

**Malaysia can leap into World Bank top 10 list in two years, says chief secretary**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Debra Chong**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 25 — Malaysia only needs two years to break into the World Bank's top 10 list of most competitive countries in the world, Putrajaya's No. 1 public servant told The Malaysian Insider.

In a recent exclusive interview, Tan Sri Sidek Hassan said for the country to be a top performer the private sector needed to grow in tandem with its civil service.

"Our country can become more competitive by having the public sector 20 to 50 years ahead and bring it to today; and have the corporate sector 50 years ahead and bring it to today. Then, our country Malaysia can indeed be Number 1," the chief secretary to the government said.

By that, he meant both government and private businesses needed to devise ways to fulfil the customer's existing needs and anticipate future requirements before anyone else did.

And Sidek (picture) believes that Malaysians are ready to take on the challenge.

He noted that Malaysia had jumped five spots to 18th from 23rd in the World Bank's ranking for 2012 in ease of doing business on the back of Putrajaya-led reforms, coming in fifth among all East Asian economies behind Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Thailand.

This comes after the nation regained its 21st place ranking in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index this year after falling to 26th in 2010.

"We are there but we have not arrived yet," Sidek said, acknowledging the government's weaknesses in filing taxes and issuing construction permits for foreign investors as highlighted in the 2012 Ease of Doing Business report.

"Our challenge is to be in the top 10 and it's not about the very distant future. I'm talking about the next couple of years," he added, confidently.

He noted that reforms were already being rolled out across the civil sector and only needed continuous follow-up action across the board to bring all administrative levels up to par.

Putrajaya's decision to raise the retirement age to 60, he said, was a boon given that many senior civil officials were still mentally fit and had the added edge of experience to complement the annual injection of younger blood.

The top bureaucrat added that the government's push to bring in more hires from the private sector was another boon as it created what he described as "cross fertilisation" and stirred friendly office rivalry.

"It is always good to have people coming from outside... at a pretty senior level because it complements what we have in the areas that we don't have yet. That competition is good [because] people compete to be at the top and [we] get the best out of everybody there," he said.

Sidek explained that the bureaucracy, too used to obeying rules even when outdated, needed help to learn how to be innovative and recognise when rules needed to evolve to keep up with the changed times.

Civil servants by training are asked to follow the rules," he said.

"Our challenge here therefore is to keep up with time. In fact, we should be ahead of the time, ahead of the curve. It is what we in the Malaysian public service should be doing and in many instance we have been ahead," he said, pointing out as a model example the Immigration's swift issuance of passports within an hour.

In contrast, he noted that airlines in the private sector could take more than two hours to issue travel tickets to their customers.

Sidek said he had advised colleagues stuck for ideas to improve the government's service to put themselves in the customer's position.

He related a past experience of being stuck in a non-moving line at the Road Transport Department counter to renew his driver's licence as having inspired him to look into ways to magic away the physical queue.

"I think what's most important is the mindset," he said, adding bureaucrats now understood they gained by simplifying red tape.

"I'm sure things will improve even better in the future."

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