

# Negotiate, PM tells MTUC

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**ROME:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday advised the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) to pursue its call for a minimum wage and higher allowance through negotiation and not by any action that could be damaging to workers.

He said employers were now concerned about the high cost of labour and could use that excuse to relocate their business to other countries.

"Investors intending to come to Malaysia may think twice about the cost of manpower (if that cost is high in Malaysia)," he told Malaysian journalists accompanying him on his visit to Italy.

Abdullah has been here since Sunday for a three-day official visit to Italy to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly in trade and agriculture.

He was asked to comment on the MTUC's demand for legislation to set a minimum wage of RM900 and cost-of-living allowance of RM300 a month for private sector employees.

The MTUC staged a nationwide picket on Tuesday to press for its demand after giving the government one week to respond to a memorandum it submitted to the Prime Minister's Office on June 18.



It is seeking an amendment to the Employment Act 1955 to set the minimum wage and higher allowance.

More than 1,000 private sector employees picketed for about an hour from 5pm near the Employees Provident Fund building on Jalan Raja Laut in Kuala Lumpur.

Similar pickets were held in several states, including Selangor, Penang, Perak, Malacca, Johor, Negri Sembilan and Sarawak.

Abdullah said the MTUC should also consider the wages of foreign workers.

"Will the decision encompass the wages of foreign workers or are the foreign workers prepared to accept the current wages without any increase?" he asked.

He said there will be competition with Malaysian workers if the foreign workers

were prepared to accept the current wages without any increase.

Abdullah said he would ask Human Resource Minister Datuk Seri Dr Fong Chan Onn to provide him with a comprehensive report on the MTUC demand.

In Seremban, Fong said it was improper of the MTUC to have staged the picket because the ministry held dialogues with the congress at least once a month to enable it to raise issues.

"I have explained to the MTUC several times that the government is sensitive to the need for workers to be paid reasonable and fair wages," he told reporters after officiating at the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Seremban office of the Social Security Organisation.

"The Wages Council Act provides for the government to set up wages councils to study and determine the wages and work conditions if it is found that workers in certain sectors are not getting proper remuneration.

"The government is serious and committed in looking after the welfare of workers in the country. We are with the MTUC. We want workers to be paid reasonable wages. We do not want even a single worker being exploited. Therefore, I ask the MTUC to negotiate in the matter."  
- Bernama

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