

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AT THE
OPENING OF THE SECOND SENIOR GOVERNMENT
OFFICERS COURSE ON 7TH OCTOBER, 1965

This is the second of a series of courses for senior Government officers arranged by the Establishment Office Malaysia and I hope that you will take full advantage of it. You will notice from the course programme that one of the objectives of the course is to bring together senior officers in the various Ministries and Departments for an active exchange of views on Government policy and its administration. From this it can be implied that this is not a course in the strict sense of the word. It should not be regarded as an attempt on the part of Government to send you back to school to study about administration. It should however be regarded merely as a get together of senior Government officers for an exchange of views, ideas and thought with regard to the present position of the Administration and the civil service and to suggest ways and means of meeting it so as to make it fulfil the needs of a progressive nation like Malaysia.

The civil service has contributed a great deal towards the efficient running of Government machinery in this country after Merdeka. Despite increased responsibilities and new problems arising out of complexity of the administration of an independent sovereign country the civil service has been able to carry out their responsibilities efficiently and loyalty resulting in the tremendous progress achieved by this country in such a short period. However, the civil service should not rest on its laurels as there are still rooms for improvement. It has to adapt itself to the present situation of the country, if Malaysia is to take its rightful place in this modern world. As you all know our civil service system is based on the British civil service system. This system has much merits but also has a few defects. Moreover the old colonial system in this country was based on the situation prevailing before Merdeka which is entirely different from that in an independent Malaysia. In the old days the British civil servant in this country was an administrator and at the same time a ruler taking orders from a distant and remote control of White Hall in London. After Merdeka this situation does not exist and it is therefore necessary that the past methods should be re-examined and reviewed to meet the need of a progressive independent nation.

After merdeka the last vestiges and traces of the colonial civil service are disappearing from Malaysia and a new service reflecting the true needs of the country is emerging. However, there are still

traces of the old colonial system deep rooted in the civil service structure and administrative methods. These vestiges of the old colonialism must be removed if the civil service is to become an effective instrument of an independent nation. There should be a change in the approach, method and attitude towards performing the duties of the civil service. In the old colonial days the Government could afford the time in writing long minutes in files before action was taken to implement the decision. However, in an independent progressive nation like Malaysia today we cannot afford to waste much time in writing long minutes. When a clear-cut policy decision has been made by Government it is imperative on the civil service to implement it with the least possible delay so as to obtain maximum impact on the electorate who elected the Government.

There are also rules and regulations, legislations and procedures which are the carry-over from the old regime rules and regulations are still being followed. If the civil service is to fulfil the needs of a progressive Malaysia, it is necessary that a thorough examination be made of these rules and to recommend deletion or amendment if they are no more appropriate to the present day situation. In the meantime where discretion is given to the appropriate authorities, discretion should be exercised in the light of the present circumstances and requirements. Wherever possible a more liberal interpretation of the rules and regulations should be given towards the same end.

It is also necessary that the present machinery of administration should be streamlined and strengthened to meet the present situation. There should be more regular discussions within the Ministries or Departments and amongst the interested Ministries or Departments. This will reduce the amount of minutes and correspondence involved and thereby reduce the time taken to implement any policy decision. In conferences or meetings the representatives of Ministries and Departments should as far as possible have delegated authority to make decisions on the spot so that decision may be taken with the least possible delay. It is also necessary that records and decisions and agreements reached at meetings should be kept and acted on immediately as far as possible without waiting for the official minutes to arrive. In addition to the above there might be other ways of streamlining the administration and it is up to you to point to the appropriate authorities so that appropriate action could be taken to implement it.

Malaysia is an independent democratic country and its system of Government is based on Parliamentary rule. In this system we have 3 clear-cut divisions of Government.

- (i) The Electorate;
- (ii) The Elected Government and
- (iii) The Administration

The Electorate consists of adult citizens who elect the Government once in every five years. It decides in what direction it wishes to go by electing the type of Government it wishes. The Electorate has its desires and aspirations which the elected Government is expected to fulfil. It is for the Elected Government and the politicians to give words to the desires and aspirations of the Electorate and to turn them into a policy. The Administration consists of the Cabinet and the civil service. The Cabinet makes decision and gives direction towards the implementation of a policy and it is up to the civil service to give that policy a form and to implement it in the shortest possible time with the maximum application of energy and effort. The civil service may be required to give advice in the formation of a policy and in this respect it is the duty of the civil service to bring to the attention of the Cabinet the advantages and disadvantages of the policy to be formulated. The elected Government is entitled to receive such an advice since the policy once formulated may affect the very livelihood of thousands of people. The civil service is expected to give an honest and sincere view based on its knowledge and experience without fear or favour, irrespective of whether the advice thus tendered may accord or not with the Government views. The final decision on the policy of course lies with the cabinet. But once the policy decision has been made, it is the bounded duty of the civil service to execute it even when a policy runs counter to its advice. The Electorate expects benefits to be derived from the Government it elected and it is therefore the duty of the civil service to implement the policy decision made by the Cabinet with the least possible delay.

When I addressed the members of the first series of this course, I advised them to follow the military way of organisation. In the Army there is delegation right from the top to the bottom. There is the General, the Brigade Commander, the Battallion Commander, the Company Commander and the Platoon Commander. The General does not do the work of a Battallion Commander or a Platoon Commander. The General sits back and keep his mind fresh to be in touch with the battle and to be able to plan ahead, think ahead and get ahead. The General does not go round with a sten gun or with a revolver, he goes round with a baton to get to know his men, to see how things are getting on and to keep himself in the overall picture of what is going on. This is the secret of delegation, command and leadership which must, in my opinion brought to the members running the civil service. Some Heads of Departments, Secretaries to Ministries and

senior officers become so muddle and befuddle with details of routines and daily decisions such as leave for clerks, duty rosters for peons, travelling claims for approval and other small details that they have no time to think of policies of big things, to plan ahead and to look ahead.

Another example of good organisation is the many autonomous bodies that we have set up under the Government that can get things done much more effectively and quickly than many Government departments. This is because they are not tied up with rules and regulations. I do not mean we should not have rules and regulations to govern our administration but we must not allow rules and regulations to delay our decisions and our actions. We must see that rules and regulations are there to help and guide us, not to misappropriate funds or to make bad decisions. Rules and regulations were made to help to smooth and straighten out administrative machinery and not to put a clot in the wheels.

I consider that the first requirement in order to achieve that aim is good leadership at the top which will get things moving and get results. It is necessary that the leadership should have a full understanding of the Government policy and the wishes of the Elected Government. It is also its duty to ensure that every officer down the line in his Ministry/Department understands what that policy is and implements it without delay. Since independence a large number of University graduates have been recruited into the civil service in replacement of the expatriates. These young men are generally of an extremely high quality and have a latest ability of great merit. However, full advantage of the capabilities of these young men cannot be obtained unless they get good leadership at the top. The second requirement is the ability of the leadership to delegate to its subordinates not only the authority but also the power to make decision on matters appropriate to their responsibility. Secretaries to Ministries, Heads of Departments and those who are put in a position of supreme responsibility for running their organisation should not waste their time on petty matters as it will mean wasting the time of the Government and the nation. They must be in a position to stand aside and judge on the performance of their organisation and to diagnose and detect any sign of inefficiency. Every officer in the organisation should be given a clear cut picture not only of its duties but also its power within the delegated responsibility to decide things for himself within the framework of the policy without wasting time of going up and down the line seeking minor decision on petty matters.

As a member of the civil service, it is your duty to give your best

in the performance of your duties which have been entrusted to you by the Government, the people and the nation. I therefore hope that after this course you will be able to give a thought as to the ways and means of improving further the civil service of which we all are proud.