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Curbing white-

collar crime

By Azmi M. Anshar

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Government, worried about the increase in white-collar crimes, will think of better ways of dealing with the problem.

He said offenders might face heavier penalties and caning. He also suggested that more publicity be given to such offences.

"Whipping is a possibility. But not the usual way of whipping (for hard core criminals) . . . maybe just caning," he told reporters after hosting a tea party for the victorious Thomas Cup team at Seri Perdana.

Dr Mahathir said that at the moment, many people thought the punishment under existing laws was not deterrent enough.

He said the Government would be drafting new legislation to curb white-collar crimes.

"The Government is also considering enhancing the powers of the Anti-Corruption Agency."

On his participation in the Eaith summit in Rio, Dr Mahathir said he has been given only six minutes to speak at the conference.

In that short time, he said he would "more or less repeat" what he had said during the second ministerial conference of developing countries on environment and development in April.

Nevertheless, he said, the thrust of his speech would be that everybody should share the responsibility of preserving the environment.

He declined to comment on reports saying that US President George Bush would attend the summit for only four hours while the European Community appeared to be disinterested.

"It is his right to stay for as many hours (as he wishes)."

On the feedback from Rio, Dr Mahathir said that so far, there had been "nothing very special".

When asked whether his tone and the US attitude meant that the Earth summit would be an exercise in futility, he said: "It is the beginning . . . it is only the second day of the summit so I don't want to sound too pessimistic."

"I hope something good will come out of it."

Meanwhile, he said Malaysia would break its 35-year ties with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) if it was no longer beneficial to remain as an affiliate.

He said the ILO was dominated by rich countries and none of them appeared to understand the position of developing countries like Malaysia.

"There is no point in remaining in the ILO if it is not beneficial to us . . . they want to twist our arms simply because we do not agree with what they are trying to do to Malaysia."

He was referring to reports that the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) was seeking Malaysia's suspension from the ILO because the Government could not grant applications backed by the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) to form a national union in the electronics industry.

A complaint filed with the ILO by the MTUC disputing the credentials of Cuepacs and the Malaysian Labour Organisation (MLO) as worker delegate and adviser respectively could also lead to the barring of the tripartite Malaysian delegate if it

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was valid.

Dr Mahathir said that while it did not matter whether Malaysia eventually stayed or opted out of the ILO, a matter of concern would be the effects it would have on workers because the IMF would begin instigating other countries to boycott Malaysian goods.

He said the Government was not sure of the IMF's actual influence but Malaysian goods were competing with the federation's 'member countries' in the same market.

"Due to Malaysia's 'edge in selling cheaper goods, these countries would like to see us get out of the market so that their goods will sell better and they will get all the jobs."

Dr Mahathir said developed countries have made it clear that they wanted wages in Malaysia to go up and curtail its competitive edge, thereby discouraging foreign investments and retarding the country's industrialisation programme.

"I like to make it clear that as a developing country, the only comparative advantage we have is our lower labour cost, not cheap labour. The cost of labour here is low because the cost of living is low.

"We also do not have the expertise, market knowledge, technology, market and capital. The only thing we have that gives us an advantage is our low-cost labour and they want to make sure that we don't even have this advantage."

Referring to MTUC leaders, he said some Malaysian workers did not seem to understand the situation and they thought the most important thing was for them to support politicians in the opposition party.

He said MTUC leaders had done absolutely nothing to create jobs for the workers as all they cared about was to compel workers to join trade unions.

"But they never created jobs for workers. It is the Government that created the jobs. The MTUC leaders only care about becoming union leaders and (clinging to) power (by) siding with foreigners in order to boycott Malaysian goods.

"If this succeeds, then our industries will collapse and workers will lose their jobs. But do the MTUC leaders care?"