

Dr M: Cheap cars first, don't worry about jobless

MalaysiaKini.com

July 2, 2015

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad today sarcastically said that it didn't matter if Malaysians lost their jobs as long as they could get cheap cars.

He was responding to Putrajaya's plan to liberalise the automobile industry which would open up local carmakers to foreign competition.

"If we lose we may have to close down. A hundred thousand or so workers, engineers and managers will lose their jobs. Their families will suffer.

"But that is alright because the consumers will get better cars at lower prices from foreign countries.

"So let us compete and let our consumers enjoy the benefit. The people who lose their jobs would not be able to consume. But it is a small price to pay," he said in a blog posting.

Last Monday, Malaysian Automotive Institute chief executive officer Mohamad Madani Sahari had declared that competition through the opening up of the industry would be good.

He said that it would benefit consumers while allowing local industry players to explore export markets.

Of apples and oranges

However, Mahathir said the automotive industry environment in foreign countries and the one locally, as well as their markets, were not the same.

"These countries impose conditions and standards which prevent Malaysian cars from being imported into their countries to compete.

"So the consumers in Japan, Germany, Korea and China cannot enjoy the benefits of competition like their Malaysian counterparts," he said.

He used the analogy of sports where competition would be between athletes of the same category such as going by divisions in football or golf handicaps to make a competition fair.

"It is always the same in all competitions. We compare apple to apple and not apples to oranges.

"Apparently in Malaysia, some people may not have noticed it. They have not noticed that the Malaysian industrial capacity is not at the same level as Japan, South Korea, China or

Germany.

"We may win in a Quran competition but not in the automotive field. We do well in badminton and squash but not in football," he said.

Nonetheless, Mahathir sarcastically said this did not matter so long as the consumer benefits, as their numbers are greater than those in the automotive industry who may lose their jobs.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/303771>