

PM's promise: Target Selangor

Malaysiakini.com

Sep 1, 2009

Hazlan Zakaria & Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

For the Pakatan Rakyat states, it seems, all roads lead back to Barisan Nasional (BN) rule and Selangor is next on the list. That is, if Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has his way. It all started with the *coup de grace* that saw BN taking over Perak. A beaming Najib - who was then PM-in-waiting - announced that the coalition is taking over the silver state in his capacity as state Umno liaison chief.

Najib was handed the portfolio after the Jan 29 Umno supreme council marathon session. He took over from disgraced former Perak MB Tajol Rosli before the events led to the controversial takeover.

The adroit orchestration which toppled the Perak government, saw three Pakatan state assemblypersons suddenly jumping ship and becoming independents. They later expressed their support for BN.

In an ominous move chillingly similar to the Perak fracas, Najib was elevated to the throne of Selangor Umno liaison chief on April 24.

As pointed out by Universiti Malaya anthropology and social sciences lecturer Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad: "If we remember what happened in Perak, we can infer that Selangor is next in Najib's sights; he has promised to take over Selangor and he is likely to do it."

In contrast to the surreptitious manoeuvring, prior to the fall of the silver state, Najib's recent campaign started with him blatantly telling the nation that he intends to "win back Selangor". He said this while officiating the Kuala Selangor Umno division meeting on Aug 9.

The prime minister's statement stirred a hornet's nest amongst Pakatan leaders. They rushed to close the respective barn doors before any more of their prized elected stallions could bolt.

As with the political jumping jacks in Perak, the assemblyperson in question will usually 'disappear' before reappearing to announce he or she has switched sides. This was the case with Jamaluddin Mohd Radzi, Osman Jailu, Hee Yit Foong and *Trojan Horse* Nasharuddin Hashim.

Now PKR's Port Klang assemblyperson Badrul Hisham Abdullah is nowhere on the radar and, so far, has remained incommunicado.

Looking at his 'disappearance', the Machiavellian machinations attempting to derail Selangor Pakatan may have been long in the making. This is despite Najib only making the announcement a few weeks ago.

Fanning the flames of race and religion

Another facet of the ruling coalition's long standing machinations seem to involve a concerted effort by Umno leaders, BN-friendly media and NGOs. All apparently with the underlying agenda of fanning the flames of race and religion, specifically to highlight issues which are sensitive to Islam and Malays in Selangor.

Noor Sulastry, who specialises in ethnic and racial politics, confirmed that "there are elements of race and religion in news carried by the mainstream media". She mentioned *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian* and others under the Media Prima and RTM aegis as being the usual suspects.

The trend probably started with the scathing attack on DAP parliamentarian Teresa Kok over the *azan* issue. This was followed by Bukit Lanjan assemblyperson Elizabeth Wong's condemnation as a person of 'loose' morality over her intimate photo scandal.

They were joined, in the line of fire, by Selangor exco Ronnie Liu (*right*) who was slammed over his alleged involvement with vice and gangster elements, as well as, over the alcohol issue. Another state exco, Dr Xavier Jayakumar, also faced flak over the 'insensitive' relocation of a temple into a Malay-majority area.

But the most prominent of these 'attacks' was the crusade by none other than DPM Muhyiddin Yassin himself against *de facto* PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim, calling the latter "a traitor to the Malay race".

Muhyiddin's allegations against Anwar go hand in hand with recent sharp rhetoric in editorials and articles in *Utusan*.

One commentary in the Malay-language daily drew the ire of Centre for Independent Journalism executive director V Gayathry who said: "I believe that the commentary is trying to racialise the fundamental issues of governance and accountability. It gets problematic when you use (the) racial lens to solve these issues."

Officials from the NGO Permuakatan Ummah (Pewaris) and Muhyiddin, however, defended *Utusan's* articles.

The DPM explained that the articles were only a reaction to protests which challenged Malay institutions. This is a 360° turn from his earlier chastising of the newspaper for its article titled *Melayu dikhianati?* (Malays betrayed?) on June 2.

Noor Sulastry commented that the DPM's defence of the Malay daily had sent the wrong message.

"As a senior government official, Muhyiddin's statement paints the picture that *Utusan* is a government tool," she explained.

"BN's shameless use of the media to further its hegemony is a throwback from the Mahathir era.

"The implications also goes beyond our borders as most in the international community now seem to think that Malays are racists."

Agitating the Malays

The lecturer further added that the reason for the focus on these sensitive issues, relating to Islam and the Malays, is because "Najib is trying to win the support of the Malay Muslims". This is especially to reach the grassroots from lower income groups.

She explained that the use of free terrestrial stations under RTM and Media Prima, is extremely effective as most of the Malay grassroots do not have access to more impartial reporting of the alternative media and channels like *Awani*, on paid services like Astro.

According to her, Najib, by using these sensitive issues, would erode Malay support for Selangor Pakatan agitating the Malays into questioning their support for the state government.

What makes it worse, as she sees it, "DAP seems to overshadow PKR in Selangor. Even in PKR, (director for strategy) Tian Chua seems to have more prominence than Anwar." This makes it easy for BN to portray the Malays as being neglected. However, Noor Sulastry warned that this is not helped by the fact that non-Malay communities are also starting to make demands that Malays may find sensitive.

Driving a wedge into Pakatan

But more than just agitating the Malays, BN is looking to drive a wedge into Selangor Pakatan. This is a major driving force of their Selangor campaign.

Najib himself specifically mentioned PAS and DAP as convenient targets when announcing his campaign to take over Selangor. In his statement, the PM described the unlikely duo as "oil and water".

Noor Sulastry concurred that the two parties "have very different ideologies".

But nothing better describes the schism between the two Pakatan components than what Puchong MP Gobind Singh Deo (*left*) told *The Nutgraph* in an interview. "PAS is pushing for an Islamic state. DAP always maintains it's a secular state."

This is the crack in Pakatan that BN is looking to drive a wedge into. Looking to turn it into a yawning crevasse that they hope would eventually break Pakatan's back.

These are the provocations that Umno and its Youth movement are heaping upon PAS. They are using issues like the alcohol ban and unity government as bait to lure the Islamic party into a head-on collision with DAP. This is the powder keg situation that BN is hoping to ignite, in order to break apart the fledgling opposition coalition.

Umno's sudden religious attitude seems to be a tad hypocritical however, as Noor Sulastry observed, "nothing was said of the same issues in other BN-led states". She also warned that "even PKR members may be at odds with PAS, as PKR is more 'secular' than the increasingly hardline PAS".

She, however, concluded that despite BN's attempts, "Pakatan is still united for now, though the opposition coalition will forever be marked by the 'taint' of the scandals peppered against it".

The 'taint' may even cost long term damage that may make itself felt in the next general election, she added.