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Mahathir-Workers

FEW LAY-OFFS DESPITE ECONOMIC WOES, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that not many workers have been retrenched following the economic crisis faced by the country.

He said that even if there were retrenchments, those affected do not have much difficulty in getting other jobs because of the vast opportunities in the country.

"Our country is `unemployment minus'...that is we have to depend on foreign labour," he said in a special interview on the consumers and the economy over TV3's live morning talk show 'Malaysia Hari Ini' (Malaysia Today).

Dr Mahathir said that at this time the people should not be choosy and should be prepared to do the kind of jobs done by the foreign workers.

"There is no reason why we should be unemployed when foreign workers are working," he said in response to a viewer, who through facsimile, had asked what would happen to workers retrenched following the economic crisis.

"But we should be prepared...if previously we have worked in a broking firm and earned a high income, we must now be prepared to work for a lower income and do a different kind of job," he said.

The Prime Minister said the people should realise that in their own and the country's economic recovery, they should be prepared to accept an income lower than they had been used to.

Since the economic crisis, experienced by Southeast Asian countries since July last year, lay-offs affecting thousands of workers have been reported in Thailand and Indonesia, the two countries which have sought bailouts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In the 90-minute slot, Dr Mahathir was also asked about the lessons to be learnt by everyone from the current situation.

He said: "Faced by challenges, we may also find strengths within ourselves. This is the time we should build our spirits and overcome...for without challenges, we will become weak."

Dr Mahathir said that in facing challenges, one could find intrinsic strengths sometimes never thought existed.

"When we are faced with challenges, we will normally react and seldom expect such strengths within ourselves...and we should hang on," he said.

Asked on the rationale of a pay increase in line with the soaring prices of goods, Dr Mahathir said that the hike in the prices of goods could not be matched by increases in salary because the prices of goods would rise even further following salary increases.

"When we get salary increases, it will also raise the cost of production of whatever goods produced by the workers. And as such, the goods will increase in price.

"With the increase in the prices of goods, others wishing to buy the goods will also face difficulty and they will also demand a higher pay, resulting in a `wage price spiral'," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that employers should try their best not to increase wages and in the event that this was necessary, they should upgrade productivity.

"We must upgrade productivity and if we were to produce more and with improved quality which could increase profits, then the company could afford to pay higher wages," he said. -- BERNAMA

RAZ RM