

Only Nine Per Cent Of Workers In Malaysia Unionised - MTUC
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 12 (Bernama) -- A mere nine per cent of the nation's 11 million workers are unionised and this figure is far from that of nations like Japan, the United Kingdom and Singapore.

A total 18 per cent of workers in Singapore are in trade unions while the figure stands at 21 per cent and 29 per cent for Japan and the United Kingdom, respectively.

"This percentage has never gone up and has been at the same level for the past few decades. We still face a lot of challenges in forming unions, and compared to many Asian countries, we are still far down," Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) vice-president A. Balasubramaniam told Bernama.

He cautioned that the number of workers joining trade unions was on the decline while the population and the opportunities for work are on a steady rise.

"The Human Resources Ministry needs to keep an eye on the challenges of forming trade unions in this country. The ministry needs to promote unions more to avert the decline in the number of union members," he said in an interview.

Balasubramaniam said the government, especially the ministry, must recognise the need for workers to be unionised as this is not only good for workers but also employers.

"Once a company is formed and has more than a number of workers, the workers should be allowed to form auto unions. This means the union is automatically formed without having to get the permission of the employer," he added.

He urged the Human Resource Ministry to take proactive steps in encouraging effective unionism in the country.

"There is a need to amend the present acts and restrictions placed against the formation of unions. We need to look at the issue holistically and not in a narrow-minded manner," he said.

He claimed that some Malaysian employers practise an "anti-union" mentality because of the perception that a union means trouble for them.

"Without trade unions, they have control over workers. Workers can't fight back to safeguard their rights. There are many issues like salary, minimum wage ... preference for foreign workers is just the tip of the iceberg," he added.

He said some unions are fully controlled by employers who hold important union positions.

"In this scenario, even though the union membership increases, its effectiveness declines because the top office bearers are the management," he added.

Balasubramaniam said employers should treat trade unions as their partners in the development of their companies rather than looking at workers and unions as their enemy.

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