

PM questions wisdom of staying in ILO

KUALA LUMPUR: The Prime Minister has questioned the wisdom of Malaysia remaining in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) if it is no longer beneficial.

However, he feared some Western unions would instigate others to boycott Malaysian products.

"In other words, they want to twist our arm simply because we don't agree with what they are trying to do to us," Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad told newsmen after a tea party for the victorious Thomas Cup squad at his residence yesterday.

He said it did not matter whether Malaysia remained or left the ILO but he feared the effects of such a move.

He was asked to comment on the action of the International Metalworkers Federation which is pushing for the unionisation of the 120,000 Malaysian electronics workers at the ILO conference in Geneva.

He said Malaysia was competing with products from these countries and they wanted all the jobs to go to their countries.

Dr Mahathir said ILO was dominated by rich countries and they did not understand the position of poor countries like Malaysia.

He said these countries

wanted the wages in Malaysia to be high so as to reduce our competitive edge.

"That way, people will not invest in Malaysia. Goods produced in Malaysia will be uncompetitive and our industrialisation programme becomes retarded, that is what they want" he added.

Dr Mahathir said he wanted to make it clear that as a developing country, the only advantage it had was the nation's "lower cost of labour, not cheap labour."

He said the cost of labour was lower here because the cost of living was low, adding that Malaysia did not have the technology, capital and expertise of the industrialised countries.

"Now, they want to make sure we don't even have that advantage. If we don't offer lower cost of labour, what is there to attract the investors," he added.

Dr Mahathir said unfortunately Malaysian workers did not seem to understand this predicament and had supported opposition-inclined unionists.

The Government had carried out investment promotion missions which had created jobs, resulting in a better standard of living while MTUC leaders had done nothing to create jobs.