

PM praises workers for not resorting to industrial action

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today paid tribute to Malaysian workers, saying their willingness to resolve problems via non-confrontational means had enabled the country to remain competitive.

In his Workers' Day message, the

Prime Minister said the ability of workers and trade unions to settle issues on wages and other matters through discussions and compromise without resorting to industrial action made it possible for them and other Malaysians to enjoy peace and harmony.

"We have seen how developed countries become less developed because their trade unions go on strike whenever they have a dis-

agreement with their employers."

Dr Mahathir hoped an understanding of economic intricacies, the consequences of their actions, and Malaysian culture among workers would ensure the country's economy was not affected by "tests of strength" which was the way of the West in resolving problems. "Our way is inevitably far better in all aspects and we should retain our way."

Dr Mahathir also gave an undertaking to workers that the Government would continually work to control inflation to ensure them a higher standard of living.

He said the Government wanted to see the wages of workers increase, but a rise in pay would come to naught if it was "eroded" by inflation.

"We want to see our workers enjoy a higher standard of living. In

fact, we want to see their salaries increase, and it has compared with earlier days.

"Inflation, however, erodes the value of wages.

"Its control is, therefore, more important than an increase in pay for what is the use of a pay rise if one can buy the same or even less products with it."

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Dr M: Endeavour to increase output so that income will rise

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'Elaborating on the Government's continuous efforts to control inflation, Dr Mahathir said price controls implemented during the war 50 years ago were retained and enforced.

The Government's aim was to totally eradicate inflation and achieve "zero" inflation.

"However, many of our daily needs are imported, and if there is a price increase in another country then it forces certain products in our country to increase in price as well.

"Nevertheless, our inflation is not too high. If we lessen imports, then our cost of living will not increase."

On workers' salaries, Dr Mahathir said they had risen because the output of Malaysian workers has increased.

"Wages are up because skills are enhanced, with machines and other equipment facilitating the process of manufacturing.

"As a result, our products are still able to compete in the market.

"We must endeavour to increase

our output so that our income will continue to go up."

It was important to realise this, the Prime Minister stressed, as Malaysia's currency value was strong whereas that of the country's competitors had depreciated.

"We can counter the depreciation of their currency by devaluing our ringgit. But if we do this, then the cost of living will go up as the price of imports increases.

"Besides, there are locally-made products which contain imported components that will also increase in price."

The Prime Minister said the best approach was to retain the ringgit's value while trying to increase the country's output.

Dr Mahathir said Workers' Day this year would be celebrated amidst improved economic conditions, with unemployment in Malaysia no longer a major problem compared with other countries, including developed nations.

"Those who are willing will find employment. If there are no vacancies, there will certainly not be that many foreign workers in the country."

He said the Government would like to see all jobs filled by local workers since it would reduce the outflow of foreign exchange to other countries.

"This (outflow) affects our economy, making our workers a little poorer.

"We acknowledge that workers contribute to the economy.

"Surely, if we as Malaysians are unwilling to work then we will not contribute to the country's development and will become a burden."

Although a small number of workers were unemployed, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians generally led comfortable lives as the Government has been able to keep the country's economy under control.

"To some, this might be nothing unusual, but keep in mind that in many developing countries inflation rises by up to 100 per cent every year.

"There are countries with inflation so high that public confidence in the currency value is non-existent.

"Their people spend hundreds of thousands in currency units every day in expenses."