

## **Base EPF withdrawal amount on savings in hand, union urges govt**

**Malaysiakini**

**12 November 2020**

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A university staff union has urged the government to allow Employees Provident Fund (EPF) contributors to make withdrawals of more than RM500 per month from their Account 1 if they have higher savings amounts.

Speaking to Malaysiakini, Kesatuan Kakitangan Am Universiti Putera Malaysia (Kepermata) president Mohd Razali Singah said the limit of RM500 withdrawal per month is not able to help the families of civil servants who are facing financial difficulties.

He suggested that the government allows the withdrawal amount per month for EPF contributors to be based on the savings in their accounts, instead of setting a fixed amount for everyone.

Razali said some EPF contributors might have more savings in their EPF accounts, for instance, more than RM10,000. However, they are unable to

withdraw more money than RM500 from their accounts to deal with the immediate crisis they are facing.

“Because there is a difference in terms of account savings, some have higher amounts, some don’t have much. The government needs to look into that,” he said.

Razali, who is a former financial secretary of the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs), gave an example of a civil servant whose husband has lost his job during the pandemic, leading to a major fall in the family income.

He pointed out that if the government allows the family to withdraw RM2,000 or RM3,000 a month from their EPF Account 1, they might be able to start a small business to solve their financial crisis.

“Maybe they still have a large amount of savings in the account and it can be used to start up a business. Eventually, it will increase the family’s income. This is something the government has to reconsider.”

Razali criticised the government for treating the EPF contributors as “school children” who will spend all the money if they are not controlled.

“It seems like the government assumes that we are not good at managing our finances. They assume that if they allow us to withdraw RM2,000 at once, we will spend it off very quickly.”

“Those are school children. We have families and if we are allowed to withdraw RM2,000 or RM3,000, we can do family financial planning. Because those are their own contributions, not the government's money,” Razali said.

One-off aid might lower frontliners' morale

Razali went on to suggest that the government gives a one-month bonus to the frontliners, instead of giving a one-off special financial aid of RM600 to civil servants who are in Grade 56 and below.

He said this initiative should cover the Health Ministry's medical personnel, the police and the army personnel.

“We don't know when this pandemic will end... therefore, I think a one-off aid will undermine the morale of the frontliners.”

“This (RM600 special aid) is not able to make up for their stress, work and for them not to stay together with their families.”

For the record, other than the RM600 special financial aid for the civil servants who are below Grade 56, the government has said it will release RM500 as special aid for the Health Ministry frontline medical personnel.

Razali also suggested that Budget 2021 should include teachers and civil servants who work from home during the pandemic, including allocating an allowance for their internet usage.

Schools need allocation for maintenance works

On the other hand, the president of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), Aminuddin Awang, urged the government to assign funds for the education sector.

He said besides projects that the government has announced, NUTP hopes that the remaining allocation will be utilised in several projects that the union has proposed.

These projects include allocating funds for teachers to attend classes on home-based learning skills and to give teachers the incentive to buy laptops or other devices, through rebates or vouchers.

Aminuddin stressed the importance of increasing the internet speed at schools in order to ensure that the teaching process will not be disturbed by bad internet connection.

He suggested that the government utilises the allocation to upgrade or to replace inoperable computers in schools.

Aminuddin also called on the government to give a special allocation of RM5,000 to secondary schools and RM3,000 to primary schools as maintenance fees.

If the schools get direct allocations from the government, he said, the schools will not need to go through the bureaucratic procedures required by the district or state Education Department offices.

Aminuddin also said that he appreciates the government for allocating RM50.4 billion to the Education Ministry.

Cuepacs president Adnan Mat expressed the union's appreciation of Budget 2021 in a statement last Saturday.

Adnan said the government put priorities in the budget to improve the civil service delivery system and civil servants' benefits. Therefore it has shown that

the government has listened to Cuepacs' proposals.

However, he said, the special financial aid of RM500 for the Health Ministry medical personnel should include other government agencies, including the police and the army.

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Source: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/550543>