

PM: We'll improve workers' lot

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday pledged that the Government will improve the standard of living of Malaysian workers.

"As the workers have pledged to the Government that they will stand by us in our efforts to turn around the economy, it is my turn to give my pledge," said the Prime Minister.

Expressing gratitude to the workers for their support to the Government to revive the economy, he said the workers should be compensated fairly and decently in a country which was developing rapidly.

Hoping that one day workers would be earning a minimum of

RM1,200 a month; he said an increase in wages would be meaningless if the ringgit was devalued.

"That is why we must defend the ringgit with the co-operation of every party - the workers, the unions, the employers and the Government -- to revive the value of the ringgit.

"We want to make sure that when a worker is paid RM1,200 a month, he will be able to use the RM1,200 to buy goods and services worth RM1,200," he said when speaking at the Workers Day unity gathering here.

Dr Mahathir also assured employers that they should not be afraid because the Government

would ensure that their revenue increased when the economy improved.

"The Government is also an employer. So we know what we are talking about. So please take the smug (looks) off your faces," he said, referring to the employers' representatives at the function.

He added that all parties should adhere to this year's National Day theme, "Our Country, Our Responsibility," as a motto to emerge from the current situation.

The Prime Minister said Malaysian workers were very cooperative as there had been no general strikes, usually almost a daily occurrence in foreign

countries, because they resolved issues through negotiation.

"Even when we have strikes here, it is something to do with the workplace, not political issues for someone else's interests," he said.

Dr Mahathir said workers must be careful as foreigners, especially Westerners, were trying to destabilise the economy not only through attacks on the ringgit and the stock market, but also by forcing the Government to adopt their measures.

"They blame us for not providing a safety net for workers who are retrenched. However, we must remember that in their

country, the safety net is not provided by the government, but by the workers, through massive taxation.

"So, those who are working are taxed to pay for the unemployed," he said, adding that the West never liked the Eastern idea of providing lifetime jobs for the people.

He said no one but Malaysians alone could defend the country from outside attacks because foreigners could never be depended upon for anything.

"Our country was built by ourselves without their help. Today they want to destroy everything we have achieved and our future," he said.