



# When Developed Status Does Not Mean Efficiency

With Selangor proudly declaring itself a developed state, one would expect greater things from it; more efficiency, better service and a healthier environment for one. But, alas, this doesn't seem to be the case for now. So, what is being developed all about then?

**WELCOME** to *Selangor Maju* (Developed Selangor). Welcome to dry taps, closed university campuses, burning forests and open burning.

On Sept 13, *The Star* headlined: 'Water Woes for 30,000'. It went on to report that Gombak had been left high and dry, the International Islamic University had cancelled classes for 10,000 students and three schools and a hospital had also been affected.

Irrespective of the cause, the people living, working or studying in the Selangor district were affected. This happened only weeks after Selangor declared itself a 'Developed State'.

On Sunday, Sept 11, when driving from the KL International Airport to the city, this scribe spotted pit fires and open burning at the site of the Saujana Putra housing project.

Having changed my *MyKad* address from my beloved *kampung* in Kedah to Selangor some years ago, I think I have every right to wonder what developed Selangor has in store for a taxpayer like me.

Elsewhere in the world, taxpayers usually have to pay more for living in a developed state or district. In return, they get better services and enjoy a higher quality of life.

In Selangor, the taxpayers have been paying progressively higher taxes and rates long before the state became a *Negeri Maju* last month. But unlike in other developed nations, states and districts, the quality of service in Selangor, I am afraid, is deteriorating or, at the very least, not improving.

The quality of life has certainly deteriorated. The green lungs have either been depleted or have disappeared altogether. The smog and haze are never very far off. The traffic is getting more congested and chaotic. The rivers are so polluted that the catfish are toxic and the fireflies

are struggling to survive.

Being a *perantau* (migrant) who came to settle in Selangor 36 years ago and having lived in several different locations, I can say, with some measure of authority, that I know Selangor as much, if not better, than the Menteri Besar, Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo.

This is only natural because I am much older than Mohd Khir and being a reporter, I have traveled extensively in the state, covering successive Menteris Besar, starting with the late Datuk Harun Idris in 1969. I have lived in Kampung Pandan and Kampung Kerinchi (then part of Selangor), Puchong, Hulu Langat, Bandar Baru Bangi, Subang Jaya and Petaling Jaya.

I have gone through many broken promises, and, given the lackadaisical attitude of state authorities and the *tidak apa* attitude of the majority of the people, our lot is unlikely to be any better in *Selangor Maju*.

What *maju* are we talking about when the Petaling Jaya Municipal Council cannot even spell *bestari* (intelligent) correctly? Its widely displayed slogan reads: '*Petaling Jaya ke Arah Bandar Bistari* (sic)'.

## PATROL CARS WITH NO PETROL

IT IS bad enough that taps are running dry in *Selangor Maju* and elsewhere in the country, but when a police fuel pump in Kuching went dry, causing patrol cars to be stranded, I am forced to ask this question: What is happening to our country?

It does not do us any good when ministers tell us that our civil service efficiency rating has fallen 10 steps from 16th last year to 26th this year. But for the police to allow its patrol vehicles to be stranded is mind-boggling. It wasn't an isolated case either. *The Star* on Sept 19 quoted

Deputy Internal Security Minister Datuk Noh Omar as saying that his ministry was short of drug testing equipment.

What has happened to the Royal Commission Report on the Police, which was completed and handed over to the government in May? The report devotes considerable efforts to recommend ways and means of improving the image, professionalism and efficiency of the police.

What has happened to the promise to improve the government's delivery system when an essential service like the police is being starved of the most essential supply like fuel for patrol cars?

The criminals would have had a field day knowing that police patrol cars would not be on the streets and police personnel would take longer to respond to reports of criminal activities.

Thus, is it sufficient for Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak to tell civil servants (*New Straits Times*, Sept 13) to be efficient and to benchmark themselves against the best in the world? Or is it enough for him to be upset (as reported by *The Star* on Sept 15) and order Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) to connect power to the affected industries in Melaka?

What about those celebrated government-linked companies (GLCs) managers who have failed in their duties?

TNB is fumbling way too often. When the power supply was disrupted in five states on Jan 13, I called for the resignation of the TNB board and top management. Of course, nobody took such a call seriously, not in Malaysia at least. And Energy, Water and Communications Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, can do all the zapping – to borrow *The Sun's* Sept 16 headline – he wants. I don't think things will change much.

Change for the better is more likely to happen if the government follows up on the recent spate of firings and resignations of GLC managers, with an early review of the performance of the remaining GLC appointees.

## CIVIL SERVANTS: A PAMPERED LOT

WHAT'S the point of the Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Samsudin Osman, threatening to haul up department heads if their officers failed to respond to telephone calls from the public when there are worse misdemeanours by his *anak buah* (subordinates)?

*The Star* (Sept 15) headlined: 'Construction Sector Choked with Graft'. It quoted the Malay Contractors Association President Datuk Roslan Awang Chik as

saying that graft and bureaucracy were choking the billion-ringgit economic sector.

We have heard these calls and threats before. The government has, for decades, been demanding performance from the civil servants while at the same time, pampering them with shorter working weeks,

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better salaries and allowances, annual bonuses and higher retirement ages.

Days after lamenting about the general listlessness of the civil service, Najib hinted that the government might announce a bonus amounting to a whopping RM1.2 billion in the coming Budget. While such a payment may help the one million-odd civil servants to overcome some of the effects of the recent fuel-induced price rises, the rest of the people may even suffer worse effects if traders take advantage of the bonus – like they always do – to hike prices.

At the rate things are going, it is the people and the taxpayers who are going to end up being the servants and slaves of the civil service. Otherwise, how do we explain the decision to raise the retirement age at a time when tens of thousands of university graduates are jobless, and to continue putting the new intake on pension when it makes more economic sense to put them on the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) scheme?

If it is not already too late, we may want to change the Bahasa Malaysia nomenclature used to describe civil servants from *kakitangan awam* to *pesuruh awam*. That is what they are – the servants of the people.

As it stands today, it is the *kakitangan awam* who are more likely to bully the *orang awam* (members of the public) than the *orang awam* exerting their inalienable right as voters and taxpayers on the *kakitangan awam*.

## Will Our Civil Service Ever Improve?

JUDGING from complaints inundating newspapers, I am sorry to have to conclude that the people are utterly fed-up with the civil service and are no longer in the mood to listen to promises of clean, efficient and trustworthy civil servants.

I am sorry for those clean, efficient and trustworthy civil servants for suffering what the Malay proverb says *seekor kerbau membawa lumpur habis semua terpalit* (for a single buffalo covered in mud, the whole herd is smeared).

If the official assertion that more civil servants are now saying no to bribes and are not abusing their power is irrefutable, then we should look up to the heavens and say 'Thank You Lord'.

For the civil service to be clean, efficient and trustworthy, the civil servants must themselves be the agents in the fight against graft.

Whereas we take comfort in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's latest assurance – made in London (*New Straits Times*, Sept 15) – that he hasn't lost the momentum in the fight against graft and that his efforts are taking bite, the public would not be fully convinced unless sufficient numbers of corrupt district officers, officers-in-charge of police districts and local government directors are charged in court.

It is at these operational levels that corruption and abuse of power are most widespread and affect the greatest number of people.

There will be some who will dispute survey findings and international ratings. But nobody can deny that our civil service, in general, is far from meeting the slogan *cemerlang, gemilang, terbilang*. I am sorry I can't find a convincing English equivalent for this slogan.

What can you say about our civil service when civil servants themselves complain about the inefficiency, abuse of power and corruption among their own kind when they find themselves on the opposite side of the counter? And when policemen still stop lorry drivers and instead of approaching the vehicles, order the drivers to come to the passenger side of their patrol cars?

## Change Starts at the Top

EVEN if the downgrading of our administrative efficiency by IMD and global competitiveness by the World Economic Forum is a coincidence, the fact that it has happened a year after the new administration came to power does not augur well for our country.

World Economic Forum, in its *2005 Global Competitiveness Report*, has also downgraded our ranking – from 29 in 2003 to 31 last year.

The question is: How can we convince investors to 'come boom with us' as 'creatively' headlined by *New*

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*Straits Times* on Sept 13, when the efficiency of our administration is being questioned and our global competitiveness is declining?

We cannot even seek solace in the fact that China's competitiveness too has declined – from 44 to 46. The Chinese are, by far, more competitive than us in the areas where we are directly competing with them.

And with our officialdom sold on globalisation and free market and in cahoots with importers by under-declaring the value of imports and manipulating Sirim-issued standards to enable foreign goods to be dumped in our country, more of our manufacturers will have to close shop or move to where costs are lower. This will only drive away capital and worsen domestic unemployment.

There is no need to go far to find out why our efficiency, competitiveness and productivity are under threat. When private sector employees previously used Saturdays to conduct their personal business with the government, they now have to take time off from work because the government, like the private sector, is no longer open for business on Saturdays.

When we talk about administration, we cannot but consider political leadership as an essential component. Thus, the blame for our predicament cannot be solely put on the civil servants. Their political masters must also examine themselves. **mb**

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