

Political appointees dominate councillors' lists
Malaysiakini.com
January 5, 2011

As in the previous year, the councillors list for the Penang (MPPP) and Seberang Perai (MPSP) municipal councils are dominated by political appointees.

This year's list, announced today by state exco member for local government, traffic management and environment and DAP MP for Tanjong Chow Kon Yeow (left), saw 20 out of 24 political appointees for MPPP, and 21 out of 24 for MPSP.

For MPPP, the appointees were recommended by DAP (10), PKR (eight) and PAS (two); for MPSP, the appointees came from DAP (10), PKR (nine) and PAS (two).

Only two out of 10 candidates elected to fulfil the council's NGO quota in a mock election by civil society groups dubbed 'The Penang Forum 3' were selected.

They are Dr Lim Mah Hui (MPPP) and Dr Tiun Ling Ta (MPSP).

The other councillors include Chinese Chamber of Commerce representatives Sin Kok Siang (MPPP) and Lim Tau Hoong (MPSP).

Mohd Zahry Shaikh Abdul Rahman, a former lecturer, and Zulkiefly Saad, believed to be linked to the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (Abim), are councillors for MPPP and MPSP respectively.

It appears that those who were closely aligned to PKR assemblypersons like Sim Tze Tsin (Pantai Jerejak) and S Raveentharan (Batu Uban) were included in the list.

They are Francis Joseph, Tan Seng Keat and Mohd Rashid Hasnun.

Chow said the appointments were made according to section 10 of the Local Government Act, under which the state can appoint between eight and 24 councillors.

'50 percent consist of new faces'

He added that 50 percent of the list consists of 'new faces', while maintaining seven slots, like the previous year, for the NGO quota.

"We hope the councillors will be able to contribute to the betterment of the state," he told a press conference at Komtar today.

Chow commended the appointees from NGOs, saying he hoped they would contribute to improving state policies as they were free from political ties.

"They can influence policies... their views can balance the situation... as all sectors have their own interests," he added.

As to why more candidates were not selected to fill the NGO quota, Chow said it was not possible to appoint more candidates from the list provided by Penang Forum 3.

"We tried, at least we maintained one for MPPP and another for MPSP from the recommendations of the forum," he said.

"We needed to review the matter carefully... the fact is there are limited places."

He said NGOs represented a wide spectrum of society, which included societies and business associations.

"There is no monopoly as to what an NGO is... this has been our view," he clarified.

"The Penang Forum did ask for more slots. We considered their request and had a discussion with them... they accepted our explanation."

Referring to the forum's historic mock elections, Chow said it was not a "contest of popularity".

"But there were elements of popularity in the contest... we did consider their lists to see who would be best to represent the voice of NGOs," he said.

As to why the Malay Chamber of Commerce was not represented in this year's councillors' lists, Chow said he did not receive any application for its candidates to be selected for the posts.

On whether his special assistant Teh Lai Heng would quit his post as he was now a local councillor, Chow said that a person on the state government's payroll would have to relinquish his or her post when selected to a post such as local councillor.

"This includes my special assistant," he added.

Other special assistants in the list include K Visvanathan (RSN Rayer - DAP Seri Delima) and Sim Chee Keong (Chong Eng - DAP Bukit Mertajam).

Chow also said each councillor was entitled to a monthly salary of RM700 and a maximum allowance of RM600 a month for attending official meetings.