

Numsa expects steel talks to be a test of state's resolve

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The National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa) expects unusually difficult wage talks in SA's embattled steel and engineering sector in 2017.



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SA's largest private-sector union said on Monday, 24 April, it expected to test the government's resolve in protecting the industrial sector, demanding further protection for a sector that has shed 30,000 jobs since 2015.

The union is expected to push for a wage hike of up to 20% during talks scheduled to begin in May.

It said it would lobby and launch rolling mass action to push the government into adopting additional protectionist measures for the sector.

The metals and engineering sector covers about 300,000 employees, representing about 1.1% of GDP, with large downstream linkages.

Since the 2014 wage talks SA's second-largest producer, Evraz Highveld, has applied for business rescue. Scaw Metals, Cape Gate, Macsteel and Aveng Steel have retrenched staff.

Numsa general secretary Irvin Jim said if ArcelorMittal SA's push for antidumping duties did not succeed, that company would also be at risk.

Numsa would push for additional protection from the government, as well as higher wages, he said.

Numsa president Andrew Chirwa said on Monday, the union was expecting concerted efforts during wage talks to undermine collective bargaining. "Lately, when we go to negotiations, they have demands. Employers never had demands before," he said.

Gerhard Papenfus, the CEO of the National Employers Association of SA, said on Monday that the employers' association was in favour of orderly collective bargaining.

"Absolutely, there will be demands [from employers], the game has changed. We need a dispensation that is much more flexible. This is an industry that just can't manoeuvre."

Source: BDpro

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