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Plantation workers seek PM's intervention in wage issue

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been asked to intervene in the effort by plantation workers in the country to claim for monthly wages.

The Support Committee for the Plantation Community has called for the Prime Minister to amend the legislation to allow workers in the plantation sector to be paid monthly salaries.

Its spokesperson, S. Arutchelvan, said the committee hopes that a meeting with Dr Mahathir can be held soon to discuss the matter.

Last year, the committee had sent four memorandums to the Prime Minister's Department regarding the issue but has yet to receive the reply.

The committee, which claims to represent the voice of the majority of estate workers, wants the Prime Minister to step in because the workers have lost faith in the leadership of National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW).

Arutchelvan told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday that the workers are frustrated with the NUPW leadership as the collective agreement signed between the union and the Malayan Agricultural Producers' Association (Mapa) maintains a colonialist wage system.

He said the workers are currently paid daily wages, the system which was practised since colonial times.

"The wage increment of between 14 and 18 per cent in the agreement as reported in the newspapers is misleading as the increase only represents RM1.10 per day or about the price a coconut," he said while holding up a coconut brought to the press conference.

He said although the recent collective agreement calculates their daily wage to be RM11.50, the actual salary after taking into account the current Consumer Price Index and inflation rate, the plantation workers would only earn about RM3.30 per day.

According to him, the concluding of the Mapa/NUPW 1999 collective agreement, effective between January 1 1999 and December 31 2001, is seen by the workers as a traitorous act by the union.

Arutchelvan also said that the agreement does not incorporate the workers' long-time demand for monthly wages. He said the economic downturn cannot be used as an excuse to delay the implementation of the monthly wage system as the plantation sector is still making money through this economic slowdown.

The support committee, which represents workers from 200 estates in Peninsular Malaysia, except Terengganu, also expressed their dissatisfaction on several terms of the recent collective agreement such as the incentive and ex-gratia payments.

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