

Mahathir—man of the moment for meeting

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From CHEONG MEI SUI

SUVA (Fiji), Tues. — Judging by the expectations, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be the focus of attention at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting (CHOGRM) here.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, and their wives, will fly in here late tomorrow to attend the five-day summit.

Except for Indian Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Junius Jayewardene, the other 15 leaders will all be present.

This is the third CHOGRM meeting to be attended by leaders in the Asia-Pacific region. Some of the delegates and members of the Press corps who are already here, spoke of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir as the most important leader in the conference.

"Malaysia is certainly

PM's off

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad left for Suva, Fiji, tonight to attend the Third Commonwealth

Heads of Government Regional Meeting beginning on Thursday. Malaysia is expected to take a strong position on the Kampuchean issue at the meeting.

emerging as an important member of the region, especially in its economic role," said a delegate.

"A lot of credibility and admiration is being heaped on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir as the champion of the Third World although he has not claimed to be such."

Opportunity

Said another delegate: "Although on economic issues Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir spoke chiefly for Malaysia, his name has gone all over the world. This man puts his finger on the nail, he doesn't mince his words."

"Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir makes good copy, particularly his forthrightness," said a correspondent from

Australia.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal, who arrived last night, said in an interview today he was glad Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir would be present.

"He has great contributions to make (to the meeting)," he said.

Announcing his intention last month to attend the meeting here, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir had said the value of the conference is the opportunity to meet the other leaders from small developing nations, particularly those from the South Pacific island States.

This will be his first Commonwealth meeting. He did not attend last September's Commonwealth summit in Melbourne.

The Prime Minister had said that although the Commonwealth is languishing and he is of the view that summits are not beneficial, Malaysia will remain a member and play a role in the development of the small developing countries.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir will be lead speaker at the meeting here in its discussion on regional and functional economic co-operation — the conference highlight.

It is learned that Fijian Prime Minister Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was very happy Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir will be present.

This will be Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's second trip here. He was last here in June in the course of a visit to the region. He also visited Tonga and Western Samoa.

Interests

A leading English daily, *Fiji Sun*, in an editorial today, said: "In this day and age when nations — particularly the developing ones — prefer to look at issues in global terms, the smaller island states usually struggle in the vicious international circle.

"They are left to the whims of the major powers in their attempt to have their aspirations recognised."

The daily newspaper said some of the smaller island States, perhaps, see the United Nations as too big an institution. That is why it is imperative in their own interests to be affiliated to

a forum like CHOGRM.

Mr Ramphal said economic issues would dominate the conference discussions. Details of the agenda will be in the hands of the Heads of Government.

"These issues — covering interest rates, debts and protectionism among others — have become bread and butter and they affect all of us," he said.