

PM: I sympathise with British workers but ban stays

By LEE KAR YEAN

KUALA LUMPUR (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) yesterday expressed sympathy for British workers who fear losing their jobs following the Cabinet ban on giving new government contracts to British firms but said the boycott stays.

The Prime Minister said the Government could not withdraw the decision because the British mass media and even some British political leaders assailed the Government with baseless allegations when contracts were given to British companies.

"If we do not give contracts to British companies, there will be no accusations.

"Should we give profits to the British companies so that they (the media and some political leaders) can hurl accusations at us?" Bernama quoted him as telling reporters at Angkasapuri after re-

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cording his Hari Raya message.

Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary John Monks was reported to have written to British Trade Minister Richard Needham to express the concern of trade unions about the damaging consequences on jobs if Malaysia's ban was not lifted.

News reports said the TUC also wrote to the Malaysian Trades Union Congress to seek its help in appealing to the Malaysian Government.

Asked to comment on the TUC concern, Dr Mahathir said it should urge the newspapers in Britain — the source of the problem that led to Malaysia's action — to stop publishing lies about the country rather than asking help from the British Government and the MTUC to resolve the situation.

"We ask for very little,

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Mahathir: Don't lie, just tell the truth

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that is, don't tell lies," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's request was not difficult to fulfil because all that was needed was courage to tell the truth.

"Say what is true. If people are not involved in bribery, don't say there is bribery. If it is a loan and not a grant, say it is a loan and not a grant."

He said, however, that the British mass media appeared to consider telling lies as part of press freedom.

Malaysia does not agree with that view because press freedom was limited to reporting the truth and did not extend to making false allegations or condemning someone, he added.

"If they (the newspapers in Britain) continue to do so, it is difficult for us to consider the interests of the workers in Britain. We must give priority to our nation," he said when asked if the Government would withdraw its decision should MTUC make an appeal on behalf of TUC.

Dr Mahathir was also asked if he would write to Britain's *Sunday Times* to seek a correction to its report which alleged that bribes were offered to Malaysian politicians and himself.

"It's no use for me to write to the *Sunday Times* which does not in the least feel at fault although they are the ones who started this," he said.

He added, however, that the *Financial Times* (London) had asked him for an explanation of the Cabinet decision.

"I received a letter from the *Financial Times*, not the *Sunday Times*, asking me to give my views. I might give an explanation."

He said Malaysia's ac-

tion had nothing to do with the allegations in the British press about a linkage between Malaysia's purchase of military equipment from Britain and British aid for construction of the Pergau hydroelectric dam in Kelantan.

At another function later, Dr Mahathir said he was not seeking an apology from the British media over the allegation made that Malaysian leaders were corrupt but an undertaking from them to stop telling lies.

"It is not a question of apology. It is an undertaking (by the British media) not to tell lies about us," he said when asked to comment on indications given by some Malaysian leaders that an apology from the *Sunday Times* editor Andrew Neil would quell the situation.

"It is not just Andrew Neil of course but he seems to be the one who is very adamant that press freedom includes telling lies about people but we don't consider telling lies as part of press freedom," the Prime Minister stressed.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after he and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali received a giant Hari Raya greeting card signed by more than 200 children at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital paediatric ward.

On the courtesy call on him by British corporate leader and General Electric Company Plc chairman Lord Prior on Tuesday, he said it was made in an effort to restore business relations between Malaysia and the British private sector.

"He was trying to find out how he could be of some use in trying to resolve the problem," said Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president.