

**Khalid: BN spitting in their own faces**  
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Barisan Nasional should think twice before accusing the Selangor government of abusing state funds for budgeting RM15 million for the dissemination of information, says Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim.

NONE Sounding a little agitated, he said in an interview with Malaysiakini earlier this week: "For Umno, MCA or MIC to say this, they are like spitting into the air, and it will fall back onto their faces."

In fact, Khalid said, if anyone was wasting public funds it was the federal government, for paying RM70 million "just for a consultant (public relations company Apco) to tell them how to send messages around".

He added: "To spend one percent (of our budget), equivalent to less than one sen per day (per Selangor resident) to make sure our position is understood is justified... because the federal government has betrayed us in terms of providing communication support.

"You say it is politics? Yes, but who started it first? There is politics, but not at the expense of the people. Selangor is expected to be ready for the 'info war' by November."

Playing by BN's rules

The former corporate giant also appeared unabashed about playing by BN's rules, saying that he was left with no choice after being stonewalled by the other media.

NONE For example, he said, in 2008 the federal government pulled out of Selangor the information officers who were meant to propagate state policies.

"When I came in I was very happy because in my previous job, radio and television (stations) interviewed me for discussions. So I thought, 'Yeah! This is Radio Selangor, operating in this building'."

But his enthusiasm was soon dampened when the radio station not only ignored his requests to talk about state policies but actually moved out of the state secretariat building.

"I could have repaired a road, I could have given out books, but I need (to communicate), if not the people of Selangor can say, 'Hey, you didn't tell us'," Khalid said, adding that while he was CEO of Guthrie, the conglomerate spent three to five percent of its budget on communications.

EC as stupid as federal government

Promoting democracy is also something a penny-pincher would not scrimp on, which was why Khalid got riled up when touching on the Election Commission's (EC) claim that a separate state election would be a waste of money.

"This is why I am quite worried about the EC... the people elect us for five years, (not) on the basis that state assemblypersons and parliamentarians should come in and go out together.

"(The EC) should not be acting such that the citizens will say it is as stupid as the current Federal Government," he said, grinning.

However, Khalid kept his cards close to his chest over when asked whether Selangor would call for separate polls in the wake of mounting speculation that a snap general election would be called.

"Politics is also strategy, if the federal government collapses and we think we can win, we will join the game," he said.

He added that snap polls very early into the term of a government was something the EC should worry about, since this was cheating the voters, as well as not giving the elected representatives time to justify being elected.

HiNONEs view on support letters, which gained significant public attention following news of Klang municipal councillor Tee Boon Hock's (left) alleged abuse of such letters, is less cut-and-dry.

Despite taking a strong stance against the abuse of power, the MB was unwilling to put a blanket ban on support letters, even though these are perceived to be a means of peddling influence.

But this is not for lack of desire, as his distaste for such acts have been evident even in his days as Guthrie chief executive, when he would penalise bidders who brought along support letters on grounds that such letters raised doubts over their ability to perform.

"Magic pen" rendered useless

Things are not so easy in government, he admits, since support letters have become entrenched in the culture and a means for elected representatives to build relationships with their constituents.

For the self-professed reformist, change can be through "revolution or evolution", and in the case of support letters, Khalid has chosen to take the latter path.

As far as the state government was concerned, he said, support letters were worth "nothing much", but if businesspersons wanted to spend time soliciting for them, "they can do whatever they want".

NONEOne area in which the pragmatic politician endorses the use of support letters is "welfare purposes", such as recommending a constituent for a scholarship.

But with his government waging an all-out battle against Yayasan Basmi Kemiskinan, which it alleges was misusing government land for business purposes, the blurry line between welfare and business is something the MB appreciates.

"So the question is this, how many people does it benefit? If the project only benefits two people, can it still be considered welfare?" he asked.

Nevertheless, Tee's sacking as a municipal councillor over the support letter fiasco sends a clear message on the Selangor government's stand on the issue.

If anyone is still unclear about the Selangor government's stand on support letters, Khalid added, they should recall that he himself never penned any such letter since assuming office.

"Many people kept asking me for such support or recommendation letters, but now I think they've given up," he said, indicating that the "evolutionary way of reform" may work after all.

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