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Ministry to come out with details of exemption

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THE Transport Ministry will come up with details soon on the abolition of road tax for motorcycles with engine capacity not exceeding 150cc.

Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy said his officers are currently working closely to come up with a mechanism, which would be announced "as soon as possible" to ensure all motorcycles are under insurance cover.

"We will be looking at this in the next few days and making an official announcement once we have finalised everything," he told reporters after opening the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) Asia-Pacific Regional Committee and the Asia-Pacific Seafarers Regional Meetings in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Chan said this in response to the move by the Government to scrap the road tax for motorcycles with engine capacity not exceeding 150 cc as announced in Budget 2004 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Parliament last Friday.

Road Transport Department director-general Datuk Emran Kadir in an earlier report had said some 5.6 million owners of motorcycles below 150cc are expected to benefit from the road tax exemption, which represent some 80 per cent of the total number of motorcycles registered nationwide.

However, Emran pointed out that motorcycle owners still require insurance coverage for their vehicles.

Meanwhile, Chan said he personally supports Malaysia Airlines (MAS) if the airline plans to raise the retirement age of its air stewardesses from the current 40 years.

"I have no objection if MAS wants to raise the retirement age of its air stewardesses. Maybe they (MAS) have their own business consideration, but I feel 40 years is too early to retire.

"Thus, I urge the management of MAS to look into this seriously and extend the retirement age as it takes time to train an air stewardess," he said, pointing out that budget airline, AirAsia, requires its air stewardesses to retire at 55 years.

Chan was commenting on ITF Asia-Pacific Regional Committee chairman Senator Zainal Rampak's remarks at the opening of the two meetings.

In his speech, Zainal said although the statutory retirement age for workers in many Asia-Pacific countries is between 55 and 62 years, ITF does not find these provisions being implemented fairly in many countries

where women workers have to go on retirement upon reaching 40 or 45

years,
citing the cabin crew members employed by MAS as an example.

"Although they are at the peak of their careers with value-added skills and experience, they are not allowed to continue working in their preferred designations nor are they offered any equal and alternative job options in ground management and administration services after having been compulsorily relieved of their cabin crew duties," said Zainal, who is also Malaysian Trades Union Congress president.

In his opening address, Chan also urged employers to appreciate the goodwill shown by trade unions in the country and reciprocate this through reasonable wages, better benefits and safe and healthy working conditions in an environment of mutual trust, transparency, cooperation and shared leadership. "The unions and their leaders have kept national interests close to their hearts and have risen to the occasion whenever circumstances demand it. Likewise, I urge employers to do the same," he said.

Chan said the Government appreciates the high level of industrial harmony in the country. "We have had no major strike or stoppage of work for many years, although workers have had pickets now and then to express their unhappiness over wages and conditions of work in their respective workplaces," he said.