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Service kiosks being set up to cut red tape

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon.- The contract to set up kiosks in the Klang Valley providing services like payment of bills, fines for traffic offences and renewal of visas will be awarded in "a month or so", Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali said.

The kiosk system is one of the pilot projects for the implementation of the the electronic government, one of the seven flagship applications of the Multimedia Super Corridor. The kiosks will eventually be extended nationwide.

"We are in the final stages of negotiations with companies that participated in the tender exercise," Abdul Halim said in an interview.

Giving an example of the working of the kiosks, he said applications for travel documents could be submitted there, with the papers to be collected at the Immigration Department at the given time.

"One will be able to submit applications for travel documents, like visa renewals, through the kiosk, without having to fill a form, and use a credit card to pay the fees and do this without having to queue up," said Abdul Halim, who added that the finer details were being worked out.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that the electronic government would reduce time-consuming bureaucracy. It required each civil servant, from the highest to the lowest levels to acquire sufficient understanding of IT, and develop the capacity to apply technology efficiently.

Dr Mahathir had said that through the sophistication of IT, the Government could deal with customers electronically.

Abdul Halim, in the interview, spoke at length on advances in the civil service, the current issue of red tape, and how clerks, stenographers and typists would be retrained for other tasks.

He said these categories of workers form the biggest group in the 800,000-strong civil service.

"In the next few years, there will be a lot of retraining."

Abdul Halim said the use of IT was set up to change the work culture and with greater value placed on "knowledge workers".

He added that many States have introduced reforms through the use of computers. In Negri Sembilan, someone owning a place in one district and living in another, could pay quit rent at the Land Office where he lives.

"Our hope is that someone living in Kedah can pay for a property he owns in Johor Baru."

Abdul Halim was upbeat on the future of the civil service in a fast changing society. In battling red tape, he said the Government was reviewing all cumbersome procedures to speed up services and project implementation.

He said the need to further reduce red tape has become more urgent with the economic downturn.

"We need to invigorate the economy," he said.

Housing approvals - the housing sector affects 140 others - which sometimes takes up one to two years, have to be given very quickly now. "They (approving bodies) have to simplify procedures and work extra hard to ensure approvals can be given."

On delays in implementing rural development projects, Abdul Halim acknowledged some of the procedures were cumbersome.

"(But) all the procedures were done during normal hours and meant to

ensure proper accountability, check and balance, and meant to give local leaders a say," he said.

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