

Malaysia: Stop targeting low-wage workers, MTUC tells HR Minister

Thursday 13 August 2020, by [ALHADJRI Alyaa](#) (Date first published: 11 August 2020).

The Malaysian Trade Unions Congress (MTUC) has hit out at Human Resources Minister M Saravanan for once again urging Malaysians to take up any jobs including low-wage positions in the dirty, dangerous and difficult sectors.

Rather than urging Malaysians to take up low-wage jobs, MTUC secretary-general J Solomon said steps should be taken to address the disparity between a company's top management and ordinary workers.

"We want to ask the minister why he is always targeting the low-income category of workers while not addressing the sinfully highly-paid top management and politicians in the country who could save many jobs by having their salaries and wages cut in a time such as this.

"Why is he not proposing that during this crisis the government should set a ceiling instead of allowing interested parties to decide their own salary and bonuses," said Solomon.

"What about all the MPs who have been appointed as GLC heads recently?"

"They are getting all the MPs allowances in addition to the GLC emoluments which can add up to more than RM40,000 a month," said Solomon who described the situation as being "immoral" if compared to an ordinary labourer.

Solomon noted that Saravanan's call was made despite MTUC's repeated reminders that low salaries have been the primary deterrence for Malaysians to take up jobs in the 3D sectors.

"Employers, aided by government policies, have managed to keep the wages for these jobs low so that they can reap high profits at the expense of these miserly-paid workers, who are mainly migrant labour.

"The employers have taken advantage of the poor foreign workers who are at the mercy of Malaysian bosses for survival," said Solomon.

"As an example, a CEO in a prominent Malaysian-owned company, who is the highest-paid CEO in Malaysia, earns 7,000 times more than the worker there with the lowest income.

"This same company chose to retrench 30 percent of its workforce during the pandemic instead of slashing wages of its top management to keep some jobs," he further said.

Solomon also reiterated calls to adopt a living wage for workers, as the current minimum wage was calculated based on the Poverty Line Income which had been recently [revised](#) from RM980 to RM2,208.

“With this revision, the government owes it to the poor workers to revise the minimum wages urgently to make up for decades of abuse by paying unfair and low wages,” he said.

On Saturday, Saravanan said all Malaysians who lost their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic should grab any available opportunity, arguing that earning a low income is better than having zero earnings.

According to the Statistics Department, the unemployment rate for June has dropped to 773,200 people in comparison to 826,100 people in May.

On a related matter, the Labour Law Reform Coalition (LLRC) had met with Saravanan in Parliament yesterday and handed over proposed amendments to the Employment Act 1955 (EA) and the Trade Union Act 1959 (TUA).

The coalition led by its co-chairperson Nadesan Gopalkishnam also urged Saravanan to immediately implement the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2020 that received the royal assent in February and pending gazette by the minister to set a date of operation.

“We have asked the minister to implement the amendment Act as soon as possible and he has agreed to look into it,” he said in a statement.

He said the main changes that would come into effect with the implementation of the amendment Act involved dispute resolutions process surrounding unfair dismissal and union disputes.

He added that the minister also agreed to review the amendments to the EA and the TUA submitted by LLRC, including discriminatory words used in the Act and areas in the Act which discriminates against women by placing exemptions to the protection that should be enjoyed by all workers in Malaysia.

Alyaa Alhadjri

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