

Dr M: No right to stop formation of MTUC rival

By AZMI M. ANSHAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — The Government has no right to stop efforts by some unionists to form an alternative umbrella labour body, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Besides, he added, the Government also sees no reason to stop its formation.

Hence, the Prime Minister said, the Government will not stop the formation of a new organisation for trade unions. He was referring to the proposed Malaysian Labour Organisation.

To the question if the Government would recognise MLO, Dr Mahathir said: "If it is registered, there is no way the Government can say it does not exist."

He told reporters this after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting.

The MLO's chief sponsor, the National Union of Bank Employees (NUBE), interpreted the Prime Minister's statement as a blessing, saying Dr Mahathir's words speaks well for democracy in the country.

NUBE general secretary K. Sanmu-

gam said Dr Mahathir's statement was a good sign for the future of workers and the union was determined to make the MLO work.

Dr Mahathir dismissed claims that the Government was involved in the formation of the new organisation, saying unions which wanted to take the cue from his statements on a new labour body have the right to interpret it as they wish.

When asked whether the MLO's existence would split the labour movement, he said it was up to the workers to decide what was good for them while reminding them of the consequences of being represented by an organisation dominated by the opposition.

"It would be different if we have a labour government where the MTUC would be treated as supporting the Government. Since it is not, then we will treat it as an opposition party," he said in an apparent reference to the MTUC-DAP connection.

He said as long as the congress was controlled by politicians from the party, the Government would treat the congress as "no different" from the op-

position because the MTUC held similar views.

"I am sorry if they disagree with my views but the Government has long regarded the MTUC as a reflection of the opposition party," he added.

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir said he has directed his secretary to fix a date for a meeting with key MTUC officials, including its secretary-general, Dr V. David, after receiving a written request from its president, Encik Zainal Rampak.

Not compatible

Dr Mahathir said at the meeting he would speak with MTUC officials on their continued support for Dr David's active lobbying to get Malaysia removed from the United States Generalised System of Preferences, this time on the grounds of human rights.

He said it was naive of Dr David to think that the withdrawal would only mean less profits for companies utilising the GSP. Inevitably, he said, some 70 factories may close and go elsewhere where they can earn more pro-

fits, thus depriving 80,000 workers of their livelihood.

Malaysia, he said, was competing very hard with many countries to get employment for its workers. Dr David's claims and attempts to seek US withdrawal of the GSP was not compatible with workers' interest.

"How can the MTUC continue supporting Dr David? If this is regarded as fighting for workers, then I cannot understand them," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government cannot stop Dr David from his lobbying because "he has his rights".

He said although there was also no law to stop him, the Government too had the right to preserve employment in the country.

Encik Zainal, when contacted, welcomed the move but declined further comment.

Meanwhile, Mr Sanmugam said the NUBE will seriously consider opening the MLO's doors to public sector trade unions at its June 12 inaugural meeting following calls from the Union of College Trained Teachers.