

Dr M: Wages here are competitive

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ALOR STAR, Thurs. -- Manufacturers should not use labour shortage in the country as an excuse to push wages higher. ~~Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ said.

The Prime Minister said wages in the country were already competitive. In fact, wages in Malaysia were higher than those offered in neighbouring countries, he added.

He said labour costs in some countries were many times higher than those in Malaysia. He cited Europe where wages were sometimes 30 times higher than

those in Malaysia.

"I'm quite sure that with the shortage of workers, wages will go up on their own."

Dr Mahathir said this when addressing a group of manufacturers at a luncheon here. The lunch was organised for the Prime Minister to meet Pekan Rabu traders at Bangunan Sultan Abdul Halim.

Accepting that workers' productivity might have a limit, Dr Mahathir said this could be overcome if manufacturers invested in automation and more efficient methods of production.

The Prime Minister said the government was concerned over the well-being

of workers and, in this context, encouraged the formation of workers' co-operatives.

He hoped manufacturers in Kedah would lend their support and encourage their workers to join these co-operatives.

Dr Mahathir also said the government sometimes talked directly to workers because some union leaders served only their members, making their responsibility restricted.

Later, addressing Pekan Rabu traders, Dr Mahathir said the Pekan Rabu complex would be upgraded and turned into a shopping centre now that the traders had given a written assurance that they were willing to

adapt to change for the better.

He said the government was willing to spend money for this purpose.

He hoped Pekan Rabu traders could be a model to Bumiputera traders elsewhere.

Urging them to emulate the Japanese traders who emphasised product display and cleanliness of their outlets, Dr Mahathir said business strategies had changed and the traders in Pekan Rabu should also change.

With the change, the Prime Minister said traders should anticipate a difficult period in the interim but they stood to gain in the long run.