

Union calls for regular wage rises

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National union leaders said on Friday they will strive to secure regular pay rises for workers across the country to counter the effects of surging consumer prices.

Zhang Mingqi, vice-chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), said it has been working with government departments on a mechanism to ensure stable pay rises for workers so they can benefit from the country's economic boom.

A recent survey by the federation found that more than 26 percent of China's workers had not received a pay rise in the past five years, despite the economy growing at an averaged 10.6 percent annually.

"We are trying to bring pay rises in line with economic growth," Zhang told China Daily.

"Trade unions should speak up for workers and protect their rights."

China's inflation surged to a 12-year high of 8.7 percent last month, and people across the country, especially those on low incomes, have felt the strain.

National think tank, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said in a recent report that years of paying low wages had helped Chinese firms boost their profits and increase their competitiveness. The report said the ratio of overall labor costs to GDP fell to 41.4 percent in 2005, from 53.4 percent in 1990.

"We are facing many problems in income distribution," Zhang said.

Last year, half of China's provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions increased their minimum wage payments by an average of 10 percent.

Li Shouzheng, a department director with the ACFTU, said: "We are pushing the government and employers to introduce regular pay rises, especially for the lowest earners."

The federation has mapped out a plan to bring more workers under its umbrella, he said.

By this autumn, the number of union members should surpass 200 million, up from 193 million at the end of last year. And of the country's 120 million migrant workers, 61.89 million are now in a trade union, Li said.

Zhang said the number of disputes over contract violations, workplace injuries and work-related illness, low pay and long hours, is rising at about 20 percent a year.

"As members of trade unions, workers are more aware of their rights."(China Daily)

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