

PM: Improved living standards for workers the aim

By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

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MALAYSIAN workers in the year 2020 will lead a more comfortable life, live in better houses, buy home furniture that now only the middle class people can afford, own cars and can afford to take vacations, the Prime Minister said.

Sharing his 2020 aspiration with the labour movement in an unprecedented Solidarity Assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his vision of a "developed Malaysia" is not confined only to making Malaysia "industrialised".

"The primary objective is to improve the standard of living of the people," he told some 6,500 public and private sector workers who took part in the assembly, jointly organised by the Human Resources Ministry, the three major trade union organisations and the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) to commemorate Workers Day.

Commending the organisers for their effort to get all three parties celebrate Workers Day together for the first time, the Prime Minister urged workers and employers to show the same spirit of co-operation in order to assist the Government achieve its 2020 aspiration.

"Poor nations in this region have shown us they could do it in 30 years. We only need to emulate their achievement to make it ourselves," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said to achieve the better living standards as envisaged by the year 2020, the cost of living must not increase with salary increases. Multi-fold pay rise, he added, will not mean anything if the prices of consumer goods swell as well.

In order to increase salaries without pushing up costs, every worker has to increase his productivity level. The Prime Minister said this can be achieved in several ways, including mechanisation and equipment upgrading.

"But in the final analysis, it is the worker who will determine his productivity level, whether he wants to work harder, organise better and be more disciplined," he added.

In this context, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir called on the trade union movement to review its role in championing the rights of the workers.

He also told labour leaders to be more

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wary of their counterparts in the developed countries, particularly the seemingly friendly gestures shown by some trade unions in those countries towards local trade unions.

"They want to forge close ties with the local unions not because they are sympathetic with our workers but because they wish to reduce the competition posed by products made in Malaysia on products from their own countries," he said, adding that this could be achieved by inciting local workers and encouraging local unions to make excessive demands.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said it is regretful that some local union leaders have taken the bait. The appointment of Malaysian trade union leaders to head international labour bodies and organisations, he added, is aimed at "influencing" the economy of certain developing countries. "Such appointment is not an honour."

At the same time, the Prime Minister warned employers not to take advantage of the country's industrial harmony to exploit workers by underpaying them or refusing to reward their productivity.