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Controversy over appointment of PPP councillors not over

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IT is obvious that the controversy over the appointment of councillors from the People's Progressive Party is far from over despite claims by party president Datuk M. Kayveas that the matter has been resolved.

For the second year since PPP became a member of the Barisan Nasional coalition party, problems have arisen over who should represent the party as councillors in the 15 local authorities in Perak.

Although the question of the legality of PPP's leadership has been settled with the Registrar of Society's confirmation that the office bearers led by Kayveas are the ones it recognises, rivalry caused by dissatisfaction among certain former leaders is still plaguing the party.

For the second consecutive year, two lists from rival factions were submitted to the State Government, one from Kayveas' camp and the other from expelled former national secretary P.V. Dass, for consideration for appointment as councillors.

Kayveas, who is now Perak PPP acting chairman, has questioned the State Government as to why it should even consider looking at "the other list" as only the one submitted by him is legally binding.

Last year, Kayveas expressed disappointment with Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib for appointing two councillors from the other faction.

This time around, Kayveas said he is not going to take it lightly if the State Government rejected the PPP's list or purposely refused to recognise the strength of the party, which he claimed "is much stronger than certain BN component parties in the State".

Kayveas said there were no factions in the party, only disgruntled former members trying to create problems.

"Even if there are internal problems in the party, that has got nothing to do with the State Government with regard to the appointment of councillors as the only list the State Government needs to consider is the one submitted by me," he said.

It is also obvious that the PPP is not happy to get only seven council seats.

Kayveas said since PPP had proven its strength, as reflected in its membership which was now close to 80,000 in Perak and about 220,000 nationwide, it was timely that the party be given at least 25 council seats.

At the height of its strength, PPP, a Perak-based political party set up in 1953 by the famous lawyer brothers S.P. Seenivasagam and D.R. Seenivasagam, was allocated 77 council seats in 1969.

Kayveas had also repeatedly argued the fact that the presence of Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to declare open the 1996 PPP general assembly, launch its logo three years ago and most recently, attend the party's open house and breaking of fast on the eve of the New Year all bore testimony that everything was in order.

This year, Kayveas sent a list containing close to 40 names for the State Government to consider.

He also asked the State Government to drop the two Ipoh City Councillors who were appointed under PPP's ticket last year - Lim Chong Hing and Rajit Singh - as they were no longer PPP members.

He claimed he had discussed the matter with State Urban Development and Local Government Committee chairman Chang Ko Youn and the controversy had

been resolved.

He also announced last Friday that two new faces comprising PPP national permanent chairman, Brig-Jen (R) Datuk Jaafar Mohd Yusof and national vice-president and State secretary-general A. Ayyathurai, would replace Lim and Rajit.

However, Chang has refused to comment. He also refused to confirm whether two different lists had been submitted by PPP's rival factions but admitted that the appointment of Perak's councillors had been finalised.

There are 331 council seats in Perak's 15 local councils and the PPP has been allocated three seats in the Ipoh City Council, and one each in the Manjung, Kinta Selatan, Kinta Barat and Hilir Perak district councils.

Of the 331 seats, 131 are reserved for Umno, MCA (94), MIC (32), Gerakan (50), PPP (seven) and the remaining seats for individuals who are not politically aligned, including civil servants.

It has always been a practice of the State Government to allocate a certain number of council seats to Barisan Nasional component parties as a reward to party activists and staunch supporters who are not nominated to contest in elections or given other political posts for their contributions.

Calls for the State Government to appoint more non-politically affiliated individuals as councillors as these individuals, who represent various interest groups, provide alternative ideas, should be considered.

The call by the Ipoh Rate-payers Association vice-president Victor Sankey last year that councillors be appointed among those who are vocal in addressing issues affecting the people should also not go unheeded.

Under the law, any individual who, in the opinion of the local authority, is well versed in council matters and capable of representing the community, can become councillors.

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