

25 MAY 2001

Hon-Canteen

THE AWARD OF CANTEEN CONTRACTS NOT FINALISED, SAYS HON

KUALA LUMPUR, May 25 (Bernama) -- The award of contracts to supply food to hostels in fully residential schools throughout the country will only be finalised when agreement on the method of implementation has been reached, said Deputy Education Minister Datuk Hon Choon Kim.

He said among the aspects which were still being considered by the ministry were the price factor which could have an effect on the students and parents, the supply of food items as well as the welfare of the existing Bumiputera canteen operators who might have to "close shop".

He said that the government had earlier planned to appoint a consortium as a pilot project to supply food to all residential schools in the country.

"However, the proposal was still being studied to determine whether it was the best method to be implemented so that no one would be burdened by the decision," he said at a media conference after officiating the Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair on behalf of Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamed, here.

Hon disclosed this when asked to comment on speculation in the press today that the government would rescind its earlier decision to award the contract worth about RM300 million to two consortiums namely Mas Catering-Advent-TNTC Sdn Bhd (Masat) and Besta Distributors Berhad.

At the end of 1999, the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Department was reported to have agreed that Masat be given the rights to supply food to fully residential schools in Melaka, Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang and Terengganu while Besta would supply residential schools in Perak, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

For Penang, Kedah and Perlis, the contract was given to Konsortium Darul Aman while residential schools in Kelantan would be supplied by Konsortium Darul Naim.

However, the decision was opposed by Gabungan Konsortium Pembekal Makanan Bermasak (GKPMB) which sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, describing the decision as inappropriate as it deprived Bumiputera companies of the opportunity to do business.

When asked whether the contract would still be implemented in the middle of next month as planned, Hon said it might be postponed until a decision was reached and it was approved by the Cabinet.

"Actually it was supposed to start in the middle of June. But at the moment we are still not ready to implement it," he said.

Hon said what was important for the ministry was to ensure that the prices of food provided by the consortium were not too high.

If possible, he said, the ministry would also consider the possibility of the existing canteen operators and their workers be allowed to continue to be involved in supplying food to the students and to share the benefits from the contract.

"But we don't want to make a hasty decision. We have to look at it carefully so that we can reach a 'win-win' situation for everyone," he added.

-- BERNAMA

NHA AHH AO