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## Competitiveness of Malaysian goods at stake, says PM

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THE Government has to ensure that prices remain stable to maintain the competitiveness of Malaysian goods in the global markets, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed said.

This is important because the country will then be able to sell more goods and "earn more foreign exchange", he said.

It is unfair for the Government to allow producers or businessmen to raise prices indiscriminately and make the people, especially those with fixed incomes, pay more and more for their essential needs.

"This is why we prefer to ensure that prices remain stable so that we don't also have to increase wages, apart from the normal increments," he said in his speech at the launching of the Eleksuria, the first Malaysian-made electric vehicle, at Universiti Tenaga Nasional (Uniten) in Bangi, Selangor, yesterday.

On the unscrupulous traders, he said: "They want to make profit when our country is facing problems... we will take action because what they are doing will further weaken us."

Some 300 staff of Tenaga Nasional, Uniten and Tenaga subsidiaries from the Klang Valley had gathered to show their support for Dr Mahathir and the Government in tackling the current economic situation.

Dr Mahathir in turn expressed his appreciation to the workers for not demanding wage increases which may aggravate the economic situation.

He called on the workers to work harder to increase productivity and the students to strive to master all fields of knowledge.

Thanking the rakyat for their unity and support for the Government and his leadership, the Prime Minister said the Government is appealing to the people from all walks of life to be more disciplined and not to do anything that might worsen the situation.

He said for the last 40 years, the elected Government has worked hard to develop the country so that people from every level of society can benefit from the country's prosperity.

It is unfortunate that when the rakyat has just started to enjoy the fruits of development, greedy and rich people from foreign countries are purposely trying to hamper Malaysia's development efforts, he said.

Referring to the value of ringgit which has dropped by over 30 per cent against the US dollar since June, Dr Mahathir said:

"We don't really need this currency (US dollar) but it affects our income and our purchasing power as the goods we make comprise imported components and items such sugar and garlic are fully imported."

In addition, when the country is weak and poor, it will provide foreigners with the opportunity to make various demands.

For example, they will want Malaysia to open its door to big foreign banks and giant companies and in the end the local companies will be bought over by them, Dr Mahathir said.

"(When this happens) the country's independence will be lost and we can no longer plan for the country's development." The Prime Minister said if giant foreign companies and banks take over local companies, Malaysians will end up working and producing wealth for the foreigners.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir launched the Eleksuria, the Malaysian-made version of the Solar Baby electric vehicle.

The electric cars are developed, manufactured and marketed by Perusahaan Otomobil Elektrik Malaysia (POEM). Its chairman, Datuk Dr Ahmad Tajuddin

Ali, said POEM is in the process of planning for larger scale production of the vehicle which currently source some 50 per cent of its components locally.

Powered by conventional lead acid batteries, the Eleksuria can travel up to 120km on a single charge.

POEM was founded by Tenaga Nasional Bhd (50 per cent), Frazer-Nash Research Ltd (40 per cent), Datuk Mohd Nadzmi Mohd Salleh (5 per cent) and Tan Sri Basir Ismail (5 per cent).

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