

S'gor MB: RM2bil cash reserve not for BN's taking

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By Nigel Aw

Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim laughed off suggestions that he had built up the state's cash reserve to a staggering RM2 billion over the past four years - and it's all for BN's taking.

This will happen in the event the BN re-captures Selangor - a jibe started by party members upset with Khalid's frugal management style and his refusal to fund Pakatan Rakyat activities in the state.

"Many people will argue that since you've got a lot of money, you have to spend it, be like them (BN).

"But if that's the case, why would the people support us? My thinking is, we show prudence, but we can still spend money," Khalid said in an interview with Malaysiakini last week.

Tabling the supplementary budget in the state assembly in July, Khalid announced that Selangor's cash reserve climbed to RM2.1 billion in the second quarter of this year, up from RM1.9 billion in the first quarter.

The Ijok assemblyperson said the huge cash reserve also allowed the Pakatan Rakyat-led state government to leverage against moves made by the federal government.

"When the federal government announced the Hari Raya bonus for civil servants, we had no problem. You have enough, we also have enough (funds).

"Maybe the menteri besar or chief ministers of other states are scratching their heads on how to finance it (the bonus)... That's why you don't see any BN state announcing it as quickly as we did," he said.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had on July 25 announced a half-month bonus for all federal civil servants, with a minimum payment of RM500.

Selangor matched the bonus payment for state civil service staff a day later, and topped it up with an additional RM200 in the form of premium savings certificates or Tabung Haji savings.

Fear of planted voters

While the scenario of losing Selangor, along with the more than RM2 billion in cash reserves to BN was a jibe, it is nevertheless a possibility.

Selangor has embarked on an ongoing verification exercise for some 500,000 new voters under its 'Selangorku Bersih' programme, following concerns that foreigners were being illegally drafted to vote.

"From that, I will be able to decide whether we are in danger of BN playing the voter game or not," Khalid said.

The results from the verification exercise, he said, would also determine whether he would call for Selangor's state polls concurrently with parliamentary elections at the federal level.

Asked to respond to a Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia research that predicted that BN will recapture Selangor, Khalid retorted:

"In 2008, I looked at the (poll) numbers and from some of the work they did, we had no chance at all. Even former menteri besar Dr Mohd Khir Toyo said, 'Don't worry, there will be zero' (seats for the opposition).

"But the truth is that the error rate was very high," he said.

At the 2008 elections, Pakatan won 36 out of 56 seats in Selangor, with PKR grabbing 15 seats followed by its allies, DAP (13) and PAS (8).

'We can do no worse than 2008'

He said Selangor Pakatan conducts its own internal polls monthly and that the prognosis has been positive for the coalition.

"Our surveys show very good results. I got very high popular votes, as good as Najib's..." Khalid quipped, referring to the PM's approval ratings, which is in the mid-60s.

He was quick to add that ground analysis remained unreliable. Unlike developed countries, the mobility of Malaysians remained high - a farmer five years ago could soon become a factory or hypermarket worker, thereby altering their mindset as well.

However, based on its internal data, Khalid said, Chinese support for Pakatan in Selangor would be stronger than in 2008 and the younger, educated and urban population have been similarly influenced.

"There is still a feeling of not being sure about the rural Malay seniors... The Indian votes are with us, they may be quite volatile in their statements, but we know that overall, we can do no worse than in 2008," he said.

Despite Khalid's methodological approach to the state election, his experience in politics since 2006 has taught him that lingering uncertainty would still be there.

"I was trained as an investment man. In investment, you roughly know the outcome if you can get 90 percent of the parameters correct.

However, in politics... even if you are correct, the outcome may not be as predictable," he said.

Asked about his greatest regret since moving into politics, Khalid said it was not having the time to play golf even once in his last four years as menteri besar.

"I have a room full of golf clubs and they are all collecting dust," he sighed.

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