

## **Menteri Besar or not, Anwar can help douse the flames in Selangor**

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There may still be lingering doubts on whether the "Kajang Move" is a wise one.

But Pakatan Rakyat leaders believe that integrating Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim into Selangor's administration will help deal with the flames of mistrust and intolerance that are about to get worse in multi-ethnic Selangor.

Anwar's skill as a communicator and negotiator can only be fully harnessed if he is first made a state lawmaker, which then paves the way for him to make real change on the ground as part of the state administration.

Being a parliamentarian and even Federal opposition leader is not enough, said Pakatan Rakyat leaders.

And though Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim is a brilliant administrator, the way the state government dealt with its first major political crisis – the January 2 seizure of bibles – showed a lack of deftness when it comes to handling politically explosive issues.

It is not enough to deal with religious and racial incitement, which is political in nature, by just giving ceramah, Pakatan leaders told The Malaysian Insider.

Real effort must be made to engage with state civil servants to help craft policies that actually put Pakatan's promise of equality and inclusiveness for all citizens and communities into practice.

Heightened tensions in Pakatan Selangor's second term are a real threat, believe DAP and PAS leaders.

It is worse this time around because Umno, which leads Barisan Nasional, shows no sign of caring

for anything else besides doing what it thinks will get it the Malay-Muslim vote.

This can be seen, said Selangor DAP chief Tony Pua, in how every issue is twisted to give it a racial slant.

The most recent being the RM1,200 reward offered by Malay supremacist groups to anyone who would slap Seputeh MP Teresa Kok.

The group had claimed that Kok's Chinese New Year video, in which she lampooned national affairs and leaders, was insulting to Malays, Islam and the Malay Rulers.

Protest leaders slaughtered two chickens and smeared the animals' blood on a banner depicting faces of Kok, two senior DAP leaders and a Penang PKR assemblyperson.

“Before the 13th general election, there was 1Malaysia. So they wanted to balance fighting for the Malays with trying to be inclusive towards non-Malays. But Umno has abandoned 1Malaysia,” said Pua.

Pua expects more of such incidents in Penang and Selangor as Umno attempts to shore up support of Malays.

In Selangor, claimed PAS central committee member Khalid Samad, tensions are going to be further inflamed especially over the Kalimah Allah issue.

He believes that the raw feelings touched off by the Selangor Islamic Affairs Department (Jais) raid early this year was just the start.

In a surprise operation in January 2, Jais raided and seized more than 300 bibles from the Bible Society of Malaysia.

“Their superiors can turn around and say that they don’t have to inform the state government, federal government or that they don’t recognise the 10-point plan,” said Khalid, who is also Shah Alam MP.

“This is an agency that has declared itself to be independent of everyone,” said the two-term MP who has been vocal in campaigning for a conclusive solution to the Allah issue.

Jais justified its raid on a 1988 Selangor enactment against religious propagation towards Muslims. The enactment bans the use of Allah and 30 other Arabic terms in non-Muslim religious ceremonies and holy books.

How the state government handled the outrage that come out of the Jais raid was just as severely criticised as the raid itself.

It took days for the Selangor government to come out with a statement explaining what occurred, but even that was not enough.

The Selangor Pakatan administration was accused by an irate public of abandoning its general election promise to protect freedom of worship for religious minorities.

Another Pakatan leader close to the state administration revealed that the state government was caught flat-footed by the Jais raid.

It struggled to balance the demands from the public to stick to election promises on the one hand, and the need to abide by the 1988 enactment.

Meanwhile, the raid and the debate it ignited has become a rallying point for Selangor Umno, which is now going on a roadshow throughout the state to defend the ban on “Allah” for non-Muslims.

To date, the roadshow has been put on hold because of the Kajang by-election.

“The state government should have come out with a stronger stand on it but there was a lack of gumption,” said the Pakatan leader who requested anonymity.

Except for PAS’s Khalid, there is also a lack of willingness among a majority of Selangor PAS leaders, said the Pakatan leader, to deal with the Allah issue and address it head-on.

This confusion and inaction among Pakatan Muslim leaders on the Allah issue will erode support from the non-Muslims who voted them in, said political analyst Dr Wong Chin Huat.

“BN does not have to go out and get the non-Muslim vote. All it needs to win is the rural Malay vote and to ensure that non-Muslims stay home and don’t vote for Pakatan,” said Wong, of think tank the Penang Institute.

It is in this context that Selangor Pakatan leaders hope that Anwar can be of help.

As a state lawmaker and part of the government, Anwar would be able to meet civil servants, the religious authorities and decision-makers close to the palace to find a way out of the legal and political impasse on the use of Allah, said PAS’s Khalid.

Anwar’s background as an Islamist activist (he was a key leader in the influential Muslim Youth Movement, ABIM) and as a Malay-Muslim grassroots leader gives him valuable insight into the “Allah” debate.

As said by PKR strategic director Rafizi Ramli, Abdul Khalid, the Selangor Menteri Besar, may be a skilled administrator, but the former corporate tycoon is less agile at dealing with race and religion issues compared with Anwar.

“Nothing against Khalid. It’s just not his cup his tea. We will be in denial if we ignore this as he is a management maestro but not a political maestro,” Rafizi said in a previous interview with The Malaysian Insider.

At the same time, according to Pua, there are also more resources at Anwar's command as a member of the state government as opposed to just being an elected representative.

"It is PKR's right who they want to contest in Kajang and who their excos are. Any change to the Menteri Besar's post has not been agreed upon by the three parties," said Khalid, reflecting the still simmering disagreements about the whole Kajang move.

"But as an Adun (state lawmaker) and PKR exco, Anwar can help with the 'Allah' issue." – February 14, 2014.

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