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R E832 AAE

MAHATHIR-GSP

(EMBARGO: FOR RELEASE AT 10.30 PM, JULY 9)

BM

KUALA LUMPUR, JULY 9 (BERNAMA) -- THE GOVERNMENT IS GIVING ATTENTION TO THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWAL OF MALAYSIA'S TRADE PRIVILEGES UNDER THE UNITED STATES' GENERALISED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES (GSP) BECAUSE IT VALUES THE INTERESTS OF WORKERS IN THE COUNTRY, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TONIGHT.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THERE WAS A POSSIBILITY OF 130,000 PEOPLE LOSING THEIR JOBS IF THE PRIVILEGES NOW ENJOYED BY MALAYSIA WERE WITHDRAWN.

THE NUMBER MIGHT BE SMALL IN COMPARISON TO THE FIVE MILLION WORKERS IN THE COUNTRY BUT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT DISREGARD THEIR INTERESTS, HE SAID IN THE +ISU SEMASA+ (CURRENT ISSUES) PROGRAMME OVER RTM.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT THOUGH THE GSP PRIVILEGES WERE CONFINED TO A SMALL SECTOR THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT IGNORE THEM BECAUSE THE COUNTRY'S EXPORT SECTOR WAS INVOLVED.

HE ADDED: +MALAYSIA DEPENDS ON EXPORTS AND WE CANNOT IGNORE THE EXPORT SECTOR, ALTHOUGH IT IS SMALL.

+SO, IF WE SAY THIS SECTOR IS NOT IMPORTANT... WE WILL IGNORE IT, AND THERE WILL BE OTHER SMALL SECTORS WHICH WILL ALSO BE CONSIDERED INSIGNIFICANT. BUT IF WE ADD UP, THIS WILL BECOME A LARGE SECTOR WHICH PUTS PRESSURE ON OUR WORKERS. -- MORE

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+IT IS BECAUSE WE WISH TO SAFEGUARD OUR WORKERS THAT WE HAVE PLACED SUCH GREAT IMPORTANCE ON THE QUESTION OF THE GSP.+

ASKED WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT OR DID NOT INTEND TO ACT AGAINST CERTAIN GROUPS IN THE COUNTRY WHICH CONNIVED IN THE EFFORTS TO HAVE THE GSP PRIVILEGES WITHDRAWN, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE GOVERNMENT FELT THAT IT WAS NOT NECESSARY TO ACT AGAINST THE GROUPS BUT IT WOULD EXPLAIN THE SITUATION FOR THE PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR ACTIONS.

HE SAID THE GROUPS ASSUMED THAT THEY COULD INTIMIDATE THE GOVERNMENT TO BOW TO THEIR WISHES.

+THEY THOUGHT THAT THE LOSERS WILL BE THE EMPLOYERS, FACTORY-OWNERS, BUT THEY DID NOT REALISE THAT WORKERS WILL ALSO LOSE OUT,+ HE ADDED.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL QUARTERS, EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS, BECAUSE IF THERE WERE NO EMPLOYERS THERE WOULD BE NO WORKERS.

HE ALSO SAID THAT IF IN THE PAST THE PEOPLE HAD GIVEN LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE QUESTION OF THE GSP, THEY NOW UNDERSTOOD THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE PRIVILEGES WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT WORKERS AND THE COUNTRY.

HE SAID THE EXPLANATION BY THE GOVERNMENT HAD SMEARED THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GROUPS WHICH AT FIRST URGED FOREIGNERS TO DEMAND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE GSP PRIVILEGES BUT NOW EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS TO RETAIN THEM. -- MORE

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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR EXPLAINED THAT CERTAIN QUARTERS IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES HAD NO SYMPATHY FOR WORKERS IN MALAYSIA. HE SAID THEY WERE KEEN ON INCITING WORKERS TO GO ON STRIKE TO RAISE THE COST OF GOODS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WITH THE INTENTION OF ELIMINATING COMPETITION FOR GOODS THEY THEMSELVES PRODUCED.

HE SAID: +IN THE PAST, BEFORE WE WERE ABLE TO COMPETE WITH THEM, THEY DID NOT AT ALL SHOW ANY SYMPATHY FOR OUR WORKERS. THEY WERE NOT AT ALL BOTHERED IF WE WERE EXPLOITED, UNEMPLOYED OR DISILLUSIONED.

+BUT WHEN WE ARE ABLE, LIKE SOUTH KOREA, TO COMPETE WITH THEM, THEN THEY BEGIN TO SHOW THAT THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE TOWARDS WORKERS.

+THEREFORE, THEY SHOW THEIR SYMPATHY FOR WORKERS SOLELY FOR THEIR OWN INTERESTS, AND NOT IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKERS HERE.+

THE PRIME MINISTER URGED ALL QUARTERS, INCLUDING THE MASS MEDIA, TO EXPLAIN THE REAL INTENTION OF THE EFFORTS BY WESTERN COUNTRIES TO CHAMPION HUMAN AND WORKERS' RIGHTS.

HE SAID THE EXPLANATION OF THE MATTER TO WORKERS MUST BE DONE OPENLY BECAUSE CERTAIN LEADERS OF TRADE UNIONS WHO HAD VESTED POLITICAL INTERESTS WOULD SURELY NOT RELATE THE ACTUAL SITUATION.

ON CLAIMS BY CERTAIN QUARTERS THAT THE COUNTRY'S LAWS EXPLOITED WORKERS, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID UNION LEADERS MADE THE ALLEGATIONS TO OBTAIN THE SYMPATHY OF FOREIGNERS AND TO PORTRAY THEMSELVES AS THE CHAMPIONS OF WORKERS. -- MORE

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MAHATHIR-GSP 4 KUALA LUMPUR

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT GAVE TRADE UNIONS FULL FREEDOM BUT IT ALSO HAD TO ENSURE THAT WORKERS DID NOT ABUSE THE POWERS TO DESTROY THEMSELVES.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE GOVERNMENT WANTED WORKERS TO EARN HIGH SALARIES AND HELP TO DEVELOP THE NATION'S ECONOMY.

HE ADDED: +BUT IF WE WANT HIGH SALARIES, AND BECAUSE OF OUR DEMANDS, WE WILL NO LONGER BE COMPETITIVE... WE WILL BE UNABLE TO SELL OUR GOODS AND THE HIGH SALARIES WILL BE SHORTLIVED.

+IN THE END, THE COMPANY WILL CLOSE DOWN AND WE WILL LOSE OUR JOBS. IT IS BECAUSE OF THIS THAT WE ASK FOR EVERYTHING TO BE DONE IN MODERATION.+

ON IN-HOUSE UNIONS, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID: +ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE TENS OF COMPANIES IN ONE FIELD OF BUSINESS, NOT ALL CAN BE SUCCESSFUL OR RAKE IN SIMILAR PROFITS.

+IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT THEY PAY SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES TO THEIR WORKERS ACCORDING TO THEIR CAPACITY. THE WORKERS KNOW THAT SHOULD THEY CAUSE TROUBLE, THEY WILL ALL BE LOSERS.+

AS FOR INDUSTRY-WIDE UNIONS, HE SAID THAT WHEN THERE WAS A DEMAND FOR HIGHER SALARIES THE COMPANIES WHICH COULD NOT AFFORD TO MEET THE ADDITIONAL EXPENDITURE WOULD BE FORCED TO CLOSE DOWN. --

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