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Rubber tappers deserve to get monthly wages for their toil

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I REFER to the issue of monthly wages for rubber tappers in estates.

This nation, which gained independence 42 years ago, has shed many unfair colonial practices and undergone tremendous changes and development.

The Barisan Nasional Government has in its past election manifestos asked the people for support in return for development.

The people, including the estate folk, have not failed them and returned them to power.

However, development has eluded the estate community who are stuck with a relic of the colonial masters, namely the daily rated wage system.

The workers have pursued their claim for a monthly wage through the proper channels including the courts but failed.

Now they are asking the Government to intervene so that the fruits of development enjoyed mostly by the urban folk will also benefit them.

In the West, development means shorter working days, better working conditions, better health and welfare benefits and even a regular allowance for the unemployed.

In Malaysia, the rubber tappers are only asking for monthly wages for hard work which many locals are shunning and has resulted in the influx of illegal foreign workers.

The workers will never be able to match the rich plantation owners lobby to maintain a daily rated wage system.

They will show the Press the conditions in the better maintained large estates to give the impression that life is a bed of roses in the estates.

But large plantation houses are few in comparison to the thousands of small estates where living and working conditions are bad and the wages are worse.

It was understandable when employers could not consider monthly wages during the economic crisis. But what did they do during the good times? Now they will argue rubber prices are low but what about the times when prices were higher?

Many workers, who had contributed towards the economic development and political stability of the country, have poor social and educational background and are a submissive lot.

They place their hope in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to look into their plight for a favourable outcome.