

Blue-collar workers to be paid more: PM

By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

ALL blue-collar workers will be placed on higher salary schemes than their white-collar counterparts once the Government completes a study on technical skills.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the negative conception that blue-collar jobs are of secondary importance in national development has to go if the nation is to be developed by 2020.

"And there is no better way to dispel the misconception than by paying blue-collar workers more than white-collar workers," he said.

"Managers should be the only exception; they should be placed and valued higher than the blue-collar workers because without good management, no work would be done," he said after closing a three-day national skills competition at the Centre for Instructor and Advanced Skill Training (Ciast) in Shah Alam yesterday.

In the study, salaries of blue-collar workers in both public and private sectors will be up for review. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Cabinet has given the green light for the study to be undertaken.

"In my view, their salaries should be on par, if not higher, than white-collar workers with degrees and diplomas... in

our drive for more high-technology industries in an effort to be industrialised, the roles of blue-collar workers can be more important than those of their white-collar counterparts," he added.

In his address, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the nation's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2020 hinges on how successful it is in making available technical skills and manpower for the various industries.

"Both parents and youths must recognise the importance of technical skills and blue-collar workers in economic development. We have to quash our misconceptions about blue-collar jobs," he said.

Fielding queries on labour shortages in industries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said firms must opt quickly for automation and robotics in their production lines. Automation and hi-tech industries, in turn, require highly skilled and trained personnel.

"If our workers are willing to learn and train themselves in the high technology fields, they will not only be contributing to development but will also ensure themselves better salaries," he added.

The Prime Minister, in his address, urged the private sector to invest more

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on industrial training and skills development. Their active participation and close collaboration with training institutes will ensure that demand for the various skills can be met by supply, thus eradicating the wastages resulting from labour mismatches.

"The involvement of the private sector will not only raise the effectiveness of training insti-

tutes. Ultimately, their investments in the training programmes will benefit them in the form of adequate and appropriate supply of skills for their projects and industries," he added.

On its part, the Government has set aside some \$8.5 billion under the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-95) for various industrial training and educational programmes. A number of vocation-

al schools will be upgraded to polytechnics to expedite the output of quality technical personnel for the labour market.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir urged more firms to sponsor their employees in skills competition, such as the one organised by Ciast, to promote worker interest as well as to gauge the technological and technical skills of Malaysians.