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Civil servants must always be apolitical

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THE subject of politics and the civil service has been highlighted in the local media following a statement by the Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali that he has instructed all government officers to remain neutral and follow the code of the civil service.

He had gone on record as having said that Grade A civil servants were prohibited from taking part in politics and those who wanted to do so would have to resign.

This is in line with Rule 21(1) of the General Order for civil servants (Conduct and Discipline) 1993 which prohibits officers in the top management group and the management and professional group from taking an active part in any political party.

I subscribe to the same view as I have on several occasions pointed out that civil servants must stay apolitical and be neutral while in office.

It is necessary to keep politics out of the civil service to safeguard its image for the nation's sake.

Politics is divisive and there is bound to be conflict of interests when it is allowed to come into play in the civil service.

How would it affect the relationship among civil servants or even between colleagues in the same department if there are differing political views?

What will be the relationship between department heads and their subordinates who are from different political parties and hold allegiance to different ideologies?

These are questions which will have far-reaching implications on the performance of our civil service if politics is brought into play.

Since attaining independence we can take pride in the fact that the Malaysian civil service has remained apolitical - a rule which has so far put us in good stead.

The Government has been at pains to keep politics out of schools and mosques. It is difficult to argue now that civil servants should be allowed to take part in politics.

Only recently Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the armed forces and police to remain professional in discharging their duties and refrain from being involved in politics in the interest of national security.

In the same way, government servants should also remain professional in discharging their duties.

Non-involvement in partisan politics is important to ensure that government policies and projects are implemented and not thwarted by personal political ideologies or beliefs.

The country's civil service has a duty to remain focused on serving and fulfilling the needs of the rakyat, irrespective of which party forms the Government.

By being not involved in partisan politics, civil servants will be able to concentrate on their duties as administrators.

However, this does not prevent civil servants from exercising their right and freedom to vote any political party of their choice in a general election. This is the essence of democracy.

But when it comes to public service, civil servants should practise political impartiality. Impartiality and neutrality of the civil service, just like the police and armed forces, must always be recognised and

safeguarded for it is the first essential of ensuring an efficient and unbiased administration.

Civil servants must serve the Government of the day in a dedicated and loyal manner, implementing its policies and programmes, irrespective of their personal preferences and judgments.

This has been a long tradition which has provided stability to the country. It is of utmost importance for civil servants to conduct themselves in such a way as to deserve the confidence of the Government of the day, and to be able to establish the same relationship with those they may be required to serve in the future.

These are the central characteristics of government service in Malaysia - permanency, neutrality and a career service.

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