

# MTUC doesn't care, says PM

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By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he will not be surprised if Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) leaders decide next year or in future to help their "international brotherhood" remove Malaysia from the US Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) list.

"There are some MTUC leaders who are fighting for workers in America and not for workers in this country. They don't really care if Malaysian workers become jobless as a result of the GSP being withdrawn," he told reporters after launching Teachers Day in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He was commenting on the MTUC's open support for petitions to the US Government filed by the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) and the International Labour Rights, Education and Research Fund (ILRERF) seeking to remove Malaysia from the GSP list. Two other petitions on Malaysia reached the office of the US Trade Representative in

Washington on June 1, one jointly submitted by Oil-dri Corp of America and the USA Poultry and Egg Export Council and the other by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

In their petitions, the five charged the Malaysian Government with violating workers' rights.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir declined to identify the MTUC leaders he was referring to, saying that "people know who they are". MTUC secretary general V. David and deputy president Ahmad Nor were reported to have pledged support for the withdrawal of Malaysia's GSP. They said they took this stand to press the Government to afford internationally-recognised labour standards, including the right to form a national union in the electronics industry.

The Prime Minister pointed out: "It's not the question of unionisation in the electronics industry. It is clear from the

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fourth petition (by the IBEW) that the question of unionisation is just an excuse to deny Malaysia the trade benefits.

"The objective of these labour bodies is to protect their own members. Some 30,000 American workers were affected as a result of the failure of their companies to compete against Malaysian products exported under the GSP. If they succeed in withdrawing the GSP privileges of Malaysia, American companies here will be forced to relocate in the US and this will provide employment for their members.

"And what the MTUC is doing is to help these organisations achieve this objective. These MTUC leaders don't care about companies in Malaysia closing down or workers losing their jobs," he said.

On a proposal that he meet US President George Bush to discuss the GSP issue, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he has no such plans at the moment but will consider it favourably if there is an opportunity to meet Mr Bush.

In its petition, the IBEW claimed that 30,000 jobs in the US telecommunications products industry had been lost due to imports of cheaper products under the GSP. It alleged that Malaysia resorts to "unfair competition practices" by denying basic rights to its workers and urged the US Government to remove imports of consumer electronics, semiconductors and high-definition TV from the GSP list.

Malaysia exported close to \$2 billion worth of electronics and electrical items, cocoa and cocoa products and palm oil and its derivatives to the US under its GSP last year.

In his address to more than 1,000 teachers attending the Teachers Day celebration, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the key to a better and more successful society lies in the ability of the younger generation to absorb life's better values. He urged teachers to play a major role in inculcating such values.