

**The leadership of rotting heads**  
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Leadership in any hierarchical system typically begins with heads and ends with tails who usually behave like blind and unthinking followers. That may also be why government employees in most departments are called 'kaki-tangan' and not 'kepala-tangan!'

It is almost as if there is no need to use one's head when he or she is doing work in public service! Theirs is to blindly do and then die; never to question why! But humans are not just resources; they are human beings with a God-given destiny!

It is no wonder then that most behave like bureaucrats, and worse still as idiocrats, in their workplaces; as if they do not have the God-given capacity to think, reason, and argue for the truth! They follow and abide by the leadership of rotting heads and become equally rotting tails or kaki-tangan at best!

Worst of all they do not seem to know, understand, and appreciate the basic responsibilities of being fundamentally human; to preserve and protect other lives and appreciate the honour and integrity assigned to every living human being.

Consequently, most of the public service leadership today appear to be predominantly of the blind follower and compliant types. Why? Most blindly follow the maxim: "Saya yang menurut perintah!"

There have been a few exceptions in the past weeks, though. Terence Fernandez highlighted the DG of Immigration as a case in point for assuming responsibility for the detention centre breakouts, after the minister concerned gave a stern public warning. Such exceptions are the few who can say; "Saya yang bertanggungjawab" or "I, who am responsible!"

How are heads of departments selected?

And, who then are these heads of departments or HODs and how are they actually selected? In the American system, such senior ranking officers of the public service are selected by a transparent Senate review process.

jabatan perkhidmatan awam jpa public service department psaIn Malaysia, no one really knows who actually made the original generation of names. I believe the Public Services Department (JPA) may generate, write up and consider the options before presenting to the political leadership to make a final selection or choice.

There was a time in the past though when the Public Services Commission (not Department) usually made these final choices, but ever since the 1970s, it seems the JPA has taken over all such "responsibility". My legal question to constitutional jurists is whether this can be reduced to merely a JPA delegated function; given that the JPA has become coloured in their "ketuanan Melayu vision?"

My point is, why is it after 53 years since Merdeka, JPA has not found one non-Malay official or bumiputra of Sabah or Sarawak to lead the Public Services Department? Why also is JPA 99% made up of only Malays from peninsular Malaysia and that too, in my time. made up of more Kelantanese than others?

In my days in the public service, the corridor talk about the process is that usually the JPA raises and reviews the names of appropriate candidates usually for the rank of DG of a department or secretary-general of a ministry. Usually the minister may then be consulted about these appointments. But to the best of my knowledge, there is no clean, clear and transparent process for such a consultation.

Zero 'black marks' a must

Usually it is done "in the corridors of power." Usually, these candidates must have zero 'black marks.' Sometimes three plausible names are given to the minister and he is expected to indicate his preference. Some ministers are astute (read political) enough to reject all the names and ask for their own preferred candidates.

I once heard of a Sarawak-based minister who insisted that a Sarawakian be given the rank of secretary-general because he was already a deputy secretary-general in the same ministry, whereas the JPA gave other 'peninsular Malaysia' names.

I have also heard of another minister who continued to ask for more candidates and went through seven candidates before he finally chose one. But finally that one, too, is unfortunately today facing a corruption charge! Corrupt leaders! Corrupt heads!

It looks like politicians always look for "corruptible public officials" to serve under them. Often they simply want yes-men and women. And yet at other times there are obviously very corruptible individuals who in fact rise through the ranks, in spite of their black spots.

How else could directors-general and secretaries-general be charged with corruption; only to be released at the end of the day! For that matter are our public prosecutors and investigative officers so bad or is there connivance by the AG's Chambers if, in all cases, the public officials are finally released, on appeal?

But, today the saga continues. We have very senior civil servants who are appointed to their posts without a transparent and open review as they do in the United States. Why?

Why should one person or a small group of "so-called wise ones" make such appointments? Allow me therefore to question the appointment of the new JPA chief more than a month ago?

With so much controversy surrounding Mindef and the bad reviews of its accounts by the auditor-general over the last few years, how and why was the former secretary-general of Mindef made the new JPA chief or even be considered for it? Can someone please explain the rationale?

The JPA chief is the second or third most senior post in the government's public services. It is a very influential and powerful appointment, especially so when serving the former Defence Minister who is now the Prime Minister. The head of JPA is after all the head of all professional services and sits as the de facto most important human resources person in the public services. Correct?

In fact, I think he even recommends all others HODs for promotion as heads of their services or other equally strategic gazetted appointments. He checks and ascertains that the due process and rules are followed for all public service appointments.

To get a job done, appoint one man

In fact, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein used to say, if you wanted some group to look into an issue but you are not serious about it; appoint a committee to do the job. But if you wanted someone to get a job done and want it done excellently, appoint one man.

My first big boss, Tunku Shahrman Tunku Sulaiman in the Prime Minister's Department (JPM), believed this so seriously that state development officer (SDO) Jaafar Bakar was transferred on promotion to become the SDO of Pahang from Penang because Tun Razak wanted a person he could trust to do a good job.

And guess what, the then-DG of the Implementation Coordination Development Administrative Unit (ICDAU) issued the transfer order! Yes, JPA officers were confounded and confused but could not do anything except comply with fear and trembling! Saya yang menurut perintah was of course the order of that day!

But who really gives this perintah today? And what is the role of the Public Services Commission which supposedly reports to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in the matter of all public service appointments?

radzi sheik ahmad My question therefore to the Parliamentary Audit (not just financial, even in accounting today) Committee (PAC) is this: Are you all fully satisfied with all the answers given by the then-chief controlling officer (or chief financial officer) of the Defence Ministry in all matters under audit review and reported by the auditor-general while the current JPA chief was incumbent CFO? MP Radzi Sheikh Ahmad (right) is now the chairman of PAC.

Therefore, allow me to ask the question directly of my good friend and former Old Putra Association (OPA) president. Do you really and honestly believe that the current appointee is suitable to hold the most important human dignity and destiny job and does he have a good enough record on matters related to "transparency, accountability and responsibilities?"

Or, in OPA language, would you be willing to award this former KSU from Mindef and former chairman of the board of governors of the RMC, an OP of the Year Award if he were an OP?

With the impending emergence of a two-party system, maybe it is timely that very senior and strategic appointments like the inspector-general of police, attorney-general, chief secretary to the government and director-general of the JPA or senior secretaries-general or directors-general of departments whose budget in many cases exceed those of some states, be selected through a new and transparent process reviewing at least their recorded financial accountability and responsibility in the past?

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