

Khalid: I could have delayed pig-farm project
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If there is one thing that Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim could undo, it would have been the state government's announcement to continue with the RM100 million modern MCPX pig farming project.

While arguing that the decision was "not really a mistake", he conceded that the matter - which generated both accolades and a backlash - could have been handled in a "more politically-savvy way".

first 100 days khalid ibrahim interview 160608 06 "I think I could have delayed the whole thing and created a situation where (if) a need (arises), then we take advantage of the situation (to proceed) rather than give a product (approved by) the previous government," he told a joint interview with English-language dailies at his official residence in Shah Alam on Saturday.

The 90-minute interview was in conjunction with the Pakatan Rakyat state government's first 100 days in power, which will be marked on Friday.

The modern pig farming project, which will be carried out on a site in Kuala Langat near Sepang, had come under fire after Umno-run Malay dailies played up the issue with prominent coverage of protests by NGOs and residents.

Some saw the decision as a means to gain popularity while disregarding cultural and religion sensitivities.

selangor pig farm Amidst the criticism, the state government defended itself, saying that the previous Barisan Nasional administration had approved the project. It also revealed photos to show that previous state leaders had endorsed the project.

Khalid, 62, insisted during the interview that the state government would go ahead with its controversial move to impose an additional levy on migrant workers.

Edited excerpts of the second part of the interview follow.

Has the state government faced any constraint from the federal government over the first 100 days? If so, in what way and how are you overcoming this?

There are perceived and real problems. The perceived problem is that, since we are not part of the federal government (BN) team, it may (try) to portray that (we) will not be able to manage the state successfully. I am not sure if this is the right attitude. I am taking a positive attitude because it is in the interest of the federal government to make sure that state governments like Selangor (are) very successful because their contribution to the country's economy is substantive.

Therefore any federal government which wants to develop the economy will have to work with the states. On average, Selangor's (economic) growth is higher than that of the (national economy). The resources are there and there are also provisions in the (Federal)

Constitution (which require) the federal government to provide certain funds (to the state).

first 100 days khalid ibrahim interview 160608 01 There are real problems, of course. There are federal ministers who may be reading the (provision in the Federal) Constitution a little bit less... less... less.. intellectual. They are more interested in serving the party and (its) members. Priority is given to the party and party members over and above the people at large.

(Take) for example, the incident of the tourism minister (Azalina Othman Said) who awkwardly requested that all activities in the state government with regard to tourism must be handed to people from the same party or (the projects) will be cancelled. I am asking a parliamentary question on this and hopefully it will be answered. Should tourists (be subjected to discrimination) between Umno proposals and (others)?

The utilisation of taxpayers' money by way of discriminatory management is (another) question. Is this the right way or not? Maybe the people may want to challenge whether is it ultra vires the constitution to discriminate in the use of taxpayers' money... (when) federal civil servants who are in charge of taxpayers' money discriminate (in deciding) which development should be done (between BN- and Pakatan-led states), is it constitutionally correct? When the executive arm of the civil service can (discriminate), we want to know whether they have failed in their duty to (be independent) in the execution (of their duties).

They will have to execute (their duties) irrespective of political affiliation, race and religion. We've also heard that senior civil servants are now becoming politically affiliated. This is the most dangerous thing to happen. We don't mind politicians (who) may lack a conscience or intellectual ability, but (for) civil servants, we would recommend (that they) quit their job if they want to be affiliated to political issues.

I was so happy to become menteri besar. I thought I would have an opportunity to talk to the people on the Selangor FM radio...15 years ago, I used to go on talk-shows to explain to people how to buy into unit trust schemes, so I thought I would have an opportunity now to explain (the state government plan) to give free water. There was nothing political about it. I called this fellow (at Selangor FM) which has an office in our state secretariat (and said) 'hey, would you please give me an hour, then you record it, so I will be talking to the people of Selangor'. I thought he would say 'yes, this is good'. After all they could control (the content) - if I become over-political, they could (edit) it.

(However), he came back about a week later and said 'oh no, this is not for the menteri besar who is not part of Barisan Nasional'. He shouldn't even say it to me because he has nothing to do with (politics). He is a civil servant who takes taxpayers' money. If he works in the private sector, I would have sacked him and told him to jump in whatever lake (laughs). That is their attitude. If you do not use (the radio channel), what is the use of having a Selangor FM office in our office; you must go somewhere else and don't call yourself Selangor FM. That is an attitude problem (that we had to address).

Let's say that Pakatan forms the federal government (but Johor remains under BN control) - should we do all (sorts of) things so that Johor won't be able to talk to the federal government (or decide that pro-BN private television station) TV3 should (toe a) different line? For the future of the country, we should start to address the question of separation of responsibilities - how we can adequately work together in spite of the (political) differences.

Going back to your recommendation that civil servants involved in politically-affiliated activities should quit their jobs - does that include those from Pakatan as well?

Yes, it is for everybody. If you are head of the EPU (economic planning unit) and the ICU (implementation and coordination unit) in the federal government (under the Prime Minister's Department), you are the one who will have to work with (state governments) to channel the money. You should not be politically affiliated.

On hindsight, did you make any mistakes in the first 100 days?

Yes, I would say the pig farming (project) although (it is) not really a mistake. We said to ourselves that we are very transparent, we adopt transparency and accountability as part of our way of governing. When we looked at the project on pig farming, I thought it was a reasonable one after having sent (people) all over the world to (do research on the viability of the project).

pig farming 080408So I thought, let's do it and after all, it's necessary. (However,) then I realised that those who had supported it in the previous government had turned 180 degrees (on grounds that) 'oh, it's against the religion and all that'.

I think I could have delayed the whole thing and created a situation where (if) a need (arises), then we take advantage of the situation (to proceed) rather than give a product (approved by) the previous government.

I've found out in politics that (people) really can change the (colour of their) skin (quickly). Fortunately, since I had read all the papers (on the study of the project) (and seen) their photographs in Germany and all that, they couldn't (deny having endorsed the project).

But we could have done it in a more politically-savvy way. I am reminded by some of my political colleagues that this is not just (about) doing (something), you must know how to tackle it as well. The backlash was quite bad, the Umno group was trying to create a clash between DAP and PAS... that caused a little bit of concern.

We could see that you were busy with fire-fighting over the increased levy on migrant workers and the 'zero-squatter' issue as well.

Yes, I have to do the fire-fighting. I made a statement (about) the foreign workers - wah, I felt the backlash from everybody. I don't know why so many people have a loving attitude to the foreign workers... (laughs). In the end, I realised it's the (humanity of the issue) but I (should) have tackled it in a (better way).

water issues and parliamentEven for (giving free) water, I had to contend with answering questions in Parliament by parliamentarians who asked why I should give (free) water because (people) will waste (it). (The MPs also said) that was a corrupt act - that since we won the election, we are giving free water to people.

My answer to the second question is very clear - that if Umno bertaubat (repents and promises not to) take any bribes, I would be glad. I did tell a MP from Johor, why don't you write a letter to the (Umno) Selangor liaison office for a list of all Umno Selangor (members) who don't want to get free water. I will (remove them) from the list and the money will go to the poor people. But I think the Umno people are more sane than the politicians.

Will the state government continue with its plan to impose a levy on foreign workers?

Yes.

How will you deal with criticism of this?

They (the NGOs) have their own humane way (of seeing the issue) but I have to (find) balance (on) the (needs of) people in Selangor - they require us to take care of their security. We are trying (to find) balance for the well-being of everybody.

What kind of investments has Selangor attracted within 100 days?

I went to Dubai (recently) because of (PKR) de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim's and my previous (business) contacts. We have a number of prominent investors who want to come to Selangor. I am happy to say that the investors that we met are very knowledgeable, I don't need to tell them where Selangor is. I am also glad to say they already have proposals for Selangor and want to implement these as effectively as possible. We are not talking about a small amount of money but over US\$10 billion (RM30.3 billion).

budget2004 trade and businessOur concept is to create a fund for Selangor and those states which are interested (in joining us). We are not creating this as an equity fund, but making these funds available for the financing or the capitalising of the project, so we are marrying both. Selangor will become an investment centre to provide investment, project opportunities, equity and financial support, (hopefully in) another 100 days.

It's like an investment house which provides facilities (not just) for equity investment, but also facilities for investors to support their project evaluation, land identification, certain areas on tax, (investment) strategy on the Bursa (Malaysia) and international stock exchange. Most people will just have the investment centre, we are more than that. We already have 10 groups (of investors) with more than RM500 million (each), they approached us and also (took a) look at the project.

These investments which will be in which area?

There are multiple areas. The (investors) have expertise in oil and gas, food, manufacturing.

Will these investments only be carried out in Selangor or would it include the four other Pakatan states?

They will be a little bit more Selangor-based, secondly a little bit more on Pakatan states, and then a little bit more on Asean countries.

Since Selangor has high economic growth and is rich in resources, would the state help the four other Pakatan states financially?

first 100 days khalid ibrahim interview 160608 05We will work together. I don't think the fellow-states seek help but want to seek investment opportunities together. We'll work together. Of course if I have a proposal which comes to Selangor that fits Kelantan, I will approach Kelantan to say this is an opportunity (for them). Maybe Kelantan will have a proposal that requires funding, and they can come to Selangor.

Selangor is quite close to the centre of financial activity, it is also the gateway for investors. The moment they reach Subang airport or dock at the Port (Klang), they are already in Selangor. We are basically fortunate to have these centres. The infrastructure is

already in place, so we just enhance the (investment) opportunities.

Are foreign investors worried that the state is not part of BN?

No, foreign investors are least discriminatory. They will invest anywhere, they don't care whether you are Pakatan or non-Pakatan. Their bottom line is quite clear cut...The idea is they want a centre, for example, most international investors like to have an office in London or New York, there must be a good reason (for this). We want people to have office in Selangor as the centre (too).

Of course, because of some experience that I have (in business), they also want me to look (for opportunities) for them so we can work together in Asean countries. They want us to look into Asean (and make Selangor) a stepping stone to China and India. The facilities and infrastructure will be provided by Selangor, so (the state) will move from only land-related and real estate (activities) to investment and financial-based activities. We are moving to a higher level and they recognise that.

Crime is a big problem in Selangor. Is the state government doing anything about it?

snatch thief 031104Yes. We are going to get the Selangor police commissioner to give the state exco members a briefing over the (security) issues and problems. For example, Klang's economy is equivalent to the economy of Negri Sembilan but the number of police in Negri Sembilan is three or four times that of Klang.

So what are our options? To create another (state police) force? That would be unconstitutional, it can't be done. I am hoping that we will come out with a budget next year in terms of assuring security for families and communities. We haven't got answers, but there is a lot of discussion (going on). It's a very important agenda, but it's not easy (to do).

Touching on the giant billboard in SS2, Petaling Jaya - the previous government leaders provided their contact numbers on the board and you don't.

I don't think I want to be on the board all over the place, sometimes I complain (about it).

It's not about the board, it's more about the contact numbers...

I feel that the billboard is unnecessary. If the MB gives his contact number (on the board), do you think he will be (contactable)? Yes, (if) one or two (persons call), but what if (there are) 300 people (calling)? We should give the numbers (of relevant government agencies). A picture of the MB and his personal phone number doesn't solve the problem.

The federal government has announced cost-cutting measures including entertainment allowances of cabinet members by 10 percent. Will Selangor follow suit?

We will look at a lot more than that. The way we will do it is not just cutting costs, we have to review each part of (the expenditure). What we want to do is to create a 'value for money' situation, that's why we didn't come out and say we will cut everybody's allowances.

To me if you cut all the allowances that you need to cut, the amount is minimal compared to the RM46 million used to subsidise transport. Our view is we don't create a mistake of a big picture by painting a small dot of sunshine, we don't come from that school (laughs). We work on a basic structure.

What would be your cost-cutting measures then?

We want to make sure the people have adequate food. (If you ask someone) who earns RM800 a month to cut costs, they will say you come from another planet (laughs)...We will take a bit of time, stand back, see the situation and adopt a different strategy. We are not going to be caught up with the actions of the federal government.

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