

# PM takes- to task critics of policy

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By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

CRITICS of the privatization policy were taken to task by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday for their lack of faith in the Government.

He said the Klang Container Terminal (KCT) is ample proof that the policy, like other government policies, is in the interest of the people and the economy.

Since it was privatized in 1986, the company has churned out better turnover. Its workers have also benefited from better salaries as a result of the recent signing of its first collective agreement with the union, the Port Authority Staff Union (Pasu), he added.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Pasu leadership has even sent him a letter to propose that the Government privatize the entire Port Klang Authority (LPK) at one go instead of privatizing it operation by operation.

"Even the union is now fully aware of the benefits of privatization to the workers," he added.

The Prime Minister was addressing a gathering of some 400 government officers and public sector trade unions leaders at Saujana, the Johore Menteri Besar's residence, in conjunction with tomorrow's by-election for the Johore Baru parliamentary seat.

The KCT, which was LPK's only container terminal before the privatization, was the first operation privatized under the Government's privatization programme for ports. A feasibility study on the privatization of LPK is now ready and Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is expected to make an announcement at the port's silver jubilee celebrations next month.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Government is confident privatization will also benefit the public sector.

With the number of government servants reduced through the exercise, the Government will be in better position

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to improve the well-being of workers in the public sector. "As long as the number of civil servants are not reduced, the Government will not be in a position to consider higher salaries for its employees," he added.

The Prime Minister said it is wrong to compare the Government's privatization policy with similar policies carried out by governments of other nations.

In the UK, for example, privatization is carried out almost unilaterally. "The (Malaysian) Government makes sure the workers do not lose out in any way. They have an option, in the first place, to remain under the Government's pay scheme even when an operation has been privatized," he added.

The Government has proposed to privatize, among other operations, the National Electricity Board, the Malayan Railway and the postal service. In every case, the respective trade unions have voiced objection.

Earlier, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir explained that the Government has given many incentives to the private sector because it is aware that the sector is its major source of revenue.

The larger the private sector grows, the more revenue will be channelled to the Government to pay salaries and carry out development projects, he added.

On civil servants pay adjustment claims, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he will not make promises. The Government wants to see its employees get their salary revision, but will not strain its financial position to do so.