

PM: Let's not be obsessed with NIC status'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned of the pressure that will be brought to bear on this country if and when it becomes a newly industrialised country (NIC).

The Prime Minister said if Malaysia achieved NIC status, it was very likely that it would be pressured (by the industrialised countries) to the point that it might collapse.

"Our efforts to raise our heads high will be futile because everytime we try to do so, we will

only be pushed down."

Opening the three-day Malay Technical Services-Union triennial delegates' conference here, the Prime Minister said that was why the Government did not profess to turn Malaysia into an NIC.

Dr Mahathir said despite their verbal encouragement to developing countries to progress, the developed nations would force them to do things that would reduce their competitiveness, such as:

- pushing their exchange rates up so that they would not

be able to compete in the open market; and,

- reducing exports and removing incentives given to industries.

"The NIC is a popular catchword used by economists, trade unionists, Government officials and journalists to give the impression that Malaysia can achieve the same standards as Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore.

"But let us not get obsessed with it because becoming an NIC could bring about major problems."

Dr Mahathir said it did not matter if Malaysia did not achieve NIC status as long as the people lived comfortably and peacefully.

He also said unemployment — despite many job advertisements in the newspapers — was still a problem because Malaysians were too choosy about the kind of work they wanted or where they wanted to work.

He said many people were not willing to leave their kampongs to look for work because they believed that such work was not suitable for them.

"If Malaysians are not willing to work, the country's economy will not grow, and in the end the workers will suffer. It is important for workers to orientate themselves with the climate of change."

Dr Mahathir said as the economy moved rapidly towards industrialisation, there was more need for highly-skilled workers in the engineering, technical and management fields.

He said the education system

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has adapted to this need and the Government would step up efforts to produce more such works.

Calling for more participation from the private sector, he said regulations like Bumiputera capital equity and preference for local workers have been relaxed to attract more investments — a strategy that provided the impetus for the economy while creating more job opportunities to eradicate poverty.

He said this premise might be thought as having nothing to do with job opportunities or income for workers in the public sector, but indirectly it had a close bearing.

"If there is no economic growth, the Government will find it difficult to finance its big machinery."

Dr Mahathir said despite the different views on issues affecting civil servants, the public sector trade unions have co-operated with the Government to settle the issues.

He said such co-operation would lead to better mutual benefits and advised them to refrain from adopting a confrontational stand.

"We hope public sector trade unions will adopt a give-and-take attitude in any negotiations."

Dr Mahathir also said moves like privatisation and the freeze on new jobs had to be taken to control Government expenditure.