INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian Public Service formerly known as the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) has assumed a significant key role in the economic and social development of the country. Shaped by the country's historical development and its social and political institutions, the Malaysian Public Service has had a remarkably interesting record. During the pre-independent period, the British introduced structures and practices to help provide various basic services to the public in order to maintain law and order which were aligned to the economic and political activities of the time. Those structures and practices set the foundation of the Malayan Civil Service.

With the aim of progressing towards self-determination after independence, the Malaysian Public Service has undergone many changes to re-orientate and evolve into a civil service structure that is relevant and progressive through the introduction of planned improvements and innovations to cope with the developments at that time as well as future needs. To date, the Malaysian Public service has staff strength of over 1.4 million employees covering 28 schemes of service including the Federal Public Service, the State Public Services, the Joint Public Services, the Education Service, the Judiciary, the Legal Service, the Police and Armed Forces.

EARLY ESTABLISHMENT

The Malaysian Civil Service inherited its legacy from the British Public Service with significant fundamental changes taking place over the last 50 years. Tracing briefly the history of the Malaysian Public Service, its establishment began in the late 1700 when the British East India Company acquired Penang. At that time the civil service attracted the best and brightest scholars from England to be appointed as administrative officers. The Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1845 laid down the public service ethos which emphasised that

1) a politically neutral civil service means complete loyalty to the government of the day regardless of its political complexion;

2) a professional public service, should offer impartial and appropriate advice, devoted to the public interests and obedient to the Minister and Cabinet; and

3) the public service should provide continuous stability when there is a change in government.
This basic tenet sets the tone of the Malaysian Civil Service for the past 50 years since independence.

Meanwhile, the late 1800 saw the amalgamation of the civil services in the Federated Malay States and that of the Straits Settlements into a single unified service known as the Federated Malay States Civil Service (FMS). This was to provide a centralised administrative power with a common recruitment procedure that would allow officers to be appointed and deployed to the various Malay states. With this centralisation, the recruitment procedures were streamlined attracting equal if not better qualified candidates for appointment into the service which marked the beginning of a well organised and professional civil service.

MALAY PARTICIPATION

The FMS expanded and opened its doors to Malay officers to form a subordinate service known as the Malay Administrative Service. By 1903, there were 332 Malays out of 6,607 employees in the government service. Raja Chulan b. Raja Abdullah who had earlier joined the government service as a Settlement Officer in Perak became the first Malay District Officer in Upper Perak, thus breaking the control of Europeans in the Service.

Under the expansion of the FMS and the Malay Administrative Service, many administrative reforms were introduced to upgrade and improve the service. Among others the Sterling Scheme, Stubb's Salary and Classification and the Bucknill Commissions continued to define and refine the principles of service relating to the systems of remuneration, leave and pension and other terms of service.

When the British left Malaya during the Japanese occupation in 1941, the mettle of 85 of these officers who were of the Malay Administrative Service were tested when the administration of the country was left in their hands. They managed the country well and they continued to play an important role towards the nation’s independence in the 1950’s.
THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

The beginnings of the formation of a unified public service started when other Colonial services such as the Medical, Education, Legal, Police to name a few were combined to establish the Colonial Administrative Service of which the MCS was now a component. The MCS later evolved into what is now known as the Administrative and Diplomatic Service (ADS), a premier service whose changing roles from that of a developmentalist to a facilitator and now as an innovator has been seen as instrumental in moving the country forward in attaining economic dominance, enhancing human capital development, addressing socio-economic inequalities, improving and sustaining life quality and strengthening institutions and implementation capacity.

The ADS, generally described as ‘elite’ and ‘prestigious,’ provides almost all the senior administrative officials at the federal and state levels. Its ‘generalist’ character where an officer will serve and function as administrators and policy implementers in various government agencies or ministries provides a general purpose perspective with a non-partisan role as advisors to the political appointees. As recent as the late 1990’s, the policy to recruit officers from multi-disciplinary academic backgrounds and emplacing them in relevant ministries or agencies has lessened to a certain extent the ‘generalist’ image of the ADS.

The MCS has its roots in the colonial administrative system established by the British. Thus, Malaysia “inherited” the civil service characterised by professionalism, ethos and not least the contribution of expatriates who remained in Malaysia in the 1950s and 1960s. Unlike some other colonial systems, the British preserved the traditional social structures and political institutions of the day with some adjustments. Even before independence, the British ensured that the Malay aristocracy and political elites were groomed for their roles in the colonial administrative system.

A significant move during the early years of independence was the policy of Malayanisation of the Public Service. This was in the forefront of the Alliance government’s agenda with the objective of completing Malayanisation by 1 July 1960. Finally on August 15, 1968, the Federal Establishment Office which was renamed the Establishment Office of Malaysia in 1967 adopted Public Service Department as the agency to oversee all matters relating to creation and restructuring of services to better serve the country’s developmental agenda.
EVOLUTION

The Public Service continued to play an important role in the years following Merdeka. Through the difficulties following the early years after Independence such as the Emergency, the troubles in 1969, and accommodating the needs of racial diversity of the population, the Public Service has been the steady guiding hand planning, maintaining, and executing government policies and programs aimed at achieving economic growth and social equity in the nation’s journey towards development and modernisation.

The Public Service has had a strong role in policies introduced and implemented in the industrial, agricultural and social sectors through the various 5-Year Plans and the New Economic Policy introduced in 1970 which helped maintain the balance between rural and industrial development, provided the impetus for further economic growth while managing the social implications of an ethnically diverse nation.

Throughout those years, the Public Service has evolved and met the challenges faced by the nation, adjusting, adapting and fine-tuning government political, economic, and social programs that contributed to the nation being one of the most modern and developed in the region. Not only has it kept the pace of development going, it has facilitated the nation’s thrust into the ranks of the higher income developing countries.

Since independence the Malaysian public service has assumed a multitude of roles in meeting the needs and expectations of the public and other stakeholders. The public service, with the strength of over 1.4 million members, has assumed the roles of negotiator, controller and facilitator. In addition, it has also become the pace setter and the change agent for the country. In assuming these roles the public service needs to perform numerous duties which include delivering services, handling public interest, ensuring public security and safety, and community programmes.

Significantly the Malaysian Civil Service has over the years carved its name and is recognised as one of the best in the regions. It is credited for playing a key role in Malaysia’s development and modernisation. Generally, the governmental efforts made during the past decades, have produced favourable impacts in improving governance and the quality of services in the public sector.

VISION 2020

In its efforts to meet the expectations of Vision 2020 to become a high income and developed nation, the Malaysian Public Service continues to redefine itself in these challenging times. Carrying the 1Malaysia aspiration of “People First, Performance Now” through the various transformation programs complemented by the call to “Merakyatkan Perkhidmatan Awam” and reinforced by the National Blue Ocean Strategy, the public service will continuously work together with all stakeholders to together create a wealthy and happy nation.
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