

16/05/1999

A question of commitment

THE revelation that the various ministries have been slow in spending their development expenditure allocation is surprising, given the shortage of funds during the current downturn.

But what is even more surprising is the fact that at least six ministries and government departments have yet to spend even a single sen of their allocation during the first quarter of this year.

It is sad that even as we are entering a new millennium, some civil servants seem to be lost in a world of their own. Such lackadaisical attitude among those entrusted with such an important responsibility is unforgivable.

The fact that at least 16 ministries and departments experienced between a 50 and 100 per cent shortfall in disbursement in the first quarter of this year is of grave concern.

While Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin are putting things right, the big question on the rakyat's minds would be 'what went wrong?' Can it and will it happen again?

The Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali's denial that the delays in the disbursement of the funds were caused by red tape and administrative bottlenecks is an age old excuse that cannot be tolerated any more.

But such instances of performing below par is, unfortunately, nothing new among some civil servants. Previously, up to 30 per cent of the allocations were returned each year. Were steps taken to ensure that such delays did not recur?

Of course, there are many valid reasons why the full allocations have not been exhausted. While there may be legitimate reasons for doing so, more often than not the main factor is inefficiency on the part of those entrusted with the task.

The current economic crisis has set us back at least five years in terms of economic development and growth. There is a lot of catching up to do. This means that we really have to pull up our socks and get on with the job. Those who are not willing to do so or who are unable to cope should make way for others.

Serving the nation is not about money, politics or power. It is about going about one's job with honesty, commitment, integrity and a sense of pride.

Any respectable civil servant who cannot fulfil his or her duty should step aside. It is the honorable thing to do. The time has come to throw the book at errant civil servants.

Surely, we cannot expect the Prime Minister or the Finance Minister to wake them up from their slumber every now and then!

(END)