

Penang groups unhappy with new Pakatan councillors
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 19, 2008
Athi Veerangan

The Penang Pakatan Rakyat government's populist agenda to appoint representatives from non-governmental organisation as councillors in local authorities seems to have backfired. MCPX

The DAP-led government came under fire from a group of NGOs for not fulfilling its promise to appoint at least 10 municipal councillors from the civil society.

By appointing only seven councillors from the NGOs, the group spokesperson BK Ong said the DAP-led government had squandered the public trust by making a blatant mistake.

"The state government promised 10 but only appointed seven and that too, not on merit.

"The NGO appointments were dominated by business groups which had caused imbalanced appointment," said Ong.

He criticised the Pakatan Rakyat government of continuing the previous Barisan Nasional administration by giving councillor jobs to "boys" rather than giving the posts on merit.

penang transportation 191206 ong boon keong organicOng blasted the state government for emulating a failed BN method which he claimed would subsequently produce weak councillors and give rise to longkang (drainage) assemblypersons and members of Parliament.

Too many business people

On Wednesday, the Penang government appointed four councillors from the civil society groups in the Penang Island Municipal Council (MPPP) and three in the Seberang Perai Municipal Council (MPSP).

The MPPP four are Women's Centre for Change (WCC) lawyer Lim Kah Cheng, Universiti Sains Malaysia professor Dr Francis Loh Kok Wah, Penang Malay Chamber of Commerce president Rizal Faris Mohideen Abdul Kader and Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce representative Choong Khuat Seng.

The three in MPSP are Chinese Chamber's Liu Ting Ling, Indian Chamber of Commerce's R Gunasegaran and Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers' Muhammad Ismail.

MPPP has 22 appointed councillors while MPSP has 21.

Of the 43 appointed councillors, DAP has 19, PKR 15 and PAS two.

Ong lamented over the "over-representation" of businessmen could cause an unbalanced council and conflict of interests since members of chambers were often involved in applying for business operational licences and building permits.

"This could cause injustice to the laymen," said Ong, speaking on the behalf of the NGOs,

including Save Ourselves, Bus Users Group, Malaysian Voters Union, Penang Watch, Mafrel, Suaram, Jim, United Hindu Religious Council, Tanjung Bungah Residential Association and Tanjung Workers Service Centre.

In contrast, he said there was lack of representation, or none, from house buyers, residents associations, consumer groups, workers' union and petty traders.

"Even women were under-represented in appointments," said Ong, suggesting that the representation should have been as high as one per three ratio.

Ong also blasted the state government's lack of transparency in the selection process, saying that it mirrored the previous BN government.

DAP members left out

He said the state government should have adopted an open selection system such as open invitation, open criteria, open process and open list of candidates even when local government elections could not be held straight away.

Ong's open criticism is the last that State Executive Councillor and Penang DAP chairperson Chow Kon Yeow, who is in charge of Local Government portfolio, would want as the state government was already under fire from DAP members on the appointment of councillors from NGOs and "strangers" under the party quota.

Disgruntled DAP members have informed Malaysiakini that they had been against the appointment of NGO councillors from the beginning as many of them would not work in the interests of the Pakatan Rakyat state government.

Several short messages service (SMS) were already sent out since Wednesday night criticising the state government leaders for overlooking loyal party workers for council appointments.

Several assemblypersons have also been singled out by the powerful Makkal Sakti lobbyists in Penang for appointing their "cronies" as councillors at the expense of loyal party members, who had worked hard to secure the party's victory in the recent general election.

"Several of the appointed councillors from NGO were known BN supporters.

"Even the Indian councillors appointed under the DAP quota were strangers to DAP," said Makkal Sakti group spokesperson MN Anbalagan.

Another Makkal Sakti supporter, R Kumaran, said he learnt that the decision to appoint NGO councillors was made without consulting the party state committee and general members.

"There is a saying that `loyalty pays.'

"But it seems staunch Indian DAP grassroots leaders and members are irrelevant today," he said.