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Mahathir-Workers

STRONG WORKERS-EMPLOYERS-GOVERNMENT TIES VITAL FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the close cooperation between the workers, the employers and the government was vital to revive the country's economy and defend its independence.

Efforts and sacrifices must be made by the three parties to overcome the current economic crisis, he said at a solidarity rally held in conjunction with Workers Day here.

He said that this was essential because foreign powers especially currency speculators would continue to undermine the nation's economy by attacking the stock market and currency.

"I am confident that for as long as we are disciplined, for as long as we are prepared to cooperate, for as long as there are strong ties between the workers, the employers and the government, we can overcome the pressures on our economy.

"To overcome our economic problems, we need to initiate actions which sometimes require our sacrifices," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that all parties should renew their resolve to defend the country because it could not depend on assistance from others.

He called for caution and discipline by the various parties in all actions taken.

"If we are disciplined, focused and with systematic planning, we should be able to overcome the economic downturn soon," he said.

The prime minister also expressed concern that if speculative attacks on developing were to continue there would be a point in time when it would hit countries that could fight back.

For instance, if there was too much pressure on countries like Russia, which has nuclear weapons, there might be grave consequences, he said.

Besides Southeast Asian countries, he said, Russia and Hong Kong also experienced the problem of currency depreciation.

"We do not have atomic or nuclear bombs. But I am sure the people of Malaysian will be able to withstand any attack launched by any party," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the pledge read out by the 40 workers representing the various sectors in the country to support the government's measures taken was most heartwarming.

He said that as prime minister and on behalf of the government, he also pledged to strive to ensure that the standard of living of the workers would continue to improve.

By the same token, he said, the government would also ensure that employers would continue to chalk better profits.

However, he said, what needed to be done now was to improve the value of the Ringgit so that the monthly minimum wage of RM1,200 envisaged for the future would also mean an improvement in the people's purchasing power.

Dr Mahathir said that the government hoped this could be achieved way before 2020.

The prime minister said that the government would continue to protect the interests and rights of workers as they play a very vital role in the nation's development.

He said that Malaysia, which had enjoyed rapid development as a result of the cooperation of the three parties -- the government, the employers and the workers -- was fortunate because all the parties understood their

respective roles and were prepared to compromise.

Dr Mahathir said that even if there had been industrial action in the country, there was never a general strike because disputes were resolved through negotiations.

In Malaysia, he said, the government would try to avoid a situation like in the West where unemployed workers would be on the dole.

He said it is as if to show that the government care for them but in actual fact, the payments given to the unemployed workers as assistance were derived from taxes paid by other workers.

"Whatever their system, it will be considered as good. Our system is regarded as not so good. They resort to retrenching workers when the economy dives but we will try to avoid resorting to that (retrenchment)," he said.

He said that the system in the country where employment opportunities were created was better as it contributed to the nation's rapid progress.

The prime minister said that during the 41 years of independence, Malaysia had achieved much progress due to its own efforts.

Dr Mahathir said that the 41st National Day celebration this year could mark the strengthening of a force comprising workers, employers and the government in overcoming the current economic crisis, in line with the National Day theme "Our Nation, Our Responsibility".

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