



Jobs and job security top unions' wish list for Budget 2022

PETALING JAYA: Job opportunities are right at the top of union leaders' wish list for Budget 2022.

Three union leaders told FMT they wanted Budget 2022, scheduled to be tabled in Parliament on Oct 29, to set the direction for economic recovery and ensure plenty of job opportunities.

Earlier this month, the statistics department revealed that the unemployment rate in August was at 4.6% (748,800 people).

In its pre-budget statement on Aug 31, the finance ministry promised that Budget 2022 would see the government focusing on restoring the growth track and providing better job opportunities.

"We want to see a recovery plan for the economy. People are facing job loss and income loss, so the government's first priority should be to create job opportunities and job security," said Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) deputy president Mohd Effendy Abdul Ghani.

"People really want jobs, so the government needs to convince more investors to come and boost the economy."

Noting the rising cost of living, Effendy also hoped to see the government roll out initiatives such as a cost of living allowance (Cola) – currently implemented in the civil service – in the private sector.

He said it was also crucial for the government to find ways to replenish the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributions of members following withdrawals by those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As of Aug 31, about 46% of EPF contributors – totalling 5.8 million individuals – below the age of 55 had less than RM10,000 in their accounts.

"We need ideas to redevelop EPF savings so that there are enough funds when people retire," he said.

Like Effendy, National Union of Flight Attendants Malaysia (Nufam) president Ismail Nasaruddin hoped to see airlines open up more job opportunities now that restrictions on interstate and international travel have been lifted.

Crucially, he called on the thousands of workers who had been retrenched due to the pandemic to be rehired, adding that it would be costly to train new staff, both in terms of time and expense.

About 4,000 aviation staff, including cabin crew, pilots and ground personnel, were laid off last year.

Ismail stressed that airlines must be fair to these employees as they had contributed to the tourism industry and the country's economic growth.

He also hoped to see the budget set aside a "sizable" allocation for aviation industry staff who had lost their jobs during the pandemic and wished to start small businesses.

Apart from pushing for more jobs in the sector, Sabah Timber Industry Employees Union (STIEU) general-secretary Engrit Liaw hoped the government would look into revising the minimum wage for workers.

The minimum wage for workers in the peninsula is currently RM1,200 while it is RM1,100 in Sabah and Sarawak.

"We want a living wage as the current minimum wage is not enough," she said.

"And, of course, job opportunities ... we want the Sabah government to create more jobs in the sector and focus on social security, which has to be expanded to help more workers."

Liaw noted how more than 1,000 workers in Sabah's timber industry who had been laid off for months during the pandemic had not been able to benefit from initiatives such as the Social Security Organisation's (Socso) Employment Insurance Scheme (EIS), which is only for those who suffer job loss.

"They didn't lose their jobs, so they are not eligible for EIS. But they have lost their income, and something should be done to help them.

"We need another scheme for workers like them," she said.

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