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Strategies to improve human resource, industrial relations

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THE Human Resources Ministry has outlined three main strategies for 2001 which are aimed at improving the country's human resource and industrial relations.

The strategies cover the upgrading of workers' skills in a knowledge-based economy (k-economy), enhancing industrial harmony in the country and promoting a caring society through improving occupational safety and health.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said the strategies were formulated after a brain-storming session within the ministry.

"By year-end, the ministry will be more effective in enhancing workers' skills, maintaining industrial harmony and reducing accidents involving workers," he said when announcing the programmes after chairing the ministry's post-Cabinet meeting in Kuala Lumpur last week.

For the first programme, the ministry will launch a mass gathering of information technology (IT) companies in Bukit Jalil to familiarise Malaysians with IT and the Internet.

The one-day event, which will be officiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is expected to attract 8,000 people.

On that day, participants can enjoy a short computer training session free of charge. This will be made possible with a donation of 1,000 personal computers from computer firms throughout the country.

The event is opened to all Malaysians, including workers, students, housewives and the unemployed.

This might be the largest event ever organised by the ministry, apart from the annual Workers Day assembly.

Similar gatherings on a smaller scale will be held later in other states.

The second programme, according to Fong, is to strengthen industrial harmony and prevent international developments from affecting the country's industrial relations.

"We are increasing our efforts to maintain industrial harmony in view of the anticipated slowdown in the US and its impact on American companies operating here," he said, expressing concerns about the possible retrenchments if the American multinationals in the country downsize their workforce or operations.

Initial feedback received by the ministry showed that many American multinationals are facing sluggish export orders.

The slowdown in the US is expected to have a global impact as it is the world's largest economy. The US is among the top three destinations for Malaysian exports.

According to the Minister, Malaysia's industrial harmony was not affected by the recent economic downturn which eroded local companies' profits and affected collective agreements signed between employers and workers.

Last year, he said worker unrests were kept to the minimum, strikes were not rampant and the number of industrial disputes had dropped compared with previous years.

There were 11 strikes in the year 2000, the same number as in 1999.

"However, the number of man-days lost from strike actions have decreased by more than 40 per cent to 6,068 days from 10,554.5 days," he said.

The final programme is aimed at promoting a caring society through the

reduction of accidents at workplaces and commuting accidents.

Better health and safety aspects at the workplace will improve workers' productivity, which in turn will enhance the country's productivity.

Although occupational and commuting accidents have dropped over the years, there is more to be done by the ministry and relevant parties like the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and National Council on Occupational Safety and Health.

For the first nine months last year, accidents involving workers had fallen by 11.5 per cent to 70,653 compared with 79,828 during the same period in 1999.

Accidents that took place on the way between the home and place of work dropped by 30.1 per cent to 9,158 cases, while accidents at the workplace slipped by 7.9 per cent to 61,495 cases.

Fong said each of the ministry's departments had been assigned with the respective tasks of implementing the strategies.

He said a meeting will be held every four months involving all departments and agencies within the ministry to gauge the progress towards the implementation of the programmes.

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