

PM: Everyone loses if there's a strike

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By Maria Samad

PETALING JAYA, Sat. — The whole country stands to lose if civil servants strike in their demand for more pay. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned Cuepacs today.

The strike would set back the economic recovery "for I don't know how many months and years," he said.

Any pay revision in future would also be affected, he told reporters after opening a two-day seminar on Malaysia's Biography at the University of Malaya.

He said that even if the date for wage talks between the unions and the Government was brought forward from May 15, the Government would still be unable to meet the demands because it was in no financial position to do so.

Dr Mahathir said he was stating "the simple truth."

"The whole country will have to pay the price of this strike coming at a time when we are facing a lot of difficulties," he added.

The Prime Minister stressed that the Government was not being selfish, inconsiderate or irresponsible.

"When we had the money, we did not even wait for them (Cuepacs) to ask.

"In 1980, we had the money. We revised the pay. That was one year earlier than they expected. They were talking about five years — but we revised after four years. But now we don't have the money," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that there was nothing much that he could do now.

"What they (Cuepacs) want me to do is to accept their views which I won't — for the reasons stated and that I find there is no change in their stand," he

said.

"The problem can't be settled not because I don't want to but because we don't have the money."

He said he had repeatedly explained this to Cuepacs leaders in all his meetings with them "and I don't know how many times I have to explain this."

"They say they want to see me and I've seen them.

"I've explained several times the situation in my meetings with them. Yet they still want to see me.

"I've spoken to their past and present leaders. But I seem to have made no impact.

"So what is the good of (they) coming to see me?" he asked.

If future meetings were to instruct him to agree to Cuepacs proposals, he said he would not be able to do so "because the Government and the nation don't have the means to pay them."

Dr Mahathir ruled out the possibility of the proposed agreement of "sign now and pay later."

He advised Cuepacs leaders to make sacrifices and to consider the plight of the many retrenched workers in the mining and electronics industries and the more than 5,000 unemployed graduates.

The Prime Minister also advised Cuepacs to follow the example of unions in Singapore.

Dr Mahathir said if the pay of civil servants were lower, the Government might have the money to employ jobless graduates.

He also reminded Cuepacs that the Government's responsibility was not only to its employees but also to the whole country.

"We can only take from one to give to the other. I

think we have distributed fairly and I don't think we should ask other people who have been forced to sacrifice to make further sacrifices," he said.

He also said there was nothing that the Government could do to stop Cuepacs from going on strike.

However it had to take all measures possible to keep the government machinery going.

"It is not because we are being unduly harsh, or inconsiderate. I've tried umpteen times to stress that we are incapable and we don't have the money."

However he said, government employees would continue to get their pay.

"I'm not going to lose anything nor am I going to gain if Cuepacs members go on strike," he said.

Dr Mahathir reminded Cuepacs that despite the huge size of the civil service which he said was the biggest in the region and the recession, the Government had not retrenched any employee.

"We don't want to penalise them. We hire them and we don't want them to lose a cent from what they are earning," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir said the Government would privatise certain services if it was profitable to do so.

"All these efforts would be for the benefit of the people and not the Government because we want to give them a better and comfortable life," he said.

Earlier, when opening the seminar, the Prime Minister said biographers should always keep in mind the moral aspect of their writings, especially on matters relating to the private lives of the people they were writing about.

Dr Mahathir said the

country needed reference books on personalities who had contributed to the country.

He described a great nation as one where its people knew how to appreciate the deeds of its heroes.

He also called on the people to realise the importance of studying history not only as a guidance for the future but also to prevent a repeat of past mistakes.