

# US firms helped explain situation

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# PM hails decision on GSP privileges

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By Ahmad A. Talib

SEREMBAN, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad thanked the US Government for retaining Malaysia's privileges under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), saying that the decision assured the continued employment of thousands of Malaysian workers.

The Prime Minister said the decision was also a testimony to the country's labour laws which were not oppressive as claimed by a few local trade unionists who are also opposition politicians.

Dr Mahathir said this at a Press conference at the end of his one-day visit to the town. He was asked to comment on the decision by the United States Trade Representative's (USTR)

office to reject three petitions from American lobby groups to withdraw Malaysia's GSP privileges.

The USTR had received petitions from the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO), the International Labour Rights Education and Research Fund and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers seeking the removal of the privileges.

An earlier petition was withdrawn when its joint sponsors — the Oil-Dri Corp and the USA Poultry and Egg Export Council — decided that the grounds for submitting the petition were unfounded. The sponsors claimed that Malaysia was imposing restrictive trade barriers.

Dr Mahathir said the de-

cision was sufficient proof that Malaysian workers have no problem in carrying out their duties, and that the nation's labour laws did not restrict or undermine their trade union functions.

He said the retention of the GSP status was made after "fair consideration" following official representation by qualified personnel.

Dr Mahathir said the US Government should now realise that the question of denying Malaysian workers their rights did not arise because there was adequate protection for them against unscrupulous employers.

He said that American investors in the country

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had also helped persuade the USTR to make the decision. They have helped in explaining the actual labour situation to the American authorities.

Asked whether the Government now planned to introduce legislation stopping dubious trade union leaders from making unfair representations on local industrial relations issues to their international federations, the Prime Minister said that this had not crossed the Government's mind.

Instead, the Government would now explain the decision to Malaysian workers and the significance of such a decision for the workers' welfare and the nation's economy, Dr Mahathir said.

He said these labour leaders were more interested in promoting their political interests using the trade union movement to further their objectives.

Asked whether the USTR's decision was the result of a compromise worked behind the scenes, the Prime Minister said that this was not so. The USTR decided to retain the privileges because it was satisfied with the case presented by Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the status of Prof Syed Hussein Al-attas. As far as he was aware, the University of Malaya Vice-Chancellor was on long leave.

He said he was unaware if Prof Syed Hussein intended to leave his post, but said the Government would not stop the move if it was genuine.

On the request for Malaysian troops by the Saudi Arabian envoy who met the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Azlan Shah yesterday, Dr Mahathir said a decision on this had not yet been made.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir addressed Barisan Nasional supporters and party workers at the Seremban Town Hall. MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik also addressed the crowd.