

**'Fed-up' MTUC to protest in Parliament**  
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**Athi Veerangan**

Fed-up with the prime minister's silence and tired of waiting for the past two years for a positive reply from Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on its memorandum of resolutions, the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) will hold a protest outside Parliament House next Wednesday.  
MCPX

The protest is to voice our disapproval on the federal government's silence over the issue of workers' rights and interests, said Penang MTUC secretary K Veeriah.

The rally is expected to draw some 5,000 workers nationwide.

The MTUC memorandum was submitted to the PM for his perusal and decision two years ago.

"However, we are disappointed that the PM has not only failed to address the issues in the memorandum, but has also yet to even call for a meeting to deliberate the matter with us," said Veeriah.

He added that the union has to resort to a public protest since it is now clear that the government has no intention to take positive steps to meet the workers' demands.

"We want the government to hear us out and deliberate the issue with us. Up till now, there was not even a reply of acknowledgment from the PM, let alone a meeting to discuss the issues with MTUC representatives," Veeriah told Malaysiakini after the state-level annual May Day run in Prai yesterday..

About 250 workers, mostly from Prai Industrial Zone, took part in the run.

### **Rally highlights**

The demand for minimum monthly wage of RM900 basic and RM300 Cola (Cost of living allowance) for workers is the main agenda of the memorandum, which MTUC will highlight at the Parliament rally.

With the rapidly escalating prices of goods and services, Veeriah said the government should address the minimum wage issue with a sense of urgency.

"It disappoints us that the PM did not bother to address the outstanding issues in the memorandum; neither did he direct the human resources minister to hold a meeting, even a tripartite one, to resolve our demands," he said.

In the memorandum, MTUC also demands the federal government to repeal a recently amended clause in the Industrial Relations Act 1967 that put a ceiling of 24-month back payment of wages plus deduction on post-earnings as the maximum amount of compensation that an industrial court could award a worker for wrongful and unlawful dismissal.

Previously, the industrial court has the discretion to award compensation as much as it deemed appropriate.

Another important issue at stake is the balloting process among employees required for the recognition of union establishments in their respective workplaces.

The union has also demanded for an amendment to the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 to make it mandatory for employers and corporate managements to provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment to workers.

MTUC demands stern punitive actions against employers who flout the laws.

At present, it is self-regulatory for employers to provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment, which according to Veeriah, "was not working."

In 2006 alone, 730 workers died in the course of carrying out their duties for their employers.

Although government statistics showed that workplace accidents had reduced, Veeriah said injuries and diseases to upper parts of the body, such as to the chest, hands and face, had been on the rise.

"This shows that workplaces are unsafe and unhealthy and we want the government to seriously look into the matter," he added.

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