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Retraining the retrenched (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Government today announced two schemes costing RM267 million to help retrain an estimated 20,000 retrenched workers.

SPM-qualified workers who were retrenched, or those unemployed for a minimum of three years after their studies, will receive RM500 a month in fees for full-time courses. Those interested in part-time courses will receive RM300 per month.

Degree and diploma holders, who come under the second category, will receive an amount for fees which will be determined later and a RM100 allowance.

A total of RM117 million had been allocated for the first category and RM150 million for the second.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said the two schemes were part of the RM4.3 billion stimulus package announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week to cushion the impact of an imminent global economic slowdown.

Speaking to the Press before chairing his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting, he said details of the fees to be paid for training degree and diploma holders would be worked out later.

He said the ministry would work with public and private training providers and major employers to identify retraining programmes.

Most would be centred around information technology, mathematics and languages, he added.

The retraining programmes, up to certificate and diploma levels, are expected to take between six months and a year.

Fong said details of the retraining programmes and applications would be published soon in newspapers besides being posted on the ministry's website.

"There is no age limit and we can accommodate up to 10,000 applicants for each scheme," he added.

He said up to last month, nearly 20,000 workers had been retrenched, 80 per cent of whom were from the electronics sector.

He said the number of vacancies reported to the Manpower Department was higher than the number of people retrenched.

"That is why we feel retraining programmes are very important."

Fong said he would be in Penang on Friday to meet employers and employees in the electronics sector.

"We are prepared to assist Malaysians working in the US who want to return home. Any expert willing to do so can benefit under the Government's incentive scheme."

He said the Government was trying to make it easier for them to join the scheme, including reducing Immigration red tape.

He said 110 of the 364 applications received from local experts abroad to return home under the incentive had been approved.

On proposed amendments to the Social Security Organisation Act 1971 to incorporate a national retrenchment scheme, he said it was currently being discussed with the Malaysian Employers Federation and other employers.

Deputy Human Resources Minister Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad said in Penang yesterday the retrenchment scheme may finally be a reality.