

10 DEC 1996

PM WARNS NGOS/UNIONS AGAINST SUPPORTING INCLUSION OF TRADE ISSUES IN WTO

SEPANG, Dec 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has warned non-governmental organisations and trade unions in Malaysia against the folly of supporting United States' lobby to include non-trade issues in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

He said if non-trade issues were included in the meetings of the WTO, which is now meeting in Singapore to chart future trade trends, Malaysian workers would ultimately end up as the losers.

Dr. Mahathir said that the real reason the U.S was pushing for the inclusion of non-trade issues was not because "they are concerned about labour standards, but because they want to undermine Malaysia's competitiveness."

"If we support them, one day we will end up being unemployed while the ones who are working will be those from developed countries," he told newsmen after visiting the site of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport here today to check on the progress work of the mammoth project.

Also present was Treasury secretary-general and Kuala Lumpur International Airport Bhd (KLIAB) chairman, Tan Sri Clifford Herbert, and Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

Malaysia has no competitive advantages other than its low cost of living which offers a standard of living no less than that in developed countries, he said.

The United States prefers to have an unemployment rate of 10-15 percent while giving welfare benefits every month to ensure those who worked obtain high salaries, he added.

Asked whether the U.S. would employ strong arm tactics to push forward their objectives in the WTO, Dr Mahathir said: We'll see, if strong arm tactics are employed all the time, its better not to have the WTO. We'll just follow whatever the U.S. wants."

"What's the use of having negotiations. They talk about democracy but it (the U.S.) forces itself on others,' he said.

On the other hand, when the Malaysian government is strict even slightly, America will accuse the country as being undemocratic.

"There should be international democracy as well as national democracy." -- BERNAMA

AD MR