

**No clear winner in Selangor MB crisis**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**Aug 7, 2014**  
**NEWS ANALYSIS BY SHERIDAN MAHAVERA**

At its worst, the whole of Selangor will be sucked into the vortex, and the people's daily routine will have to once again be put on hold for a snap election, just over a year after the 2013 general election.

At its best, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will still hold on to the Selangor government but its image as a cohesive, viable alternative to Barisan Nasional (BN) to rule the country will be seriously questioned.

It is almost certain that Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim's days as Selangor Menteri Besar (MB) are numbered. His party, and at least another of the three parties that form the PR coalition that he is a part of, want him out.

Unless PKR suddenly has a change of heart, he would probably not stay as MB beyond the next few weeks.

Observers note that in the parliamentary system that Malaysia practises, office holders are beholden to their parties.

And if Khalid defies PKR and PR, it would put into motion a series of events putting the country's richest state into political deadlock for the next four years. This could also see its economy suffer.

But even if the crisis is settled without a vote of no-confidence in the state assembly, and Khalid is removed, it is only the beginning of a rough four years for PR, which was formed after the 2008 general election.

No easy options

Khalid has gone on record to say that he has the support of the majority of the 56 state lawmakers in the Selangor assembly and as such will not resign as demanded by his party.

Even if PKR sacks Khalid from the party for breaching its directive, technically, he does not lose his job until he loses a vote of no-confidence in the assembly, said political analyst Dr Wong Chin Huat.

And if Khalid fails to marshal 29 assemblymen to back him, he must either resign or request that the assembly be dissolved, said Wong, a fellow at the Penang Institute.

The latter option would pave the way for state-wide elections.

Analysts believe that it is likely PKR and the DAP will band together in the assembly if a vote occurs. Together, they have 28 assemblymen (DAP 15, PKR 13, excluding Khalid).

If Khalid insists on defeating a no-confidence vote, he would need the support of PAS which has 15 assemblymen, and Umno which has 12. He would also need to convince at least one more assemblyman, either from DAP or PKR.

But this scenario is fraught with disaster.

If PAS' 15 assemblymen go along with its president and spiritual leader who have backed Khalid, it would be tantamount to leaving PR altogether.

"It is a complete mistake for PAS to support Khalid as it is bad for party discipline," said Wan Saiful Wan Jan of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas).

Wan Saiful said as a member of a party, Khalid has to abide by its decisions.

PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang's support of Khalid is essentially saying that he supports a member who rebels against his own party, added Wan Saiful.

If PAS's 15 assemblymen do not go along with their allies in PR and support Khalid in a no-confidence vote, the party would show that "it can't be trusted", added the political analyst.

And if Khalid survives a no-confidence on these terms, PAS would need to move mountains to get votes from Selangor's residents in the next election.

"Voters in Selangor are very aware of what is going on and they have very strong opinions on how things should be done," said Ibrahim Suffian of independent pollster Merdeka Center.

A senior PAS leader, however, believes that how the 15 would vote depends on what the party's central committee decides this Sunday.

"The majority of leaders in PAS want Pakatan to remain intact and together. It's just a handful of hardliners who do not want to be seen to be bowing to PKR," said the PAS leader who requested anonymity.

No easy state polls

A state election called now would be tough for both PR and BN.

PR would be going into such an election on a very defensive campaign, said Merdeka Center's Ibrahim (pic, right).

"There would be a lot of apologising instead of offering anything new," he added.

Turnout would be low and those voters who do come out to vote would be critical of how each party and candidate in PR acted during the crisis.

Wong of the Penang Institute believes that PR's chances are even slimmer.

"BN can win in many constituencies by default if enough of PR supporters decide to punish the coalition they supported passionately a year ago.

"A spoiled vote campaign can easily be launched. 'Third force' may be formed to try their luck.

"Some PAS hardliners may vote against PKR in the hope that PAS will have much more seats than PKR to claim the office of MB. While non-Muslims, liberals and PKR hardcore may choose to punish PAS," says Wong (pic, left).

Ibrahim, however, said that the BN would also have a hard time canvassing for support among Selangor's urban, well-informed voters.

The prime minister's performance will be scrutinised, the BN would need to answer accusations it allowed racial and religious tension to fester and that its national policies caused the price of goods to go up.

Even if PR somehow manages to scrape through the elections, there is still a big question mark of who will become the new MB.

Given that no one can really predict which party will come out holding more seats, there is no sure bet that the next MB will come from PKR, PAS or Umno.

And going by how PR is solving its current MB crisis, it is uncertain if it can deal with another similar problem. – August 7, 2014.

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