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Social Strategic Foundation executive director*

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‘Workers must prove they deserve a pay hike’

KUALA LUMPUR: Civil servants are seeking a salary hike of between 10 and 40 per cent.

Their main argument to back up their claim is that salaries have not been reviewed for the last 10 years, with the cost of living going up tremendously.

Is their request justified? Generally, there is a consensus for a salary increase, but some people have put a condition to it — the civil service force should be leaner and meaner.

“The government should reduce the number of civil servants and employ only the best people and pay them better. This will raise the standard of the civil service,” said Social Strategic Foundation executive director Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria.

He said whether they were doctors, policemen or receptionists, those in government employ must be able to perform well. Those who do not should be asked to leave.

Jayasooria said the civil servants’ performance was below world standard.

“Unlike workers in the private sector, most government servants are too comfortable with their job, knowing that they will not be sacked even if their performance is poor,” he said.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsudin Bardan said since the last wage review for civil servants, the consumer price index has not increased by 40

per cent to warrant a hike of that size.

“If there should be a salary increase, let it be based on the key performance index,” he said.

“The civil service receives much flak for its inefficiency and, therefore, the workers have to prove that they are efficient to deserve a higher salary.”

On the size of the civil service, Shamsudin said it should be about quality and not numbers.

“I feel a civil service of between 800,000 and 900,000 would be adequate for a population of between 32 million and 33 million by 2020.”

He said since voluntary separation schemes or retrenchment were unthinkable in the government, there should be natural attrition where civil servants who retire or resign should not be replaced so that the figure would be not only at a comfortable level, but also more efficient.

Former director for Centre for Public Policy Studies, Dr Lim Teck Ghee, supported the request for a salary hike, but felt that the increases should be proportionate.

He noted that the lowest

paid civil servants were receiving less than RM500 a month, which placed them in the hardcore poor group.

Lim said a salary review was urgently needed.

However, there should be a progressive salary increase with those in the lower scales receiving more in terms of percentage.

“Already the salary differences within the Malaysian civil service are among the worst in the world.

“A huge increase for the top scale civil servants is likely to increase this income inequality,” he said.

MTUC deputy president Shafie B.P. Mamal said since the price of everything had gone up, it was only logical for civil servants to be paid more.

He, however, felt that a 40 per cent hike would be on the high side.

“Cuepacs and the government should discuss the issue with an open mind and come up with a realistic figure.”

The manager of a private firm said the number of civil servants must be trimmed.

“There are about 1.3 million civil servants but the same job could be done by perhaps 800,000 people,” he

said.

“Reduce the number and the amount saved on their salaries should be paid to those who are efficient. At present, even with 1.3 million civil staff, it takes a long time to get things done at government departments.

“It is not that they have so much work to do but they are simply inefficient.”

The owner of a small business spoke out against any pay increases.

“Why should my taxes be used to pay higher salary to the inefficient and over-staffed civil service.

The government’s salary bill is estimated at RM1.7 billion a month and an increase of 25 per cent translates into RM400 million.

Cuepacs president Omar Osman disagreed with the suggestion that the civil service should be trimmed to justify a salary increase.

“No. I do not agree. In fact, I think the number should be gradually increased to 1.5 million by 2010 to prepare the country for developed nation status by 2020,” he said.

Omar, however, admitted that the employees in several departments were not performing up to par.

“We are working to improve the situation.”

Omar said Cuepacs leaders would go on a road show, which began with Kota Baru on Dec 16 and Klang (today), Kuala Terengganu (Saturday) and Alor Star (Sunday), to argue its case for a salary hike.

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