

## **A tale of two states (and two men)**

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COMMENT On 30 August, the state of Kelantan sued the national oil corporation Petronas, for alleged breach of a contract that had been signed between Kelantan and Petronas, in 1975. With Kelantan deprived of oil royalties, its people were robbed of the benefits that could have improved their lives.

If this is the federal government's way of punishing the Kelantan people for voting PAS at the state level, then BN is defeated even before it has begun. Isn't BN bothered that it is also punishing its own supporters in Kelantan?

The federal government treats Petronas like its personal kitty - a cash cow with which it can dip its grubby paws into, to reward those states which are compliant. The federal government is acting irresponsibly, by being spiteful and therefore, is unfit to govern.

Kelantan (population 2,100,000) is the poorest state; Sarawak (2,500,000) is the next poorest. Both Sarawak and Kelantan are blessed with oil reserves and timber, but they remain poor. Their poverty is because of different reasons.

Sarawak's abundance of liquefied petroleum gas and petroleum is the mainstay of the Federal government's economy and yet it receives only 5% royalty. Its state sanctioned logging and oil-palm industries, has resulted in massive deforestation. Only 5% of virgin jungle remains.

Despite the relative economic growth from timber, oil palm and oil, Sarawak still lags markedly behind the rest of the other states, bar Kelantan.

These two states have in common, elderly leaders who have been at the helm for decades: Taib Mahmud led Sarawak for 30 years whilst Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat served Kelantan since 1990.

But the two men, who are in their seventies, are like chalk and cheese. Taib belongs to BN whereas Nik Aziz is with PAS.

Apparently, after filing the suit against Petronas, Kelantan menteri besar Nik Aziz led 200 supporters in a solat hajat (prayer of need) at the nearby Federal Territory Mosque. Nik Aziz is famed for commanding support from non-Muslims in Malaysia and is instrumental in playing a leading role for the increase in popularity of PAS among non-Muslims.

However, the only recent suit we remember involving Taib Mahmud was the white one he wore (complete with red bow tie) on the night of the glittering high society banquet of the Islamic Fashion Festival (IFF) Charity Gala Dinner in Monaco-Monte Carlo.

Together with various members of Malaysian royalty and 600 guests from Monaco's high society, Taib watched as Malaysia's "First Lady" Rosmah Mansor, the IFF patron, donated 270,000 euros (RM1,120,961) to the Prince Albert II Foundation of Monaco. The money had been raised from the promotion of Sarawak tourism, and an auction of items including a framed signed photo of Prince Albert

Tok Guru, as Nik Aziz, is affectionately called, commands huge respect from several people. He interacts well with non-Muslims, because they admire him for his honesty, views on

moral issues and his candour.

They may not agree with all of his policies, but he is valued for his wisdom and his courage. How many in the Umno camp can match up to Tok Guru?

Taib Mahmud on the other hand, raised the ire of many, including a group of foreigners who joined a protest in Oxford when he went to the United Kingdom to woo investors with the 'Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy' (SCORE).

They were protesting at the destruction of the rainforests of Sarawak, the denial of justice for the Penan and also the construction of the 12 mega-dams project which will displace the indigenous people living in the affected areas.

The contrast between the two men continues on a personal level.

Nik Aziz lives in a modest wooden house which has no elaborate fencing, no ornate gate with security features and no sentries. He has been known to carry and use the same BIC ballpoint pen and travels in the official Proton Perdana, official registration number DBA 8668.

Home for Taib Mahmud is a grand riverside mansion overlooking the Sarawak River, stuffed with gilt-edged 'Louis-Farouk' style furniture. He, and his son, own a fleet of luxury cars including a Rolls Royce.

Taib has no need for car registration-number plates – those are for ordinary folk. His official car is a Mercedes 600 SEL which has no number plates, only a 'YAB KETUA MENTERI SARAWAK'. His travelling needs would not be complete without the helicopters and a jet belonging to Hornbill Airways, specifically for his use.

Back in Kelantan, Nik Aziz's religious background is complete with a religious school owned by his family, but Taib Mahmud's greed, knows no boundaries.

He and his family own various multimillion properties and companies in Sarawak, the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia. These were allegedly built from the proceeds of the lucrative business deals exploiting Sarawak's natural resources.

Awangku Jinal Pengiran Jawa, the PBB Youth leader said last week, that they would "vigorously oppose" any attempt to pressure Taib Mahmud to retire and that the 'provocations and pressure' on Taib should stop. He also questioned why people were picking on Taib when 'other old leaders and poverty in places such as Kelantan were never questioned by certain quarters'.

Many people have, only he was not listening.

Of the two poorest states in Malaysia, one receives oil royalties, the other does not. But whilst the Chief Minister of Sarawak manages to lead a life that is way beyond his official \*\*\*RM13,000 salary and is alleged to have built a multi-million fortune and stashed it abroad, the Menteri Besar of Kelantan lives a modest life, one that speaks volumes of the man.

Nik Aziz, the spiritual leader of PAS, does not receive any oil royalty. Taib Mahmud who belongs to BN, does.

Are Malaysians, principally the Sarawak people, content to gawp at the opulence and grand lifestyle of Taib Mahmud? Are they happy with the breach of trust?

Taib Mahmud is a perfect example that the route to wealth in Sarawak, (and Malaysia) is by entering politics and remaining subservient to those at the 'peak', unless one is at the 'peak', as Taib is.

Sadly, when they're there, they can be a law unto themselves.

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