

PM: Malaysia can't depend on concessions

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SUNGAI PETANI, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed reminded workers today that Malaysia cannot afford to depend on concessions like the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) accorded by the United States to step up exports.

The Prime Minister said the only way to ensure that exports of Malaysian manufactured goods continued to increase was for workers to produce quality goods at minimum costs.

Such a competitive edge will enable Malaysian goods to be steps ahead of other nations, he told representatives of workers and management personnel of 47 companies at a gathering at Toyobo Textiles at Bakar Arang industrial estate here.

Just as the US accorded privileges under the GSP, it could also withdraw them, Dr Mahathir said, adding that the latest and recent link to the GSP by certain quarters was over the country's policy of not

accepting Vietnamese illegal immigrants.

He said the GSP had enabled Malaysia and neighbouring Thailand and Indonesia to export large quantities of goods to the US.

"Even if the GSP is withdrawn one day, we must ensure that our exports are not affected.

"The best way to ensure this is for our workers to increase productivity and at the same time reduce costs."

Dr Mahathir, who arrived this morning for a two-day visit to Kedah, said the Government's industrialisation programme of attracting foreign investors was to generate as much employment opportunities as possible for the increasing workforce.

Workers must, therefore, play their part in ensuring that the investors remain while the Government continues to attract many others.

They could do so not only

by stepping up productivity, he said, but by preserving industrial harmony.

He said increased productivity was bound to lead to higher wages as employers would be making more profits.

Dr Mahathir reminded the workers that foreign investors were here because they wanted to make profits.

The Government did not mind this as long as the investors treated the workers fairly and the ultimate aim of reaching full employment was reached.

He said Malaysian workers had proven that they could acquire skills which was vital to ensure that Malaysia becomes industrialised like the Europeans and other developed nations.

Later, addressing a mammoth gathering of Barisan Nasional members and supporters, Dr Mahathir said the 50 per cent increase in padi subsidy for farmers will be backdated

to Jul instead of being effective from Aug 16 — a move which will benefit those who had harvested their crops earlier.

He said the backdating would benefit more farmers.

At a Press conference later, he said after his announcement of the 50 per cent increase on Aug 16 which took effect immediately, he had received a request from Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Haji Osman Aroff to backdate the implementation.

He said this was because some of the padi farmers had harvested their crops from the beginning of July.

Datuk Seri Osman had said earlier this week that some 30 per cent of the 63,000 farmers in the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) region had harvested their crops before Aug 16.

Under the scheme, farmers will receive a subsidy of \$24.61 for every 100kg compared with the previous rate of \$16.64 per 100kg.