

06/04/2000

Ministry studying viability of monthly wages for plantation sector workers

THE Human Resources Ministry is conducting a study on the effects and viability of a monthly-wage system for plantation workers. It is expected to be ready in three months.

Deputy Human resources minister Dr Abdul Latif Ahmad said the ministry had asked Universiti Malaya to do the study. The findings will be presented at the next sitting of Parliament.

Ministry officials together with representatives from the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) and Malaysian Agricultural Producers Association (Mapa) met for the first time on March 23 to discuss the problems.

"The meeting was chaired by the ministry's secretary-general.

"The ministry is concerned with this problem and we hope pleas by plantations workers for monthly wages can be a reality by the next Parliament session."

Dr Abdul Latif was replying to points raised on the Supply Bill 2000 at the committee stage for the ministry.

On calls by Opposition MPs for a minimum wage, he said this would only be implemented if conditions set by the Government were fulfilled.

He denied allegations made by Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kuala Kedah) and Theresa Kok Suh Sim (DAP-Seputeh) that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad had made empty promises or was offering lip service when he (Dr Mahathir) said the Government would introduce minimum salary.

"What the Prime Minister said was for us to implement minimum wage system in the country, certain conditions must be followed.

"If we can fulfil the conditions, then we can take measures to ensure that this system can be a reality."

The Government must practise caution. He said if Malaysia practised the system the teh-tarik man would get a salary of RM1,200.

"Then a glass of teh-tarik will not be 60 sen anymore."

It was the Cabinet and MTEN policy that wages should depend on productivity.

At this juncture, Muhammad Mustafa (Keadilan-Peringat) stood up and asked for clarification on the conditions for a minimum wage.

"There are various conditions, but the Government must first ensure the workforce is competitive compared to other countries.

"We have always said salary should relate to productivity."

On the industrial training centre, Dr Abdul Latif said the ministry would build 16 similar centres under the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

On Perkeso, Dr Abdul Latif said a working paper had been approved by Perkeso Council to allow single mothers who get pensions from Perkeso to remarry.

"We will widen the scope to allow single fathers to enjoy similar benefits too.

"This means if either the wife or husband dies, those who get the benefit from Perkeso can continue to enjoy the pension even if they re-marry."

Perkeso would also extend its benefits to include schemes for foreign workers, to cover illness and maternity benefits.

On the backlog at the Industrial court, he said, in December last year, it was 1,367.

"It did not exceed 5,000 cases as mentioned by Theresa. To address this,

we have created six new posts of court chairman."

During the debate, Wan Junaidi Tunku Jaafar (BN-Batang Lupar) urged the Government to give priority to those working in the high-risk sector.

The Government must make it compulsory for companies to report accidents in this sector.

"And if they fail to report the accident, the Government must impose penalties on the owners of the companies as they have not been responsible in taking care of their workers."

(END)