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PM: Don't ape foreign labour unions

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged local workers' unions not to fall prey to the instigations of their counterparts in developed countries.

Dr Mahathir said foreign labour unions had a track record of trying to instigate local unions into resorting to strikes, demanding excessive wage increases and taking their grievances to court.

"Their intention is for us to become uncompetitive, and our goods will then become expensive, they actually have no sympathy for our workers," said Dr Mahathir during the Workers' Day gathering at Stadium Putra in Bukit Jalil here.

"If we fall prey to their ploy, then our country's industrialisation process will stop, job opportunities will be scarce, and the country's economy will deteriorate," he said.

When this happened, foreign economies will continue controlling the market and their workers will continue to receive high wages, added the Prime Minister.

The Workers' Day gathering was themed "Knowledge Workers Spur National Excellence." Also present was Human Resource Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn.

Later asked to elaborate on his reminder to local unions not to be influenced by the Western counterparts, Dr Mahathir said:

"During past International Labour Organisation meetings, for example, local union leaders met with their counterparts from developed countries. They often pressured us to give better treatment to our workers and that they should resort to industrial action if there are problems.

"It looks like they are sympathetic to their workers, but actually, when our workers to make excessive demands and take industrial action, this will cause the production of our goods to decrease.

"Our prices will then increase, and our goods will not be compete with those from developed countries," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir said he was thankful that Malaysian workers were not very interested in making excessive demands.

"In our country, we find that workers are all the more willing to negotiate and are not that attracted to rough methods.

"With that, we can continue to maintain our competitiveness and because of that, our country has been successful in producing goods which are equal to that in developed countries, but at cheaper prices."

On the Malaysian Trades Union Congress which had reportedly decided to defer their picket scheduled today over reported grievances concerning the Employees' Provident Fund, Dr Mahathir said:

"Thankfully, rational thinking overrode all other considerations."

Dr Mahathir added that in this country, employers, employees and the Government formed an important partnership for the country's development.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also reminded the country's workers to continue their tradition of choosing to negotiate rather than confront employers and the Government.

As an example, Dr Mahathir cited that excessive demands for higher wages would be meaningless if it was not matched with an increase in productivity.

Dr Mahathir said high wages in some countries was an inaccurate indicator for local workers to compare with. This was because the cost of

living in such countries were normally very high.

Dr Mahathir said it was important to maintain high productivity and competitiveness rather than seeking high wages, illustrating that some developed countries saw inflation growing by 1,000 per cent, whereas in Malaysia, the figure was only three per cent.

Constant squabbling between workers and employers would also jeopardise the country's industrialisation process, said the Prime Minister.

He also cited an example of a developed Western country, whose labour unions were so powerful that their excessive demands resulted in the crippling of the country's automotive industry.

"Confrontation between workers and employers is not our way because it would bring us no benefit," he said.

In his welcoming address, Fong said that to compete with developed nations, the country needed knowledge workers who would be able to increase work efficiency and create a knowledge-based economy.

"In this, we need workers with wide knowledge, varied skills, creativity and innovation," he said.