

**Frequently-asked Questions at the
Secretary for the Civil Service's Tea Gatherings
with Staff Associations**

**Issues Raised by Staff
Representatives**

**Response by
the Secretary for the Civil Service**

1. If the Government could not reduce the civil service establishment to 160 000 by 2006/07 through natural wastage, would it initiate forced redundancy?

The Government aimed to reduce the civil service establishment through the implementation of the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme, civil service recruitment freeze and natural wastage. The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) would review the overall manpower situation in the light of the manpower plans to be submitted by bureaux and departments this October and then consider whether additional measures would be required to achieve the target. The guiding principles for any new measures were lawfulness, reasonableness and fairness. There was no plan for forced redundancy at this stage.
2. Would staff be given an opportunity to comment on the proposals arising from the development of an improved civil service adjustment mechanism before they were finalized?

CSB had set up a consultative group, involving representatives from the staff sides of the central consultative councils and major service-wide staff associations, to provide input to the exercise. While the whole exercise was scheduled for completion by late 2004, CSB would consult staff widely on the proposed framework for the improved pay adjustment mechanism and the possible means for conducting the Pay Level Survey in late 2003.
3. Had promotion exercises been withheld?

The policy on promotion remained unchanged. Where there was an operational need to fill vacancies, promotion would be considered and promotion exercises could be conducted where necessary. However, due to the need to achieve financial savings and to reduce the establishment, Heads of Departments had to take a more cautious view on promotion exercises than before. The position would be clearer by the end of the year when departments had finalized their manpower plans and received the financial envelopes.

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4. It seemed that CSB had changed the policy in processing officers' applications for re-employment after retirement upon reaching maximum pension status.

The policy was that the management retained the discretion to grant such approval, having regard to service needs as well as other relevant factors. Re-employment after retirement was never an entitlement for staff. Due to fiscal deficit and uncertain manpower situation, Heads of Departments had been reminded to process these applications cautiously. As a result, it was expected that approval would be given only in very exceptional cases. Nevertheless, officers could continue to work up to their normal retirement age if they so wished.
5. Would CSB draw up new initiatives to boost staff morale?

CSB attached great importance to boosting staff morale. We were reviewing the commendation system with a view to giving due recognition to more deserving staff for their praise-worthy performance and deeds. Details would be announced later this year.
6. Upon the departure of officers under the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme, would their former work be entirely taken up by remaining staff, hence leading to unbearable workload?

Given the austerity drive, civil servants should be prepared to do more with less resources. Heads of Departments should engage staff proactively to draw up plans for streamlining work procedures, reprioritizing various tasks and, where applicable, outsourcing services in order to achieve savings and enhance efficiency.
7. Given the general civil service recruitment freeze, there would be no new civil service recruits in the coming years and this would hence undermine the succession planning of departments.

In order to reduce the civil service establishment to 160 000 by 2006/07, a general civil service recruitment freeze had been imposed with effect from 1 April 2003. In-service appointment would still be allowed. If departments had genuine needs to recruit civil servants in meeting essential operational requirements, they could seek exceptional approval for external recruitment from a committee comprising the Chief Secretary for the Administration, the Financial Secretary and the Secretary for the Civil Service. CSB would monitor the impact of the recruitment freeze closely and review it in due course.

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8. Would the education allowances for civil servants be substantially reduced or abolished in the coming years?
- In view of the Government's commitment to reduce its operating expenditure in the coming years, CSB had undertaken to carry out a comprehensive review of civil service allowances, including education allowances. We fully appreciated the staff concerns on this review and planned to put up our preliminary proposals for staff consultation by late 2003. We would adopt the principles of lawfulness, reasonableness and fairness in taking forward the matter.
9. When would the review of job-related allowances (JRA) be completed and how would it impact on staff?
- Our review on JRA was to ensure that the continued payment of the JRA was fully justified in present day circumstances. We had already completed the review of most of the JRA earlier this year. We had deferred the review period to the end of this year for a number of Hardship Allowances which were payable for performing duties related to the Team Clean initiatives. We had reminded departmental management to consult staff and to take account of staff views in making their recommendations.
10. The progressive outsourcing exercises of departments would threaten the career prospect of civil servants.
- With a view to maintaining a small government and providing efficient and cost-effective services to the public, departments would explore whether outsourcing was feasible. When pursuing outsourcing exercises, departments had been reminded of the need to address staff concerns proactively in the planning stage and to avoid redundancy.