



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES, SINGAPORE

# Public Personnel Administration in Malaysia

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It is important to clarify at the outset the scope of this paper.\* The "public sector" in Malaysia is composed of the "public services" (the armed forces, the judicial and legal service, the general public service of the Federation, the police force, the railway service, and the state services), statutory bodies, and local authorities. This paper aims to provide an overview of personnel administration in the general public service (commonly referred to as the Civil Service) of the Federation. Where appropriate, reference is also made to personnel administration in the entire public sector or in other parts of it.

Personnel administration is now a profession. So complex has the personnel function become that nearly all large scale commercial enterprises have a specialized personnel section headed by an expert. National and state governments, especially in industrially advanced countries, have several personnel departments employing literally hundreds of such experts. In developing Malaysia, there is a shortage of qualified personnel administrators. Advertisements for personnel administrators, usually offering high salaries and fringe benefits, appear regularly in local newspapers. Malaysian universities and private academic institutions are responding to this demand by offering courses in personnel management, often under the rubric of a comprehensive management programme.

The importance of public personnel administration requires no special emphasis. There is probably no more important single factor in successful administration than the securing of capable employees by the government. Improvements in organization, in methods and procedures, important as they are, will be ineffective if the personnel concerned are incapable of making the required adjustments in their work pattern. Not only must government officers possess the professional skills required to perform their duties but also the right orientation. For example, it is important that government officers are not socially aloof and arrogant in their contacts with the public. Such postures by some Malaysian Government officers have sometimes been attributed to the existence of "a colonial mentality". According to one Cabinet minister,

It is unfortunate that the Malaysian bureaucracy has still not completely shed its vestiges of a colonial orientation. It is still sometimes detached, aloof and even arrogant, in dealing with the public, especially the poor. It is still very much an élite class, still very urban in outlook and there is the danger that bureaucrats working in air-conditioned offices, driving around in fancy cars, with ties or Bush-Jackets, might easily forget that a sizeable part of the Malaysian people still live in poverty, living from hand to mouth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Ho Ung Hun, "The Role of the Bureaucracy in the Implementation of the New Economic Policy" (paper presented at the Fourth Malaysian Economic Convention, Kuala Lumpur, May 1977), pp. 11-12.

Proposals for administrative reform in Malaysia will be successful only if they are accompanied by a changed attitude and increased professional competence amongst government officers. Personnel administration therefore deserves high priority in any programme of administrative modernization in Malaysia.

What is "personnel administration"? O. Glenn Stahl, author of a well-known book on this subject, defines it as "the totality of concern with the human resources of organization".<sup>2</sup> This definition is so broad that it could just as appropriately describe the roles of the general manager of a firm or the head of the civil service. A list of the areas subsumed under personnel administration provides a more explicit definition and indicates the field's broad scope and complexity.

### Job Analysis and Classification

Job analysis is fast emerging as a specialized field within personnel administration. The task of a job analyst is to provide detailed descriptions of the duties and responsibilities of each job and the qualification, training and experience necessary for adequate performance. An example is provided below:

#### Job Description

Position:	Assistant Security Officer
Salary scale:	B11: Ringgit (Rgt) 485 x 40 - 565/605 x 925/1,005 x 40 - 1205
Duty:	Assisting the Senior Security Officer in planning and implementing security arrangements.
Qualification & experience:	MCE or equivalent with a credit in Bahasa Malaysia at MCE level; and five years experience and must have at least achieved the rank of Inspector in the Royal Malaysian Police Force. Experience in fire brigade will be advantageous.
Status of appointment:	Permanent and pensionable
Age limit:	Applicants should not exceed 30 years of age
Probation period:	1 - 3 years
Examination:	As required in the schemes of service.

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<sup>2</sup> *Public Personnel Administration* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 15. An advertisement for the post of "personnel manager" mentions the following: "His duties would normally include staff recruitment, salary and wage administration, employee relations and general administration of the personnel office. More important, he must be able to communicate effectively with all levels of staff as he is expected to participate in the development and implementation of personnel policies, as well as represent management in all union negotiations" (*New Straits Times*, 23 January 1979).

What job analysis does is to clarify the division of labour among employees (making it clear to the employee what performance is expected), outline the content of training programmes, facilitate evaluation of individual employees, help in planning promotions and transfers, and in settling controversies over job content and related aspects.

Job classification refers to the activity of placing jobs which have broadly similar functions and responsibilities and require like qualifications and experience into a single class without regard to the department in which the positions are located. The advantages of a classification system are that:

It establishes uniformity in the method of describing posts, titles, and salaries throughout the service; it fosters mobility within the career service by facilitating transfers and promotions; it provides standardized job titles for the personnel component of the budget; it forms the basis for recruitment and promotion by merit, and it eliminates the question of the pay of individuals from the realm of political controversy, inequality and favouritism.<sup>3</sup>

In Malaysia, the Establishment Division of the Public Services Department (PSD)<sup>4</sup> is responsible for job analysis and classification. Requests for new posts, upgrading and downgrading of posts, and even deletion of existing posts are all processed by this Division. Creation of pensionable posts in the state services also requires the approval of the PSD because the federal government is responsible for payment of pensions of state officers as well. However, for pensionable posts with less than Rgt 250 monthly salaries in the state services, the PSD has delegated its powers to state governments. Heads of departments cannot afford to treat review by the PSD and the Treasury as merely a bureaucratic procedure that has to be fulfilled because approval is not easily given. They have to prepare papers containing justifications for their requests and sharpen their persuasive skills for the meeting with PSD and Treasury officers.

In the past, ministries that were in urgent need of personnel created ad hoc posts with special permission from the PSD. Some ministries used this "loophole" to appoint new personnel even though there were no strong grounds for such appointments. Partly because of the failure of the PSD to scrutinize carefully such requests, this practice became quite widespread and by 1978, according to the Director-General of the PSD, "30 per cent of posts in various ministries were ad hoc posts". To prevent

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3 United Nations, *A Handbook of Public Administration* (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 1961), pp. 37-38.

4 For a description of the structure of the PSD, see Abdul Aziz Zakaria, *An Introduction to the Machinery of Government in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1974), ch. 13.