

PM: Pitch in for progress

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked workers to rethink their role in a developing nation such as Malaysia.

He said many countries that do not celebrate Workers Day are developing nations. These countries, which were once ruled by central economic control, had failed to provide workers the paradise they promised.

"And with the downfall of their ideology, the class concept no longer carries any meaning," he said in his message to mark Workers Day.

However, "we in Malaysia have invented the concept of Malaysia Incorporated."

Dr Mahathir said this concept not only sought the progress of the country but also asked for the co-operation of all Malaysians, for the betterment of all Malaysians.

He reminded workers that the country's economic and industrial success depended on the efforts of all its participants.

This meant workers, their unions and associations, must join the Government in its fight against inflation, unemployment and, together, keep the cost of living down.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek meanwhile told trade union leaders to steer clear of attempts by the West to institute glob-

al minimum wages.

The motive behind the move, he said, was to undermine the nation's economic competitiveness on the pretext of increasing salaries in developing countries.

"They fail to take into account the fact that the cost of living in developing countries is generally lower than in developed countries."

He said local wages were appropriate, being market-determined and pegged to productivity.

The practice of global minimum wages would increase labour costs while productivity remains unchanged.

"This will increase produc-

tion costs and cause investors to suffer losses," he said.

Lim added that workers would eventually suffer in the event of reduced investments or closures, he said.

Union leaders should not jeopardise the interest of workers and the nation at large.

"In our undertakings, let the spirit of harmony and togetherness prevail," he said.

The Government is sensitive to the needs of workers and the enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 1994, in February was part of the continuing efforts to improve workers' safety and health.

Lim urged employers and workers to comply with the Act for their common interest.

To maintain the country's competitive edge, he called on workers, employers as well as the government to jointly shoulder the responsibility of skill upgrading.

The implementation of the Human Resources Development scheme and the provision of training at various public sector institutes were aimed towards this end.

"With skill upgrading and the capacity to adapt to new changes in technology, workers' productivity will be enhanced and eventually lead to improved wages," he said.