

Dr M: We will clarify labour stand with US

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Malaysia will explain to the US Government the labour conditions in the country so that the trade privileges accorded to Malaysia under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) will not be withdrawn.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said pressure groups urging the withdrawal of the GSP had their own interests and did not take into consideration such factors as bi-lateral relations and friendship between two countries.

"Their views are narrow ... their attention is solely focussed on one thing, that workers in Malaysia do not have rights," he told newsmen after reviewing a full-dress rehearsal for the opening of the G 15 Summit conference at the banquet hall of Parliament House.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the move by the International Labour Rights and Education Research Fund (ILRERF) to petition the US Government on May 31 to withdraw trade privileges accorded to Malaysia.

ILRERF general counsel Terry Collingsworth said yesterday Malaysia stood a "good chance" of losing trade privileges accorded by the US Government if electronic workers did not have the right to form a national union.

Dr Mahathir said there were many countries where workers did not enjoy any rights and asked the pressure groups to state their stand.

"I want to know what kind of ac-

tion they want taken against South Africa and those countries which do not accord any rights to their workers.

"Do they try to pressure the US Government to break ties with these countries?"

Dr Mahathir said because Malaysia was liberal and accepted them, they threatened the Government.

What was unfortunate, he said, was that there were some groups in the country which were supporting these groups.

"They are supporting people who are threatening their own country ... (this) will indirectly obstruct our freedom. We will no longer be an independent nation, but one which is forced to bow to others."

Dr Mahathir said policies were formulated according to the conditions prevailing in the country.

Malaysia accorded more rights to its workers than many developed countries when they were at the same level of development the country now experienced.

"Our aim is not to oppress workers but to protect them. There is no point having the freedom to act and form unions if workers do not have jobs.

"The main consideration is jobs. If we have too much industrial unrest, many people who now have jobs will be unemployed and those not working will lose the opportunity to secure employment."

Dr Mahathir said the way to resolve differences was not through

confrontation or test of wills, which was now out-moded.

Resorting to such actions, he said, would only affect the economic growth.

It was the Government's wish to distribute the country's wealth fairly and in order to fulfill this, it could not place emphasis on any one group.

The role of workers in nation-building, Dr Mahathir said, was important, but it must also be admitted that there would not be workers without investment.

He said the Government would continue to give priority to workers' interests without adversely affecting the economy.

In Penang today, Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu said the labour movement's desire to unionise the 100,000 electronics workers in the country should be seen in the context of national interests.

Dr Lim said electronics workers now worked in environments which were highly advanced and their work situation could not be compared with, say, the estate workers.

"Ultimately the workers themselves have the right to decide whether they wish to unionise," he said of the move by the ILRERF to file a petition to have Malaysia's GSP status withdrawn.

Dr Lim said he did not know why the media was giving so much publicity to Mr Collingsworth's visit to Malaysia.

"In the United States, nobody knows him (Mr Collingsworth)."