

22 MAY 1999

Lim-Remarks

LIM MUST APOLOGISE FOR HIS REMARKS, SAYS PPP AND NUPW

KUALA LUMPUR, May 22 (Bernama) -- Two organisations today demanded an apology from Primary Industries Minister Datuk Dr Lim Keng Yaik and want him to also retract his statement regarding rubber tappers.

The People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) said that Lim should have checked his facts first before making the remarks regarding rubber tappers in the Dewan Negara on Thursday.

PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas said rubber tappers were responsible for putting Malaysia on the world map and making unpleasant remarks about their occupation was an insult not only to them but also their families.

Lim, when answering Senator N. Marimuthu's question on why the ministry had not proposed monthly wages even though commodity prices had gone up, had said that "how could rubber tappers be given monthly wages when nobody knows what they do behind the trees."

"I came from an estate and my mother was a rubber tapper too. I am inviting Lim to go to one of the estates and see for himself what can be done behind a rubber tree," Kayveas said.

Kayveas said he received numerous calls from party members who were angry over the remarks.

Lim owes an apology to all the rubber tappers and must retract the statement, he said.

"If he feels monthly wages are not suitable in the current situation, then he must come up with rules and system that suits present condition. Do something positive...don't provoke something just because the workers are not educated and earn less income," he said.

NUPW secretary-general G. Sankaran said Lim's statement was uncalled for and the minister must apologise to the rubber tappers, especially those working in the estates.

"The rubber tappers have been contributing to the economic success of the country for the past 100 years...Gerakan was only established in the late 60's," he said, here.

Sankaran said Lim should have given proper reason for rejecting the proposal instead of humiliating the workers.

"We want him to apologise within one week or else we will organise pickets wherever he goes. At a Labour Day celebration in Sungai Petani yesterday, the workers expressed their unhappiness," he said.

Sankaran said it was a pity that such comments came from a cabinet minister at a time Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was working hard to revive the economy.

"This might work against the government," he said.

He said the monthly wage issue was shot down by the Industrial Court in 1985 but the union plans to take up the matter again later this year.

Sankaran said the collective agreement for oil palm harvesters expires this year and the NUPW would push for the monthly salary in their negotiations with the Malayan Agricultural Producers Association (Mapa).

Meanwhile, National Justice Party supreme council member Irene Fernandez said Lim's remark smacks of arrogance and ignorance.

"No one can argue that the Malaysian economy was built and developed by the sweat and blood of plantation workers in the country. They remained isolated, and when they leave the plantation, the workers do not even have the capacity to buy a house," she told a news conference.

She said for the past 100 years and more, the productivity of workers had increased tremendously, but wages remained low.

They get less than RM400 per month despite tapping over 800 trees a day, she said.

Fernandez said Lim had failed to address the issues confronting plantation workers who still remain poor, denied of facilities and proper medical care.

-- BERNAMA

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