

# **CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND ITS CHALLENGES– A CASE STUDY OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The government of Brunei Darussalam and the Civil Service in particular, needs to address what its role should be and how it should conduct its activities from time to time. This requires a constant review of its function and modes of operation, so as to improve and upgrade the quality of services rendered to the people.
2. As for this reason, the Brunei Civil Service has conducted a frequent review of the current operating and administrative system, process and procedures. This is to identify whether they are still appropriate and applicable with the present situation. Any obsolete process, procedures, rules and regulation will be amended in order to bring improvement to the delivery of services and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness in government administration, which undoubtedly will promote a conducive environment for the enhancement of economic development and revitalisation

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRUNEI ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM**

3. When Brunei Darussalam gained full sovereign status in January 1984, There was also a notable structural change in the system of government. The sultanate adopted a ministerial structure with His Majesty's the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam maintaining the supreme executive authority and occupying the Prime Ministerial Post. Ministries were created and headed by ministers appointed by His Majesty who are directly responsible to the Prime Minister for the formulation and implementation of policies in their areas of responsibility. The Chief Executive Officer of each ministry is the Permanent Secretary, who is responsible for the administration of his/her ministry and help the minister in the formulation and implementation of policies. At present, His Majesty also holds the posts of Minister of Defence and Minister of

Finance. His Majesty's involvement as a working monarch reflects his commitment to a meritocratic, efficient, effective, responsive, dynamic, fairness and impartial government.

4. The government of Brunei Darussalam has **twelve ministries and seventy-seven government departments and has about 50,000 employees**, thus making it the largest employer in Brunei. The large number of Civil Service staff reflects the government's effort in taking care of the well being and welfare of the people through its extensive economic, social, education, health, religious, administrative and development programmes and projects.

## **CIVIL SERVICE REFORM**

5. The civil service of Brunei Darussalam has grown from being "Law and Order" oriented into one that is a pacesetter and facilitator for national development. In meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Civil service is well equipped to be more involved in steering than in rowing and possessing more the mentality to serve rather than to be served. It is this vision that has provided the direction and driving force in addressing emerging challenges.
6. Some of the review of the current operating and administrative system, process and procedures are as follows:
  - a) The tax exemption for the pioneer status and several other licensing approvals, which formerly were under the auspices of Ministry of Finance, has been transferred to the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources. Also, several units of the department of Economic Planning and Development (Ministry of Finance) such as Domestic Trade Unit and Tourism Unit had been transferred to the Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources in order to centralise and expedite the process of industrialisation. This is in line with the government's effort to diversify its economy so as not to be dependent on oil and related industries; and
  - b) The Ministry of Finance is currently making some amendments to the country's financial policies, rules and regulations. This is to encourage more foreign investment in Brunei.

- c) Public Service Department is also reviewing from time to time The General Order 1962 in order to update and make it more relevant to the current situation and environment
7. His Majesty, in his 44<sup>th</sup> birthday's speech on 15 July 1990, had also given directives to the Civil Services to review and improve their organisational performances. In response, the Prime Minister's Office initiated the Civil Service Review Programme. Its basic philosophy is to achieve improved performance in the Civil Service. The **Civil Service Review Committee (JPPA)** was formed on 16 November 1991. It is aimed at developing an effective, efficient, responsive, progressive and dynamic civil service. **The Management Services Department (MSD)** was given the responsibility as the secretariat of the committee.

## **INVOLVING CITIZENS AND MEASURING THEIR SATISFACTION IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

8. Although the Brunei Darussalam administrative system is uniquely Bruneian, nevertheless the people are given freedom to express their ideas and expression through appropriate authorities. This was often mentioned by His Majesty through his titah (royal address) such as those concerning the National Development Plan:

*“In the initial stages of the National Development Plan, people in this country are given wide opportunity to express their ideas, opinion and proposals to the relevant committees that have been formed. Conversely, the committees will also meet them and seek their opinions. In this context, I believe, the people are having their right for freedom of speech and expression. It has always been my intention that all my subjects will inform (relevant authorities) whatever their desires for the sake of our happiness in order to be accountable to Allah on our beloved land of Brunei Darussalam”.*

9. One of the most effective avenues for the people to express their opinion, ideas and grievances is through the **Village Consultative Committee**, which comprise of village heads and leaders. They are elected by the people and act as a mediator between the government and the people. Their role is also to ensure that the well

being, welfare, safety and security of the people in the village of his responsibility are being taken care of. Each Village Consultative Committee has an advisor appointed by His Majesty. All of them are responsible to the Board of Organiser headed by the Minister of Home Affairs. They will meet at least once a month to discuss the current problems and issues raised at the village consultative level.

10. The new millennium is expected to confront us with much greater challenges.

Nevertheless, Brunei Darussalam will continue to strive for peace, stability and prosperity. In order to achieve these, the government is committed in strengthening and accelerating the process of nation building. It has embarked on various developments covering various areas such as socio-economic and structural reform programmes to improve the standard of living and quality of life of its people, as well as strengthening further its economy.

## CHALLENGES

11. In its continuous strive to improve the standard of living and quality of life of its people, the government of Brunei Darussalam have been confronted with many challenges. **Its greatest challenge came from its economy, which was largely dependent on the production of crude oil and liquefied natural gas.** Being too dependent on oil and its related industries makes the Brunei economy vulnerable to exogenous shock and therefore upgrading the economy remains a major task for Brunei Darussalam.

12. Brunei Darussalam has not been spared from the effects of **the Asian Financial crisis**. This crisis has prompted the government to cut back its spending on development programmes/projects. Improving efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service is paramount task for the government. Thus, a call towards greater efficiency, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness remains to be the main agenda.

13. **The impact of globalisation** as a result of a strong linkages established between nations and regions through trade, investments, capital and labour flows presents

every country with both threats and opportunities. Globalisation can become threat at the absence of equal players and the world become economic playing field where there are winners and disadvantaged players because of uneven power and financial status. The process of globalisation is complemented by the advancement of information technology that eases and expedites the flow of capital knowledge and information across national boundaries. This development requires every country to be competitive, thus requiring a constant review of its function and modes of operation.

14. **Social changes including the increased expectation of the people as consumers of government services are challenging the quality, efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of public services.** This is as a result of increasing educated citizen who are continuously exposed to outside world and who demand for higher standard of services and greater accountability. Civil servants should be held accountable for the efficient and effective utilisation of resources as well as the delivery of services. In view of this challenge, the Civil Service needs to be responsive and must learn to anticipate demands as well as able to meet the consumers' needs and expectations in a more innovative and creative manner.

## **CREATING THE QUALITY SERVICE CULTURE**

15. At the same time, various initiatives that gear toward enhancing the culture of excellent and innovation, such as the **Civil Service Excellent Award (CSEA) and The Quality Control Circle (QCC) have been introduced into the Civil Service.** These efforts were not only enable the government to adopt to environmental changes, but also to continuously strive to improve the quality of services rendered to the public. On the other hand, they also encourage staff participation and ensure the sense of belonging towards change process. The CSEA and QCC also provide avenues for staff recognition and to inculcate teamwork.
16. The government has also provided an **avenue for the public to submit their complaints and grievances in relation to the quality of service given by the Civil**

**Service.** For this, the Management Services Department (MSD) has been appointed as a complaint centre. This calls for greater accountability from the Civil Service agencies especially in fulfilling their respective **client charter (a written pledge or promise made by a ministry or department regarding the quality of standard to be delivered to the people), which has been implemented since 1995.** In so doing, the Civil Service has become more customer and quality oriented.

## **HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

17. Skilled, well educated, motivated and versatile civil servant are needed to run the government in order to achieve the government goal and objectives in developing Brunei Darussalam. The Civil Service Institute and the University of Brunei Darussalam have played an important role in formulating and implementing various training programmes for the development of skills, knowledge and quality of leadership of the civil servants. The Civil Service Institute is taking the training seriously. Those who have been selected to attend courses at the institute but failed show up are considered absent from their duties and will get salary deduction. Currently, the Civil Service Institute is looking for partners in providing “international excellence” in leadership, management and organisational development expertise and knowledge for its activities towards developing “vision driven and result oriented” leaders and organisation in Brunei Darussalam.
  
18. Public Service Department, Prime Minister’s Office has been mandated to organise an Annual Executive Development Programme for senior government officers since 1996. The EDP is geared to shorten the learning curve for upper level executives by developing the skills needed to achieve excellence as a cross-functional executive. Participants been provided with an overview of key managerial disciplines, including strategy and decision-making, public policy imperative and cross-cultural management. The program also demonstrates how to maximize people and resources, develop a broader understanding of integration across functions, and make accurate projections to enhance ones organization's effectiveness and competitive advantage. This program is mandatory for administrative officers to attend in order to be confirmed as head of Departments. In addition to that, the department also organised

Development Program for Government Middle Management Officers. This program is aimed to enhance the participants with managerial knowledge and skills.

19. Apart from being well trained and knowledgeable, the civil servants also need to be very disciplined in performing their duty to the public. This is because good work ethic normally produces good quality service. They are undoubtedly crucial in projecting the image of the Civil Service as a whole. As for this reason, strategic measures has been intensified through training, seminars, publications and speeches by government leaders to inculcate positive attitude and progressiveness values among civil servants. A book entitled **“Moral Pillars And Work Ethics Of The Public Service Of Brunei Darussalam”** was also launched during the 1996 Civil Service Day. This book contains eleven key values for enhancing quality and productivity that should be subscribed by all civil servants when performing their duties and responsibilities. Similarly, a nation-wide “courtesy campaign” was launched in 1997 to create a climate of respect and team spirit as well as discipline and integrity among civil service.

## **EXPANDING THE PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE**

20. Most of the country’s economic and physical developments were government generated and this has put so much strain in the government’s account particularly at the present budgetary constraint. In response, the government has called for wider private sector participation in accelerating the economic growth. Among measures taken were **to privatise, corporatise and contract-out some of the government functions and activities. The Special Privatisation Committee was formed in 1994 to study and implement privatisation project proposal submitted by ministries and departments.**
21. There are several government entities that have been privatised such as the **privatisation of domestic waste collection, the privatisation of cellular mobile network and the contracting out of several Port Department’s functions.** With the implementation of these privatisation programmes, the government managed to reduce the size of civil services, optimised the government expenditure, relieved the

government from the administrative burden and at the same time improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

22. The Brunei Civil Service's role will continue to respond reactively and proactively to the needs of the private sectors, that is by creating and providing a conducive environment for a rapid economic growth. **The public and private sectors need to work together in establishing a competitive, dynamic and resilient economy through the notion of "Brunei Incorporated"**. What this means is that the private sector will be the primary engine of economic growth, whilst the public sector will provide the major framework and direction.

## CONCLUSION

23. Good governance is essential for the creation of prosperity, harmony and stability as well as for maintaining continuous progress and development of the country. It is even more challenging in the current period of economic instability and financial crisis that are sweeping this region. Fortunately, Brunei is least affected since it has abundant resources. The people of Brunei Darussalam are still enjoying free education and health care and the subsidised housing project for the needy is still progressing well.
24. Depending on the irreplaceable resources of oil and gas alone may not guarantee our future success and survival. The previous experiences have indicated that too dependent on oil makes the country vulnerable to external pressure such as the fluctuation of oil price affecting Brunei's revenue. **In response, the government calls for the Civil Service to be more prudent in their spending. At the same time, a comprehensive review of the government administrative system needs to be conducted in order to upgrade and improve out-dated systems and procedures, rules and regulation as well as ameliorating the overlapped functions of ministries and departments.**



25. The dependent on the government for economic and social development as well as for a source of employment can put further strain on the government's purse. As for this reason, the government has been making efforts to transfer some of their activities and functions to private entities or corporate agencies. This is also to encourage more private sectors' participation in the development and revitalisation of Brunei's economy. On the other hand, **the government's roles will then become a facilitator, regulator and catalyst that can provide a conducive environment for economic growth.**

26. **The future success of this programme can be further enhanced with the help of a well planned human resource development programme for both the government and the private sectors' employees so that they are equipped with the required skill.**