

# PM urges M'sians working abroad to come home

By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

THE Prime Minister yesterday urged Malaysians working abroad — especially in Japan, Taiwan and Singapore, — to return and take up jobs in Malaysia. There are enough employment opportunities for them here, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters after opening a \$300 million textile firm in Malacca.

"The salaries may be lower compared with what they get in Japan, for example, but they will have the benefit of greater purchasing power because our cost of living is lower compared with those countries. The pay in Japan can be 10 times higher, but you pay \$200 for a water melon and \$25 for a bowl of noodles.

"Furthermore, working in their own country, they will not be pushed around and be treated like criminals," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who made the call in his address to workers and management staff of Hualon Corp earlier, said the Government, however, will not force these workers to return. "We can only coax them."

He said the Government cannot be expected to restrict the recruitment of foreign workers if Malaysians continue to leave the country for employment elsewhere. There are more than 700,000 foreigners working in Malaysia while the number of Malaysians working abroad is "substantial".

The country, which has reached full employment, is said to have 50,000-80,000 job opportunities in the manufacturing sector alone, but the number of Malaysians leaving for employment abroad is growing.

And while a local company recently went to London to recruit Malaysian engineers working there, a group of local employment agencies plans to provide local workers to Taiwanese industries beginning next month.

Dr Mahathir said labour shortage is, indeed, a problem facing the country's industrialisation efforts. "We are yet to develop, but we already have labour shortages. Do we stop our efforts to industrialise due to this shortage? If we do, we will never be able to realise the aspiration to become developed."

This is one of the reasons the Government had to shift the emphasis from labour-intensive to capital-intensive and high-tech investments. "But while we train our workers for the high-tech jobs, I would like to urge Malaysians working abroad to return home and fill these posts."

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia will not lose if it is barred from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as a result of the instigation of several union leaders claiming there is no freedom of association in the country.

"Being out of the ILO won't hurt. But we are concerned about what the union

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leaders will do after we are out of the ILO," he added.

The Prime Minister said once Malaysia is out of the ILO, the union leaders will use it as an excuse to get international assistance from foreign trade unions to

put pressure on Malaysia.

"With their close connection with powerful unions abroad, they will call for a boycott of Malaysian goods at ports, for instance, and this means putting the nation's economy at peril.

"We know who these union leaders are, and we know their tactics," Dr Mahathir added. The Government, however, does not plan to take action against them, "only to remind workers to be wary of their motives".