

# Prudent to maintain retirement age at 56

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## Comment

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THE Government's decision to reject a proposal to raise the retirement age of its employees will be a disappointment to the 950,000-strong civil servants who have been looking forward to the extension.

It will be a blow to those who are on the verge of retirement and were hoping that the Government would review the situation again following strong lobbying by their union, Cuepac.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said on Tuesday that the Government could not consider the extension because of financial constraints.

If the retirement age was raised, he said, it would also affect the promotions of the existing employees as well as restricting the recruitment of new staff, which has to be done every year to add new blood to the service.

It would not be able to do both at the same time as the cost could bankrupt the Government. The Government is also unlikely to consider reviewing the Cuepac proposal in the immediate future.

The Government's decision is a prudent one as its intention has always been to try to reduce the size of the civil service or at least keep it at a manageable level.

The workforce will swell considerably if the Government should raise the retirement age and recruit new workers at the same time. It is not just salaries that the

Government will have to worry about but also the other benefits to the workers, which can come to a tidy sum.

With better healthcare, 56 is a comparatively young age to stop work especially if the workers are still hale and hearty. Therefore those in the twilight of their working life should accept this reality and be prepared to leave the service.

Unfortunately, many workers have no retirement plans and they do not know what to do if they should stop work even though they have sufficient time to prepare themselves for this eventuality.

Dr Mahathir has suggested that those who are still keen to work after retirement should consider joining the private sector where their government service experience and understanding of official procedures may be useful to some commercial firms.

But only those in senior positions have such experience and their number is therefore rather small. These people can use their expertise and influence to help their new employers in dealing with government departments and officials.

However, those at the lower levels will not have this advantage and can expect difficulties in being employed in the private sector. Many who are in need of money will become petty traders.

While it may be a caring gesture to keep the workers employed for as long as possible, one important factor is that everyone, both those committed to their work as well as those who are not, will benefit from such a move.

This will mean keeping the deadwood as well and surely this is not what the Government has in mind. It will not be fair to the public to have such workers who do not understand their role as public servants.

Such workers will only make life difficult for members of the public who go to them expecting service but instead get abused and bullied. However, the Government cannot discriminate when it comes to extending the retirement age.

It is a case of either everyone will benefit from such an exercise or else it will not be introduced as it is unfair and unreasonable that only a selected few are included in such a scheme.