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Mahathir-retirees

LET RETIREES REPLACE IMMIGRANT WORKERS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

PORT KLANG, Jan 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the government wants retirees to take up jobs held by immigrants under its proposal to lure the former to rejoin the workforce.

The Prime Minister said the proposal was not meant to create jobs for the retirees.

"That is a different way...it is not our intention to create work for them to get income but we want them to take up the jobs currently held by foreigners," he said when asked to elaborate on his New Year message.

In his message, Dr Mahathir said the government planned to train retirees and housewives for suitable jobs to reduce dependence on foreign workers, whose number will swell to 2.3 million by the year 2000 if left unchecked.

Following his statement, there have been calls that it is better to raise the retirement age of government servants from 55 to 60 instead of re-hiring them after they were pensioned off.

Dr Mahathir said the suggestion to raise the retirement age was a different matter altogether from the government proposal.

"The objective is totally different...sometimes we did not make it very clear, and that is our fault," he told reporters after launching the first direct trans-Pacific service of the world's largest container ship, "OOCL California", from here to the west coast of the United States.

He said the government made decisions and left it to other authorities to clarify them.

He said increasing the retirement age meant that workers would stay in their jobs longer and would not be able to replace foreign workers.

The Prime Minister said allowing government servants to continue working until 60 would also deny staff of promotional opportunities.

"This will only increase the number of government workers but our idea is to control the size of the civil service," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked if he was willing to communicate directly with the people via E-Mail without the impediments of bureaucracy and protocol.

He said it was difficult for him to field all sorts of questions in a large number.

"It can be done...but if it was like the other day (at the launching of the Gerak Mesra programme in Angkasapuri) when the number of questions reached 30,000, there must be officers to vet them," he said.

At a dialogue session on Internet in conjunction with the launch on Dec 27, the Prime Minister was reported to have received a wide range of questions from people surfing the net between 8.30am and noon of that day.

-- Bernama