

Skilled Malaysians abroad requested to return home

PM tells workers: Country needs you

By Syed Nadzri and Raslan Baharom

MALACCA, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants skilled Malaysian workers employed abroad to return to help the country as it moves rapidly towards high-technology capital-intensive industries.

These workers could earn sufficient wages at home where the cost of living was much lower, he said.

"Although the wages here might not be as high as those offered abroad, the purchasing power here is better," he said at the opening of the \$300 million Hualon Corporation Sdn Bhd textile factory in Tangga Batu near here.

Dr Mahathir, singling out those who migrate to Japan and Taiwan, said it might be true that Malaysians could earn wages 10 times higher if they worked in Japan.

"But it must be remembered that the price of a watermelon is \$200 while a

plate of noodles costs \$25.

"So what's the use of working in another country? It is most shameful to sneak into another country to work and be treated like criminals if you get caught."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was now concentrating less on labour-intensive industries by switching to high-tech capital-intensive operations.

"Hut to make a success of this, we need well-educated, qualified and technically-skilled workers.

"This means that workers here must be patient while they undergo relevant training. Hut they will not lose out as their wages will increase (once they qualify)."

He said that if Malaysians were not willing to undergo training, the Government might have to continue with labour-intensive industries, forcing it to import foreign workers.

"We cannot ask the Government to stop the intake of foreign workers if we ourselves do not value what is here and instead go abroad to work."

Dr Mahathir said he was proud that foreign capital investments had doubled each year, bringing them to \$16 billion last year.

"But our success in bringing in foreign investments is not without problems. While we have yet to achieve a fully-industrialised status, we are faced with a shortage of labour.

"Does this mean that we have to slow down our industrialisation process? If we do this, we cannot achieve our goal. So, we must adjust our strategies."

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said moves to suspend Malaysia from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) would not, by itself, pose problems.

"But we reckon that if we are removed, local trade union leaders will instigate their counterparts in other countries to act against us.

"For instance, they will ask port workers elsewhere to boycott the handling of Malaysian goods and many other actions to destroy our economy. That is their style and we know who they are."