

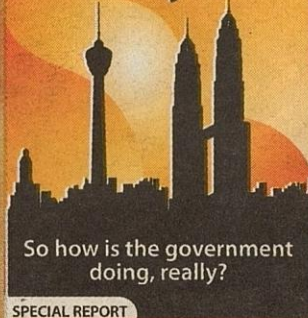
■ THE CIVIL SERVICE AND THE PUBLIC DELIVERY SYSTEM

New civil service mantra:

NST 3/2/08 PG 6, 7 + 8

The man who oversees the largest group of personnel in the country has made promises few would dare to make: telephone calls answered by the third ring, payments made within 14 days, queries answered within three working days and an end to the government red-tape runaround we've all had to surrender our sanity to. **ANIZA DAMIS** and **ELIZABETH JOHN** speak to Chief

CHANGING Malaysia



SPECIAL REPORT



Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan about the civil service, and the brisk pace he sets for it

Q: The promises that you've made are very daring, because you are making promises on behalf of the 1.2 million civil servants. What makes you confident that your promises will come through?

A: I have a lot of confidence in all the people being fair to me. But I need all the support I can get. Because the intention is to improve. I made the announcement but the commitment is from all of us. None of them said: "This is lousy." They said: "This is a good idea; we want to change."

This is their commitment, too, because however good someone is, there is no way that he can do it alone.

Q: So, the announcement that you have made is based on strong trust that everyone would do his job?

A: Yes. But, I'm not going to pretend that all is going to be perfect. I'm pretty sure that out of the 1.2 million, not every one of them will be putting all his weight to the task.

We should be proud of what we are. And I believe we in the public



service are proud. For example, when the prime minister acknowledged that the public service had improved, we were proud. We are proud of the service we give, and we think there is a real improvement, not just a perception, but a real thing.

For instance, you can make a passport very quickly, and when you go to the government offices, people are smiling. And when you promise payment within 14 days and people are paid within 14 days or even five to seven days, people appreciate that, and you want to improve further.

I believe the morale is good right now.

Q: What was the problem last time? Why was there such a delay?

A: I think people should work to meet a deadline.

Imagine if you don't have a

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In December 2007, 96.9 per cent of payments by federal ministries and agencies amounting to RM8.455 billion were made in 14 days.
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deadline. You feel like doing, you do *lah*. You don't feel like doing, you don't do. You can't do that.

So, we are trying to acculturate the civil service to that — working to meet a deadline.

You must do your best. You must take pride in your job.

Just like when I answered my phone just now. You must respond fast. And if you cannot respond, you must explain why.

The telephone is but one example, but the principle applies to everything. You do it fast, and if you cannot do it, then you must explain why. And thirdly, you should call back.

All of us must be like this. Everyone must move in tandem. And there must be pride in the work.

Q: Do you get any complaints at all about rude or indifferent staff?

A: *Ada* (there are complaints). When there are 1.2 million civil servants, surely there'd be times, even for me. If you catch me on the wrong side of the bed, don't you think I'd scold you? Of course, I would! What more when you have 1.2 million staff.

But, generally, things have to be good. Generally, the civil service has to be good. That's the point, to get everybody to behave.

Q: How are you trying to achieve this?

A: You have to lead by example.

And when people like you write good things about us, don't you think that civil servants will respond to that positive feedback by maintaining that level of service, or improving on it? I think they would.

It is because we feel appreciated. It doesn't matter whether you give us more pay or not. The pride

Working to a deadline

AN IMPROVED PUBLIC DELIVERY SYSTEM

Progress has been made in reducing the suffocating government red tape, and more structural changes are on the way.

Some tangible results

There has been some improvement in frontline services. For example:

15 minutes to renew your business licence

1 hour to register a new business licence

2 hours to apply for a new passport

3 hours to renew your passport

7 days — payment made to 60% of the contractors who had submitted their invoices

14 days the maximum amount of time before a contractor is paid after he has submitted his invoice

14-30 days to get a refund for overpaid income tax; and you get it automatically, without having to apply for it

70% of the backlog of cases in land offices have been cleared since 2004 when "flying squads" were deployed.

all those things.

But that's only good as a first point of entry. Because after that, no amount of Harvard training can help you.

So, we have a good crop of applicants. But, more important is to make sure that the people we recruit to join us are trained to be the way we want them to be.

How do you McDonald-ise them? How do you get the same consistently good service everywhere?

It's the training. And the manual.

All the different sectors have their training institutions.

All this is supposed to be building that culture.

So, beyond just attracting the best to join, the training is important.

But beyond training, because you can only train a person for six months or one year at the most, it is on the job itself that this person will learn. Mentoring by the bosses and peers, and people like you (reporters) not abusing them so much, will really help them.

Q: How are you going to retain the best talent?

A: What is the reason people stay?



me, or email me, I promise you it will be cleared within 24 hours.

Q: So what's the consequence now for a civil servant who doesn't measure up? Doesn't do the job?

A: What do you think?

Q: Isn't it the case that once the Public Service Department hires you, it's pretty much impossible to fire you?

A: You cannot simply fire anybody. It depends on the offence.

It's very clear. You must follow the rules.

The problem is, perhaps, in the past, you didn't follow the rules.

Q: If secretaries-general on contract don't perform, will they get a renewal?

A: There are rewards and punishment.

If you perform you get a reward, if you don't perform you get punished.

The rule is already there. The question is whether you are enforcing or not.

You must implement the rules. You must monitor, and then you must en-

Structural changes being made

- Secretaries-general of ministries who are put on contract have to meet key performance indicators. Their contracts will only be renewed if targets are met.
- A pilot project is being carried out to rate the 144 local councils

International recognition

- World Economic Global Competitiveness Study for 2007-2008 ranked Malaysia 21st among 131 countries
- World Bank's "Doing Business 2008" ranked Malaysia 24th out of 178 countries on the ease of doing business

■ TAX REFUNDS ON THE WAY: P27-29

■ GETTING YOUR PASSPORT IS NOW A BREEZE: P30-31

in doing a good job is itself a motivation.

Q: Do you think this motivation is going to attract a better quality of staff?

A: Yes. As of now, there are more applicants than posts.

And they are of good quality. But it is only at the point of entry.

I am sure many of us are enamoured of graduates from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Harvard, Oxford or Cambridge, or people with First Class Honours and

challenge. And we have improved the salary.

When people like you appreciate us, that is satisfying.

And we ourselves know it — that we can make payment in 14 days.

In December 2007, alone, 96.9 per cent of payments by federal ministries and agencies amounting to RM8.455 billion were made in 14 days, and 70.4 per cent of the amounts paid were made in seven days.

Q: So, everyone must be really happy.

A: I would say so.

The same standard must be applied to all. It's easy that way.

The same thing about payment. Treat others the way you would like to be treated.

How would you like to be paid? How would you like to be treated? You want to be paid fast; you want to be served fast.

So, when it's your time to serve, please serve fast. And if you can't do it, then please tell why you can't do it. And please tell nicely, *lah*.

Q: Has the one-stop-centre changed people's view of local government?

A: Datuk Fuad (Datuk Ahmad Fuad Ismail, Housing and Local Government Ministry secretary-general) tells me it's working well.

But what is government to you, what is public service to you? It's the local authorities.

They are the largest form of government — not the federal government, nor the state government. So,



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Pemudah is about consultation and the consultative process between the government and the private sector. It's mostly to handle issues in the corporate sector but it is not necessarily confined to that.
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it's very important they give good service.

Q: Since local government is so big, is it difficult to modernise and change attitudes?

A: What are the issues at local authority level? Cleaning drains, collecting garbage — easy, isn't it?

But it can also be the most difficult thing, when people refuse to work.

So to answer your question:

Yes, it is very difficult because there

are so many of them.

Yes, it is difficult if you choose not to do it.

But no, it's easy, because those are easy issues.

When someone asks you to clean the drain, you clean it! Because that's what you're paid to do.

Even payment, you know. What's so difficult about making payment in 14 days?

But I must admit, a few of them will still fall through the cracks.

But I promise you, if you come to

must monitor, and then you must enforce — on any subject.

Q: Has action been taken against anyone who hasn't performed?

A: Yes.

I don't have the number here but I'm sure it has come out before.

Why are you only interested in blood?

Q: Because, there's the incentive to do well, that's the carrot. What about the stick?

A: Of course, there is a stick.

If they are found to be corrupt and charged, that is action. That means, while awaiting the decision of the court, he would have been suspended.

If the charge is proven, then we sack him.

Some who didn't perform didn't get a pay rise. And some even got demoted.

I want to be fair. The integrity of the system depends on fairness.

You must be especially fair when you punish, because when you punish unfairly, it's a bad thing and quite difficult to get out of.

But after some time, you don't have to punish any more because they don't do it.

The fear itself is enough to discourage people from doing it.

Q: What is the value of Pemudah (Special Task Force to Facilitate Business)?

A: What is important about it is the idea of close collaboration.