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Dedicated To Creating A Better Society

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Dawn of better civil service

CHIEF Secretary Datuk Seri Dr Ismail Bakar (pic) was excellent in his meet the press session last Friday. We have not heard much about him or his views on how he would lead the 1.6 million civil servants whom we all help to support through our taxes and our hopes and prayers.

As Dr Ismail rightly pointed out during the session, the huge civil service is the "backbone of the administration" and it needs to make adjustments to serve the country better. He highlighted the top priorities he would focus on, including political neutrality and corruption, which is a scourge in the civil service.

Dr Ismail hit the right note in conducting the new civil service orchestra. Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had expressed serious doubts, both publicly and in private discussions, over the partisan feelings and performance of large sectors of the civil service.

After all, civil servants had served only one government for 61 years and had developed strong partisan loyalties, often based on personal and political lines, for leaders in the Barisan Nasional government. They did not know any other government at the federal level and so, although wrong in principle, their loyalties became internalised in practice.

Thus, to some extent the civil service at most levels became subtly and sometimes even openly politicised from top to bottom.

I watched this development as one of the senior civil servants, having worked for 30 years from the early days of independence.

The politicising of the civil service grew worse as it became more mono racial in our multi-



racial and multi-religious country.

It's just as well that the Pakatan Harapan government has noticed the dramatic changes and negative transformation as well as the consequent and relative decline in the standards and quality of the civil service particularly in more recent times. Thus, the Chief Secretary has to cleanse the civil service of "politics and political interference" and make it more professional, efficient and intellectually honest. This is a huge challenge and he can only succeed if he gets the full backing of the Prime Minister, Cabinet, state governments and the secretaries-

general and directors-general. Corruption has and can continue to undermine and erode all the good socioeconomic and indeed all positive and progressive government policies. The current strong commitment of the government to combat corruption at the highest level of the administration is praiseworthy but more needs to be done and at a faster pace.

We can go all out to catch corrupt civil servants but if they think that some big sharks are still swimming freely, they will sense injustice and become lukewarm in their cooperation and commitment to fight corruption. After all, if the big bosses can do it, why can't they?

Dr Ismail also said that "for a country to progress and determine its future path, she needs an effective and efficient and well-oiled machinery and that is the civil service". It was certainly well said! But he must quickly introduce a survey of the quality of the delivery system to find out how effective, efficient and well oiled the administrative system really is today.

How long do members of the public have to

wait for action to rectify their complaints?

The public often does not get good or fast response, or even replies, to their complaints. Thus, an ombudsman must be appointed as a matter of priority.

From the outside, the perception is that it is very difficult to get attention within a reasonable period of time to public concerns and complaints. Who do you contact and are the officers concerned available? Phones can ring and ring without being picked up, and then you are put on hold and often passed from pillar to post before you get some attention. After that, you've got to keep following up as some officers are too slow to keep their promises to serve the people efficiently.

Dr Ismail could institute a monitoring system to check on the efficiency and effectiveness of his 1.6 million staff. He has to ensure that the administrative machinery is well oiled to deliver public services more smoothly and satisfactorily.

He can then review the progress made in achieving political neutrality, less corruption at all levels and definitely more efficiency and a better-oiled administrative machinery to serve us all better.

The people, government and civil servants and retirees are waiting and watching for the supposedly new civil service in new Malaysia.

We will support the new Chief Secretary and even pray for his success. If and when he succeeds – and we hope he will – the whole country will be grateful to him and celebrate the good legacy that he will hopefully leave behind for a better Malaysia.

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