Pakatan must quicken pace of reforms in S'gor
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It been two years and seven months since Pakatan Rakyat with PKR in the lead, took over the administration of Selangor from BN.

The state takes pride in its efforts to combat corruption, ensure transparency, improve the welfare of its people and set the pace among Malaysian states in economic development.

However, despite its efforts to distance itself from the previous government which was riddled with allegations of corruption and scandals, it hasn't quite made the mark yet, said speakers at a forum last night.

This was held in the launch of a book entitled 'The Road to Reform - Pakatan Rakyat in Selangor'.

They demanded that the state works speedily to tackle stagnant bureaucracy and display swift and decisive governance.

Coalition for Free and fair Elections (Bersih) chairperson and former Malaysian Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenivasan advised the state to work harder on its public relations platform, especially to ensure the people understand crucial policies being delivered to them.

Ambiga (*left*) said that, for a start, the state government can educate its citizens on the re-delineation exercise by the Election Commission (EC) that is scheduled to begin early next year.

"It is crucial that people in Selangor to know that they have a say in how their constituencies are drawn up in the re-delineation," she said.

"There is a lot of gerrymandering in the redrawing of boundaries... although the EC says it is correcting mistakes by shifting the boundaries."

Right before the last general election, Selangor was one of the states where the EC had embarked on a major delineation.

Ambiga also said Bersih will be launching its 'Bersih 2.0' campaign in Kelana Jaya on Nov 10 to address this issue.

She highlighted corruption and religious matters as key problems which Selangor has to tackle.

"Not to do so would be regarded as a failure," said Ambiga.

She also said it is necessary to empower the people with skills, particularly the Orang Asli community - rather than being charitable all the time.

'Media lacks freedom'

Seasoned journalist and editor of news and current affairs portal *The Nut Graph*, Jacqueline Ann Surin, opined that Selangor has a long way to go before it can boast of providing the

media with an acceptable level of freedom.

"Just because the state has its *Selangorkini* and *TV Selangor* it doesn't mean there is more media freedom here... simply because these are propagandist tools," she said.

Disappointed with the chapter in the book which deals with media freedom and the supposed proactive initiatives taken to improve the condition, Surin (*right*) said there is no "quality control" in the state's mouthpiece.

She said the state's newsletter and news media should provide space for both government and opposition views.

"If you can't, don't call it *Selangorkini* call it *SelangorPRkini*".

The state's efforts in tabling the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill has been her "greatest disappointment", as none of elements she considered crucial have been included.

"Maximum disclosure is not made mandatory, exemptions are not clearly defined and there are no clauses to protect whistleblowers.

"Not only that there is no routine information, there are also no costs determined (to use it) - it should be cheap and simple - instead you can be fined RM50,000 if the information is used for other purposes than that mentioned."

Although a draft bill was prepared in discussion with civil society groups, she asked Selangor on what is keeping it from implementing "best practices".

Gloomy review

Universiti Malaya economics professor Terence Gomez also gave a gloomy review of the state's economic policies.

"This is an opportunity for us to do the mid-term review - there are concerns among the electorate about the performance of the government," said Gomez (*right*).

"When we look at the 2009 global financial crisis - it is the death of neo-liberalism, an economy model where basically you need to get the state out of the economy, deregulate, and let the market drive the economy."

Neo-liberalism is reflected in the Malaysian Economic Agenda which talks about the need to promote entrepreneurship, foster competition and deregulate the economy.

"But is there an alternative economy policy in the works? How are we dealing with social policies which encompass affirmative action like the New Economic Policy? There is no discussion in the book on that.

"My main concern is that I see nothing that distinguishes Pakatan from BN. What should Pakatan focus on? We are looking for just and inclusive development. We need to talk about labour and the need to bring in trade unions.

"I'm worried that Selangor will replicate the policies which have failed in the past."

Ibrahim Suffian, the director of the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, said the state has been faced with time constraints in making changes and to disseminate information on

policies.

"Something snapped in the minds of the people. The emperor does not have any clothes now as the people are less fearful of government," said Ibrahim.

Although Selangor is working on making the state a better place, the government needs to address issues of sand theft and issuance of support letters to be completely transparent, he added.

Long way to go

Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim, who sat through the 90-minute panel discussion and public feedback session, conceded that the state has a long way to go.

"But the fact remains that we accept transparency, accountability and we want competency," he said before the end of forum last night.

"We do agree that unions need to be included in planning the state resources and we should work together in ensuring less disparity in income."

Khalid *(right)* nevertheless, defended his government's work with regard to the FOI Bill, saying that Pakatan had brought in a landmark change in just tabling the enactment - a first in Malaysian history.

"It has gone through the first reading but we are not rushing into it. We have set up a committee to look into improving the Bill before it is tabled for second reading," he added.

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