

## **MTUC, MEF say no to new minimum wage Bill**

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 15 — The country's largest workers' and employers' groups are in rare unity against the recently passed minimum wage law due to its wide powers and demand a review before its year-end implementation date.

Putrajaya has come under fire as Pakatan Rakyat (PR) MPs have charged that the National Wages Consultative Council (NWCC) Bill was a futile exercise as the government would still have the final say in setting a minimum wage rate.

Despite widespread concerns, the Najib administration went ahead and tabled the highly-anticipated Bill in Parliament last month, paving the way for the implementation of a minimum wage policy in the country.

Both the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and the Malaysian Employers' Federation (MEF) listed several reasons as to why they were unhappy with the Bill, with MEF executive director Shamsuddin Bardan remarking that this was the first time both groups reached an understanding regarding minimum wage enactment.

They feel the human resources minister has wide jurisdiction in the enforcement of the new law, with the MEF saying that the new law allows the minister to amend or cancel any directive concerning minimum wage at any time.

The MTUC and MEF are also opposed to the membership figures in the NWCC, saying employers and employees were seen to be the "minority groups" in the council's decision-making. Of the 29 members in the council, employer and employee groups can each send five representatives who do not have to be from the MTUC or MEF.

The MTUC said it disagreed with the launching date of the minimum wage which will be executed according to different sectors, cities and jobs. It wants a national minimum wage Act to be implemented simultaneously throughout the country.

"The law has just been passed but has not received the blessings of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong... so we feel that there is time for the government to rectify the unfair enactments," Shamsuddin told *The Malaysian Insider*. He said however that the MEF had no power to reject the new Bill.

"But we want the government to amend this Bill," he added, stressing that the MEF and MTUC were never formally invited when the Bill was first drafted.

"Any laws pertaining to workers and touching on the interests of employers should have been discussed via the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC) but this has not been done," Shamsuddin said.

MTUC secretary-general Abdul Halim Mansor concurred, saying that the NLAC has not had any meetings since May last year.

"We have decided not to agree with a big part of the Bill... it gives too big a power to the minister and belittles the role of the MTUC when it comes to negotiations," Halim told *The Malaysian Insider*.

*The Malaysian Insider* understands that many MTUC leaders were shocked when the government tabled the Bill in Parliament.

"We were never consulted over the matter... that is why we are shocked, it feels as though we do not matter.

"We are not saying we reject (the Bill), but we are just dissatisfied," Halim said. He said that both the MTUC and MEF had sent letters to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak calling for a review of the law shortly after it was tabled and passed in Parliament.

According to the Bill, the NWCC's role will be to advise the government on all matters related to minimum wages, including its development at the international level as well as recommendations to the government on minimum wage rates and coverage according to sectors, types of employment and regional areas, among others.

It will comprise a chairman, a deputy, a secretary, at least five members drawn from public officers, at least five employee representatives, five employer representatives and another five others who have yet to be named — all of whom will be appointed by the minister.

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