

The battle for Taib's affections
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COMMENT Sunday lunch with the rest of the family in the Taib household is never going to be the same again. Sarawak Chief Minister, 74-year-old Taib Mahmud has taken a new young bride from Jordan and at 28-years-old, the age difference is an eye-watering 46 years.

Even Taib's youngest daughter from his union with his Polish-Australian wife, Laila, who died last year, is only 38 years old. It will be awkward for Hanifah to call a younger woman "mama".

Kuching may have been buzzing with interest and amusement at this union but this latest news has probably filled his political associates and his family with dread. Will Taib find the time to concentrate on affairs of state, at a crucial time in Sarawak's political history, with the Sarawak state elections and the general election due soon?

Or will Taib be more interested in the affairs of the heart?

Will his 'new-found love' be able to soothe away his troubles and rejuvenate his tired old body that he is able to summon the strength to focus on the upcoming elections?

Will the happy young bride, reluctantly release Taib to attend to matters of the state or will she want to keep him all to herself?

The sniggers of the domestic staff as they discuss their employers' playful romps should be interesting.

What about the rest of the family? How have they taken to Taib's latest 'acquisition'? They must be wondering if she is able to influence him and change his cosy domestic arrangements, which thus far have been managed by his daughters.

How will they even react if the new mistress of the household decides to move the furniture around to her satisfaction? All those little mementoes of their own mother might be consigned to the storeroom.

Did they ask "papa" to make the new lady in his life sign a pre-nuptial agreement?

If the rest of the family and his political colleagues do not make his new wife welcome, she might make him spend time away from Sarawak - his political base. Will he be able to hold the country together if he is frequently absent from his heartlands?

At stake is a multi billion ringgit empire which includes city properties, country estates, land, cars, shares and control of companies spread all over the world.

Last May, Taib told Semariang assemblywoman Sharifah Hashidah Syed Aman Ghazali, that he had no plans to remarry after he was widowed.

He said, "I am already 74. It's too old for me to get a new partner now".

He joked that he missed Laila and that she was his "accountant" who would carry money on her whenever she went with him for functions.

He joked and said, "Now, if I need money, I have to ask my bodyguards."

At least, the new bride is assured of a new role when they are out in public.

But it must be worrying for the rest of the family, if she decides to be in charge of more than just a few thousand ringgits in her purse. What if she had grand designs on the rest of Taib's finances?

Taib's rags-to-riches rise is inextricably linked to his political well-being.

Sarawak politics has just become more interesting with Taib's marriage.

People have been unkind about her and asked "Did she marry for his money or his morals?"

What if it was the other way around? The new bride might still be the sweet innocent party and from what we know of Taib, he is cunning and an opportunist.

What if he saw an opportunity in his new wife's Middle Eastern credentials as a means and an excuse to expand his business empire and political influence, in that part of the world.

Didn't he just officially launch a 'world halal food hub' in the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE), which is the new development corridor in central Sarawak?

When he remarried, one can expect the crafty old devil wasn't just thinking about his private pleasures but also about extending his political and business domination.

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