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MAHATHIR-LABOUR

KUALA LUMPUR, JUNE 3 (BERNAMA) -- THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT INVOLVED IN ANY MOVE TO FORM A NEW LABOUR CENTRE TO REPRESENT TRADE UNIONS IN THE COUNTRY, PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMED SAID TODAY.

HE SAID IT WAS TOTALLY UP TO THE WORKERS TO DECIDE IF THEY WANTED ANOTHER CENTRE OTHER THAN THE MALAYSIAN TRADES UNION CONGRESS (MTUC) AND THE GOVERNMENT HAD NO RIGHT TO STOP THEM FROM REGISTERING A NEW BODY.

ASKED IF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SUPPORT THE FORMATION OF THE PROPOSED MALAYSIAN LABOUR ORGANISATION (MLO), HE SAID: +IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF SUPPORTING (IT). WE HAVE NO REASON TO STOP THE REGISTRATION OF ANY LABOUR CENTRE IF THAT IS WHAT THE WORKERS WANT ... THIS IS OUR STAND.+

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS UMNO PRESIDENT, WAS SPEAKING TO REPORTERS AFTER CHAIRING A PARTY SUPREME COUNCIL MEETING LASTING MORE THAN THREE HOURS AT MENARA DATUK ONN IN THE PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE HERE.

ASKED IF THE ORGANISERS OF THE MLO HAD TAKEN A +CUE+ FROM HIS EARLIER STATEMENT THAT THE MTUC SHOULD NOT BE MADE A POLITICAL TOOL, THE PRIME MINISTER REPLIED THAT IT WAS UP TO THEM TO INTERPRET HIS STATEMENT. -- MORE
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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HE HAD STATED THAT AS LONG AS OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS DOMINATED THE MTUC, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD REGARD IT AS PART OF THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION AS ITS OPINIONS WERE NO DIFFERENCE FROM THOSE OF AN OPPOSITION PARTY.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE HAD AGREED TO MEET MTUC PRESIDENT ENCIK ZAINAL RAMPAK AFTER RECEIVING A LETTER TWO DAYS AGO FROM ENCIK ZAINAL REQUESTING A MEETING TO DISCUSS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT.

ASKED IF MTUC SECRETARY-GENERAL V. DAVID COULD ALSO ATTEND THE MEETING, THE DATE OF WHICH WOULD BE DECIDED BY THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRIVATE SECRETARY, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THERE WAS NO PROBLEM FOR HIM TO DO SO.

+I WILL TELL HIM THAT IF THE MTUC IS LED BY OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS THEN I WILL REGARD THEM AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY, THAT IS ALL. I DON'T THINK THEY REPRESENT THE WORKERS AT ALL,+ HE ADDED.

HE SAID HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HOW WORKERS COULD BE REPRESENTED BY A LEADER WHO HAD WORKED ACTIVELY FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE GENERALISED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES (GSP), WHICH WOULD HAVE COST THE WORKERS THEIR JOBS. -- MORE
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+IF THAT IS REGARDED AS WORKING FOR THE WORKERS, THEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND,+ HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID ENCIK DAVID WAS STILL ACTIVELY WORKING FOR THE UNITED STATES TO WITHDRAW THE GSP, BASED ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND THE MTUC WAS SUPPORTING HIM IN THIS.

HE REITERATED THAT IF THE GSP PRIVILEGES WERE WITHDRAWN, ABOUT 70 FACTORIES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS WOULD HAVE TO CLOSE DOWN, RESULTING IN SOME 80,000 PEOPLE LOSING THEIR JOBS.

WHEN A REPORTER SUGGESTED THAT IF THE GSP WERE WITHDRAWN, ONLY THE PROFITS WOULD BE REDUCED, THE PRIME MINISTER LAUGHED AND SAID: +IF PROFITS ARE REDUCED, THEN PEOPLE WILL SHUT THEIR FACTORIES AND GO ELSEWHERE. NOW WE ARE COMPETING WITH THAILAND, INDONESIA, MALDIVES ETC.+ -- MORE

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ON WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RECOGNISE THE MLO, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID IF IT WAS REGISTERED, THERE WAS NO WAY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO SAY THAT IT DID NOT EXIST.

ASKED IF HE FELT THAT THE FORMATION OF ANOTHER APEX LABOUR ORGANISATION WOULD SPLIT THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN THE COUNTRY, HE SAID IT WAS UP TO THE WORKERS TO DECIDE WHAT WAS GOOD FOR THEM.

+IF THEY WANT TO BE REPRESENTED BY A POLITICAL PARTY AND CONSIDER THEMSELVES A POLITICAL PARTY, THEN WE WILL TREAT THEM AS A POLITICAL PARTY,+ HE SAID.

+MAYBE ONE DAY IF THERE IS A LABOUR GOVERNMENT IN THIS COUNTRY, THEN THEY WILL BE TREATED AS A SUPPORTER OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT AT THE MOMENT WE ARE NOT A LABOUR GOVERNMENT.+

THE MLO IS BEING ORGANISED BY THE NATIONAL UNION OF BANK EMPLOYEES (NUBE) WHICH SAID THE PROPOSED BODY WOULD BE FREE FROM INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS.

THE NUBE HAD SAID TRADE UNIONS SUPPORTING THE FORMATION OF THE MLO WOULD HOLD THEIR INAUGURAL MEETING ON JUNE 12 TO ELECT PRO-TEM COMMITTEE MEMBERS. -- BERNAMA

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