

Cuepacs told to keep an open mind

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was willing to meet public sector union leaders in Cuepacs if they kept an open mind on their demands for wage increases.

However, if the meeting was to persuade him to direct the Government to approve the pay hike Cuepacs sought, then there was no need to meet, Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said: "When I explained the Government's position to them at previous meetings, they rejected my views.

"If my views are of no use to them, what is the purpose of seeing me," he said.

The Government had already rejected Cuepacs's wage claim because the RM4 billion increase in the wage bill was unreasonable.

He said the quantum sought by Cuepacs constituted 35 per cent of the current wage bill for the 800,000-strong civil service.

Speaking to reporters after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting here today, Dr Mahathir said the Government was only willing to consider Cuepacs's request for a pay hike if the quantum sought was acceptable.

Meanwhile, Cuepacs president Mohamed Mat Jid said the body would send a letter to Dr Mahathir detailing its wage claim which the trade unionist said had been reduced.

Mohamed said he would seek an appointment to meet Dr Mahathir over the matter, maintaining that Cuepacs would continue to

seek an amicable solution to its claim.

The president of the umbrella organisation for public sector unions said Cuepacs had not threatened to picket over the claim and that it would stick to the consultative approach to solve the issue "as long as there were avenues to do so".

Mohamed added that Cuepacs had lowered the overall cost from the original RM12 billion to RM4.2 billion after Dr Mahathir had advised a Cuepacs delegation which met him on Feb 20 to review the wage claim due to the huge financial implications.

He said the actual salary claim amounted to RM1.7 billion, and the other items like pensions, gratuity and housing assistance were a one-off claim and not regularly sought.

The improved pensions would cost RM680 million, better gratuities RM810 million and other costs RM380 million.

Cuepacs leaders met senior Public Services Department (PSD) officials on June 22 when both parties were said to have agreed on how much the wage claim would cost.

Cuepacs' leaders had since come under fire for the latest wage claim which Dr Mahathir has described as unreasonable and which he said would make the Government go bankrupt.

They had also been criticised by others, including trade unionists who chose to remain anonymous, for adopting the wrong strategies on the wage issue. Cuepacs leaders were also criti-

cised for asking too much.

Criticisms against Cuepacs also came from economists who questioned the justification for the claim in terms of productivity.

Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam, deputy chairman of the Asean Strategy and Leadership Institute, said Cuepacs had to give more justification to its claim as pay rises had to be matched by productivity.

Industrial relations consultant Abdul Farouk Ahmed, managing-director of International Consortium Consultants (ICC) Malaysia, said it was rather difficult to quantify civil servants' productivity as in some cases it was tied up with factors such as security.

Farouk, who has been trying to give a new perspective to wage reforms, said that in the private sector, productivity was also measured by dividing revenue with employment cost.

The closest to calculating productivity in the public sector was to divide operating cost by the total cost of a department.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress secretary-general G. Rajasekaran said the problem over the Cuepacs' wage claim arose because public sector unions did not have bargaining rights.

"They are doing the negotiations in the newspapers," he added.

Former Cuepacs vice-president Abdul Ghaffor Ibrahim said civil servants were the backbone of the Government and therefore the Government should give due attention to their wage claim.