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Call to civil servants to set up unions for negotiations

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CIVIL servants should set up workers' unions in their respective departments to enable them to negotiate for their entitlements, Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) newly-appointed president Abdul Aziz Mohd Sultan said.

The workers' unions should then merge with Cuepacs so that the benefits from their claims and demands can be enjoyed by the other civil servants as well.

"Many questions or issues are raised by non-members. As such, we cannot forward their problems to the management.

"Some people just sit and wait until the requests made by Cuepacs are accepted by the Government," he said.

To date, there are 102 civil servants' unions in Cuepacs with memberships totalling more than 250,000. This excludes members of the police force, armed forces and prison warders who are not allowed to form any unions because of national security reasons.

Abdul Aziz said the large number of members in Cuepacs did not mean that the Government will accommodate its demands.

This, however, shows that the civil servants are united and their welfare is well taken care of.

"Without a union in a department, it will be difficult to solve any internal conflicts between the employer and the workers," he said.

He said representatives from the union can meet the employer on behalf of the other employees.

"Cuepacs was not formed to make it difficult for the Government or the Public Services Department," he said, adding that the Government, as the employer of about 850,000 civil servants in the country, would surely want the best for its employees.

Under the Service Circular No 2 of 1992, there is a directive where each department must set up a Department Joint Council so that the employer and the workers can sit down and discuss their problems at least once in three months.

"If the problem cannot be solved, then the issue will be forwarded to the National Joint Council. Cuepacs and the Public Services Department are among its members," he added.

To date, he said almost 50 per cent of government departments have yet to set up the joint councils, even though they have been directed to do so.

He also denied allegations that the current Cuepacs' leadership is pro-government.

"We must understand that there are some things that we simply cannot demand that the Government approves. We must take into consideration the current economic situation as well," he said.

He said the Government has been very supportive of Cuepacs and there are no problems in communicating.

He said negotiating with the Government was like "asking something from your father. He may not consent to all your wishes, but sometimes if you ask for things nicely, he may give you more than what you ask for initially.

"We use the same approach when dealing with the Government," he said, adding that if a claim is dismissed, Cuepacs will find another way to get it approved.

Among Cuepacs' major achievements last year were to increase the fixed housing allowances from RM60 to RM90, and the 50 per cent increase on the gratuity that a civil servant receives on retirement.

"We may not get 100 per cent of what we ask for, but it is better to get something by asking for it nicely, rather than by force," Abdul Aziz said.

As for this year, he said Cuepacs will continue to ask the Government to scrap the matrix salary system because by doing so, it can save on civil servants' salaries.

A committee, chaired by Cuepacs' deputy president Mohd Yusop Harmain Shah, has been set up to draft a new salary scheme.

"We will submit the draft to the Government once the economy gets better," he said.

He said Cuepacs and several other associations were recently invited for a briefing on the economic situation with the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

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