

'Whatever I do, I know I'll be better than Khir'
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It has been a rocky two-and-a-half years for Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim, and the glass remains half-full for this pragmatic politician.

"I spent the first six months understanding the administration... and (now) we are trying to correct the activities of the past, some of which are beyond rationality. We stumbled on quite a lot of things... I think hundreds," he said.

NONEBut despite all the problems the former corporate high-flyer has inherited, he is thankful that at least it means he does not have big shoes to fill.

"What excites me is that it gives me an opportunity to do better, because I can see that going by the old record, I can certainly do better.

"I can tell you now that there were some dumb MBs previously. I don't come from that group of people," the 63-year-old Khalid (right) said.

High on the irrationality scale

Among the list of issues to untangle is the water tariff, which Khalid feels ranks high on the irrationality scale.

"This is (an agreement) prepared by somebody (else) and the state was asked to sign... an intelligent man - of course I'm not saying Umno does not have them, but there might be less of them around - would ask, 'how much would it cost after so many years'?

"It would cost more than petrol, so we say jokingly, it's better to drink petrol than water!" he said of the agreement signed by the previous BN government allowing concessionaire Syabas to increase water tariffs by certain percentages over the years.

Despite these setbacks, Khalid said his government "is better (than the BN government) by any imagination", even after less than three years in office.

khir toyo pc on khir toyo mansion 060709Likewise, he was less than kind about his predecessor Dr Khir Toyo (left), saying that the Umno man did "not deserve to be an MB" and "won't even reach senior manager level" at Guthrie, where Khalid was once CEO.

"He does seem to me to reflect the Malay proverb, sambil menyelam minum air (opportunistic). From an investment banker's point of view, he cannot sign a guarantee because his word may not be his bond," he said.

The MB's dim view of Khir extends to the "exposes" that the latter claimed to have made on sand-mining in a bid to discredit the Selangor administration.

"I cannot imagine why they are saying this. (Khir's government) was doing it illegally so they should keep quiet at least! Not saying that we're digging bigger holes than they were.

"But once these people get addicted to certain things, and we withdraw them, then the withdrawal syndrome kicks in, and they act irrationally," he said, shrugging, as if to show how little he thought of the past administration.

Second wife allegations

Personal attacks from pro-Umno bloggers who claimed Khalid appointed his "second wife" as the coordinator of MB Incorporated have left even less of a dent on the self-professed reformist.

Going on the record about it for the first time, he said the individual in question is his personal assistant who had been working for him for over three decades now, since his days in Permodalan Nasional Bhd.

khalid ibrahim "When the previous assistant retired, I offered the job to her because I had worked with her for over 30 years and it is better to have someone I know, to avoid leaks and all that," Khalid said.

Brushing off the allegations, he added that his wife too has known his 50-plus years old assistant, who is married and has two adult children, for over three decades.

While BN politicians and cyber-troopers appeared to have failed to get on his nerves, the same cannot be said about Giant, and the 19 other cats his family cares for.

"My daughter is a cat surgeon (so) we have a lot of cats, but I have a weakness, I have a sinus (problem). I pat them but they can't crawl on me. I'll throw them away.

"Sometimes they'll come next to me and sleep, so I say, 'Okay, you can sleep here for 10 minutes'," he said, trying unsuccessfully to show his distaste.

"There is one cat that only eats ikan bilis, and ikan bilis is very expensive. This is competing with my nasi lemak! Very manja!" said the reluctant cat lover of the tabby that received a special treat when Khalid visited Sabah recently.

Giant and his posse may have made their way into the MB's heart, but for now, the shine behind his often fingerprint-stained glasses belongs to the state of Selangor.

"I'm lucky to be an MB. I want to be a very good MB, I don't want people to say (that I made) a stupid decision. I take pride in my work," Khalid said.

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