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PM: No lay-off without proper notice

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government will take action against employers who retrench workers without giving them proper notice.

He said they were not allowed to retrench workers without notice.

However, he said the number of workers retrenched in Malaysia was not as high as in other countries.

"It is not so serious. In other countries, millions have been retrenched. We will definitely have some workers who have to be retrenched, but only a small group compared to other countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir assured workers that there are still many job opportunities, and asked them to be patient.

On Monday, Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek had said he had received complaints against the management of two factories, one in Ipoh and the other in Sabah, for retrenching workers without due notice.

Dr Mahathir said workers whose employers had taken advantage of the economic situation to retrench them without notice should report to the Human Resources Ministry.

He was speaking to reporters during a break from greeting guests who poured into Seri Perdana to wish him and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Selamat Hari Raya.

Many also took the opportunity to express support for his leadership, Dr Mahathir said.

"I feel overwhelmed because many came today, and besides wishing me Selamat Hari Raya, they also said they supported me, stood behind me and so on. These statements of support, of course, are actually for the Government."

Asked if the foreign visitors offered similar comments, he said they told him they had come from Australia, Singapore, and the Middle East, and supported him. Some said they had come especially from Singapore and Australia.

Asked about the reluctance of Malaysian students abroad to return, he said it was not that they did not want to return, but the question was whether there were suitable courses in the country for them to continue their studies.

"We will not bring them back unless there are places in the country."

However, he said for private students, it was up to them to decide what they wanted to do, if they could afford to continue their studies.

"But the reality is that if they study overseas, our money will flow out and this will eventually become a problem for the country," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked to comment on the Iraqi crisis.

He said the best solution was through negotiations and he hoped the matter would be resolved peacefully.

He said he agreed with Russia, which wanted the parties to return to the negotiating table rather than use military force.

If Iraq was bombed, he said, there was no way to avoid killing the innocent.

"It is not possible for bombing to be so accurate that the innocent won't be affected. We cannot drop a bomb exactly on its target ... others will also become victims," he said.

Asked if he thought the United States was imposing its will on the United Nations to take military action, he said the statement by US

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright indicated that even if there was no support, the US would take unilateral action.

Dr Mahathir said this was not in accordance with the spirit of joint action among the countries.

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