

Public service must change as part of

Serve the people,

national transformation

says PM

By Farush Khan and
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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today gave the public service another nudge towards change as part of the overall national transformation to achieve the objectives of Vision 2020.

He reminded members of the service that they are not a caste apart or mandarins whom the people must *kowtow* to in order to procure the services they are supposed to give.

"The public service is not a colonial bureaucracy meant to serve the colonial office and the metropolitan power. The public service is now truly a servant of the public. It is not a civil service."

He said they were very ordinary people who were part of the machinery to make Malaysia a developed country by the year 2020.

"The public, that is the nation, must be served and the public service is there to do just that — to serve the public," he said when opening the National Seminar on the Public Service at Istana Hotel.

Dr Mahathir said to ensure that administration was applied to the overall effort to achieve growth, procedures and functions had to be revised and simplified.

themselves and public accountability was therefore practically non-existent.

The theme of the one-day seminar, jointly organised by the National Institute of Public Administration (Intan) and Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (Mampu), is "The public service — new strategic dimensions for the 21st Century".

Dr Mahathir said after independence, politicians had replaced the metropolitan power represented by the Colonial Office in London as overseers and directors of the public service.

"Whether democratic or not," he said, "the politicians oversee and exercise power over the public service. This was a radical departure and the public service had to adjust to a role where it does not have the final say."

Yet, it remained the permanent wing of the Government, he said, adding that "the Government may change, but the public service remains".

He said the public service "must be answerable to the public and the elected politicians as Ministers had to do the actual answering in Parliament or outside."

"But the Ministers must make sure that public servants understand that they have to be sensitive to the needs of the public and to serve as true public servants."

He said they would be further revised to ensure that the administration served the people and the nation and not the other way round.

Even though Malaysia had inherited from the British colonial administration some experience in public service, he said, it had undergone many changes as its structure and function could not be static.

It had to respond to the needs of the times, he added.

Present were members of the board of directors of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (Capam) who are attending the seminar tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir said a purely colonial civil service could not possibly serve an independent nation and that was why the Malaysian public service was now more truly a public service.

He spoke at length on the colonial civil service, saying that the colonial administration was "truly bureaucratic" with the civil servants responsible to

Dr Mahathir said as more and more projects and policies were implemented, which were for the good of the people, the public service was forced to interact directly with members of the public.

Desk-bound public servants just could not remain that way, he said, adding they had to go out and meet the people, especially during Ministers' visits.

"The civil service of today remains very much a professional service, quite non-partisan and willing to serve whichever party or politician is in power."

"In Malaysia, this is essential as State Governments may change and be formed by parties which are not the same as the central Government."

He said the most radical change in the country was the introduction of the Malaysia Incorporated concept where the public service could not merely implement

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Vital to ensure success of private sector

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government policies and plans according to the administrative rules and procedures.

Under this concept, the whole nation is regarded as a corporation and both the public servants and the private sector are responsible for its success.

Dr Mahathir said they had to work together for this success and the public servants must understand that the failure of the private sector would result in a revenue loss for the Government.

Furthermore, he said, the development of the whole nation depended on the success of the private sector.

"Obviously, the more the private sector makes, the wealthier the nation will be. Jobs will increase and there will be sufficient funds for public works, far more amenities for the people, including the public servants."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia went one step further and decided to reduce the size and role of the Government and its functions and transfer government jobs to the private sector, that is privatisation.

He said under the privatisation programme, nothing was sacred. The Government did not abdicate its responsibility of continuing to ensure that the services formerly rendered by its agencies and departments were properly carried out by the privatised entities.

He said a number of government officers had to be retained to supervise and check on the services rendered so that profit would not be the only objective but also service.

"This puts a new twist to the responsibility and function of the public service. It is now more a supervisory body than an operational body. It can, if it wants to be quite obstructive, look for faults and failures."

But then, Dr Mahathir said, the public service had become a partner in Malaysia Incorporated and it was in its interests to see that the public and the nation were well served by the privatised entities.

However, being obstructive and finding fault were certainly not going to achieve this, he said, adding that the public service must be in every way helpful without being irresponsible.

Also present were Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid who is also Capam vice-president, and Capam president Senator Gordon Draper.