

BLUE-COLLAR REWARDS

By Zulkifli Talib

SHAH ALAM, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today the Government is looking into proposals to show more recognition to blue-collar workers.

"We are now studying how those working in the technical fields can be rewarded for their contribution to the economic development of the country," the Prime Minister said.

He said the private sector should take cognizance of any models the Government came up with for skilled and semi-skilled workers in the civil service.

Dr Mahathir said the "recognition" could be included in any new salary scheme for civil servants.

"The wages of blue-collar workers should be at least equal to, if not more than, those with degrees," he said, adding that in this era of technology, skilled work was vital.

He was speaking to reporters after presenting prizes to winners of a competition organised for skilled workers and students at the Centre for Instructor and Advanced Skill Training.

"Society should not assume that a person's job is not important just because he works with his hands.

"The value of a person's job should be viewed from the point of his contribution to the development of the economy," he said.

Earlier, the Prime Minister said in his speech that the wages of blue-collar workers must be raised to meet the nation's growing need for skilled and semi-skilled labour.

He said this was the only effective way to shed the "negative perceptions" society might have of blue-collar jobs.

"Our efforts to produce more skilled and semi-skilled workers can only succeed if we can change society's perception of blue-collar jobs.

"Parents and the youth must realise the

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Dr Mahathir

enormous contributions of blue-collar workers towards the nation's economic development.

"The objective of becoming an industrialised country depends heavily on our success in producing sufficiently a group of skilled workers in all areas,

Dr Mahathir said only management jobs should be appraised higher than blue-collar jobs.

"We feel that management is important because without efficient management, work cannot proceed," he said.

He also said that the nation could not continue to depend solely on cheap labour to provide it the competitive edge over other countries.

"This is because automation is increasingly replacing manual operations.

"Hence, a skilled workforce, especially in high-technology fields, will play an important role in ensuring that our competitive edge remains in the future," he said.