

Malaysia: Despicable! Education Ministry has failed to deliver on minimum wage promise

Thursday 30 June 2022, by [RASIAH Rani](#) (Date first published: 29 June 2022).

We, Parti Sosialis Malaysia, call upon the government to honour the Minimum Wages Order 2022 by ensuring successful implementation of the new monthly minimum wage of RM 1,500 to all workers spreaded across 10,000 schools and colleges in Malaysia. A simple survey covering different parts of the country reveals that the contractors who are employing cleaners and security guards — in 7 out of 10 schools — have broken the law by not paying the minimum wage that began in May 2022.

The contractors hiring these workers have given the following standard excuses for not meeting the RM 1,500 requirement:

- The contracts they had signed with the government predate the new minimum wage order, with the then prevailing wage of RM 1,200 or RM 1,100 which have not yet been adjusted to reflect the new required amount.
- They have yet to receive any directive on payment of the new wage from the District Education Offices (PPD).

Both excuses cannot be justified, because the government would have been fully conscious of an imminent pay hike for all its low-income contract workers at its premises. Why were contracts not adjusted, along with the other arrangements made in time for the May salary? Is it true that the Education Ministry has not yet briefed its contractors of the 2022 Minimum Wage? How do we expect compliance from the private sector when the government itself has failed to pay their workers under its own roof?

When does the Education Ministry plan to start paying RM 1,500 and actually fulfill their promise? How will the arrears be paid?

In 2013, when the minimum wage was first introduced, most school cleaners and guards continued receiving their old wages for the entire year — generating arrears of RM 1,200 each by the end of the year. Payment of the minimum wage had only begun the following year, but the RM 1,200 was quickly forgotten. When this was addressed as an issue, the Ministry rebutted that the contractors were free to submit claims to the government. However, those contractors were not able to do so, as they did not pay the minimum wage. The Ministry itself proved to be the opposite of proactive and refused to make adjustments to their payment mechanism to ensure that these low-income workers received their rightful arrears owed to them.

‘Wage theft’ is the term used when employers withhold wages from workers without any acceptable reason. Are there any assurances that these workers would not be cheated out of their RM 300, for all the months they are denied the minimum wage again? The government must ensure that its contract workers are not continuously victimised.

Diverting workers away to complain to the labour office about non-payment of their minimum wage

cannot be expected to remedy the situation, as it is a solution that is clearly unsustainable. The core of the problem originates within the Education Ministry where the contract is designed — and where the contractors are selected. There seems to be an endless amount of complaints regarding errant contractors, and those complaints keep recurring. They only serve to overwhelm labour ministry agencies which are known to be chronically short of officers. It is self-evident, by now, that the Education Ministry must immediately take responsibility and pay the minimum wage to all its workers without any further delay.

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