

# Remove threats then we talk, PM tells union

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed his willingness to meet with Cuepacs officials over wage claims if they removed all threats to the Government.

"I will not even con-

sider talking to them if they do not remove these threats," he said. "I cannot function under threat."

However, he also said that although he was willing to enter into discussions with Cuepacs over its claims for wage increases and salary revisions, he could not

make any promises.

Speaking to newsmen during tea break at the Umno General Assembly today, Dr Mahathir said the Government was not going to make any promises it could not keep on meeting the wage demands, even if this meant that it would have to lose the general election should the union withdraw its support for the Barisan Nasional administration.

"If we lose the election, then it is just too bad," he said.

The Prime Minister expressed his dismay that the union officials would ask for a meeting with him and at the same time issued threats of strike and withdrawal of support for the Government.

He warned that any strike action on the part of the 870,000-strong civil service force would only cripple the country and threaten the political and economic stability.

"If our political and economic stability is threatened, we will lose in terms of investment and, therefore, in actual income that we can accrue," he said.

"A reduced national income for the Government

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will only mean that we will have less money to meet any future wage claims or increases and we cannot entertain them for a long time.

"It is wrong (for Cuepacs) to think that their threats would only affect the Government, because the Government is the people. The Government does not exist in a vacuum."

Dr Mahathir pointed out that the Government only administered the nation's money for the people, it did not have absolute control over it.

"We cannot entertain the claims now because the \$300 million we are spending annually is already a hefty sum and we are prepared to stretch our means, but we also have to ensure that the interests of the Government are protected. And the interests of the Government are the interests of the people.

"Of course, civil servants are the people too but while we pay heed to their needs, we also have to pay attention to the needs of the people who are not being paid salaries by the Government."

Dr Mahathir repeated his stand that it was illogical to borrow money to pay a recurring expenditure like wages.

"We can borrow to finance once-off projects like bridges and certain infra-structure because, after all, you don't build bridges everyday."

"But we cannot borrow to pay off the salaries of our employees."

On Cuepacs leader Ahmad Nor's sponsorship of the Parti Nasionalis Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said that was his right to participate in politics.

There were, however, already stipulated limits to civil servants' participation in active politics, that they could not hold office in political parties while remaining in Government service.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam added that the Parti Nasionalis Malaysia had not yet been officially registered.

"But Ahmad Nor is one of the sponsors and he has been designated to hold a high office in it when it does get registered," he said.