

THE STAR EDITORIAL EXTRACT

(EXTRACT: Commenting on monthly wage for the plantation workers THE STAR says while it is long overdue, it is still timely that at least justice is being done to a group of workers who have contributed so much to the national economy. THE STAR feels if not for the intervention of the Cabinet, the workers' case would have remained in limbo. The resolution of the issue was hastened by a Cabinet decision which instructed the Human Resources Ministry to settle this matter once and for all. THE STAR points out events had shown that the estate workers did not disappoint as they gave their votes to the Barisan in the 1999 general election. The government is making good its promise to champion their cause.)

LONGER VERSION:
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THE STAR, in its editorial entitled " LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL FOR ESTATE WORKERS" says estate workers may finally see the light at the end of the tunnel over their long-standing claim for a monthly wage system.

"They must be about the last group of workers who are being paid differently unlike their counterparts in other industries."

THE STAR feels somehow, their plight has never been properly addressed by the employers or the government until recently.

"While it is long overdue, it is still timely that at least justice is being done to a group of workers who have contributed so much to the national economy.

"One reason for their not getting the right recognition is that they are working in the rural areas and therefore not many people are aware of their situation except for the estate owners and the National Union of Plantation Workers.

"They also do not have much contact with the outside world as their places of work are private property and therefore out of bounds to those not working or living there.

"It is a classic case of "out of sight, out of mind".

THE STAR points out for some reason or another, the government too has seemed quite reluctant to get "involved" with the workers' struggle for monthly wages.

"This issue has been left to the estate owners and the workers to resolve with the Human Resources Ministry holding a watching brief."

THE STAR notes if not for the intervention of the Cabinet, the workers' case would have remained in limbo.

"The resolution of the issue was hastened by a Cabinet decision which instructed the Human Resources Ministry to settle this matter once and for all."

THE STAR points out the MIC came out very strongly on the workers' side and even Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, also threw his support in favour of the new system of payment.

"As Primary Industries Minister Dr Lim of course has a vested interest as palm oil and rubber are under his portfolio.

"If there should be any drop in production due to any industrial dispute,

then Malaysia's exports of these two crops would be affected."

According to THE STAR, politics could not be ruled out and the MIC president Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu realised that the votes of these estate workers, especially the Indians, could be crucial.

"Events had shown that the estate workers did not disappoint as they gave their votes to the Barisan in the 1999 general election.

"The government is making good its promise to champion their cause."

THE STAR is confident that with the new millennium, the estate workers can look forward to a better deal from their employers.

"Apart from the payment issue, the authorities are also looking into better housing, health and other amenities which will make their life so much easier.

"Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn has also requested the Economics and Business Administration Faculty of University Malaya to come up with formula on a monthly wage for the estate workers and the impact on the industry."

(Editor's note: MALAYSIA NANBAN ALSO WRITES AN EDITORIAL ON THE SAME TOPIC)

NANYANG/SIN CHEW EDITORIAL EXTRACTS

Two Chinese newspapers express concern over possible "comeback" of haze resulting from massive forest fires in Sumatra and Riau Islands in Indonesia.

Noting that air quality in peninsula Malaysia, particularly Klang Valley, had deteriorated lately as a result of the current dry spell, made worst by bush fires in Indonesia, NANYANG SIANG PAU while welcoming a recent order by the Environment Department requiring high rise owners to install sprinkler system, nevertheless, feels it is merely a stopgap measure.

The daily fears air pollution in the country may take a worst turn when the current north-easterly winds change to south-westerly winds bringing more polluted air particles into the peninsula.

The paper recalls an agreement to enforce a "zero burning" policy in the region among Asean member countries and as such Indonesia should continue to take concrete action to curb the problem.

NANYANG also suggests that a trans-border agreement to check haze pollution be formulated, to enable Asean members to institute legal proceedings to resolve the haze woe.

SIN CHEW JIT POH:

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SIN CHEW says the haze "nightmare" will continue to haunt Indonesia's neighbours if Jakarta does not seek a long term solution to the haze problem.

Forests fires in Indonesia, the daily says, is not an act of God but man-made.

The daily cites among other things shortage of enforcement officers to fight fires for the problem.

It also pinpoints logging companies and big plantation owners as culprits, although primitive shifting cultivation by a small number of farmers is also an contributing factor.

SIN CHEW urges the Indonesian authorities to step up their enforcement to bring to book those set ablaze forests openly. Stiffer punishment including hefty fine and jail sentence should be imposed to serve as a deterrent.

It also calls for efforts to rehabilitate shifting cultivators by educating them and providing them necessary tools for cultivation of crops.

The paper, meanwhile, urges the Malaysian government to make public

development of the Air Pullutant Index to enable members of the public to take necessary precautions to safeguard their health.

NEW STRAITS TIMES EDITORIAL EXTRACT

(EXTRACT: NST is confident with the proposed K-economy masterplan, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will give the country a strong presence in the cyber geography of the Information Age. No less than a cyber visionary himself, Dr Mahathir is likely to add a new dimension to the nation's effort to shift gear into a knowledge-driven economy. The English daily notes with the right strategies, we may find ourselves standing on equal footing with some developed nations in the quest for cyber-supremacy. The key to is the national recognition and recruitment of knowledge professionals. It is not the electronics, computers or softwares that will be the prime mover but the knowledge persons.)

LONGER VERSION:
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NST, in its editorial entitled " POISED TO MOVE FORWARD" says with the proposed K-economy masterplan, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will give the country a strong presence in the cyber geography of the Information Age.

"No less than a cyber visionary himself, Dr Mahathir is likely to add a new dimension to the nation's effort to shift gear into a knowledge-driven economy."

NST notes the proposition is well-timed.

"It is said that the Information Revolution is now at the point at which the Industrial Revolution was in the early 1820s when the railroad was created in 1829.

"From thereon, things moved fast with dramatic changes in the economic, political and social spheres.

"As described by French historian Fernand Braudel, it was the railroad that made France into one nation and one culture.

"It was the railroad, too, that shaped West America.

"There is a parallel here which, we suspect, is long known to Dr Mahahtir and, consequently, enticed him in his bid to put the country on the amorphous and borderless cyber map."

NST asks: The parallel?

"E-commerce is to the Information Revolution what the railroad was to the Industrial Revolution.

"Both were totally new and unprecedented.

"The railroad created a mental geography where humanity mastered distance while E-commerce created a cyber geography where distance is eliminated.

"There is only one economy, one market.

NST observers: Were French economist Jean Baptiste Say around today, his observation that "the Industrial Revolution had changed economics by creating the entrepreneurs" would have been changed to "the Information Revolution has changed economics by creating the entrepreneurs".

NST feels with E-commerce as a major worldwide distribution channel for goods, services and jobs, it will bring tremendous changes in industry structures, economic and social landscapes.

"Presently in its nascent stages, E-commerce has already caused changes in the nature of work, flow of products and services, consumer segmentation,

consumer values and behaviours and information content in industries and services."

NST went on to say:

"Like the railroad, E-Commerce is the triggering point for changes yet to be envisaged.

"The significance of standing at a point when this catalyst is still in its infancy stage is not lost on Dr Mahathir.

"Start beyond this point and we will be playing catch-up for good, as is the case in our industrialisation efforts."

NST points out with the right strategies, we may find ourselves standing on equal footing with some developed nations in the quest for cyber-supremacy and our corporations may not be completely "amazoned" (meaning to lose a big chunk of business to non-Malaysian web companies).

"That said, there is no time to lose.

"The key to capitalise on this catalytic point is the national recognition and recruitment of knowledge professionals.

"It is not the electronics, computers or softwares that will be the prime mover but the knowledge persons."

As pointed out by Dr Mahathir, NST says Malaysia must invest in the passion and capabilities of knowledge workers and lay the foundation for learning at the primary level.

"The foundation must encompass all segments of society so that K-economy will not be an "enclave development".

"The masterplan must have the nuts and bolts which will enable each and every citizen, poor or rich, to harness the Knowledge Revolution.

"K-economy will become relevant only when linked to developing the people's true potential."

BUSINESS TIMES EDITORIAL EXTRACT

(EXTRACT: BUSINESS TIMES comments a BERNAMA news report released on Thursday quoting an United States official as saying that Washington-Kuala Lumpur ties may be chilly at present but not frozen. The official who asked not to be named said that relations between the two countries "have not gone down the tubes" because "our business and economic relationships are good while our military cooperation is strong")

LONGER VERSION:

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BUSINESS TIMES, in its editorial entitled "FROTHY FROSTY ROTH" says it is quite assuring to see a US official actually making an effort to "clarify" a statement made on Malaysia by another government official, Assistant Secretary of State of East Asia and Pacific Affairs Stanley Roth, who reportedly said last week in Hong Kong that "until there is a change in the policies, it is difficult to envisage a warmer relationship between the United States and Malaysia".

"One could imagine that this official "who asked not to be named" occupies a fairly senior position in the Clinton Administration and had spoken to the Bernama representative in Washington out of a need to stress, particularly to the Malaysian public, that Roth's remarks did not wholly reflect Washington's stand on Malaysia."

BUSINESS TIMES is certain that Roth's remarks do not reflect the state of bilateral ties.

"In terms of investment, the US has remained Malaysia's largest and most important source of foreign direct investment over the years.

"Last year, US investors proposed to establish projects valued at some RM2.54 billion (RM6.5 billion in 1998), more than doubled the worth of proposed Japanese investments in Malaysia.

"In terms of trade, the US has been Malaysia's largest export market for many years.

"America is still a favourite place for thousands of Malaysians to send their children for further studies every year.

"In terms of economic cooperation, American companies are actively involved in various socio-economic programmes and are represented on various national committees."

BUSINESS TIMES points out there have been numerous clashes of views between Malaysians and Americans but these almost never involved the ordinary person.

"PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD IS AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF THE US BUT MAINLY WITH REGARDS TO POLICIES THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND ALSO MOSTLY IN RESPONSE TO AMERICAN CRITICISM OF MALAYSIA, THE THIRD WORLD AND ISLAMIC COUNTRIES, AND OF HIS OWN VIEWS ON VARIOUS ISSUES.

"Malaysia is also against American unilateralism, veto power, double standards, extra-territorial tendencies, and holier-than-thou attitude."

BUSINESS TIMES recalls Malaysia also looks to the US for inspiration: for example, Dr Mahathir went to the Silicon Valley himself to look at what Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor must do to succeed and he woos American enterprises to invest in Malaysia because they have the technology, the motivation as well as the innovation.

"Malaysia never condemned Americans for constructing the tallest buildings in the world before the Petronas Twin Towers, for sending a few men to the moon with money that could have fed millions of hungry people, or for making the largest battle ships and deadliest bombs.

"On their part, US envoys to Asean take the initiative to go coast-to-coast every year to "sell" the potential of economies in the region to their businessmen back home.

"And leaders and officials from both nations engage in dialogues at various levels to enhance bilateral relations."

BUSINESS TIMES feels for Roth to speak of Malaysia as if it was a major foe of Uncle Sam, therefore, is uncalled for.

"While he said the US did not regard Dr Mahathir as a dictator or "another Pinochet", the references themselves are clearly aimed at making people draw parallels between the Prime Minister and the former Chilean president and other dictators.

"Roth spoke of the "heavy-handed" way Dr Mahathir handles Anwar, the opposition, the press, the judiciary and the general election and of Malaysia's "worsening" human rights situation and disrespect for the rule of law.

"In short, what happened in Malaysia over the last 18 months is not a government that the Clinton Administration would want to associate with, Roth said."

BUSINESS says if Washington does subscribes to Roth's views, it would only confirm where the US is headed.

"After all, he was just belatedly taking the cue from Vice President and presidential hopeful Al Gore, who showed Malaysians in November 1998 how shockingly impertinent and irresponsible the stand-in America head of government

could be.

"At least the official who asked not to be named has put things in correct perspective by noting that " there is chill in the air but the water is not frozen".

RELATED BERNAMA NEWS ITEM. BERNAMA RELEASED THIS REPORT ON THURSDAY

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US-MALAYSIA RELATIONS CHILLY BUT NOT FROZEN- US OFFICIAL

WASHINGTON, March 9 (Bernama) -- Washington-Kuala Lumpur ties may be chilly at present but not frozen, a United States official said.

The official who asked not to be named said that relations between the two countries "have not gone down the tubes" because "our business and economic relationships are good while our military cooperation is strong"

"There is chill in the air, but the water is not frozen."

"What is not good at present is the broad political relationship," he said.

The official said that exchange of visits between high-rangking officials of the two countries, for instance, would not be likely till the end of the Clinton administration in January next year.

U.S. Defence Secretary Richard Cohen departed for Asia on Wednesday in a trip that will include Hong Kong, Vietnam, Japan and Korea.

The official was asked to clarify a comment made by Assistant Secretary of State of East Asia and Pacific Affairs Stanley Roth, who said in Hong Kong late last week that "until there is a change in the policies, it is difficult to envisage a warmer relationship between the United States and Malaysia."

Roth cited what he claimed the Malaysian government's recent crackdown against the Opposition and trial of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as indicators of the country's worsening human rights situation and a weakening respect for the rule of law.

Roth said it was difficult to understand why the crackdown had continued even after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Barisan Nasional won the November 29 general election.

The official said Washington does not regard Dr Mahathir as a dictator or another "Pinochet "(former Chilean President) but views with concern the Prime Minister's "heavy-handed way of dealing with Anwar, the opposition during the elections, the press and the judiciary."

"What happened in Malaysia over the last 18 months is not a government that they (the Clinton administration) would want to associate with," he added.

-- BERNAMA

BERITA HARIAN EDITORIAL EXTRACT

BERITA HARIAN says Indonesia has accorded a great recognition when its president Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) openly said Indonesia needs the guidance of Malaysia for its economic recovery.

Such a statement had never been made by any leaders of Indonesia.

In the past Malaysia was only considered as a follower of Indonesia due to its vastness in term of land and population.

However in his efforts to rehabilitate and recover national economy Gus Dur paid tribute to Malaysia for its fast economic recovery.

Malaysia has emerged from the economic crisis without foreign assistance and pressure.

BERITA HARIAN notes Indonesia should learn from Malaysia's experience and strategies in resolving the crisis.

While confronted with currency speculator, George Soros, Malaysia did not fall in the trap of the International Monetary Fund with its numerous conditions attached for financial assistance.

While Indonesia was forced to accept the IMF aid due to pressing needs and with a great risk, Malaysia rejected the offer in total to maintain dignity. Instead the Malaysia government relied on its rakyat for cooperation in its efforts to resolve the economic crisis.

BERITA HARIAN says Malaysia is always willing extend a helping hand to enable Indonesia to rehabilitate and recover its economy.

Gus Dur is facinated with the Malaysia's New Economic Policy and its objectives. Indonesia can adopt the policy for its own good and to narrow the gap between the have and have nots, says BERITA HARIAN.

BERNAMA