

BE REALISTIC, PM URGES WORKERS

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs.— Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that a realistic attitude among the workers will help the Government overcome all problems and revitalise the national economy.

He said that with realism and realisation the workers could shoulder the problem of economic recession that they now faced.

In his message in conjunction with Workers Day tomorrow, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he was proud of and appreciated the workers' contributions at all levels that had helped in developing the nation.

"The dedication and hard work of the workers cannot be separated from the success that Malaysia had achieved since obtaining independence," he said.

The Prime Minister also urged the people to remember the work of union leaders and outstanding workers who had made the trade union movement a champion of the workers in the country.

Labour Minister Datuk Lee Kim Sai, in his Labour Day message, said that the rate of retrenchment in Malaysia had stabilised as the economy was starting to show signs of recovery in certain sectors.

He said for the two-year period of 1985 and 1986, 63,704 workers, or an average of 6,200 workers a month, were retrenched.

For the first four months of this year, he said, 1,380 workers, or an average of 345 workers a month, were reported to be retrenched.

"More job opportunities are being created slowly.

"However, with the workforce targetted to increase at the rate of 2.97 per cent this year, competition for limited job opportunities is expected to increase further," Datuk Lee said.

On labour costs, Datuk Lee said Malaysia was no longer competitive and in the face of increasing protectionism, it would find it difficult to compete in the world market.

He said that Malaysia had to compete not only with newly industrialised coun-

tries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore but also with developing countries like China, India and Thailand where wages for skilled and semi-skilled labour were much lower.

The Minister said the wages of South Korea and Taiwan were almost the same as Malaysia's, but their workers' productivity was much higher.

"With keen competition, only those whose cost of

production is competitive and those who have aggressive marketing strategy will be able to penetrate the market that is becoming more sophisticated," Datuk Lee said.

He said for Malaysia to compete in an ever-changing world, efforts to increase productivity, training and retraining should be intensified.

He said attention should also be directed towards the prevention of industrial ac-

cidents and occupational diseases.

"With the growth of the manufacturing sector as envisaged in the Industrial Master Plan 1986-1995, industrial safety should be given more emphasis.

"The high rate of industrial accidents especially in the Klang Valley, Province Wellesley and the Johore Baru areas could be reduced if both managements and workers given due emphasis on work safety," he said.

The Labour Minister said the Government would continue to uphold the principle of tripartite co-operation on labour matters.

He called on employers and workers to face the current economic situation "with a common spirit".

"We should all be aware that the atmosphere that is needed for economic recovery will be lost if we do not uphold industrial peace," he said.

MTUC president Zainal Rampak in his message said more than 100,000 people had lost their jobs because their "employers have

grossly failed in their fundamental responsibility" of caring for the workers.

In the present depressed economy, Encik Rampak said, this year's theme — *Progressive Labour Policy for Economic Recovery* — appropriately emphasised the need for an equitable and well-defined labour policy to speed up the economic recovery.

"It is common knowledge that the quality and the rate of economic performance is directly proportionate to the clarity and justice enshrined in the various policies governing labour," he said.

He said the Government could not run away from the reality of the situation which had opened a "Pandora's box of socially poisonous contents" such as occupational accidents, victimisation of workers, ad-hoc retrenchments, unwarranted dismissals and lay-offs.

Despite the Government's repeated assurances that all was well and that investments were pouring in, he said the actual conditions appeared to be otherwise, with the shutting down of factories, supermarkets, trading companies and retail outlets.

"The depressed economy, is real and is here to stay for quite sometime causing irreparable harm and misery," Encik Zainal said.

He also said that organised labour must not play second fiddle to government policies but should state its stand clearly and boldly.

"We have to maintain a strong and neutral position in our objectives and functions to be recognised as a clear-thinking, independent entity capable of constructive action for the betterment of the people" he said.