

**Nationwide MTUC picket on Nov 3 over labour law changes**  
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**By G. Manimaran**

SUBANG JAYA, Oct 11 — The Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) has unanimously agreed to hold a nationwide picket on November 3 to protest proposed amendments to the Employment Act passed last week that could affect job security and workers' rights.

The national labour centre's general committee came to the decision last night at a meeting attended by officials from more than 100 unions. The MTUC comprises 390 out of the 692 registered unions in the country, which represent 802,323 members.

File photo of the picket which MTUC officials and some 200 members staged outside Parliament on October 3.

MTUC officials and some 200 members had picketed outside Parliament on October 3 against Putrajaya's insistence to hold the second reading of the Employment Bill (Amendments) 2011 which was fiercely debated for some five hours before being approved on Thursday.

"We have decided to hold a picket to express our dissatisfaction with the government's action especially the Human Resources Ministry's move to continue with the second reading of the amendments although we have sent a letter to the minister for a postponement," MTUC president Khalid Atan told The Malaysian Insider.

The MTUC sent the letter asking for a postponement of the amendments to minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam during a meeting of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC) on October 3, an hour before the picket outside Parliament.

The last time MTUC held nationwide pickets was in 2007 over the issue of minimum wage in the private sector. Next month's proposed picket will be held after office hours, between 5pm and 6.30pm, officials said.

The latest move could have an effect on workers' support for the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) in the next general election widely expected next year for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to seek his own mandate since coming to power in April 2009.

Najib tabled his Budget 2012 proposals last week that provided cash handouts and an extra one per cent employers' contribution to the pension fund for those earning up to RM5,000 a month, which covers most of MTUC's members.

His government has also promised to implement a minimum wage policy by end-2011 but his political foes, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), have already pledged a national minimum of RM1,100 and support for the union's protest against labour law changes.

After last night's MTUC meeting, several unionists expressed disappointment with Putrajaya's move to ignore their objections against the law change, saying the workers would make their stand known at the ballot box.

"We want to send a message that the MTUC is not happy with the Human Resources

Ministry's decision," Khalid said after the two-hour meeting.

He said apart from the proposed picket, the MTUC will write to Najib about their reasons for objecting to the amendments.

"The letter will be sent as soon as possible," MTUC general-secretary Abdul Halim Mansor told The Malaysian Insider, saying the organisation will also seek the support of the Senate against the amendments.

"We are asking the senators to listen to us because we are not opposing all the amendments in the Employment Bill (Amendments) 2011 but just a few ... so we hope to get the support of the Dewan Negara and get them to throw it back to the Dewan Rakyat," he said, adding there was also a proposal to send a memorandum to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong if the Senate approved the amendments.

Khalid said the picket mechanism and strategy will be decided soon but hoped all workers and the public will join in the efforts as "it involves every worker in the country".

Among MTUC's objections is the use of labour outsourcing companies which the workers say is a return to practices before independence in 1957. The organisation also wants maternity leave to be increased from 60 to 90 days and rules against sexual harassment which are not in the latest amendments.

The amendments were first tabled on July 8, 2010 but were withdrawn on October 12 the same year over disagreements with the unions.

"We have discussed this issue 18 times, not once or twice, and their views have been accepted but at the last minute they want to picket. Our intention is to provide protection to the workers and not to open up 'outsourcing' as alleged by them," minister Subramaniam had said.

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