

29/06/1997

Towards a more efficient nation

THE Government's blitz against corruption has no doubt by now sufficiently galvanised the whole nation to fight this evil in our midst. Inevitably, with the nation's top leaders and politicians both at the Federal and State levels so serious in the war against graft, reinforced by statements of action from senior Government officials, the people's expectations will be high.

For the private sector and the ordinary citizens, clearly their greatest hope out of this exercise is better services to the public. While a corruption-free civil service may not necessarily mean an efficient one, the top leaders are evidently striving towards these ambitious goals. Their objectives have to be lofty in Malaysia's hope to attain developed nation status by the year 2020. A graft-free and efficient civil service enhances the country's competitive edge. It may be recalled when the Seventh Malaysia Plan was launched last year, the private sector said it cannot be the engine of growth without the civil service's support.

While all agree that the civil service has come a long way under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership with its motto Bersih, Cekap dan Amanah (Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy), and the Malaysia Incorporated Concept, there is still vast room for improvement. For the citizenry, there is a discernible gap between what the leaders want for the people and what can be delivered by the implementers. While the civil service has to bear a large part of the blame, politicians have not been blameless. Allegations of political interference hampering the work of the civil service are nothing new.

There is, however, hope yet that things will change for the better in the not too distant future. On the horizon is the big attempt to strive for the achievement of the ISO 9000 quality standard in all ministries, departments and agencies by the year 2000. Motivation and proper supervision by higher authorities are crucial. Cabinet Ministers and State authorities should be proactive and on the ball in discharging their responsibilities. We applaud last week's directive from Acting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that Cabinet Ministers and government officials must make surprise visits to check the actual situation on the ground. Anwar himself has set the example. Nothing, as he has said, could replace the effectiveness of impromptu checks. Going incognito to see the problems faced by the public at large is another useful method of monitoring. Official functions, though unavoidable, do not necessarily portray that the politicians and officials are doing their job. At times, the publicity can be counter-productive. For often, the statements by the relevant authorities suggest that they have been fed the wrong information.

Another much welcomed statement this month is the directive from the new Malacca Chief Minister to improve counter services. The substance of his directive shows his sensitivity to the people's needs. Quick and courteous response to the public, replacing officers on leave to ensure no counter is unmanned and his personal monitoring of public feedback are pre-requisites for efficiency. Johor Baru's launching of a Client's Charter to ensure an open and corruption-free administration is yet another commendable move. A significant feature is that all applications and approvals for permits, plans and licences will be settled within a specific time frame. This should be emulated by other authorities for one

of the biggest complaints against counter services is that the people are left in the dark as to when their applications will be processed.

The people are elated by the concerted move for a better Malaysia. Cynics of course view it as a flash in the pan. But times have changed. As we enter the next millennium, efficiency is vital to take us to greater heights of development in this competitive global environment. At home, the political masters are aware that with an increasingly sophisticated and knowledgeable electorate as well as a watchful media, the ability to deliver is the surest way to retain the people's trust.

(END)