

Consider retirement rate, need to minimise redundancies



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NO one would deny that the year 2020 has made the world a topsy-turvy one. All because of one tiny virus, the coronavirus dubbed Covid-19, that brought a global pandemic and stifled the livelihoods of all living beings.

Almost every segment of society has been affected, endured pain in one way or another and altered the way it functions normally, which prompted the "new normal" for continuous survival.

The public sector is not exempt from this as it too has to adopt an alternate mode of serving the public, which is the core of its DNA.

After the Movement Control Or-

der was imposed on March 18 last year to curb the spread of the deadly virus, the director-general of the Public Service Department issued a circular on May 2 requesting all government departments, including state governments, statutory bodies and local councils, to work from home with minimum physical presence at the office to ensure the government machinery is not disrupted.

The ruling required only 30 per cent of employees at the office and the rest to perform their duties from home. The mechanism is to be implemented on a rotational basis among employees at the discretion of the head of department. This includes granting permission to officers to bring home restricted or confidential documents if necessary to complete a job.

Services considered essential and frontliners, however, continued to serve the public face-to-face. In addition, many departments, such as Immigration, expanded their services online to be even more effective.

As the work from home mechanism has proven to be effective, the director-general of the Public Service Department issued another circular on Dec 21 saying that this system will be enforced to further enhance the public delivery system as well as take care of the welfare of civil servants to ensure healthy work-life balance.

In this context, the views expressed by Datuk Dr Fauziah Mohd Taib in an opinion piece titled *"Is it time to trim the civil service?"* in the *New Straits Times* on Jan 2 did not augur well for our civil service as her argument was that if government offices could still function as normal with 30 per cent capacity, therefore we have a bloated civil service.

Her point of contention reflected common public grouses about the fact that we have approximately 1.6 million civil servants. We have to understand that though the figure sounds enormous, nearly one third of the workforce are involved in uniformed bodies, security forces and the medical and

teaching professions.

Only the remainder directly serve the public at the federal and state levels. Despite the expansion of various ministries and departments, as well as expansions to cater to the needs of the public as dictated by the government of the day, the Public Service Department is always cautious and makes due diligence not to overstaff any place, including in getting office space and workstations.

Additionally, one should not ignore the higher rate of retirement every year, where in some circumstances there's a need for replacement to reduce the workload.

The current management of the public sector, headed by both the chief secretary to the government and director general of the Public Service Department, is charting robust strategies for an effective delivery system and to overcome redundancies among agencies.

Further, the F.A.S.T.E.R. principle (flat, agile, streamlined, tech-enabled, efficient and resilient) emphasised by the chief

secretary of the government last year is a booster for the public sector to go beyond the normal. The Institute of Public Administration (Intan) is at the forefront in giving the public sector a further boost through various courses for seamless operations at all levels.

What is noteworthy is that the pandemic that have we endured for nearly one year has taught us many good and positive lessons, notwithstanding some agony. The work from home policy is not new in developed countries and the private sector.

The public sector, however, takes the move seriously and attempts to effectuate and provide the best service for the benefit of public at large. The public can rest assured that the Malaysian civil service will travel and perform in tandem with the changing times.

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