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PM: Give notice before laying off workers

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday warned of government action against employers who fail to give due notice before retrenching their workers.

From tomorrow, employers are required to provide a month's notice of retrenchment to the Human Resources Ministry to let the authorities help workers involved get alternative jobs.

"Employers are supposed to give advance notice, otherwise we will take action," Dr Mahathir told reporters at his Hari Raya open house in Kuala Lumpur.

The Prime Minister, who was asked to comment on reports that employers had resorted to terminating workers without any notice, described retrenchment in Malaysia as not serious and limited to certain groups of people.

"In other countries, millions of workers have been retrenched but not here. We should be patient because there are other job opportunities available," he said.

Asked about employers who have allegedly used the current economic situation as an excuse to sack workers, Dr Mahathir said, "If employers take advantage of the situation, then reports should be lodged against them."

The Prime Minister was also asked on the fate of Malaysian students overseas who are not able or willing to pursue courses locally.

In many cases, Dr Mahathir said, local universities do not have suitable courses and, thus, these government-sponsored students will not be brought home. However, private students overseas will have to make their own decisions.

"The reality is that when we study overseas, there will be a currency outflow and this is a problem for the country," he said.

Thousands of Malaysians and bus-loads of foreigners came to wish to Dr Mahathir and his family "Selamat Hari Raya" at Sri Perdana, his official residence, during the open house. Some waited as early as 7.30am for the chance to celebrate the day with the Prime Minister.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and his wife Datin Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail were among the visitors.

Dr Mahathir was visibly moved by the turnout and the expression of support for him and the Government.

"I am overwhelmed ... many who came expressed their support for the leadership, apart from wishing me Selamat Hari Raya. They said they were behind me, and so on," he said, adding that there were visitors from Australia and Singapore, too.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek also warned employers against retrenching workers without giving prior notice and that legal action will be taken against those who fail to do so.

He said the ministry will investigate incidents of employers laying off workers in an unlawful manner as soon as the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Puasa festive season ended.

"Employers should not be hasty in laying off workers due to current economic problems. Instead, they should treat their workers humanely in view of the festive season," he told reporters after attending Anwar's Hari Raya open house in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Under the labour regulations (the Employment Act 1955), Lim said,

employers must first discuss the matter with workers or unions before any action can be taken.

"They are warned against taking advantage of the current economic situation to lay off workers at their whim and fancy," he said.

To date, the ministry has received two reports of unlawful retrenchment of workers by employers. "One of them involved a company which retrenched its workers despite recording profits," he said.

"However, we cannot simply rely on newspaper reports or rumours of such matters. We will investigate on a case-by-case basis," Lim stressed, adding that the ministry will not hesitate to impose a penalty against employers who fail to comply with labour regulations.

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