

31/12/2001

The heart of the matter

CUEPACS' proposal that all civil servants go for a mandatory medical check-up at the age of 40 seems sound. The underlying logic is, said president Datuk N. Siva Subramaniam, that our civil service must have a healthy workforce to ensure higher productivity.

He cited the worrisome statistics that 40 per cent of Malaysians suffered from various ailments and thus, the necessity of such a medical test. Yes, we all want civil servants who are fit enough to brave through swirling waters to reach flood victims. Or the physical and mental stamina to see to the prompt and proper implementation of public policies and projects.

Presumably, a thorough medical examination will weed out the medically unfit, if not sickly, civil servants who threaten the efficiency and productivity of the system. But might there not be a steady drumbeat of alarms about the senior public servants' health and a jostle for soon-to-be-vacant posts? And when promotion prospects depend on one's fitness, many will clock out at sharp 4.30pm and head for the gymnasium or golf course, never mind if the day's work is unfinished.

Assuming a person suffers from a chronic disease, what will be his fate? Is he overlooked for promotion and assigned to less demanding jobs? And how does one define a "non-demanding" task? Should persons with certain genetic factors that lead to likely diseases be penalised?

As persuasive as the proposal seems to be, let us not overlook the fact that there have been persons with critical ailments who refused to be treated like an invalid. Yet, their efficiency is unsurpassed. One example is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad whose efficiency and productivity are unrivalled despite the fact that he once went for a bypass operation. Which proves that the indomitable will to survive and serve the nation will overcome physical debility.

The heart of the problem is the degeneration of Malaysians. Medical examination at 40 is a poor solution. Far better for Cuepacs to propose that all civil servants go for mandatory half-hour workouts thrice a week and incorporate the Health Ministry's healthy lifestyle programme into the lives of its members.

(END)