

R GE 11-06 00187 EB440

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GSP (News Analysis)

By Azhar Ghazali

KUALA LUMPUR, June 11 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has repeatedly warned local trade unionists not to be misled into believing that their foreign counterparts have the interests of the Malaysian workers at heart.

The foreign labour organisations are more concerned about protecting their own interests and that of the workers they represent, the Prime Minister has stressed at various labour fora.

The true colours of such organisations have once again been exposed by the fresh effort by the US-based International Labour Rights Education and Research Fund (ILRERF) to press for the withdrawal of Malaysia's privileges under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP).

GSP privileges allow the entry of certain Malaysian exports into the US market with preferential tariffs.

The ILRERF, unhappy with the alleged anti-union activities of Harris Solid State Malaysia (HSSM), an American-owned electronics company in the Ulu Klang Free Trade Zone here, has made Malaysia its target under the pretext of championing workers' rights, instead of attacking its kith and kin. -- more

♥11/06/15-21MST

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GSP 2 Kuala Lumpur (News Analysis)

If the American organisation is out to find supporters for its petition in Malaysia this time around, it is obviously pushing its luck too far. Even the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC), a strong critic of the government and linked to previous GSP petitions, says the issue was misused to penalise Malaysia.

Its president, Encik Zainal Rampak, said the ILRERF was +barking up the wrong tree+.

Calling for the petition to be withdrawn, Encik Zainal told a press conference yesterday that the government should not be penalised for the +anti-union+ tactics of the HSSM which should take the rap instead.

The ILRERF, in its petition, included a letter written by the MTUC to the International Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU) which highlighted the alleged victimisation of 23 HSSM union leaders and activists. The letter was described by the ILRERF as +new information+ to back its claims after its first such petition last year was rejected by the US government.

The MTUC was stunned to learn that its letter to the ICFTU was being used as a weapon to attack Malaysia, saying that this was done without its knowledge. -- more

♥11/06/15-22MST

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GSP 3 Kuala Lumpur (News Analysis)

Petitions against Malaysia in 1988 and 1990 had been linked to the policy on unionisation for electronics workers. The government allowed the formation of only in-house unions for the electronics workers in view of the sensitivity of the industry.

It is a fact that US multinational companies operating overseas are against the formation of workers' unions but ironically, American labour organisations have not been known to be going after them for their anti-union posture.

The HSSM Workers Union (HSSMWU), formerly known as RCA Workers Union, was registered on Jan 31, 1989, as the first union in the electronics industry in Malaysia.

As expected, it did not go down well with the management for since its inception, the union had complained to the Human Resources Ministry of various forms of harassment and victimisation by the company.

In November 1989, RCA changed its name to HSSM following the change in name of the company which forced the union to also change its name through secret ballot. During the exercise, the union alleged harassment by the company against workers signing the ballots. -- more

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GSP 4 Kuala Lumpur (News Analysis)

In January last year, the company transferred all but 23 workers to the newly-created Harris Advanced Technology (HAT) with the 23 (comprising those actively involved in the union) being left in HSSM in a separate plant outside the FTZ.

The HSSM was subsequently closed down in September last year and the 23 lost their jobs but were given retrenchment benefits.

The Human Resources Ministry, checking into the union's complaints, found that the transfer of the workers was lawful but the dispute over the termination of services of the 23 is now pending in the Industrial Court.

Former MTUC deputy secretary-general G. Rajasekaran, who wrote the letter which the ILRERF attached to its latest petition, said the petition was +business oriented+ to serve the Americans' own interests.

+If they deny Malaysia's GSP, they (the Americans) will have better business,+ he said. Without the GSP, which is a tariff preference programme, Malaysian exports to US would cost more. -- more

♥11/06/15-24MST

CNS5711

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GSP 5 Kuala Lumpur (News Analysis)

+If they are concerned with the standard of labour rights, then go after the employers and not the country,+ said Encik Rajasekaran, who is now an MTUC general council member.

Encik Rajasekaran said making Malaysia lose the GSP status was not the answer to the problems of unionisation at the HSSM and safeguarding workers' interests. Without the GSP privileges, the companies would suffer and this would affect the livelihood of the workers.

The ILRERF should, instead, take up the question of unionisation in US multinational companies overseas to trade unions and companies in the US itself and use its resources to influence and educate the US employers to respect labour laws of other countries like Malaysia, he added.

+It is the American companies that are anti-union, why take on the country,+ he said.

According to Encik Rajasekaran, who was special adviser to the HSSMWU, the dismissed 23 workers were now making do with jobs paying less wages. -- more

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CNS5712

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GSP 6 Kuala Lumpur (News Analysis)

The former HSSMWU president, Encik Bruno Periera, was still jobless, he said.

Secretary-general of the Malaysian Labour Organisation K. Sanmugam said the ILRERF petition was aimed at hindering Malaysia's economic progress.

+The Americans are finding all ways to hinder progress in Malaysia and are looking for the slightest excuse to withdraw the GSP privileges,+ he said.

They were not helping the workers but destroying development and the ILRERF's petition was a clear indication of the American motive, he added.

In view of that, he advised Malaysian union leaders not to provide the foreigners with any +loopholes+ that they could take advantage of to deprive Malaysia of the GSP privileges.

+Malaysian unions leaders need to be more mature in the future in dealing with the foreigners,+ he said. -- Bernama

♥11/06/15-25MST