

COMMITMENT

Leaders should be more involved in conferences

IT is the norm at government-organised conferences and seminars for the head of department (HOD), secretary-general (SG) or director-general (DG) to officiate at its opening and then leave.

Recently, I attended a conference organised by the Women's Institute of Management (WIM) on Integrity and Governance. I was impressed with the active involvement of its chief executive officer (CEO), Datuk Dr Nellie Tan-Wong, who sat through the two-day conference.

Not only did she receive the VVIPs and speakers and delivered the opening address, but she also listened to all the papers delivered, asked a lot of questions and made the closing address. During breaks, she mingled with the participants.

And what impressed me the most was that she was one of the very last to leave once the conference was over.

During my 28 years in civil service, rarely have I seen the SG or DG attend the full conference, participate in deliberations and share insights.

Yet, in the keynote address, the SG or DG will impress upon the participants to spend their time productively by coming up with concrete recommendations for the ministry or department.

But why is the SG or DG not present to facilitate the process of sourcing feedback and picking the brains of the speakers, experts, CEOs and participants?

The fact that ministries and departments spend a great deal of re-

sources in organising the conference with a theme, indicates it is anxious and eager to get as much feedback before coming up with a new policy framework or blueprint. The conference serves as a good forum to probe into issues and gain new insights.

No prizes for guessing what the excuse will be for their absence — the SG or DG has another important appointment. There is little excuse for them to not attend the conference as it was planned months before.

Indeed, attending the WIM conference was a breath of fresh air. It was one of the most productive conferences I've attended since it was helmed and steered by the CEO until the end. It was refreshing to hear the CEO share her perspective. Due to her active involvement, the absen-

teeism rate was not so glaring or conspicuous.

At the end of the day, after spending resources, WIM was rewarded with new knowledge and insights. And that was exactly the objective of the conference. I understand that the deliberations will be shared with the government.

It would be good for the chief secretary to the government to develop a standard operating procedure for the role of HODs at conferences and seminars so that as much mileage as possible could be gained.

Conferences, especially annual ones, should never be held just for the sake of having such events.

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