

The civil service beckons

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More school leavers, especially graduates, are applying for jobs in the civil service following the salary hike in July. But there are other reasons why a career in the civil service is now an attractive prospect.

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BACK when Malaysia was a fledgling nation, it was the wish of most parents that their children found a job with the civil service. A job there meant a stable source of income, and job security was ensured – not to mention the many benefits civil servants were entitled to, which were unmatched by the private sector.

But as the nation began to grow and the economy boomed, there was a shift of preference to jobs in the private sector.

In recent times, though, a career in the civil service has once again become an attractive prospect.

For example, a total of 153 job vacancies for graduates in the Health Ministry were advertised in the last few months, and about 40,796 applications were received. This did not include the growing number of applicants for non-graduate posts.

This paradigm shift has become notable after the civil service pay rise in July – which saw those working in the public sector bringing home an extra 7.5% to 35% in their wages – making salaries comparable to or better than those in the private sector.

The Public Services Commission, the body managing the appointment of personnel in public service, was not available

RESPONSE TO VACANCIES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR in 2006

Graduate post	Ministry/department	No. of vacancies	No. of applicants
Accountant	Accountant-General's Department	14	8,114
Economic Affairs Officer	Entrepreneurial Development and Cooperative Ministry	9	20,752
Research Officer	Fisheries Department	2	21,941
Corporate Communications Officer	Human Resource Ministry	13	19,325
Counsellor	Public Service Department	17	10,106
Factory and Machinery Maintenance	Human Resource Ministry	8	4,065
Information Technology Officer	Public Service Department	100	12,937
Law Officer	Attorney-General Department	146	2,357
Electronic Engineer	Railway Department	1	3,705
Investigative Officer	Anti-Corruption Agency	33	12,055
Diplomatic and Administration Officer	Public Service Department	350	44,758
Research Officer	National Remote Sensing Centre (Macres)	1	22,218

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Source:PSC



for comment.

However, a check on the PSC website shows that this phenomenon was not particular to the health services sector. In fact, the upsurge in the number of applicants is apparent across the board, in all areas of the civil service (see chart).

Last year alone, the PSC received over 672,000 applications for various government positions.

But a top-tier administration officer, who declined to be named, opines that the rush for civil service jobs could be a reflection of the country's development.

"More people have the opportunity to get an education so we have a higher number of school leavers and graduates entering the job market in the country. The number of people competing for jobs is simply higher, not just those competing for civil service jobs," he says.

Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan concurs, saying there has been an increase in the number of younger applicants of late.

However, he says that the government is still studying the reasons why.

"It would be interesting to see what these applicants state as their reasons for wanting to join the civil service. I would hope that young people today recognise that by joining the public service, they are able to play a key role in developing the nation."

Money matters

The increased interest in public service

College students just want a job

THERE was mixed reaction from college students when asked about their job preference. Kim Choo, 18, an arts student, believes that the most important thing would be getting a job in the first place.

"Whether it's private or civil it doesn't matter, as long as I can survive. If given a choice, however, I would prefer to work in the private sector," she says, adding that she would jump at the chance of working abroad.

Law student S. Ravenesan, 20, from Temerloh would prefer the private sector because of better career prospects and salary.

He acknowledges the long-term benefits of working in the civil service such as pension but reckons the competition would make it tough for him to get in. He would, however, consider the post of Deputy Public

can largely be attributed to a matter of Ringgit and sen.

"Frankly, more graduates seem to be choosing the civil service nowadays because of the attractive pay packages," says Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) chairman Shamsuddin Bardan.

A look at the country's civil service remuneration system (Sistem Saraan Malaysia, SSM) is revealing.

According to the Public Service Department's (PSD) salary and allowance division director Yap Kin Sian, "People

Prosecutor (DPP) because he wants to fight for the good of the people. "It wouldn't be easy, though (to get in)," he says.

Another law student, James Au, 19, also prefers the private sector because he believes the benefits and remuneration are more attractive, although he wouldn't mind being a judge.

Social science student Muhammad Rusdi, 20, reckons there is more security working in the government.

"But the most important thing is to get a job and anything I get I will take," he says.

Eil Raduan, 21, who is studying early childhood development, is not interested in either sector. She wants to open up her own car wash business instead. "I want to be my own boss. I don't have to listen to anyone," she says.

has the notion that a government job does not pay well and is not attractive. That is not true."

He explains that all fresh graduates under the SSM start at Grade 41 (except for lecturers at grade 45). He gives the example of those in the management group, where the basic salary is RM1,993.

"Then we have the many allowances, from the fixed civil service allowance of RM300, housing allowance of RM210 and the cost of living allowance of RM300 (depending on area, which varies from

»The public service needs people with a real drive to serve the nation and the public«



TAN SRI MOHD SIDEK HASSAN

RM100 to RM300), so they will be drawing about RM2,800."

Additionally, states Yap, there are many other allowances that are sector-specific (see table on Page 29 for examples). Critical service workers such as doctors, nurses, architects and lawyers, for example, are entitled to an additional critical services allowance. Teachers of languages and mathematics get an additional five per cent of their basic salaries.

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Training and perks the plus points of public sector

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He continues, "If someone is posted from the peninsula to East Malaysia, he is given a regional allowance; or if posted to the interior, a hardship allowance."

Besides allowances, there are the other perks that come with a job in the civil service, and at the top of the list are medical benefits.

"Not only does it extend to the spouse and children, but even to the parents. There is no civil service in the world that provides it to parents, and the Government is very generous in that regard," Yap says.

Then there is the added benefit of house and car loans at a four per cent interest rate, he adds.

With the promise of pensions taken into account, the perception that the civil service does not pay as well as the private sector simply does not hold any water anymore.

Says Yap, "There is a gratuity payment made on top of the pensions. With this taken into account, civil servants are very well taken care of."

Civil career

Mohd Sidek believes that in order for Malaysia to maintain its competitive position and improve upon its global standing, the skill set of public servants will need to match those in the private sector, and with their

INCOME FOR GRADE 41 OFFICERS (Figures are in RM)							
Post	Basic Salary	Fixed Civil service allowance	Fixed housing allowance	Cost of living allowance	Critical allowance	Public Health Worker allowance	TOTAL
Administrative and Diplomatic Service Officer	1993.63	300.00	210.00	300.00	-	-	2803.63
Medical Officer	1999.19	300.00	210.00	300.00	500.00	1040.00	4349.19
Research Officer	1899.01	300.00	210.00	300.00	91.95	-	2803.96

regional counterparts.

This in turn has broadened the roles and functions of Malaysia's public service.

He elaborates, "Our recruitment policies and needs thus reflect these changes and demands.

"Perhaps it is this that has influenced the perception towards public service."

Mohd Sidek opines that the public service strives for excellence, just as any other organisation would.

"We want to hire the best people and provide them the best training and exposure possible."

The result of this is that civil servants have a better chance than those in the private sector for individual betterment.

Yap describes how a person can join the civil service with a basic degree and obtain their Master's degree or PhD qualification – all at the expense of the government. This is besides the numerous short courses that are afforded locally or even abroad.

"The opportunities for education that the civil service offers are unmatched. The private sector simply does not allocate as much money for training," says Yap.

For added value, further qualification would result in increased remuneration. For example, he says, "Doctors who take a specialist course at the expense of the government will get an additional specialist allowance upon completion."

Highlighting another point, Navaratnam says there is a sense of security in the civil service because an employee cannot be sacked easily.

However, it has been highlighted that the civil service still has a problem in attracting the cream of the crop.

In August, Mohd Sidek revealed that only 5% of the newly elected diplomatic and administration officers obtained first class honours qualifications or degrees from top local and global universities.

A mid-range civil servant who wants to be known only as Lim believes this is a result of the slow hiring process.

"You have to wait at least six

months after the test and interview stages to know if you have made it. By then, the top candidates, even those who are really interested to join the public sector, would have been grabbed by the corporate sector," he explains.

Service above self

In June, Public Service Department (PSD) director-general Tan Sri Ismail Adam revealed there were about 100,000 job vacancies in the civil service, with the health and education sectors offering the most openings.

A problem, he said, was finding suitable candidates – despite the increase in the number of applications – due to their mismatched qualifications.

Last year, graduate unemployment was recorded at 60,000 due to this problem.

Ultimately, those who want to join the civil service should have one priority on their minds – and that is to serve the nation.

Mohd Sidek puts it simply, "Financial success is not the primary motivator to joining the service. The public service needs people with a real drive to serve the nation and the public."

For those interested, he reminds, "A career in the public service is to serve with integrity – that is the underlying career motivator."