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Public servants offered RM400 financial assistance each

Kamarul Yunus

RECOGNISING the hardship faced by civil servants in these difficult times, the Government has decided to grant RM400 in financial assistance to each of its employees.

Announcing this yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the money is in lieu of a bonus.

"The Government is unable to pay a bonus this year and I apologise. However, to help ease public servants' financial burden, including expenses for their school-going children, the Government has decided to provide the financial assistance," he said at the opening of a three-day 21st convention of the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the offer shows that the Government is aware of the difficulties faced by its employees, and is doing what it can to help although a deficit of RM16 billion will be posted in the 1999 Budget.

Public Services Department director-general Tan Sri Dr Mazlan Ahmad, when approached by reporters later, said the department will try to arrange for the payments by this month.

He said the offer will cost the Government about RM339 million as there are currently 848,000 workers in the public sector.

Cuepacs had earlier appealed to the Prime Minister for an "incentive payment" in place of a one-month bonus.

Its president, Encik Abdul Aziz Mohd Sutan, thanked the Government for heeding the plight of the public servants. He said Cuepacs did not specify the amount when it submitted the proposal for an "incentive payment" to the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir meanwhile urged employers to appreciate the moderation and responsibility shown by workers, and to try their best to meet their employees' claims.

Due to the economic uncertainties, salaries need not be raised if the employers cannot afford to do so, but like the Government they should consider allowances which are not fixed, he said.

The Prime Minister also said he was very happy that unions and workers have avoided resorting to strikes and other industrial action to press their claims.

Workers must continue to cooperate with their employers to save the country's businesses and economy so that with the support of the Government "a strong wall could be built to ward off attacks by 'modern capitalists' who are only looking for quick profits without giving a thought to the fate of workers," he said.

Referring to the currency traders, Dr Mahathir said "these modern capitalists are far more cruel and fiercer than the old ones."

At least, the previous capitalists provided job opportunities, while "the modern capitalists are not even present in the countries they attack," he added.

This means that the "weapon" made available to unions to take to strike and industrial action to safeguard their interests is totally ineffective against the modern capitalists, and in fact if used would only bring more hardship to themselves.

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