

PM: Government will meet needs of workers

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The Prime Minister has assured workers that the Government will always be sensitive to their needs and problems.

In his Labour Day message, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government was not only prepared to hold discussions with trade unionists but had also settled many problems faced by workers.

"The close relationship between trade unions and employers, whether in the public or private sector, must continue to be enhanced.

"Such harmony will stand to benefit workers in the long run, which is better than short-term gains that are not lasting."

Dr Mahathir said workers, the Government and employers were friends and had their respective roles and responsibilities in nation building.

"In this context, the Government appreciates the role played by trade unions.

"The positive attitudes and qualities of workers in this country clearly reflect their ability to face current challenges."

He said Malaysia was fortunate to have workers who were willing to co-operate and negotiate with their employers and the Government in solving problems.

This had resulted in an atmosphere conducive for rapid economic growth which would always benefit workers.

Dr Mahathir said workers in poor and backward countries could not hope to live more happily than their counterparts in nations which were developed, had stable working conditions and strong economies.

In PARIT BUNTAR, Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba urged workers and employers to settle their disputes amicably without allowing them to be politicised by the trade unions.

Best parts

He said that the interest of workers will always be protected by the Government as seen in the recent amendments to the labour laws.

"The Government respects the labour movement and this is why tomorrow (Labour Day) is a holiday.

"The recent amendments were made after the labour laws of Singapore, Japan, United Kingdom and the US were scrutinised and we adopted the best parts.

"There shouldn't be any more complaints from our workers," he told reporters at a meet-the-people

gathering in Nibong Tebal near here today.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek, in his Labour Day message, reminded employers and workers to negotiate wage increases this year with "caution and wisdom" to maintain the country's competitive edge in encouraging foreign investments.

"Whether we attract more investments to the country depends very much on wage settlements this year," he said.

This was because foreign investors looked for countries which have competitive wage rates besides higher productivity, he added.

In this respect, he called for wage settlements in the form of higher bonuses and gain-sharing rather than "locking in high increases into the basic wage."

Increased foreign investments, compounded by prudent fiscal policy measures by the Government, he said, had led to the country's economic growth rate of 8.3 per cent in 1989 and expected this trend to continue this year.

In line with the economic growth, he said employment in 1989 grew by 3.4 per cent to create about 210,000 jobs mainly in the services and manufacturing sectors.

"This continued growth is expect-

ed to reduce the unemployment rate to slightly over seven per cent this year."

Besides competitive wage rates, he said the local labour force must be more productive than other countries to attract "our share of investments."

"And the major challenge in the 1990s lies in our ability to produce and provide better quality goods and services."

This, however, could only be achieved with better management techniques and a better trained workforce.

Corporate plan

In improving the quality of the workforce, he called on the employers to make programmes on re-training and upgrading skills of the workforce an integral part of the corporate plan.

"Upgrading of the human capital asset will ultimately enhance not only the current comparative advantage of our products, but will also assist to enlarge our share in the world market."

He also said the trade union movement in the last 30 years had contributed "significantly" to workers' welfare and improved "considerably" labour-management relations.