

PM: Issues with Singapore can be quickly resolved

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SHAH ALAM, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the outstanding issues with Singapore could be solved quickly if the republic is willing to compromise.

"We can resolve the issues but there must be a certain level of compromise (on Singapore's part)... if we are to resolve issues by adhering to conditions set by others all the time, then it would be difficult.

"Where we have a right and we are in the right it should be accepted ... then we can further our discussion."

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's statement published in a local Malay daily today. Among others, Goh expressed hope that outstanding bilateral issues could be resolved as soon as possible in order for both nations to enhance their working relationship.

Goh reportedly said that this was vital for Malaysia-Singapore cooperation in current regional problems, especially as both nations were economic powerhouses in Asean.

Goh also stated his readiness to meet Dr Mahathir again over the outstanding issues.

Dr Mahathir said he had no plans to meet Goh for now, but said officials from both nations would continue with their discussions.

"From there it should progress to the Ministers' or Prime Minister's level."

Dr Mahathir was speaking after addressing a Workers' Day rally at the Malawati Stadium here.

On Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar's statement that they required more specific information on how the land reclamation in

Pulau Tekong affected Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said it should be a two-way affair.

"What is it that they want to know? Our environmental impact assessment?

"If that is so, then we would also like to know what their EIA reveals, don't just expect us to do so, both sides have to do so.

"So far we have only heard that they have dismissed our concerns, we do not know the basis for the rejection of our findings," he said.

Earlier, addressing more than 8,000 workers gathered at the rally, Dr Mahathir advised them against adopting Western industrial cultures which could be detrimental, both to them and the nation.

Dr Mahathir said the belief that workers' demands could be achieved via strikes and employers' demands via lock-outs should not be subscribed here as such actions have proven to be extremely damaging to the economy.

"I am not being anti-West but we should realise that the West is not the sole proprietor of intelligence and the ability to think wisely.

"In labour relations, as in other matters, they believe in the test of strength in resolving disputes, and often workers go on strike over even slight disagreements."

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Addressing the packed stadium, Dr Mahathir said such backward thinking and actions would create negative chain reactions which would eventually close down businesses, industries and finally ruin the national economy.

"While other nations mark Labour Day with massive demonstrations, we in Malaysia stand united and pledge to serve better... This is our way and we don't have to be shy or apologise to anyone over this," he said to lengthy applause.

He pointed out that the sensible way of resolving industrial disputes was through discussions and negotiations, as practised in the country now.

"See our celebrations today, it involves not only workers but also employers and the Government; this is the kind of healthy relationship that we must maintain and enhance," he said at a Press conference later.

He said Malaysia had a good record of resolving industrial disputes and workers were generally happy with the conducive employ-

er-employee relationship.

The Prime Minister, who was asked to comment on demonstrations by a group of so-called estate workers at the KLCC Twin Towers on Workers' Day, said they (those who demonstrated) were only bent on expressing their anger and not on achieving anything.

"That is not good. For us what you achieve is important, the objective is important and not the way of expressing your anger. If you follow the Western way, then it will be very difficult," he said.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir reiterated the fact that 94 per cent of the total number of unemployed graduates in the country were Malays.

He said the situation was such because Malay students avoided science and technological fields.

"They prefer to study Literature and Religious Studies, but the demand for such expertise is very, very low.

"All you can do (with such qualifications) is to be a teacher, and we have 300,000 teachers in service now.

"That is why recently we made it clear to them that Religious Studies

must be complemented by an additional subject which could guarantee a job," he said.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Malay graduates often blamed the Government and others when they failed to secure jobs.

"Some even join opposition parties out of mere anger. But they have only themselves to blame as the choice of studies was theirs, and they must be wise in making a proper choice."

He said they were roped into government departments on an attachment-basis in a RM300 million retraining programme where they could learn the necessary skills while earning an allowance.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about a statement by Pas that the opposition party would field a woman candidate for the newly-created Putrajaya parliamentary constituency in the next general election.

"They can put anyone there, even a *pondan*. It's their decision," he said in jest.

Asked if the seat would be given to a BN representative from Selangor, he said the person need not necessarily be from the State.