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Mahathir-Bonus

MAHATHIR ANNOUNCES RM400 FINANCIAL AID TO CIVIL SERVANTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 2 (Bernama) -- All government servants, except for those in the top management positions, will each get RM400 financial aid this year.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced this when opening the 21st convention of Cuepacs, the largest public sector employees union, here today.

Dr Mahathir said the aid was to help them meet their children's schooling and other expenditures.

The prime minister however reiterated that the government could not afford to pay civil servants bonus for this year.

"I'm aware that some will not be happy with this offer but this is all that the government can afford to give," he said.

Dr Mahathir said despite the depressing economic and government's financial situation, causing a RM16-billion deficit for 1999, it still appreciated the problems that its workers were facing.

Cuepacs and several other bodies had earlier demanded that the 800,000 government staff be given incentive in lieu of bonus which the government could not afford because of the economic downturn.

The government first gave its 850,000 civil servants bonus of half-month salary or a minimum of RM400 in 1993, followed by one-month salary or a minimum of RM600 in 1994 and 1995.

In 1996 the bonus was also a month's salary or minimum of RM700 for the lowest category and last year's was a month's salary or a minimum of RM700 paid out in two instalments.

Public Services Department (PSD) director general Tan Sri Dr Mazlan Ahmad said the move would cost the government some RM338 million for the 847,000 civil servants against the RM1 billion allocation for the bonus given previously.

He said the support group would also benefit from the financial aid which is expected to be paid out before the end of this month.

"We have to work very hard and to try to get all government departments to include the financial aid in this month's payslip ... but it depends on how fast the calculations can be made," he said.

On where the money would come from, he said: "It has to be found. We'll have to work that out with the Treasury."

Asked if he could give an assurance to all parents that the financial aid would be given before schools reopen, Dr Mazlan said a circular on the financial aid would be issued.

He said the financial aid is expected to be paid in one lump sum.

Cuepacs president Abdul Aziz Sutan said the financial aid was the best the government could do in view of the current economic crisis in the country.

"In the present situation, even RM400 is very much welcomed," he said.

Abdul Aziz said Cuepacs, the umbrella body for public sector unions, did not state an amount in its incentive proposal during a meeting with Dr Mahathir last month.

He said the financial aid would help lighten the burden of parents with school-going children.

He also hoped the aid could be given before schools reopen on January 4, 1999.

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