

21/05/2001

An equitable balance

THE Government should give serious consideration to the need for a racial balance in the nation's composition of the civil service. The rationale is compelling: an equitable non-Bumiputera representation in the service will promote and consolidate national unity.

With the exception of the diplomatic corps, the number of non-Malays is conspicuously lacking at all levels of the public sector, particularly the armed forces and the police.

The disjunction needs to be dislodged, for any occupational divide will impede the nation's socio-economic re-structuring. This is not as easy as it may appear on the surface. But there is a need to delve into the reasons on why the Chinese and Indians refrain from joining the service.

It would be a mistake to assume that human resources planning in the service may not pose a serious challenge. The reality of rapid economic growth and social changes, particularly in the context of a multi-racial country like ours, requires that this issue be given closer attention.

The luxury of the earlier years, when the national security forces and the civil service could sit back and expect the best material from all races to join in, is progressively less available.

In an environment where employment opportunities are rapidly expanding, the service will have, increasingly, to compete for quality personnel almost on the principle of a free market. But surely, the service cannot compete with the private sector in terms of pecuniary rewards and job mobility and prospects. As pointed out by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, "Increasing civil service wages is not the solution. If the Government increase its wages, the wages in private sector will also increase. We cannot match them."

That said, human resources assessment and planning will have to resolve a fundamental contradiction in the service: the need to attract and engage the best pedigree and provide career satisfaction at least equal to those in the private sector. Perhaps, the sole attraction in joining the service now is job security. This perception needs to be changed for surely, the service has more to offer than just life-long employment security.

Undeniably, employment in the service was much coveted in the old days. Be it the Malay or non-Malay, there was a deep sense of pride in belonging to the service.

Those civil servants were regarded as men of the steel frame - imbued with a national perspective and singular sense of purpose, selflessly toiling away for the rakyat. Some of these illustrious civil servants were from the Chinese and Indian communities. It is sad that we have reached the point where we must ask: Whither the men of steel frame from non-Bumiputera communities?

Clearly, there must be conscientious efforts to correct the imbalance. Such efforts should begin by making the service more attractive. Demoralisation and demotivation transcend race and they will lead to the ruination of the nation's administrative structure. The lack of monetary gains may be compensated with recognition for all levels. Hitherto, we tend to see the top being bestowed with State and Federal awards.

This issue deserves the utmost attention but it should not be politicised, communalised or exploited. Nation-building requires men of strong character and vision who will not sacrifice national interests and rise above the prejudices born of racial differences.

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