

24 MAY 1999

Abdullah-Keng Yaik

UP TO KENG YAIK TO EXPLAIN TO CABINET, SAYS DPM

PETALING JAYA, May 24 (Bernama) -- It is up to Primary Industries Minister Utama Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik to explain to the Cabinet a recent controversial statement about rubber tappers, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

The cabinet would not seek explanation from Lim unless the minister himself would want to clarify, Abdullah said.

"It'll be good if he takes the opportunity to enlighten the cabinet about the issue," he said.

Reporters approached Abdullah on the matter after he launched the book "A New Deal For Asia" written by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, here.

He said the cabinet would have a clear understanding of how the issue came about if Lim would be forthcoming with an explanation.

Last Thursday during question time at the Dewan Negara, Senator N. Marimuthu asked Lim why his ministry did not propose monthly wage for tappers when rubber fetched good price.

Lim had replied: "How are we to pay rubber tappers monthly wage when no one knows what they do behind the trees."

Lim's statement angered, among others, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) and the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUTP) which thought it disparaged rubber tappers.

They had demanded that Lim apologise publicly and retract his statement.

Yesterday, Lim denied making the statement in the Senate and said it was taken out of context by a local Tamil-language newspaper, the Malaysian Nanban.

Lim, who is Gerakan president, said he had never meant to insult or hurt rubber tappers' feelings.

Lim reportedly explained yesterday that he told the Senate that it was hard to supervise estate workers unlike factory workers who worked under a different environment.

Abdullah was asked whether some ministers still chose to ignore his recent directive that ministerial problems be discussed within the cabinet and not through the Press.

He said he could not determine whether Lim's statement was really sensational or was it the Press that sensationalised it.

Abdullah, who was back to work today after leave, said he was unaware whether the cabinet discussed monthly wage for rubber tappers while he was away.

He was also asked about PAS' plans to set up a secretariat to look after the interests of the country's Chinese community.

Abdullah, who is an Umno vice-president performing the duties of the party's deputy president, said he could not understand why only now PAS wanted to set up such as secretariat.

"The Chinese themselves will determine their politics and not through the PAS-proposed secretariat," Abdullah said.

He added that the Chinese community was capable enough in making their own choice in the next general election.

-- BERNAMA

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