

'INTENTIONS MUST BE FULLY EXPOSED'

Groups want to curb progress

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said attempts to withdraw Malaysia's US Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and to classify it as a newly-industrialised country (NIC) are both meant to stop the country's progress towards becoming another Asian economic powerhouse.

He believes they are made because Malaysia has been increasingly capable of competing efficiently with the economies of the advanced nations.

In an interview with Isu Semasa, telecast over Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) last night, the Prime Minister said the intentions of these groups must be fully exposed.

RTM news and current affairs director Zahari Saad, Utusan Melayu group editor Zainuddin Maidin and Shin Min Daily News editor Cheng Song Huat conducted the interview.

He said the groups seeking the withdrawal of Malaysia's GSP do it not out of sympathy for the workers but to safeguard the interest of certain quarters in the US.

"When Malaysia was not capable of competing with US companies, these labour groups took no interest whatsoever and did not care if the Malaysian Government suppressed workers or provided them with employment," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

"But when Malaysia began to compete effectively with their goods, these groups appeared from nowhere to claim to be champions of our workers. They know they can do nothing to improve their efficiency to compete with Malaysian goods, so they try to achieve the objective by another way — by inciting local workers to go on industrial strike or demand higher wages. The aim

is to push production costs in Malaysia up so that US goods can compete with Malaysian goods."

The Prime Minister said contrary to the claims made by these labour bodies, the trade union movement in the country enjoys a lot of freedom. But workers must be careful not to abuse the freedom and power that exist. In South Korea, for example, labour freedom was used to demand higher wages and conduct industrial strikes, resulting in severe losses to companies, the economy and the workers.

On NICs, he said the Group of Seven (G-7) nations unilaterally classify a country as such to slow down the advancement of Asian economies. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong were categorised as NICs without their consent.

As NICs, they were forced to increase their currencies, result-

ing in higher costs; to give up their GSP benefits; to adhere to quotas that limit their exports and, thus, their earnings; to be subjects of scrutiny on human rights matters; and of scrutiny on labour rights and freedom.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the five conditions will slow down the progress of these nations or even stop them from becoming another economic powerhouse like Japan.

"Japan became an industrialised nation because the West had not invented a way to stop its progress then. Today, they have invented a way to stop the rise of Asian powerhouses. We must oppose this by exposing their real intentions for wanting to classify us as NICs," he added.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is not trying to run away from the fact that it is an advanced economy if indeed it has reached that stage.

"But we question the right of these advanced nations to classify us without even asking for our opinions. Why not ask us and discuss with us what should be the conditions of NICs and what should be imposed on the NICs. What they're doing is unilateral — seven advanced nations imposing these conditions to safeguard their own interests," he said.

The Prime Minister said he doubts that the G-7 will categorise Eastern Europe countries as NICs. "They are not advanced economies, but are the US and Europe going to classify them as NICs? I don't see this happening. In fact, they are going to help the East European nations as West Germany is helping East Germany."