

**S'gor procurement: Ditch BN model and start fresh**  
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The recent controversy surrounding Klang municipal councillor Tee Boon Hock's alleged abuse of support letters is symptomatic of a larger issue surrounding the way the civil service works.

Although some politicians have tried to justify the issuance of support letters, many concede that this practice is open to abuse and corruption, especially by office bearers.

Those who are against the practice believe that it develops a network of cronyism among politicians, civil servants and contractors, contrary to the concept of good governance such as that advocated by Pakatan Rakyat.

In a continuing exploration of the issue, Malaysiakini talked to several councillors and representatives from civil society for their suggestions on how to improve the current procurement system.

Petaling Jaya municipal councillor Cynthia Gabriel (right) said the best way to keep the 'little Napoleons' in check is to put in place a transparent open tender system and clear guidelines.

"We should not put our elected representatives in a situation that is open for abuse and corruption," said Cynthia, referring to the culture of issuing support letters.

She stressed that the current Selangor procurement system, that accommodates letters of support, is inherited from the BN regime and has many weaknesses and loopholes.

Affirmative action still possible

She therefore urged that Pakatan should replace it with a new procurement mechanism that is based on transparency, openness and merit.

Citing as an example - although the current policy requires contracts of RM500,000 and above to require tenders to be approved by the local council tender committee, contractors struggle with many procedures before their tenders reach the committees.

"If there are more than a hundred tenders submitted, maybe only about ten will be brought to the committee. There are many problems with the tender process; it should be streamlined," said Cynthia, who is also the secretary of the Coalition of NGO and Professional Councillors (Conpac).

She proposed that, in order to level the playing field and assist new contractors to secure projects, some sort of affirmative action be included in the procurement mechanism in the short term.

Existing, long-time contractors currently monopolise projects at present, making it difficult for new companies to enter and compete.

'Total revamp needed'

Meanwhile Tah Moon Hui, member of the Coalition of Good Governance, felt that it was necessary to revamp the current procurement mechanism.

"The letter of support is just (one) part of the BN government's procurement mechanism. The real problem lies in the whole system," said the Suaram coordinator when contacted by Malaysiakini.

He further elaborated saying that abolishing support letters would not solve the problem, as civil servants

would then simply give out contracts to contractors whom they know are close with the BN regime, hindering the entry of newcomers to the market.

NONE "If the new government is led by the old system, corruption will still happen."

Tah (left) urged the Selangor government to totally do away with the inherited BN procurement mechanism and develop its own version.

He suggested that if the government wants to assist underprivileged groups, then affirmative action can still be included in the procurement system, but with clear guidelines instead of doing it through support letters, which is not part of the official procedures.

Tah also reminded that the Freedom of Information Act enacted recently by the Selangor state assembly should be applied to the state's procurement system.

"No matter big or small, information of all contracts should be made public. Let the public monitor the civil servants," he said.

Conpac president Tan Jo Hann called on all elected representatives to refrain from indiscriminately issuing support letters to please the voters, but to instead educate the electorate about the merits of going through the proper procedures.

"I always do that in my constituency. But they may not be happy, saying that we as people's representatives cannot do anything," said Tan, who is also Subang Jaya municipal councillor.

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