

29 FEB 1996

Mahathir-MTUC

MAHATHIR CRITICISES MTUC OVER EPF DIVIDEND ISSUE

LANGKAWI, Feb 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the extremist attitude of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) over the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) dividend issue would harm the national economy.

Their arrogance arising out of their dissatisfaction with the 7.5 percent dividend for 1995 could bring the nation to the brink of bankruptcy, he added.

"They are conceited, simply saying that we must pay more when we cannot afford it. There's no money but want to spend more, this will make the nation go bankrupt," he told a press conference here.

Dr Mahathir said the clarification by the EPF on why it could only pay a dividend of 7.5 percent (instead of the eight percent paid in previous years) had already given and he saw no point repeating it.

"We cannot afford it, so we cannot pay more. But the MTUC leaders couldn't care less. All they know is to demand for payment regardless whether we have made profits or losses," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the MTUC's attitude is "salaries must increase, otherwise, there'll be a strike. And, why ask for the increase? ... because we are strong."

Accusing the MTUC of testing its strength by ignoring etiquette, he said such an irresponsible attitude would be damaging to the nation.

Dr Mahathir said that in Britain, irresponsible workers' unions created chaos, and if MTUC wanted to destroy Malaysia in order to get what they wish, then the West would praise them for destroying Malaysia's economy.

He said he had no problems with members of workers' unions on the whole but not their leaders who were uncompromising.

According to Dr Mahathir, the MTUC leaders were making noise because they wanted support so that they could continue to lead in perpetuity.

"Just like some politicians making all sorts of promises, they also promise to demand for something with no care for the adverse effect it would have on the national economy," he said.

On the refusal by MTUC leaders to meet the EPF management yesterday without Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim being present, he said this was yet another proof of their arrogance.

He said: "It's difficult if they do not want to meet the lower echelon... they want to meet only those higher-up."

"Soon, they may not want to meet me because they see me only as a small person and if that is the case they can meet President Bill Clinton."

Dr Mahathir said he did not see any necessity for Anwar to meet people with such an attitude.

"No need to meet such people... even if they meet there is nothing to gain, we cannot make any additional payment and Anwar has no money to give," he added.

-- BERNAMA

ZAA AR LDB