

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2005

Fong orders probe into abuse of Socso claims

■ By Annie Freeda Cruz
anniefc@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The order has gone out: track down the Socso frauds and all those who colluded with them.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan today ordered an investigation into the abuse of the Social Security Organisation's (Socso) disability pensions, which was exposed by the *New Sunday Times*.

"There has been abuse, and it must be stopped. We will ensure that compensation goes to only those entitled to it," Dr Fong told the *New Straits Times* today.

Yesterday, the *New Sunday Times* reported that hundreds of healthy workers were swindling Socso of millions of ringgit in disability benefits with the help of doctors and some independent medical boards which Socso endorsed.

As many as one in 10 workers medically boarded out could be a fraud. The pensions and benefits they draw cost Socso at least RM43 million a year.

In response to the article, Socso today set up a hotline for the public to report cases of fraud by phone at 03-42575755 or by email to perkeso@perkeso.gov.my.

"Public information is very important in our probe," said Socso Corporate Communication and Planning Division general manager Mohamad Rashidan Ahmad.

He also said Socso had been investigating these cases, but had not discovered the extent of the abuse.

From today, workers certified as unfit to work must go through Socso's rehabilitation programmes before they can draw their pensions.

"The rehabilitation centre will be able to assess and file a thorough report on their disabilities. With this report, we will decide on the invalidity pension payment," Dr Fong said.

The rehabilitation programmes were originally meant for workers with temporary disabilities, providing them with physiotherapy and other treatment.

Dr Fong also instructed Socso to review its entire medical evaluation process, to find the loopholes which these frauds, doctors and medical boards exploit.

He will also discuss the matter with Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek as some of those who sit on medical boards are doctors from government hospitals.

"There is a need for transparency on the findings of the medical boards," Dr Fong said.

He said he would seek the help of the Malaysian Employers Federation and Malaysian Trades Union Congress to resolve the problem and eliminate any abuse.

In the first seven months of this year, Socso suspended 102 invalids' pensions. Last year, RM173.5 million in invalids' pensions were paid to 26,994 people.