

03 MAY 2001

Asean-Labour

LABOUR MINISTERS MEETING TO FOCUS ON REGIONAL LABOUR SCENARIO AND ILO

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 (Bernama) -- The 15th Asean Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) beginning here on Tuesday will focus on the regional labour scenario and attaining a common position on several issues at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conference in Geneva next month.

According to a Human Resources Ministry official here, the ALMM will be briefed on the decisions reached at other Asean fora which affect the labour scenario in the region.

The ministers of the 10 Asean countries or their representatives are also expected to discuss ways to create more job opportunities for their people, in the wake of a United States economic slowdown.

They are also expected to focus on the issue of retrenchments and lay-offs which are already taking place, including in Malaysia, following the US economic situation and the effects of globalisation on the labour market.

"The meeting will also take the opportunity to discuss follow-up actions on the decisions of the 14th ALMM in Manila last year," the official told Bernama when contacted here today.

These include the on-going regional projects to enhance human development capabilities and create employment opportunities.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to open the meeting at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel here where about 50 delegates are expected to participate. Malaysia first hosted the ALMM in 1980 and again in 1990.

The ministerial-level meeting on May 10 and May 11 will be preceded by the Asean Sub-Committee on Labour Affairs (ASCLA) meeting on May 8 and Senior Labour Officials (SLOM) meeting on May 9.

However, it was not clear whether the issues of child labour and forced labour, which are popular among many non-governmental organisations, will be discussed at this year's ALMM.

The Asean members are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

With a population of more than 500 million people and a collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$750 billion, the region is the third largest overseas market for US exports.

The official said the ministers would take the opportunity to discuss agenda items for the ILO conference with the aim of achieving a common stand on the revision of the supervisory mechanism in the ILO and the ILO budget for 2002 to 2003.

They would try to forge a common position on the new instrument to be adopted by the ILO on occupational safety and health in agriculture, he said.

He said that for the first time in the history of the ALMM, there would be participation from three Asean dialogue partners, namely Japan, South Korea and China.

"The discussions with the dialogue partners will focus on efforts to identify areas of technical cooperation in operationalising the Asean projects," he said.

As usual, a joint communique is expected to be issued at the end of the four-day meeting.

The labour ministers have been invited to attend the Labour Day gathering on May 12, which is expected to be participated by some 10,000

people, in an effort to promote the tripartism concept involving the government, employers and workers in the country.

The ALMM, inaugurated in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1975, was formed to address labour issues of common interest, initiate projects to enhance human resources capabilities and employment opportunities and attain a common position on various issues at the ILO.

Meanwhile, the secretary-general of the Asean Trade Union Council, Zainal Rampak, said the KL ALMM must try to fully implement the social safety net for workers which was adopted in the Yangon and Manila meetings in 1999 and 2000.

"The question of social safety net...I think this has not been fully implemented by the respective countries. We are worried about the economic downturn in the US as more people will be retrenched," he told Bernama.

Zainal, who is also Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) president, said more than 20 million people in the Asean countries lost their jobs during the regional economic and financial crises a few years ago and the same scenario could happen if efforts were not made to protect workers following the US economic slowdown.

He hoped the ministers would take up the issues of globalisation, mergers, Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) and job creation which have direct implications on the workers.

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