

PM: We'll take care of MAS employees

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Government will look after the interests of MAS employees and will not disappoint them following its "takeover" of the airline, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

When privatising the national flag carrier, the Government made it a pre-condition that none of the staff should be displaced unless they themselves chose to leave MAS, he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked about

the fate of MAS workers upon the Government's re-purchase of the 29.09% stake in the airline held by Naluri Berhad last Dec 20 at RM8 a share or for RM1.792bil.

"We'll look after them. We've never let workers down," he told reporters at the People's Progressive Party open house and New Year reception at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

"Malaysia is not like some other countries which abscond on their obligations to workers upon a privatisation exercise on the excuse of cutting down on

costs or improving efficiency," he said.

Asked who would replace Naluri's owner Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli as MAS executive chairman following the Government's takeover, Dr Mahathir said the matter was being handled by Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Citing Telekom Malaysia as an example, Dr Mahathir said the privatisation of several

government agencies had so far been a success.

In fact, he said, Klang Container Terminal and Northport workers had also requested for their entities to be privatised as they believed such a move would be better for them, in terms of income.

On the Government's move to restructure the light rail transit (LRT) system in the Klang Valley, Dr Mahathir said it was necessary as people

wanted cheap fares.

"But they should know that if it is cheap, then the companies won't make profits," he said.

Dr Mahathir said one solution was to increase the fares but this would give the opposition an excuse to protest and demonstrate.

"I am willing to transfer the LRT restructuring to the opposition and the DAP, especially, can reduce the fares and maintain the costs," he added.