

'Equip civil servants to be digital literate'

By Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan - September 28, 2021 @ 9:00am



A civil servant following a panel discussion on Twitter Spaces involving Communications and Multimedia Minister Tan Sri Annuar Musa last month. The government plans to make the civil service digital literate by 2025 in the 12th Malaysia plan. FILE PIC

KUALA LUMPUR: A digital literate civil service can expedite delivery of services and reduce waiting time of the public at governments offices.

The Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) secretary-general Abdul Rahman Mohd Nordin said digitalisation had increased efficiency in many government agencies in the past.

"One good example is the process of applying or renewing passports at the Immigration Department.

"Through digitalisation, we have brought down the time to get the passports done from two months previously to within a day now.

"If more public services can be digitalised with digitally competent civil servants at the helm, I believe our service delivery will be more efficient and effective," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Rahman was commenting on the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) target for every civil servant to be digitally literate by 2025.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob announced the Public Sector Digitisation Strategic Plan 2021-2025 when tabling the 12MP at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Besides providing regular IT training for civil servants, Rahman also urged the government to rope in more technical and vocational education and training graduates into the service as they could naturally adapt to a digital working environment.

Rahman called on the government to retain the work-from-home (WFH) arrangement for civil servants who could work remotely, such as those with administrative duties and graphic designers.

He proposed that the government provide digital devices to civil servants and cash incentives for them to purchase Internet packages to support the WFH arrangement.

"The government should provide notebooks instead of desktop computers for civil servants so that they can bring the devices home if they need to work from home. Some office systems should also be integrated in the notebook devices so that civil servants can work remotely to handle urgent matters.

"Otherwise, they will have to endure the hassle of entering the office each time they need to access the database or systems," he said.

Maintaining WFH, Rahman said, would save the government water and electricity costs, as fewer people would be utilising these amenities at the office.

The Centre for Public Policy Studies chairman Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam also called on the government to provide subsidies for civil servants to get Internet and digital devices to work from home.

The former Transport Ministry secretary-general said a digital literate civil service could move as "one heavy technological family" and ensure smooth delivery of services to the people.

"Without proper digital equipment, civil servants may not be able to operate effectively as their counterparts in the private sector.

"The notion that civil servants only work during office hours is no longer relevant today. They, in fact, work around the clock.

"The private sector should be able to expect a response from the public sector on urgent matters even outside office hours."

Ramon advised the government to survey the level of digital literacy among civil servants and provide training.

"Most civil servants at senior levels are familiar with digital systems and technology.

"However, the newer batch of officers should have acquired digital literacy before they are recruited into the service.

"The best way to achieve this is to incorporate digital literacy into the school and college syllabus."