

Officials prepare for Dr M- unions meeting

By AHMAD A. TALIB
UNOFFICIAL discussions between senior government representatives and trade unionists involved in the current wage dispute continued yesterday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who returned last night from attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in the Bahamas, will be fully briefed on all these latest developments.

"I can't comment on the situation until I've been fully briefed," Dr Mahathir told newsmen on arrival at Subang airport.

Business Times learnt from trade union sources it is highly unlikely the much-sought after meeting will be held this week, considering the heavy schedule Dr Mahathir has ahead of him.

He will probably spend some time being briefed on "recent developments" and chair tomorrow's weekly Cabinet meeting before focusing on Friday's 1986 budget.

Having defused the tense situation over the long-drawn wage dispute, the government is now confident that tomorrow's one-day nationwide picketing initiated by Cuepacs and the National Joint Council (Staff Side) will be called off.

A letter from the Prime Minister's office informing the unions of the date and venue of the meeting will be sufficient encouragement. "It is not necessary for the meeting to be held before tomorrow. A fixed date would be good enough," Cuepacs president Ahmad Nor said.

Officials from the Public Services Department (PSD) have been told to be on standby for the full briefing. Hence, a meet-

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PAGE ONE

ing between the National Joint Council for Subordinates and officials from the PSD scheduled for today has been postponed indefinitely.

High-powered talks are believed to have continued into the night, which led many unionists to believe that the discussions are not just confined to "finding a suitable date for the meeting."

The discussions may be on an acceptable compromise formula. It should be noted that Encik Ahmad Nor has a clear mandate to work out a settlement, though this must naturally be with the concurrence of the full NJC later on.

It is not known what form a compromise formula will take, but the trade unions will not be

unhappy if the government can assure them that there will be a full salary revision when the national coffers permit. The \$15, \$25 and \$35 revision announced last June must only be interpreted as "interim rewards."

Dr Mahathir declined to even say if prospects of a settlement is imminent. But he is "optimistic" a solution can always be found to smoothen industrial relations in the public sector.

However, it is unfortunate that with settlement was near, some trade unions affiliated to Cuepacs now appear to disagree on the "approaches" taken by the national centre to settle the dispute.

The Railwaymen's Union of Malaya (RUM),

one of the founding fathers of Cuepacs, questioned the strategies used by the secretariat to tackle the dispute. RUM president Mohamed Abbas said yesterday Cuepacs must convene an emergency congress council meeting to discuss the matter.

The Malayan Technical Services Union (MTSU), the Malayan Nurses Union (MNU) and the National Union of Employees of the Public Works Department have thrown their support behind RUM, while the National Union of Telecom Employees (NUTE) has not objected to such a meeting.

With the exception of NUTE, whose role as a public sector union is numbered pending Telecoms Department priva-

tization, the other unions had written to Cuepacs demanding a congress council meeting. Encik Ahmad Nor likened such moves to a betrayal.

Defending his position, Encik Mohamed maintained that he had since the end of last month suggested a more sober and, therefore, less militant approach to solve the problem.

"RUM's policy has always been consistent. We're only concerned that Cuepacs may not be allowed to be used by elements which are not sympathetic to its cause. We are not out to create problems for Encik Ahmad Nor, but we don't want him to be accused later on of taking Cuepacs into a different path."