

Housing allowance for all not feasible

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THE government is in no position to extend the housing allowance to all categories of its staff. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that government employees would have to wait "till the time is appropriate" before the request could be considered.

The Prime Minister added that in the light of the present tight economic situation, the plea made by the public sector unions would have to be set aside for the time being.

Dr Mahathir revealed this to the Press after a wide-ranging two-hour meeting with leaders of Cuepacs, the umbrella organisation of government sector unions, at his office in Parliament House yesterday.

He pointed out that government wages were fixed to provide a living wage, with due consideration to the three basic elements of food, clothing and shelter.

Cuepacs was pressing for an extension of the housing allowance to all government servants instead of to senior officers alone as now.

Dr Mahathir said that the government had given out the civil service allowance when it reviewed wages for all government employees in July 1980. This was partly to lighten the burden of rising cost of living.

But the granting of the housing allowance at this juncture was not possible. However, he stressed that he understood the nature of Cuepacs' request and hoped that the organisation would understand the government's position too.

Cuepacs' president, Mr T Narendran, said earlier that the meeting, the second in less than one year on the same issue, was very fruitful.

The Prime Minister, Mr Narendran added, ap-

peared to understand the difficulties faced by government employees but explained in detail the government's present situation.

Mr Narendran said: "The Prime Minister has taken a close look at Cuepacs' demand regarding the housing allowance to all government employees.

"He told us that the demand was not without merit, but the Prime Minister emphasised that the present economic situation should not be overlooked," the Cuepacs' chief added.

In Cuepacs' memorandum on the demand submitted last year, the 60 affiliated unions were pressing for allowances of \$75 for employees in division four, \$125 for division three, \$175 for division two, \$225 for timescale one and \$275 for senior timescale.

In the 1980 salary revision, employees in cate-

gory superscale G upwards were given housing allowance of \$350 per month while the most senior employee, the Chief Secretary to the government, was given \$2,000 per month.

Cuepacs officials would be meeting on Thursday to explain the outcome of the meeting with the Prime Minister. Once this was done, the organisation's general council would decide on the next step.

At one stage late last year, Cuepacs had threatened to carry out mass rallies to back its demand, but this was dropped after the Prime Minister decided to hear Cuepacs representation.

Cuepacs officials yesterday were not unhappy at the outcome of the meeting, and pointed out that the commitment from the Prime Minister that the request would be reviewed when the country's economy gets better was "welcome news."