

Trade Unions slam govt for using labour reforms to ease 'hire and fire'

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NEW DELHI: More than half a dozen central [trade unions](#) have slammed the government for what they call its policy of giving the industry unhindered powers to "hire and fire" workers on the pretext of improving the ease of doing business through the so-called [labour reforms](#).

At a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister [Arun Jaitley](#) on Monday, representatives of these unions presented a 14-point memorandum that asked the government to raise the minimum wage to Rs 18,000 per month, increase the income tax exemption ceiling to Rs 5 lakh, extend the scope of its flagship [employment](#) guarantee scheme MGNREGA and increase the allocation to social sector schemes.

"The process of labour law reforms being pursued by the government to provide for unhindered 'hire and fire' and for pushing the majority of workers outside the purview and protection of most of the labour laws — all for ease of doing business — be stopped," the unions said in their memorandum.



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The trade union representatives present at the meeting included Tapan Sen of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Brijesh Upadhyaya and Saji Narayanan of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Ashok Singh of Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), DL Sachdeva of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Harbhajan Siddhu of Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Rajeev Dimri of All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), Shankar Saha of All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC) and Manali of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

"Minimum wage linked to Consumer Price Index must be guaranteed to all workers. The 7th Pay Commission has worked out the minimum wage of Rs 18,000 per month. Therefore, the minimum wage should not be less than Rs 18,000 per month," the unions said in their memorandum.

The unions demanded that the scope of MGNREGA should be extended to agriculture operations and urban areas and that employment for a minimum of 200 days with guaranteed statutory wage should be provided under it.

"Raising the ceiling for the salaried persons and pensioners to Rs 5 lakh per annum and fringe benefits like housing, medical and educational facilities and running allowances in railways should be exempted from the income tax net in totality," the unions said.

Jaitley told the unions representatives that making social security schemes accessible to the unorganised sector workers is a major challenge, which the government is keen to address, the [finance ministry](#) said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, representatives of various agricultural groups met the finance minister and suggested granting infrastructure lending status to the micro irrigation system, imposing tax on food exports and using the funds thus collected for improving the irrigation system. They also suggested fixing the maximum retail price (MRP) for different types of fertilizers, increasing the cost of urea while decreasing NPK prices for balanced use of fertilizers and discouraging import of urea from China. Admitting that agriculture is facing some big challenges in India, Jaitley said these can be addressed by revisiting the incentive structure of farming, use of latest technology to raise productivity, reducing wastages and enhancing earnings. "There is a need for more investment in agriculture sector," he said.

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