

## Ministry threatens to blacklist firms paying salaries to full-time unionists

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Members of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions rally against new labor laws at a demonstration near the National Assembly in Yeouido, western Seoul, on Saturday. A similar rally by another umbrella group, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, took place yesterday. [REUTERS]

A high-ranking official in the Labor Ministry told the JoongAng Ilbo in an exclusive interview yesterday that companies that contravene a new labor law that prohibits the payment of salaries to full-time labor union workers will be penalized and blacklisted.

The official said the ministry plans to publish a list of the companies that break the law, which goes into effect from next January.

The move follows the ministry's decision last month to ban salaries to workers who serve full-time for their companies' labor union. The law was crafted in March 1997, but enforcement has been delayed.

The Lee Myung-bak administration also plans to allow the introduction of more than one labor union into a single company and prevent companies from paying wages to full-time workers in labor unions from Jan. 1, 2010.

The senior labor ministry official said the ministry set out regulations for full-time workers in labor unions early this month that make it illegal to pay union workers.

According to the official, the ministry will create a blacklist of companies based on complaints it receives. It will also undertake its own investigations. The punishment for violating the law will be at least a two-year jail sentence and a fine of up to 20 million won (\$17,123), the official added.

In response to the ministry's plans to revise laws related to labor unions, employers' associations such as the Korea Employers Foundation and the Federation of Korean Industries plan to establish a monitoring group to crack down on salaries to union workers and adopt a resolution to encourage companies to implement the ban.

The Korea Employers Foundation will also operate a whistle-blower system to encourage workers to file reports if they find that their companies have broken the new law.

If found guilty, violators will be expelled from the foundation, and they will be reported to the ministry, a KEF official said. "To help the ministry implement the regulation, the employers' association needs to have its own regulation to autonomously control illegalities in labor unions in addition to the government's policies," an official at the foundation said.

Meanwhile, the country's two umbrella unions - the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions - held separate rallies in Yeouido, western Seoul during the weekend.

Over 60,000 FKTU members gathered on Saturday afternoon. "If the government wants conflicts and enmity in labor-management relations, the FKTU will hold up the flags to fight," Jang Seok-chun, the head of FKTU, said on Saturday, adding that FKTU will vote on launching a general strike if the government insists on going ahead with its revised laws. Over 40,000 KCTU members rallied in Yeouido Park yesterday, accusing the government of trying to overthrow labor unions and failing to protect basic labor union rights stated in the Constitution.

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