

Evaluating PKR's reasons for 'Kajang Move'

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COMMENT They say gentlemen (and ladies, presumably) never discuss religion or politics. The reason for this is ostensibly that passions and obstinacy would be ignited to the point of friendship and courtesy being thrown out the window.

Discussions about politics and other high-profile subjects in Malaysia certainly seem to go that way. It has become a habit of ours to make personal attacks and attempt to demolish the credibility of a person making an argument, rather than address the arguments themselves.

I cannot say for sure if I, in all my years of commenting, have not been guilty of such things. I can only say that for now, I hope to stay as far away as I can from that kind of unproductive engagement.

With that in mind, I humbly submit my personal evaluation of some of the reasons PKR leaders have most frequently thrown around in defence of Kajang-gate. I know this will be impossible for some of the reasons, but hope that others will be judged on their merit.

I will attempt to list out conditions in which these arguments would hold weight, as well as offer my own analysis and interpretation.

1. Selangor needs a better menteri besar

PKR has been quick to recognise Abdul Khalid Ibrahim's popularity and accordingly (and intelligently) refused to take the position that he has been doing a bad job. Of course, they also find themselves in the awkward position of saying 'Yes, he's great, but he still needs to be replaced'.

One popular line of reasoning is that Khalid (right) is not a good politician, and is thus unable to handle the severe political problems that allegedly befall or are going to befall Selangor. This line of reasoning could be justified in the following circumstances.

Firstly, if Khalid is indeed a bad menteri besar. There are many ways of subjectively trying to evaluate this, but not many objective ones. One example of the latter is to simply refer to hard numbers.

In the 13th general election, Selangor increased its seats in the state assembly by eight. The only other incumbent state governments to increase their state assembly seats were Penang and Negri Sembilan - both by one seat.

I think a strong argument can thus be made to say that the rakyat at least think that Khalid is a good menteri besar.

Secondly, if Khalid can be shown to be failing to deal with political problems in Selangor. If for instance, he is engaged in incessant politicking and is the instigator of problems within PKR, and with PAS or DAP, or somehow be responsible for losing political ground to the BN, then we might say he is bad at politics. With regard to facing BN, I think the GE13 results again speak for themselves.

Many point to the problem with PKR deputy president Azmin Ali (left) as proof that Khalid is no good at politics. One must admit various interpretations of this problem: first that Khalid and Azmin are equally culpable for the conflict; second that Khalid is more culpable; and third, that Azmin is more culpable.

As I've argued before, if we see two people fighting on the street, we cannot say for sure that both are equally responsible. Is it not possible that one man simply walked up to another and started punching him, while the other was acting in pure self-defence?

As always, it is not for me to force on anyone else my view on the matter, only to say that this is a possibility and that readers will have to decide which interpretation of events they find convincing.

In summary, unless incontrovertible evidence can be provided that Khalid is indeed a bad menteri besar, than the burden of proof as to why he needs to be replaced lies with those seeking to replace him.

One may plead 'political secrets', strategy, tactics and so on, but in this day and age, I think many of us do not like to be asked to accept things on blind faith. Some people clearly still will, and that is their right, but the rest of us would like to be treated with a bit less condescension.

2. Pakatan can only take Putrajaya with Anwar as MB

This is quite an odd one. For this argument to be valid, we must be able to demonstrate that there is something positive that Anwar can do as menteri besar of Selangor that he cannot do in his current capacities, which will then lead to Pakatan

Rakyat taking over Putrajaya.

The key word here is 'positive'.

This argument holds water if, for instance, Anwar (right) has not had sufficient opportunity to show his mettle as a leader.

Is this the case? Let us look at the number of positions he currently holds: Member of Parliament for Permatang Pauh, PKR de facto leader, and the Leader of the Opposition, which in effect makes him the head of Pakatan and its candidate for prime minister.

Anwar has consistently been a strongly heard voice on every major national issue for the last seven or eight years; it would seem he has hardly lacked a platform to be heard.

Most of the time, on national issues, people pay a lot more attention to what Anwar has to say, rather than to the menteri besar of Selangor, who apparently prefers to do his work diligently but quietly.

This argument would also be valid if we have never seen Anwar in a position of organisational leadership. However, Anwar has held several portfolios as minister. He is also, as the captain, responsible for everything on the PKR ship and, perhaps to a lesser extent, on the Pakatan ship.

My humble view is that we have seen plenty of what Anwar is like as a political leader, and as an administrator.

People will have to decide for themselves whether Anwar has done a good job in keeping PKR's house in order over the years. My views were expressed earlier, but in short, I think the current state of the party very accurately reflects the principles of its de facto leader. I imagine any government he runs will have similar dynamics.

On a related note, it has also been argued that Anwar needs legitimacy to speak on Selangor issues.

I agree that Selangor is a key state, but this argument cannot be valid unless we accept that Anwar has less legitimacy to speak about other states; and that as party Number One, Anwar has failed to ensure that unity and common purpose are the order of the day within the party that governs Selangor.

3. If Anwar loses, Pakatan is finished

Tony Pua, another man greatly worthy of respect, most recently made this argument. He qualified his statements as being personal, not the DAP's, and also by saying, yes, in six to eight years, perhaps another leader would emerge, but that this would be "the end of Pakatan as we know it".

If Pakatan as we know it can be finished with the defeat of one man, then perhaps it is time to finish Pakatan as we know it.

To get technical, Pua (right) did not say that Pakatan is finished if Anwar does not become MB. If we extend his meaning to that however, the question remains the same.

This argument would valid if it can be shown that the reason Anwar needs to become menteri besar is so pressing that it supersedes ethical considerations. It would also work if we believe that the ends always justify the means.

It seems to me a little like we are being helped to ransom - asked to support a move that does not make sense to us, failing which all our hopes and dreams of a better Malaysia without the BN will be smashed.

I do not subscribe to this point of view. A better Malaysia cannot be built upon suspect principles, so to my mind, the burden of proving that this move is in accordance with sound ethics and principles falls back to those who are pushing it.

Personally, I am also not swayed by the prattle about realpolitik. Politics is real, but it is also what we make it. To think otherwise is defeatist, and would render any movement for change meaningless.

4. The Kajang Move will strengthen Pakatan

This argument would hold water if it can be shown that, with Anwar as menteri besar, political ties between Pakatan's component parties would improve.

It would appear that this has already not been the case. PAS has been forced to support Anwar as Pakatan candidate for Kajang, since it has little say over who PKR chooses to run in the seat.

However, the PAS president and the Youth wing have respectively been lukewarm and expressed outward objection to the idea of changing the menteri besar.

Having more seats in the state assembly than PKR (while DAP has no eligible

candidate) would also give PAS a justifiable reason to ask for the menteri besar's seat.

When the alternative is status quo until GE14, does this sound like something that will strengthen and stabilise Pakatan? Or something that will rip it apart?

I think there are legitimate concerns about what the role of the palace in determining the menteri besar should be.

That said, in this case, we will be facing the existing laws. Should the sultan of Selangor exercise his right to refuse a candidate for menteri besar, what will happen in the ensuing standoff?

At 'best', we are looking at fresh statewide elections (what joy). At worst, we are looking at a BN-sponsored mass media campaign about how Pakatan is anti-monarchy, which will 'surely' endear Pakatan more in exactly the areas which it most badly needs to win on its road to Putrajaya.

So, how again will this move strengthen and stabilise Pakatan?

5. MB Anwar needed to fight racial and religious strife

"If you don't vote for us, there will be racial and religious strife."

Sound familiar?

That Anwar and associates would stoop to such a BN-esque level to further their cause may be one of the saddest parts of Kajang-gate. After decades of enduring fearmongering by BN, to hear the same from Pakatan is heartbreaking.

Nevertheless, under what circumstances would this argument be valid? I suppose the answer would be if there was proof of an oncoming Umno sponsored onslaught. It would also be valid if it can be shown that there is something Anwar can do about racial and religious tensions as menteri besar, that he cannot do with his massive present profile.

I have already written my thoughts about Kajang-gate and the 'Allah' issue, and do not believe that being menteri besar or even Kajang state assemblyperson will help Anwar do something he has previously been unable to do in attempting to defuse controversies about race or religion.

This last issue perhaps offers us the most reason to fear an Orwellian scenario,

where the animals who rebelled against the oppressive humans in 'Animal Farm' become more and more indistinguishable from the humans they have replaced.

We can only pray that we will not meet the same fate.

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