

Features of new labour policy highlighted

LAHORE: Punjab Minister for Labour and Human Resource Ansar Majeed Khan on Friday launched the Punjab Labour Policy 2018.

The policy launching ceremony was organised at the Industrial Relations Institute, Township, in the presence of a large number of workers' representatives, employers and government officials of different departments.

Speaking on the launch, the minister said the PTI government had taken numerous steps to ensure social and economic welfare of the workers during its first 100 days. He said some of the steps included finalisation of the Punjab Labour Policy 2018 which would also highlight future policy interventions focused on result-oriented implementation of prevailing labour laws and identification of key objectives to be achieved both in the short as well as long run along with implementation strategies.

Mr Khan said all the targets, identified in the Punjab Labour Policy 2018, were finalised after thorough tripartite consultations.

The Punjab Labour Policy 2018 elaborates future policy and strategic interventions in predominant areas of labour interest, especially elimination of child labour and enrolling such children in schools, payment of monetary incentives through Khidmat Cards, eradication of bonded labour, enhancement in notified minimum wages for the workers, free medical facilities even after retirement, health cards, extending coverage for the secured workers, new legislation on occupational safety and health (OSH), separate legislations for domestic and home-based workers, promotion of tripartite consultations, freedom of association and facilitating trade unionism, women's participation in industrial progress, elimination of gender discrimination and harassment, establishment of labour colonies for the workers, timely payment of welfare grants to the workers, including marriage grant, death grant and talent scholarships and protection of GSP+ status, ensuring continuance of preferential export quota through effective and result-oriented compliance with the eight core conventions of International Labour Organisation.

Reacting to the new labour policy, the trade unionists said the policy lacked substance as the document unveiled no concrete measures or the methods of its implementation.

Ume Laila Azhar from HomeNet Pakistan, a network of organisations working for home-based workers, termed the labour policy a good document but added that it lacked timeframe for the initiatives specified in it and also failed to set a mechanism for their implementation.

Lauding the pledges made for gender equality and insurance of retired workers, she demanded the government immediately form an implementation cell and allocate budget for realising these objectives.

She recalled that the earlier policy announced in 2015 had contained similar promises but failed to produce the desired results as no mechanism to achieve the goals was defined.

Powerlooms workers leader Aslam Miraj regretted that no steps had been suggested in the policy for ensuring registration of industrial workers with Social Security department and Employees Old Age Benefit Institution (EOBI) nor any timeframe had been set for adjudication of cases pending with various labour courts.

Textile Garments Workers Federation president Niaz Khan pointed out that neither employers nor employees were consulted before formulating the policy and thus was devoid of very important input from the two major stakeholders.

He said the document did not include measures for ensuring real freedom of association as most of the private sector industries were disallowing trade union activities on their premises.

Labour Education Foundation director Khalid Malik appreciated recognition of informal sector workers, including domestic help and home-based workers, in the policy but said that it might have been improved had the policymakers consulted all the stakeholders. He quotes Labour Minister Ansar Majeed Khan as saying after launch of the policy that he was for registration of all industrial workers and wanted labour department teams to sit outside each industrial unit to check whether each and every employee was registered with the social security and the EOBI. He said the minister believed that his steps would begin bearing results within two to three years.

Mr Malik, however, asserted that GSP Plus, a low-tariff export facility for European destinations, compulsions were making successive governments to announce `half-hearted` steps without devising any implementation mechanism as poor allocations for labour department spoke volumes of the intentions of the authorities.