

21/01/2000

Govt to study proposal on arbitration panel

THE Government has agreed in principle to the setting up of an arbitration body to settle disputes and problems faced by civil servants, similar to that of the Industrial Relations Court of the private sector.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said, however, the Cabinet will decide whether to have such an arbitration body after studying views from various departments and agencies related to the public services.

He was speaking to reporters at Putrajaya yesterday after meeting Congress of Union Employees in Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) president N. Siva Subramaniam and secretary-general Abdul Rahman Manan.

"In our country, things considered as major issues will be discussed in the Cabinet meeting. In this case, the decision will come from the Cabinet," he said.

Rais also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad mooted the idea of such arbitration in the civil services when launching Cuepacs' convention in 1996.

Rais, who took charge of the law portfolio after his appointment as a Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said besides Cuepacs, the ministry will also have to gather views from other organisations such as the Human Resources Ministry and Public Services Department (PSD).

"Through such an arbitration, problems and issues faced by the civil servants can be settled fairly and just through a neutral body.

"As it is now, there are no neutral institutions that can listen to the plight of the civil services," he said.

Rais also said the Government is also looking at various models of arbitration from abroad to be emulated in the proposed arbitration in the country.

"We are keeping our mind open to other models, including from foreign countries, as what is good for the country will be taken into consideration," he said.

Later, Siva said Cuepacs hopes that the Government will set up such an arbitration body based on the tribunal which was set up to oversee the implementation of the New Remuneration Scheme. The tribunal has since ceased operations in October last year.

"When the tribunal was set up, its main function is only to look at the wages of the civil servants. We hope the Government will continue with the tribunal and widen its scope to cover other issues and problems faced by employees," he said.

Siva said through such an arbitration, it will save civil servants cost and time as well as ease congestion in courts.

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