

It's noble to serve in the public sector

THERE is much debate about how to upgrade the civil service into one that reflects the nation's multiracial diversity.

The "colour-blind" and "gender-blind" promise from Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan on new recruitment is a good start.

Then there is the argument that the civil service pay structure needs to be raised to be on a par with the private sector. I disagree.

We do not need to go down the route that Singapore has taken. Singapore argues that it has a limited pool of talent and must offer competitive pay to ensure a quality civil service. That may or may not be so but is beside the point.

The nobility of serving in the Malaysian public service must be preserved, and that disappears if civil service pay follows that of the private sector. Which is not to argue, of course, that civil servants should not be paid well.



What will do wonders to upgrade the civil service is to undo the concept of a lifelong career in the public service.

There should be flexible recruitment schemes to allow high-achieving talent from the private sector to be appointed.

Such public service can only boost the resumes of high achievers and will act as an incentive for those in the private sector to spend part of their careers in the public sector.

I recently met a young surgeon attached to the heart unit of the Sarawak General Hospital in Kuching. He chose to return here after graduating and working in Britain.



He could have stayed back in the UK, and I was curious as to why he returned.

It was a heart-warming reply he gave me. He said he felt great to contribute his services to his hometown and also that he did not believe that anyone should have to pay an arm for a heart operation.

And word has it that this surgeon is gaining a reputation for his skills on the operating table.

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The 'colour-blind' and 'gender-blind' promise from Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan when recruiting new staff to the civil service is a good start.

The pay for a surgeon on the public payroll cannot be all that great, especially when one considers what he could have earned in private practice or in the UK. I asked what it would take for the government not to lose his service.

His answer was so simple as it was startling. He replied that he would be content to receive a pension (like most of his colleagues, he is serving under a contract) and if the govern-

ment could assure him that it will take care of the university education of his children.

This goes to show there are young and talented Malaysians who not only choose to return but also return to serve the country in public service.

They feel good about themselves and are proud to put their expertise to use in service to the community.

All the government needs to do is to come up with public-service schemes that are tailored to address the simple and reasonable needs of skilled Malaysians.

The government should never underestimate the pull of patriotism of talented Malaysians, and should protect and improve the lure of public service to them.

And while the government seeks new ways to recruit the best brains, it must make sure it retains talent in the service, because that in itself may attract more top-drawer talent.