

## **Has Pakatan become corrupt as well?**

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COMMENT Has Pakatan Rakyat become corrupt? This is an extremely loaded question.

Massive currents in Malaysia united behind Pakatan as the 2008 general election approached, to fight for change, to kick out the corruption and cronyism that has poisoned Malaysia for decades.

Now, we are at a point where we need to ask: have we been fighting to replace one corrupt party with another?

Is this an Orwellian scenario where the people who say they are fighting to replace tyrants start bearing a disturbing resemblance to those very same tyrants?

It is never right to jump to conclusions. This article attempts to apply an objective test in search of answers, and readers will have to judge for themselves the degree of its objectivity and applicability.

I will weigh two possibilities: firstly, that Anwar Ibrahim and all those pushing for a new menteri besar in Selangor are doing so for positive reasons; secondly, that Anwar and his supporters want to replace a menteri besar who refuses to pander to vested corporate interests with one who will.

To determine which of these is true, I propose the following test (the details of which will be elaborated on in the rest of the article).

If Anwar and all his supporters can commit in written, legally binding form, that any new menteri besar they install will keep to the following two promises, then I believe it plausible that the first possibility is correct.

If they cannot, this strongly suggests that the second possibility is more accurate.

Promise Number 1: Not to approve the transfer of ownership of 308.72 acres of land near Kota Kemuning from Tropicana Corporation Bhd to Eco World Development Sdn Bhd, or allow any development by any of these two companies on the total 1,172 acres of land, until Tropicana pays the state government no less than RM844.2 million - this being the Selangor people's rightful share of the profits from this transaction and development.

Promise number 2: That water concessionaire Syarikat Pengeluar Air Sungai Selangor Sdn Bhd (Splash) will not be paid one sen over the RM250 million currently offered by the Selangor government.

## Tropicana Corporation

I first wrote about land deals a few weeks ago. I noted my surprise to find the issue being used by those in the anti-Khalid Ibrahim camp, given how they are likely the real root of the problem.

As of Monday, PKR secretary general Saifuddin Nasution himself - the man challenging Khalid for the deputy presidency of PKR - has been leading the charge, blatantly accusing Khalid of corruption with regard to this deal.

I cannot imagine any other politician being as quiet as Khalid while being the epicentre of this crisis.

As always, people mistake this silence for an invitation to attack him with impunity, even to the point of thinking that controversies that reflect badly on themselves can be contorted to reflect badly on Khalid. The gall and the hypocrisy is mind boggling.

Tropicana (formerly known as Dijaya Corporation Bhd, is owned by Danny Tan, brother of Vincent Tan), basically entered into what was essentially a joint venture with the Selangor government to develop some 1,172 acres of land near Kota Kemuning.

This was to be a long-term development and venture, and the agreement was that Tropicana would pay RM1.297 billion to the state over 20 years.

Tropicana then reneges on the spirit of this agreement, and sells 308.72 acres of this land to Eco World, for RM470.67 million to make a very quick, very large profit of some RM170 million.

When Khalid found out about this, he immediately objected to what he saw as a fundamental departure from the spirit of the joint venture, which originally emphasised joint, long-term development, instead of making a quick buck.

No land transfer if no immediate payment

Khalid insisted that since Tropicana is more interested in short-term profiteering rather than long-term joint development, it should pay the state RM844.2 million immediately, instead of RM 1.297 billion over 20 years.

Should Tropicana fail to do so, the state government will not approve the transfer of ownership from Tropicana to Eco World, as well as block any attempt by either Tropicana or Eco World to develop any part of the entire 1,172 acres of land.

However, Tropicana insists that according to the letter of the agreement, they are completely within their rights to have sold the piece of land to Eco World, and that there is no element of impropriety.

In what may be an acknowledgement of having been blind-sided, Khalid does not seem to contest this directly, but believes that if Tropicana feels that it can do this, then the state is owed their money upfront as well.

For some reason, some in PKR and DAP seem to feel an obligation to represent Tropicana's interests in this matter, and the concern is that should PKR get its way with regards to a new menteri besar, both Tropicana and Eco World will suddenly find themselves with no barrier to transferring and developing the lands in question.

The DAP itself may not want to rock the boat in relation to its own dealings with the Tan brothers up in Penang, namely in the projects of GDV Bayan Mutiara Penang World City, IKEA Batu Kawan and the Penang Turf Club.

If Anwar has the numbers, then by all means, revoke Khalid's membership in PKR and remove him via a vote of no confidence in the state assembly. Most likely, that will result in fresh state-wide elections.

Crisis has weakened confidence in Pakatan

If Pakatan wins bigger (a near impossibility, by my reckoning), Anwaristas will say the people have rejected Khalid; if Pakatan loses ground, Anwaristas will say it was Khalid's fault.

In any case, it is clear that the crisis has weakened confidence in Pakatan, possibly fatally, and we can all have our own opinion regarding who manufactured the crisis in the first place.

There will always be sound and fury on one side, hiding all manner of corruption, and simple facts and figures on another. Those who do not have good answers to pressing questions have a tendency to attack the questioner. Be that as it may, the questions remain.

The biggest question of all is the one mentioned at the beginning of the article: has Pakatan become corrupt?

If there are facts and figures to prove that their integrity remains intact despite the information above, then by all means, please share them for the public good.

Better yet, let us all call for Anwar and his supporters to commit to these two promises, which will potentially resolve the controversy conclusively.

I know that a lot of us have become emotionally invested in the Pakatan dream. I also know that many of us hate to give in to cynicism - the one thing that will sink our country faster than anything else.

I will always advocate hope above cynicism, but at no point should our hope and dreams

blind us to the truth before our eyes. We must always face that truth boldly, and make the best of it.

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