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PM welcomes workers' cooperation

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said cooperation among workers, the private sector and the Government will speed up the country's development and help increase the income of all parties.

In his Workers' Day message, the Prime Minister said he welcomed the willingness of labour unions to cooperate with the private sector and Government under the Malaysia Incorporated concept.

"Malaysia is among a small number of countries in the world where job opportunities exceed the number of workers. This means no one should be unemployed, unless he is too choosy or does not want to work," Dr Mahathir said.

He said even though Malaysia employs foreign labour, the shortage of local workers has pushed up wages. Higher wages are welcomed because the people will have a better life, but if wage increases exceed productivity, the price of goods and services will also increase.

"If prices increase, the cost of living will also increase, and this means we will not get to buy the goods or services we should with the higher wage we enjoy," Dr Mahathir said.

In addition, if goods and services are expensive, the country cannot compete in the international market. "Our industries will lose out and not be able to sustain employment. In other words, we will be unemployed," Dr Mahathir said.

He called on workers and labour unions to consider the problems faced by the US and developed countries in Europe, where unemployment is between 10 per cent and 50 per cent of the workforce.

"Many of their people have to sleep under bridges or on park benches. Some die in the winter, or go insane," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said developed countries were the ones that came up with industrial action and strikes to seek justice for workers. While this was reasonable in the past when employers did exploit their workers, nowadays the priority is to get higher wages, regardless of whether the employer can afford it or not.

"What determines the success or failure of their demands is no longer justice, but who is willing to accept losses. The decision is based on who is stronger. This is not much different from the primitive method of solving a problem through a boxing match," Dr Mahathir said.

He said in a civilised world, a conflict between two parties is resolved through arbitration by a third independent party. But the Western view is that conflict between workers and employers should be resolved through test of strength.

"In the end, the cost will be very high and shouldered by the public through inflation. The country will lose because inflation makes it less competitive.

"The economy will slow down and many will be unemployed," Dr Mahathir said.

If Western countries could previously meet their workers' demands, it was because they reaped the wealth from countries they colonised. Today, these countries have gained independence and can compete with their former colonial masters, he said.

"That is why they try to import into developing countries (the idea of) industrial action, so that these former colonies cannot compete with them.

"They never cared about the hardships of our workers before. Can we

believe that now they are so saddened by the so-called exploitation of our workers?

"We don't have the time to search for better ways to resolve problems between employers and workers. Wealth must be distributed fairly among all parties - employers, workers, investors and the public.

"Remember that if the people are poor, if the country is in chaos, if there are no investors, businesses and industries, then industrial action will not bring any result," Dr Mahathir said.

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