

Penang's

new growth

panels

superfluous

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THE recent Umno Youth leaders' criticisms of Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon for marginalising the Malays have produced typical bureaucratic reactions - more committees.

One is the Land Development Committee headed by Penang Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Sri Abdul Rashid Abdullah. The other is Tanjung Development Committee headed by State Executive Council member in charge of tourism and environment Teng Chang Yeow.

There is no question about the capability of Rashid and Teng or their diligence. But there are already legally constituted committees or bodies dealing with development in Penang Island.

In the case of planning and regulating land development, the Town and Country Planning Act provides that the Penang Island Municipal Council is the authority.

More specifically, the council has the Planning and Building Committee that considers applications for permission to undertake land development in the whole island, including Tanjung.

Since Umno Youth leaders are concerned about the interests of the Malays, it is useful to note that this committee is chaired by

Municipal President Datuk Abu Bakar Hassan with 19 councillors as members: six from Umno (including the alternate chairman), five Gerakan, three MCA, two MIC, one PPP and two district officers.

It is clear that Umno and the Malays are well represented in this very important committee, which often gives land developers in Penang Island some of their biggest headaches.

The council also has the Development Planning, Landscape, Beautification and Recreation Committee, which has the same number of representatives from the Barisan Nasional component parties, except that the alternate chairman is from Gerakan. Among other things, this committee considers planning and development issues of the island or any part of it.

The newly formed Tanjung Development Committee to advise the state government on development is also superfluous, as the latter has no direct role in the approval or otherwise of specific development projects.

Furthermore, for development policies, there is already the State Planning Committee, which is chaired by Koh with, among others, Rashid and Teng as members. It can and does make policy directives that must be followed by the council. An example is the draft Penang Structure Plan that was launched by Koh recently.

There is also no need for the new the Land Development Committee to identify land owned by the state and local councils for housing. Rashid is already the chairman of the State Land Committee, which, apart from looking after state land, also decides on applications by developers for land sub-division, conversion of land use and excision from hill-land reserves.

As for council land, there is the Council Property Committee headed by the council president, with an Umno councillor as alternate chairman, to handle issues related to the use, development and even sale of land. Any sale of council land has to be approved by the state government.

The Malays in Penang certainly have problems. So do the rest of Penangites, especially the physically handicapped, pedestrians, bus commuters, small businessmen, developers and investors. And the list goes on.

There is no necessity for Koh, who is the deputy president of the Gerakan, to react positively to criticisms by minor publicity-seeking Barisan National