

15/07/1998

Don't be choosy about jobs: Dr M

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IN any situation the calls for retrenchment of workers, employers should lay off foreigners and save locals their jobs, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said despite the economic downturn, Malaysia still has more jobs than it has workers.

"If there is a situation where people are jobless, then those people should be the foreigners and we can send them back and our people can replace them.

"But Malaysians cannot be at all choosy (about the jobs they have to do), otherwise it will be difficult to employ them," he said in an interview aired on Radio dan Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) last night.

Some 50,000 workers have lost their jobs since the regional crisis that started last July; by the end of the year, the number of jobless is expected to exceed 500,000 people or around 8 per cent of the workforce.

At the same time, however, there are still about 2 million foreigners working in plantations, factories, construction sites, and the various services sector in Malaysia.

"I believe that our situation is better than many other countries which are not able to provide jobs for everybody; in the event of unemployment, the jobless have no other options.

"In Malaysia we have more job opportunities than workers, and if something happens which forces us to retrench workers, then we will ask them to retrench the foreign workers.

"Our workers need not be jobless," he said.

Kuala Lumpur Malay Chamber of Commerce president Syed Amin Al-Jefri, Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations president Hamdan Adnan, and The Star chief news editor Chua Yew Kay were panelists on the RTM programme.

The Prime Minister was posed wide-ranging questions related to the economic downturn and the measures being taken by the Government to expedite recovery. The issues discussed covered inflation, interest rates, the roles of the National Economic Action Council, foreign investors, the coming year's budget, and why the Government is not resorting to International Monetary Fund's (IMF) aid.

He re-emphasised the wisdom of not seeking IMF assistance as it does not guarantee economic recovery.

"What we really see is that when the other countries sought IMF assistance, the situation became worse. Take Indonesia for example. When Indonesia went to the IMF, the rupiah fell from 2,500 to the US dollar to 3,600. When they received IMF assistance, the value of the rupiah strengthened a bit to 3,200 to the US dollar.

"But, it soon plunged to the level of 16,000 to the dollar. It is the same with the South Korean won which did not improve after getting IMF assistance, it became worse instead.

"That is why we do not see any reason to seek the help of the IMF because it cannot guarantee the strength of our ringgit. Instead, we take the efforts ourselves and the situation is not as bad as the other countries which have sought IMF's help. That is why we choose not to go to the IMF."

On the campaign to import less and use more Made-in-Malaysia products, Dr Mahathir said the purchase of foreign products has been on the decline.

"This is why the Malaysian trade figures for the first three months showed a surplus of RM16 billion in terms of exports over imports. This means that we are buying locally-made products, not imported ones."

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