

Khalid plans to work with Federal Government

New Selangor MB shares some strategies on how to resolve problems and make the state a better place to live and work

The Star - 27/3/2008



More than 600 e-mails were sent to Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim when *The Star* asked readers to pose questions to the newly appointed Menteri Besar. The questions were often direct to the point, with most readers wanting to know what Khalid's priorities were, particularly in relation to the economy of Malaysia's most industrialised state.

The environment was another major issue, reflecting Malaysians' growing concern over the subject. The *Star* Group Chief Editor Datuk Wong Chun Wai, in his latest Cafe Latte Chat series, met Khalid on Monday, shortly after the new state executive councillors were sworn in.

POLITICS

What is the most important issue you will tackle in your first year as Menteri Besar of Selangor? - Tan Peck Choo (Taman Serdang Jaya, Selangor)

Khalid: Youth unemployment, because of two reasons. One, I would have thought Selangor would have full employment because there are 1.5 million foreign workers here. If our idea is to reduce reliance on foreign workers, we must make sure all our youths are fully employed at a very reasonable level.

Secondly, I think part of the social issues in the state is also related to youths not being given the right thing. Hopefully, if I'm able to tackle youth unemployment, I may be able to reduce the social problem.

How are you going to serve efficiently as the Menteri Besar of Selangor while being the assemblyman for Ijok and MP for Bandar Tun Razak? - Lam Han Wen (Tao Payoh, Singapore)

Khalid: I'm quite used to multi-functional positions. Even in the corporate world, I used to have companies operating not only in Malaysia but also all over the world. In terms of providing service to the community, I'll have to use representatives to act on my behalf, and I will also have to allocate time for meetings with the people.

For Ijok, we have a Menteri Besar's office. The previous Menteri Besar opened an office there but he didn't use it. So I use it now.

For Bandar Tun Razak, I will be there once a week just to hear issues. We have formed a group with PKR, DAP and PAS to tackle the issues.

How exactly will the PKR-led state government work with the Barisan Nasional-led Federal Government? - Bhaskar Bhagwanji (Kelana Jaya, Petaling Jaya)

Khalid: We should work closely. The issue is that Federal Government needs Selangor to grow so that the Federal Government will enjoy the tax returns from the state. And Selangor, of course, wants the Federal Government to channel some of its development projects into the state. I think the attitude is that we have to work together, rather than be confrontational.

Of course, we may have differences in political views but I don't think we have differences in trying to develop the country.

There are many issues that I want to present to the Government that

can easily be tackled by the state, rather than at the Federal level.

For example, the Federal Government found out that it couldn't use the inland port it had built, which cost a few billions of ringgit. The state is willing to look after this for the Federal Government and then develop it. At the end of the day, the whole country will benefit from utilising it.

This is an example of how the Federal Government and state can work together.

Many say that PKR won only because many Malaysians have become disillusioned with Barisan, and not because the Opposition is strong. What is your view on this? - Dheepan Pranthaman (Malacca)

Khalid: Yeah, maybe, but that gives us better opportunity. Partly it was that reason, but partly the youth wants change. Of course, that's the biggest challenge. Now you are no more an Opposition to criticise, but rather to prove you can bring in changes. Bringing in changes is different from being critical. You have to implement certain steps to realise the changes. So it's a challenge. I think that the wave of change was initiated and we reaped the benefit.

What are you going to do to ensure proper and efficient use of taxpayers' money by the local councils? Will you move to declassify council finances that are currently state secrets? - Sakina Mohamed (Damansara Utama, Petaling Jaya)

Khalid: My basic idea is to reform the Official Secrets Act (OSA). But the OSA is in the hands of Federal Government but when I'm in Parliament, I'll also propose the change of OSA to the Right to Information Act. I feel a transparent Government is more likely to be efficient and effective, and with less chance of corruption. So the people know where their money is going to.

For Selangor, I had a discussion with our legal adviser. She said there were ways the state can do this if there was no link with the Federal Government. The state can declassify some information for the public. The Menteri Besar's office can declassify. I'm now trying to understand how to do the declassification. If it can be done, I will make sure the local governments will be my testing ground.

Many low-income workers and the jobless trying to set up small stalls at pasar pagi and pasar malam cannot get a licence to do so. How will you help these citizens of the state to earn a living? - Tony Chen (Pj Old Town, Petaling Jaya)

Khalid: That's the reason why we thought about the youth programme. Of course, we also must explain to people that there is a limit to giving licences because if we give too many licences, there will be too much competition. Then there is very little revenue for everybody.

I'll try to resolve the current issues. But I saw a few places that have been there for at least three or four years, and they applied for a licence but they didn't get it. I think we should consider them.

I heard that you want to implement local government elections. That's a good idea. How about elections or Ketua Kampung and JKKK in Selangor? - Ahsan Imaduddin



In-depth interview: Khalid answering a question during the Cafe Latte Chat with Wong.

Ya'cof (Padang Jawa, Klang).

Khalid: We will do it in phases because democratisation takes time. People don't realise there is a cost to it. What we want to do first is to set up a transparent system, so that everybody knows what we're doing and then we can easily select the best representative.

So I'm doing it in two or three stages. There is a big bureaucratic structure inherent in the Government, in our local governments. If we don't resolve the bureaucratic structure, then any democratic process will not work.

BILLBOARDS

Is the new state government going to move towards reducing clutter, standardising formats and making all panels legal for advertising or maintain all sites as they are but ensure all sites are legal? - Bala Pomaleh (Damansara Heights, Kuala Lumpur)

Khalid: We'll sort it out. But first we want to know who the owners of the billboards are, and how they were easily given licences. I think we'll try and reduce it but at the moment, I don't want to take action because it is at the local government level. We will try to find out how billboard licences were issued, who the beneficiaries are and how we can try to reduce the illegal ones.

CRIME

Will you push the Anti-Corruption Agency to reopen cases that remained dormant during the previous MB's administration? - Hamdan Datuk Hj Mohd Salleh (Faculty of Social Science and Industrial Studies, Universiti Industrial Selangor)

Khalid: I'll do it but at the moment I have not seen anything. But my idea for the future is to reduce it. The main issue is the future, that's why I've been talking about making sure of the legislation and the environment that allow this.

I would like to know what plans

the state government has to make to the people feel safer, especially during the early hours of the morning as many women and children have to leave their homes alone to their places of work and schools? - Jayanthi Sivarajah (Subang Jaya, Selangor)

How are you going to cut down on crime and create a safer and more secure environment in Selangor? - Sharifah Shirilina (Ampang, Selangor)

Khalid: We will recommend to have a briefing by the Selangor Chief Police Officer on the crime situation in Selangor, how he is overcoming it, what his problems are and how we in the state can assist him to reduce it. If I get angry with the police for not solving the problems but we do not appreciate their problems, then we are not resolving anything.

ECONOMY

How would you ensure all Malaysians in Selangor don't feel marginalised? - Lui Kwee Hui (Kuala Lumpur)

Khalid: If everyone is given a chance to enhance their income and get a decent job, I think that will reduce everything else because they will be quite happy to go on with their lives. But still I must say that there are areas, unless you put in certain real support, they will not get out of this vicious circle (or poverty).

So we have to target the areas that need to be lifted. I have not identified them, but once we have, we will support them. But the big issue is basically in the rural areas, they have no opportunity to enhance their income. We must make sure that everyone in the family is fully employed.

What are the areas of employment that you can introduce? - K. Ramasamy (Puchong, Selangor)

Khalid: We cannot compete with low labour and unskilled labour. There are people are from other countries who are willing to receive far less pay. But we have a list of intermediary jobs. For example, if you

set up a hospital, you'll need X-Ray technology, dental support; at least, based on experience from my friend in the United Nations, there are areas when you improve these people, it will immediately value add to your economy.

You move these people from hard labour to machines to CNC (Computer Numerical Control) mechanic, where they are higher-level technicians. So we are going to get a list of higher skills and train the people. For example, the demand for nursing is there and the growing economy will be there. There are a lot of young women not fully employed; we can also provide funds for nursing.

Then, you'll ask me a question. How do you fund this?

I can even go to the Federal Government and say, you allow foreign labour to come to Selangor. If let's just say there are a million foreign workers in Selangor, and if I can levy RM100 a year, I accumulate RM100mil for training for my people.

So the government will benefit, there will be less social problems in future and so forth. I don't think the employees will mind over RM10 a month. The money will also be translated into the youth programme.

The United States is in recession. How are you going to attract investors to come in? - Adeline Yong (Damansara, Petaling Jaya)

Khalid: Fortunately for Malaysia, we are slowly reducing dependence on the US because of the growth of China and India. Malaysia is a small country, with less than 25 million population, and if we can get our niche in China, India and Indonesia, there is enough business for us.

Of course, the electronics and electrical businesses, which are of a different nature, will be affected by the volatility of the US demand and supply. But my focus will be on Asia. The good thing about Selangor is that it has the infrastructure to win the hearts of the investors.