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Mahathir-Workers

STRIVE HARDER TO CATCH UP WITH DEVELOPED NATIONS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, May 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on workers in Malaysia to strive harder to ensure that the country catches up with the developed nations before they could enjoy the fruits of their labours.

Dr Mahathir said that workers in Malaysia must still work hard to ensure that the country attained developed nation status and cannot yet expect terms and conditions of service like that in developed countries.

He said that a shorter working week and higher wages like that enjoyed by workers in developed nations cannot be implemented in the country for now.

"We must work harder because we need to catch up with them (developed nations). We cannot possibly be on par with them if we do not strive harder.

"If we were to work in a manner that they do, earning higher wages and doing less work, believe me, there'll be no investments and returns for anyone. Nobody will want to make investments," he said at the Workers Day 2003 rally at the Putra Stadium in the Bukit Jalil Sports Complex here.

Dr Mahathir said that in some developed countries, workers only work about 35 hours a week and earn wages 10 time more as they felt that they had attained developed nation status and need not have to work any harder.

He said that workers in Malaysia cannot yet reduce their working hours to a five-day week.

The government, he said, had already implemented a five-day working week by granting a holiday for the first and third Saturdays of the month but found that there were additional costs to be borne, up to four times more, through overtime payment for those working on those holidays.

He said that the escalating costs would erode the country's competitiveness and would eventually incur losses.

"We cannot yet afford a five-day week because we have to catch up with those in the developed nations. We need to work even harder than them so that we can compete with them," he said.

The prime minister said that if workers appreciate that Malaysia was not yet a developed nation and refrain from making demands which the country could ill afford, the nation would continue to enjoy peace and harmony and gradually and eventually attain its vision of becoming a developed nation.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia which depended on international trade, selling its goods and services in the world market, must maintain its competitiveness and ensure foreign investment kept flowing into the country, thereby creating more employment opportunities.

He said to compete, the country and also employers need not increase costs but rather raise efficiency, knowledge and skills among their workforce.

"We are ready to train people who wish to raise their efficiency so that during the present information technology era, we can offer employment that provided for higher wages and people from all levels can enjoy a better life," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this was the government's approach and not through test of strength and confrontation.

Commending the workforce in Malaysia for being very responsible and not resorting to industrial action, he said this was one way to develop the

country.

The prime minister said that this attitude had also instilled in workers in the country the spirit of preparedness in facing challenges even though the tasks entrusted to them posed a danger their lives.

Dr Mahathir thanked doctors, nurses and healthcare workers in the country for their dedication and selflessness in fighting to contain the outbreak of the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

"We've seen how the doctors, nurses and other workers in our hospitals have been selfless in answering the call of duty to contain the deadly disease and they did all this not for the money.

"Even if they were offered an increase in salary, it's nothing compared to the danger to their lives but they remained steadfast in their duty to ensure that the outbreak of SARS in the country is contained," he said.

He said that Malaysia had attained much progress because of the responsible attitude of its workers who were not easily instigated and resorting to making threats and demands or to be confrontational.

He said that the principle subscribed by the West that the winners in a conflict take all and the losers give up everything would lead to destruction to all parties including the country.

"In the event of a conflict, the employers and the workers will all lose because competitiveness and productivity will be reduced. In fact, even if anything at all is won in a conflict, we would still have suffered and will be incapable of competing," he said.

The prime minister said that Malaysians must strive to ensure the progress of the country as it was also a struggle of the individuals and there was much to benefit.

"In terms of the government, progress means an increase in revenue, for the employers an increase in profit and for the workers an increase in salary...all of us will benefit by making progress," he said.

Later, at a media conference, Dr Mahathir said that there was a tendency among Malaysians to behave like rich people and those in developed countries.

"There is a tendency (to behave like rich people). They want the same facilities, standard of living as developed country, but we don't have the capacity (at the moment)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that he was satisfied with the level of productivity of the workers in the country but felt that it could be improved.

He also said that workers should not only think of incentives or higher perks but should be happy with work well done.

"Of course, we deserved to be paid but if we keep thinking of how much we'll be paid, we'll never be able to face challenges. We'll have to be providing incentives...incentives for investing, incentives to take three more steps, more incentives for quicker pace...incentives for everything," he said.

Asked whether workers could not expect higher pay, Dr Mahathir said that if the workers want higher salary, they would have to be productive.

He said that more rewards would be given to the workers if the country was developed and more prosperous.

-- BERNAMA

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