

Govt to keep open mind on pay hike request

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PUTRAJAYA: The government has promised to keep an open mind on Cuepacs' request for a salary hike.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the views of the umbrella body of civil service unions would be considered.

At the same time, he called for a spirit of "give-and-take" as there were many factors to consider in approving a salary revision.

"We will maintain an open attitude towards their request. We will have to consider all factors, especially the government's financial capacity," Abdullah said in his speech to some 3,000 government employees attending the

seventh Civil Service Premier Assembly (MAPPA) yesterday.

"We acknowledge that we haven't had a salary revision for a long time, but the government has given various allowances from time to time.

"There must be give-and-take in this discussion and perhaps one day, the government will be able to give civil servants a means to ease further their financial burden."

MAPPA is a platform for the prime minister to address civil servants on a variety of topics and take questions from them in a closed-door dialogue. Yesterday's assembly was beamed via video conferencing to civil servants in Sabah and Sarawak.

Abdullah's statement drew cheers from the participants as his words mark the first positive

reaction by the government to the Cuepacs request made late last year for a salary hike of between 10 and 40 per cent.

Cuepacs had earlier drawn criticism that civil servants should work harder to justify a salary increase and that the civil service ought to be trimmed as the nation progressed and as computerisation becomes more widely used in public administration.

The salary for civil servants was last revised 14 years ago.

During the dialogue, Cuepacs president Omar Osman handed Abdullah a memorandum calling for a salary review.

Omar told the *New Straits Times* later that it was an impromptu move which Abdullah allowed after he (Omar) asked for permission to present the document.

Omar said the memorandum explained that improved performance and the higher cost of living justified a salary hike for the more than one million civil servants.

He said there might be adverse impact on the morale and performance of the public sector, especially if the lower-income group civil servants continued to draw salaries that put them within the urban poverty group.

"As it is now, many civil servants, especially those in the support group, have to have some side income. In fact, some are giving more focus to their side business," he said.

Omar said Cuepacs was hopeful that the government would announce something pleasant for civil servants on Labour Day which falls on May 1.