety net**

More important than any upcoming elections, added Syed Shahir, is the burgeoning financial crisis which has hit Europe as is evident in Greece and Ireland.

"Those crises will effect our region as well, sooner or later. And any crisis will affect the companies and in turn the workers," he cautioned.

Syed Shahir opined that there is no social safety net for workers in Malaysia. Which is why the matter of worker's welfare must be given due consideration as they will suffer the most in the case of a financial crisis to hit Malaysia.

"MTUC is ready to talk to all parties about the matter. However, we want it to be on equal footing, both sides must cooperate, we cannot be compromising while other parties do not

give ground.”

More so, the union leader wants the government to hold true and be serious about implementing any decisions mooted in labour talks.

“There must be effective solutions developed, not just discussions and talk,” he said.

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