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A more efficient civil service

TWO significant events pertaining to the civil service occurred in July. The first was a report released by the Public Complaints Bureau. The second, the extension of Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali's tenure as Chief Secretary to the Government by a further two years.

These next two years could be Halim's most challenging in his career, given the economic situation in the country.

The economy is forecast to slip into recession this year. It would take extraordinary effort and sacrifice by every Malaysian to ensure a speedy recovery.

The task ahead is not easy. This is perhaps the best time for civil servants to rise to the occasion and prove their mettle.

If the statistics of the report released by the Public Complaints Bureau are anything to go by, then several divisions of the civil service badly need to clean up their act.

Halim lamented that 60 per cent of the complaints were about government officials who were slow in discharging their duties. Land matters top the list of complaints.

Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on civil servants not to delay processing applications as this could mean financial losses for the nation. He has directed all ministries and state governments to cut red tape in approving projects.

The prime minister's concern is understandable. One only needs to examine the Clients Charter of government departments to see how many of them are being ignored or disregarded.

Perhaps now the time is as good as any to come down hard on errant civil servants. Enough advice and warnings have been given. Those who refuse to buck up should opt for early retirement or be told in no uncertain terms to leave.

Although the government's privatisation policy has reduced the number of civil servants employed, efforts should be continued to improve productivity at all levels.

Each head of department should be asked to submit a detailed proposal as to how he or she can optimise manpower.

With a leaner and more efficient civil service, the nation's economy will be better positioned for speedy recovery.

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