

28/07/2002

Cuepacs chief: Short breaks should not be abused

CUEPACS president Datuk N. Sivasubramaniam says the tea break culture has, to a certain extent, dented the reputation of the civil service.

While admitting that there are some bad sheep in the service who take an hour just for a break, he says it is essential that all civil servants be given a few minutes break in the mornings and evenings.

"We agree that there is no written rule in the General Orders on tea breaks and this is purely at the discretion of heads of department.

"But if an employee needs to take a break, say for 10 minutes, I feel it is legitimate and no one will question it," he says.

Sivasubramaniam says the public's expectation of the civil service is high as they tend to compare it with the private sector which is generally more efficient and prompt.

Those who have been overseas, Sivasubramaniam says, are the more critical if the service is slacking.

"They cannot accept it if they are made to wait long for an appointment because the officer in charge is having a long break," he says.

Sivasubramaniam says heads of department must lead by example and be in the office at all times if they want their subordinates to go by the book.

"Heads of department are not above the law. They, too, are subordinate to the law."

However, he says as far as teachers are concerned, there is no such thing as regular tea breaks. The only break they have is during recess time.

He says it is a fallacy that teachers have it easy although they go home at 1.30pm or 6.30pm.

"They even have to take their work home and sometimes come back to school during the first and third Saturdays, which are public holidays."

Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Senator Zainal Rampak says it is difficult to change the mindset of civil servants towards tea breaks as the culture has been there for decades.

"It is an old problem but nobody has done anything about it," he says.

Zainal says the introduction of the punch card system by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is to ensure civil servants adhere to the working hours and do not slack.

However, this is also being abused.

He says the authorities should raise the matter with Cuepacs as any immediate "correctional measures" would not go down well with the civil servants.

"The matter must be dealt with tactfully," he says, adding that there should be clear guidelines on this.

Zainal says the heads of department should be more responsible and ensure their subordinates are at their desks during regulated working hours.

"But we have some bosses making appointments for golf at 3pm. So, when the cat is away, the mice will have a field day," he adds.