

Civil servants' input vital in carrying out projects

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THERE has been much debate of late about the poor delivery service, which has supposedly led to the delay of many government projects under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

The civil service has been blamed for this unsatisfactory state of affairs and there have been many calls for public servants to buck up. This is really quite a difficult job since civil servants are known for their lack of urgency and complacency in carrying out their work.

Still, something needs to be done and the time is long gone for finger pointing. The poor work attitude of government servants is legendary and has been in existence since the service was first set up.

The civil service seems to operate entirely on its own and political leaders and the public are at a loss as to how to deal with them. Their actions are guided by the General Order, which sets out the Do's and Don'ts in carrying out their daily tasks.

However, many of them have used the directives to cover their own faults should anything



go wrong. It is obvious that civil servants can afford to be arrogant and inefficient because of the size of the service.

It may be possible for the Government to take disciplinary action against some wayward workers but surely it cannot take on the whole service with-out some serious repercussions.

No one is even sure exactly how many civil servants there are. When the privatisation of government agencies was in full swing in the 1990s, the total was supposed to be around 900,000. But now the estimation is supposedly in the region of 1.2 million.

What really takes the cake is Cuepacs' call for more civil servants to be recruited in order to improve the efficiency and performance of the administration. It would appear that all the trumpeting of reducing the size of the civil service had come to nothing.

The Government would have to do some serious thinking on how to deal with this massive problem. Maybe it is time for counsellors to be appointed to advise government employees on their role. They should be repeatedly reminded that they are the servants and that the people masters.

And if they should misbehave or do not carry out their tasks with diligence and efficiency, then they should be disciplined for this memory lapse. However, the Government must ensure that those who supervise them, such as the heads of section or department, must be more responsible and responsive in running a tight ship.

Without the input of these supervisors, it would be almost impossible to get their subordinates to be committed to their work. Perhaps, the most effective weapon is to remove their security of tenure so that it would be easier to sack them for not doing their work.

When workers know that they cannot be easily dismissed then they are likely to be more laidback in performing their

daily routine. If supervisors should ignore complaints against their staff, they would naturally be more daring and rude to the public.

The Government, of course, will have to find a balance since there are also many civil servants who are hardworking and dedicated to their work. While it has to punish should the occasion arise, the good workers must also be rewarded.

Based on past experience, it would seem that many of the Cabinet decisions were not passed down to those working at the grassroots level and this will not be beneficial to the people. Almost all the decisions taken at such ministerial meetings were made for the good of the people.

If those at the departmental levels ignore such directives, then the people would be deprived of services and assistance due to them. They may have to resort to bribery to get help that should be free. This is what could happen because of red tape and workers who have a lack of interest in serving the public.