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To cite this article: Tricia Yeoh (2010) The Pakatan Rakyat Selangor State Administration: Present and Future Challenges on the Road to Reform, *The Round Table*, 99:407, 177-193, DOI: [10.1080/00358531003656347](https://doi.org/10.1080/00358531003656347)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00358531003656347>



Published online: 01 Apr 2010.



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The Pakatan Rakyat Selangor State Administration: Present and Future Challenges on the Road to Reform

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ABSTRACT *Dubbed the 'political tsunami', the 8 March 2008 elections in Malaysia gave overwhelming results. Selangor is one of the five states now governed by the Pakatan Rakyat coalition. This was a significant win, being the most urban and lucrative state of the country. It has been considered a model state for the Pakatan Rakyat in its desire to position itself as an alternative federal government. This has been the mandate of the new Selangor government, but its execution has been accompanied by numerous obstacles. This paper analyses the distinctive reform measures undertaken by the state government, the challenges faced, ensuing political transformation, and long-term prospects for Pakatan Rakyat in Selangor.*

KEY WORDS: Selangor State Administration, Pakatan Rakyat, federal–state relations, 2008 general elections, reform in Malaysia, Barisan Nasional

Introduction

Malaysia is facing tremendous political change today, largely as a result of its 12th general election in 2008. Selangor is one of the states whose government was changed in these elections. Selangor forms the most part of Klang Valley, the centre of urban life in Malaysia. It is the most developed state, boasting an annual budget of RM1.4bn (Ibrahim, 2008), the largest state budget in the country, and contributes almost 20% to the national economy (Ibrahim, 2008; Treasury, 2009). The state of Selangor has the highest proportion of net in-migration in Malaysia (Talha, 2007) for those seeking job opportunities and higher standards of living and therefore is of great political and economic worth.

Barisan Nasional had only once lost its majority in the state of Selangor before this, in 1969. This was the year that racial riots erupted between Malays and Chinese, largely contained within Selangor. Although there are varying accounts of the causes, the consensus is that inter-ethnic tension transformed into violence when the Chinese-supported Democratic Action Party (DAP) tipped the balance, thereby causing Barisan Nasional's loss. Fearing a similar incident taking place, the Federal

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Territory of Kuala Lumpur was carved out of Selangor to become an administrative capital and the state would be considered safe from opposition hands—that is, up until 2008.

Selangor is considered crucial to the Pakatan Rakyat, whose performance in governing a state will be closely observed by the public. Should it be managed in a more efficient manner than the previous state government, voters would then perceive Pakatan Rakyat as a viable alternative to the present Barisan Nasional-led federal government. Reform measures of transparency, accountability and competency were key clarion calls made against Barisan Nasional, and Selangor will be the litmus test for Pakatan Rakyat's abilities. Selangor faces many issues also seen at the national level, including its opportunities and numerous challenges.

Background

The results of the elections saw the following breakdown of Selangor state legislative assembly seats: Barisan Nasional with 20 seats, and Pakatan Rakyat 36, made up of People's Justice Party's (PKR's) 15, DAP's 13 and Islamic Party of Malaysia's (PAS's) eight, respectively. Pakatan Rakyat succeeded in winning 64% of the Selangor state assembly, slightly less than two-thirds majority. The resignation of a Port Klang assemblyman from PKR, who is now a 'Barisan Nasional-friendly independent', in October 2009 reduced Pakatan's seats to 35, but did not change the power structure.

It is crucial that the background of each of the parties making up the Pakatan Rakyat is elaborated on, as it sets the tone for the challenges that can be anticipated. It is also important to understand that Pakatan Rakyat is a post-election coalition, which some have criticised as a 'marriage of convenience', for the necessary sake of power. A majority of state legislative assemblymen candidates hardly expected to win, much less form the new state government.

The DAP was formed in 1965 as a social democratic party. Although positioning itself as a multiracial party, it has difficulty in proclaiming this identity as a majority of its membership is of Chinese ethnic origin. In previous elections where it has done well, it was mainly due to Chinese voters expressing their dissatisfaction with the Malaysian Chinese Association's (MCA's) failure to address their needs as an ethnic community.¹ The PKR was formed in 1998 in the wake of the arrest of then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, believed by his supporters to be wrongly accused by then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed of corruption and sodomy. PKR was later fortified by the veteran Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM), with its socialist leanings. The party today is considered by some as being ideologically weak relative to its counterparts in the coalition, although some efforts are being made to solidify the essence of PKR's positions. For instance, in 2008 its advisor, Anwar Ibrahim, conceptualised 'The New Deal', an elaboration of the basic economic principles espoused by the party. Of note is that PKR is the most multiracial party of the coalition in terms of membership make-up.

As an Islamic party, PAS is deeply rooted in religious principles. It was formed as a breakaway group from United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) by the *ulama* faction in 1955 and has subsequently fluctuated between conservative and inclusive Islamic interpretations and practices over the years. In the 2008 elections,

there was unprecedented electoral support for PAS by non-Muslims in response to slogans such as 'PAS for all' and the fielding of its first non-Muslim candidate. Nevertheless, the conservative elements of the party continue to be a force, and it is this struggle between the *ulama* (religious teachers) and the 'Erdogans' (progressives) that manifests itself in the governing of Selangor.

The months leading up to the general elections culminated in a widespread perception that the incumbent government had 'failed to deal effectively with issues such as . . . UMNO arrogance and excesses, economic scandals, rising cost of living, crime and corruption' (Saravanamuttu, 2008, p. 39). As in the nationwide campaign, the opposition party in Selangor was no different in drawing from these elements to lambast Barisan Nasional. The *Barisan Alternatif Selangor*, or Selangor's Alternative Front, unfurled an election manifesto themed as 'Clean, successful and welfare-driven' (Barisan Alternatif, 2008), arguing that the state's economic resources should be returned to the people of Selangor in the context of a global financial crisis, the effects of which were beginning to be deeply felt by local businessmen. A common thread across these promises included ensuring a transparent, corrupt-free government, and increasing welfare aid to Selangor residents, especially the poor. It is against this backdrop that Pakatan Rakyat won in Selangor, and now has the challenging task of translating these promises into reality.

Reform Measures

This section elaborates on some of Pakatan Rakyat's reforms since coming to power in March 2008. Much of its first year was spent putting into place the welfare-based promises made during the election campaign. Encapsulated as '*Merakyatkan Ekonomi Selangor*', or Selangor's People-based Economy, it consisted of a mix of seven welfare-based programmes.² *Menteri Besar* (Chief Minister) Khalid Ibrahim strongly emphasised returning the economy to the people, where 'Selangor citizens are the true owners of the state's resources . . . the State Government merely acts as the guardian of these resources on behalf of the people' (Ibrahim, 2009b, p. 2).

The second economic prong was announced in early 2009: a state economic stimulus package encompassing six areas to boost the state's economy. The package includes rehabilitation of the Klang River Basin, urban renewal, revival of abandoned projects, increasing the paddy yield in selected areas of Selangor, public transport and restructuring of the water services industry (Selangor State Government, 2009). To improve economic development further, PEMUDAH Selangor was formed in 2009, the state version of the successful national-level PEMUDAH, to reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and shorten the number of days taken for business approvals.

Transparency Efforts

Some of the reform measures that the Selangor government has implemented over its first two years can be considered as serious attempts at promoting a greater level of democracy through the practice of transparency and accountability. For instance, the State Legislative Assembly passed a resolution tabled in May 2008 to form a special select committee on competency, accountability and transparency (Selcat)

that would hold public hearings on alleged discrepancies in the running of the state. Established under existing provisions in the Selangor constitution and assembly standing orders, it would investigate complaints received, request documents and sworn statements from those involved, and then issue summonses to them to appear before it, including members of the public and civil servants where relevant (Ganesh, 2009). In addition, the Contempt of the House Enactment 2008 was also passed, which makes it compulsory for those summoned to attend Selcat hearings and provides for a fine and jail term for non-compliance, although prosecution is only upon consent of the Attorney-General and under the jurisdiction of the police. Selcat consists of both Pakatan Rakyat and Barisan Nasional state assemblymen, the chairman of which is the Assembly Speaker.

Selcat's first investigation was on the dissolution of *Balkis*, the Wives of Elected Selangor Representatives Welfare Organisation, and its expenditures. This was considered a controversial case because investigations revealed that Balkis received large funds from the former Selangor government's state subsidiary companies, and paid for expenses unrelated to state government activities.³ Examples of these included exorbitant sums channelled for overseas trips and expensive gifts for VIPs in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility (Spykerman, 2009). Selcat's second hearing involved investigations into the annual RM500,000 allocation of funds to state assemblymen. District officers and selected assemblymen were called up for the inquiry to examine the expenditure of Selangor assemblymen, in particular, to clarify how a RM2.7m allocation for assemblymen was spent within the first three months of 2008 by 54 Barisan Nasional assemblymen (Dass, 2009a). The objective of the inquiry was to propose a mechanism on the use of constituency development funds distributed annually, in order to avoid misuse of funds for political purposes. Both Selcat hearings have been criticised by Barisan Nasional politicians as being a 'witch-hunting exercise', although its proponents maintain that it adheres to international standards of public inquiries, the practice of which it is eventually hoped will be modelled in other Pakatan Rakyat-controlled state governments.

In attempts to practise the separation of powers between the Executive and Legislature, the Speaker announced plans to create an independent arm of government. If passed, the Selangor Legislative Assembly Service Commission Enactment 2009 (Selesa) would ensure the Selangor State Assembly would have its own administration, budget and structure, while the Speaker of the assembly would have sole jurisdiction over the legislative precinct (Arukesamy, 2009). This is a move to de-politicise the legislature as employees of the state government executive arm are federal-appointed civil servants.

Within the executive, moves were also made to practise transparency through asset declaration of the State Exco members, including the Chief Minister. The decision was made to declare assets obtained and disposed of since assuming their positions in the state government from March 2008 onwards. Implemented in March 2009, all relevant information was posted on the Selangor government website (Selangor Website, 2009), including income drawn, donations and benefits in kind, and bank loan agreements. Some considered the move to be watered down, as it did not list assets owned prior to assuming positions. The state government's reason for limiting it to assets purchased after March 2008 was to have a check against Executive Council (Exco) members misusing their positions for wrongful gain.

Part of the reason transparency and accountability are difficult to measure is the lack of public information provided by government. The state government is subject to the Official Secrets Act 1972 (OSA), which prohibits the dissemination of classified information. In order to circumnavigate the provisions, a taskforce was formed to work towards a Freedom of Information (FOI) enactment, obliging state agencies to make information public, with some exceptions. In its celebration of the World Press Freedom Day 2009, the state government announced its intentions to table the FOI Enactment bill in its state legislative assembly by the end of 2009 (Koshy, 2009b). It is now expected to table it in the March 2010 assembly sitting. Additional transparency measures included the decision to practise open tenders instead of negotiated tenders.⁴ The services of Alam Flora, the company contracted by the previous state government on solid waste management, were terminated in 2009 in a move towards implementing an open tender system. Most recently, the Menteri Besar, under his powers of Section 2(c) of the Official Secrets Act, declassified information relating to the former Barisan Nasional projects that unveiled how selected individuals had profited largely at the expense of the state. These projects are three abandoned projects in Alam Perdana, Alam Mutiara and Bukit Botak, and a reforestation project in forest reserves. The common thread among these projects was that crony companies were given contracts and concessions that were disadvantageous to the state, and had failed to deliver on what was stipulated within the terms of the said contracts.

Management Reforms

Several changes were also made at the management level. These included streamlining sand-mining activities into one company in order to reduce illegal sand-mining, the uncontrolled development of which has led to badly eroded river embankments, landslides and flash floods throughout the state. The state government's solution was to regulate the industry through greater state control and ownership. In recognition of indigenous people's rights, the state government also formed an *Orang Asli* (Indigenous People) Land Taskforce with the function of preserving orang asli ancestral land, much of which had been seized from them in recent years, and to expedite the identification and gazetting of remaining orang asli land. The over-arching objective is to improve the quality of life of the orang asli (Selangor State Government, 2009). In another landmark move, the state government withdrew the former government's appeal to the Federal Court against a judgment in favour of the orang asli (Selangor Govt vs Sagong Tasi & Ors),⁵ an action well received by the orang asli community throughout the country (Koshy, 2009a).

In recognition of the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, the Selangor state government decided to celebrate for the very first time 'Malaysia Day' on 16 September 2009. This was a significant symbolic gesture in appreciation of the important roles that these two states have played in national development, long considered as neglected in the past. It is relevant to note that immediately after the two Pakatan Rakyat-controlled states of Selangor and Penang had decided to commemorate this date, the federal government announced that Malaysia Day would be a national public holiday from 2010 onwards.

To arrest the previous state government's privatisation policies, water services were transferred back to the concurrent list in the Federal Constitution and reversing state jurisdiction enabled through the Water Services Industry Act (WSIA) 2006 and the National Water Services Commission Act 2006. The policy resulted in terminating concessions given to private companies, returning all water-related assets to the federal government⁶ and the formation of a holistic water management agency. The Selangor state government has begun negotiations to take over these private entities, but to date two concession companies have refused to accept offers by the state.⁷ Reflective of opposing policy positions, deep tensions also emerged during negotiations between the federal and state governments.

In November 2007, a massive peaceful demonstration organised by the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) brought an estimated 30,000 Indians to the streets of Kuala Lumpur. Demonstrators were disgruntled with the perceived systematic discrimination of Indians through lack of employment opportunities, victimisation by the police, and a series of high-profile temple demolitions (HINDRAF, 2007). This demonstration resulted in 160 police arrests and widely publicised acts of police brutality. Many Indian voters subsequently turned against the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), a Barisan Nasional component party. After the 8 March elections, the Pakatan Rakyat government in Selangor set up a taskforce to handle non-Muslim affairs. Its first act was to outline guidelines on the construction and status of non-Muslim places of worship in the state, largely to avoid temple demolitions. For example, specific procedures for the demolition of the so-called 'illegal structures' were laid out, and depending on the nature of the land on which the structure was built, any demolition would require the state government's express approval first, as well as ensuring that local councils would provide an alternative site, or have consultations with the religious committee in advance. The guidelines also laid out rules on infrastructure and financial aid. In order to regulate the largely unmonitored situation, the guidelines stipulated that every application to register a non-Muslim place of worship should be conducted through the local councils or district land office. One of the immediate changes made was to double the allocation for non-Muslim places of worship from RM3m annually to RM5m in 2008 and then RM6m in 2009. Financial aid would be justified for the purposes of building relocation, refurbishment and religious education. Although not all problems relating to religious places of worship would be solved immediately, what was unique was the state government taking the initiative to confront issues to clarify matters, as opposed to ignoring them.

In November 2009, the Selangor state government made the decision to ban all state government civil servants, and employees at state subsidiaries and at state-owned educational institutions from attending the National Civics Bureau Course run by the federal government. This course was first set up in 1974, known as the Youth Research Unit under the Culture, Youth and Sports Ministry, and was later moved to the Prime Minister's department in 1981. Its original objective was to inculcate a spirit of patriotism and national unity and attendance was compulsory for most civil servants at both state and federal levels. However, complaints started surfacing in the 1990s that the course contents were rife with racist connotations, pitting the Malays against the non-Malays and alleging that members of the opposition parties were anti-nationalist. No official reports have surfaced, and it is

difficult to obtain documentation of the said courses. There have been heated responses to this decision, which was followed by the Penang and Kelantan state governments. The Selangor government, by choosing not to participate in what it considered racial and one-sided nationalist propaganda and indoctrination, demonstrated its desire to reform the ways in which officers are educated. It has also said that a more appropriate course would be used to replace the National Civics Bureau Course, although this has not yet been determined.

Challenges Faced

The key challenge faced by the Pakatan Rakyat government in Selangor since 8 March has been to administer in a hostile environment and to undo the entrenched Barisan Nasional power structures (Ooi, 2009).

Federal–State Relations

Although Malaysia officially adopts federalism, over the years the ruling government has responded to opposition challenges by tightening their terms of power sharing across different tiers. Several factors have led to this highly centralised federal system, including constitutional design and the developmental and funding process. The Ninth Schedule of the Federal Constitution lays out the distribution of legislative powers and responsibilities between the federal and state governments. The federal government's purview includes trade, commerce and industry, foreign affairs, defence, internal security, law and order, physical development (communication and transport), and human development (education, health and medicine). The state governments have jurisdiction over lands and mines, Muslim affairs and customs, Native laws and customs, agriculture and forestry, local government and public services, burial grounds, markets and fairs, and licensing cinemas and theatres. The concurrent list covers social welfare, scholarships, town and country planning, drainage and irrigation, housing, culture and sports, public health and water services (Loh, 2009b, p. 194).

The central government has monopolised taxation, leaving state governments a small range of indirect taxes and export duties, and it treats very differently state governments held by the opposition at federal level, namely through 'modulating cunningly the sharing of resources in ways that keep (them) functioning, but on drip' (Case, 2007, p. 140). The central government has put into practice a 'minimalist federalism' by reducing budgetary grants and hampering policy implementation, which strengthens their muscle and weakens the state governments. Malaysia is characterised by a high degree of centralisation (Watts, 1999, p. 28), which was exacerbated over time. For instance, between 1985 and 1999 the central government's revenue increased from four times the consolidated state-level government revenues to seven times (Jomo and Wee, 2002, p. 29). The centralisation process was exacerbated further by the abolishment of local council elections, and the use of the Internal Security Act (which allows for detention without trial), the Official Secrets Act, and the Printing Presses and Publications Act to restrict civil liberties. Researchers have described Malaysia as a 'semi-democracy' or 'a centralised unitary state with some federal features' (Loh, 2009b, p. 189). In fact, some conclude that

this semi-democracy was originally wielded by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, who concentrated policy prerogatives and institutional strength in his executive office, for the very purpose of enabling him to pursue his developmental visions and to restructure agendas (Case, 2004, p. 79).

When Pakatan Rakyat took over the governing of Selangor, several changes were made to restrict financial flows. Previously, development funds had been injected directly to state-governed local district offices through the Federal Government State Development Office (SDO). After March 2008, funds would still be channelled to the Selangor SDO but no longer be under state jurisdiction (D. Loh, 2009). Falling directly under the purview of the Implementation and Co-ordination Unit (ICU), which is based in the Prime Minister's Office, the SDO was also physically removed out of the state government building to operate without state knowledge. Under the Federal Constitution, the federal government is obliged to provide only two major grants to state governments, which are the 'capitation grant' and the 'state road grant' (Loh, 2009a).

In the 2010 budget speech, the Selangor Chief Minister outlined details of funding received by the federal government. The proportion of federal funds in the Selangor budget of 2009 was 16.6%, compared with in 2008, where it made up 21.65% of its budget. He also stated that if, for example, 20% of the RM16bn in taxes that was obtained by the federal government from Selangor were returned to the state, state revenues would be more than twice its current budget (*2010 Budget Speech*, Ibrahim, 2009a).

The majority of bureaucratic civil servants at the state and local governments are appointed by the federal government. Officers who have worked under the previous Barisan Nasional government have found it unnerving to serve a new government. This is especially the case for high-level officers of the Administrative and Diplomatic Service (*Pegawai Tadbir dan Diplomatik*), who are appointed to top positions of the state bureaucracy by the federal government. Reports of conflicting allegiances have arisen as the State Secretary, State Financial Officer, State Legal Advisor and all mayors of local councils are technically employees of the federal government. For example, the Minister of Agriculture Noh Omar has forbidden all its officers (including those stationed at the state office) from attending any meetings or courses sponsored by the Pakatan Rakyat state governments (*Utusan Malaysia*, 2009). Similar directives from the federal government have made it difficult for the opposition-controlled state governments to operate.

In September, federally appointed civil servants were in uproar over Selcat's public inquiry into allocation of funds. They were being questioned on their approvals of the development projects by former assemblymen, many of which involved large sums of money. They protested at Selcat's questioning, saying it was humiliating in nature (Dass, 2009a) as they were merely, in their opinion, performing their duties. As Selangor's bureaucracy depends largely on the efficiency of its civil service, it is a challenge to the Pakatan Rakyat state government when it experiences uncooperative civil servants who do not necessarily act in the state government's interests. In fact, practising professionalism and independence, something that they have been accustomed to doing, may often jeopardise their standing with the Barisan Nasional leaders. Most recently, as rumours swirl about the Pakatan Rakyat Selangor state government being

under attack and possibly taken over by the Barisan Nasional, these sentiments are felt even more acutely by the civil servants.

Non-independent Institutions

The non-independence of institutions and bias against the Pakatan Rakyat state governments was observed in the Perak crisis. Pakatan Rakyat had won the Perak state government by a close margin in the 8 March 2008 elections but after a series of dramatic events in February 2009, the Barisan Nasional reclaimed victory in Perak. The events saw the police force, judiciary, elections commission and civil service acting against the Pakatan Rakyat's interests. Numerous incidents in Selangor have leaned in a similar direction, most acutely in the investigations perpetrated by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC). Formerly known as the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), the MACC Bill was passed into law in December 2008, transforming it into a powerful institution. Not long after its formation, numerous investigative cases were begun against the Selangor government.

The MACC investigated the Selangor Chief Minister in February 2009 for alleged abuse of power, using state funds to maintain his own vehicle and for the purchase of 46 cows in his Parliamentary constituency (outside Selangor) during a Muslim sacrificial celebration (Song, 2009). In July of the same year, it investigated several State Exco members for alleged abuse of funds. One Exco member's political aide, Teoh Beng Hock, who was called up and interrogated as a witness to a case, was eventually found dead in the MACC building premises. He was being questioned as a witness in a case where 1,500 Malaysian flags were allegedly not delivered, although RM2,400 had already been paid to the supplier. The federal government responded by launching an inquest into Teoh's death and a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the manner of his interrogation. At the time of writing, the state-appointed forensic pathologist stated at the inquest that there was 80% probability that Teoh died as a result of homicide, leading to the family's requesting and the coroner's consequent directive to exhume the late Teoh's body to have a second autopsy, results of which have not yet been concluded.⁸

Subsequently, the Chief Minister issued a statement forbidding any Selangor state government employee to be questioned at the MACC premises, only at their respective offices. Interrogations would also be held within office hours and in the presence of a lawyer (Press Secretariat, 2009c). The Attorney-General's Chambers responded by filing a legal suit against the Selangor state government to proclaim its circular as illegal, null and void as it contradicted the MACC Act (Anbalagan, 2009). Although the MACC purports to be an independent institution it reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office and not to Parliament. Its subservience to the federal government was evidenced by the Attorney-General's Chambers filing a suit on MACC's behalf against the Selangor government. In a related case, Kajang municipal councillor Tan Boon Wah filed a suit against the MACC, stating it had no right to interrogate him outside office hours. The High Court ruled that the phrase 'day to day' as laid out in Section 30(3)(a) in the MACC Act cannot mean round-the-clock investigation and the MACC was restricted to operating only between 8.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m.

The media as the fourth estate plays an important role in disseminating information to the public in a fair and unbiased manner. However, mainstream media are owned by conglomerates close to the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition and the opposition is consistently hampered by unequal media access (Lim, 2009). As a result, any positive news announced by the Selangor administration is given relatively little coverage. In the lead-up to the March 2008 elections, it was found that mainstream newspapers *Utusan Malaysia* and *The Star* (the most popular Malay and English dailies in Selangor, respectively) had 82 and 73% of bias towards Barisan Nasional (Centre for Independent Journalism, 2008). News agencies have been cautioned against inviting Pakatan Rakyat representatives on to their programmes. Although alternative media such as *Malaysiakini* are popular among the urban and English-speaking, a survey found that 71% of people in Selangor rely on mainstream newspapers as their primary source of information (Merdeka Center for Opinion Research, 2009). The state government has responded by launching its own communication tool package, which currently includes a bi-monthly newspaper, *Selangorkini*, which has a corresponding online version, and TV Selangor, an online broadcast channel. The independence of institutions is essential for a functioning democracy. The executive, judiciary and legislative arms should be administered separately, whereas the media, civil society and other agencies have their roles to play by keeping public bodies accountable. There is certainly room for improvement in this area.

Burdens of the Previous State Government

Many controversies arising within Pakatan Rakyat's first two-year rule of Selangor are related to policy decisions made by the previous state government. Some examples have been elaborated on earlier, namely *Orang Asli* community problems and the privatisation and fragmentation of water services in the state. In another case, residents in a Selangor middle-class neighbourhood have protested against the approval of hypermarket Carrefour in their area, based on safety and traffic congestion concerns. Although the deal was inked by the previous state government, the present government has allowed the project to proceed. Residents' associations have since filed suits against the Selangor government. Another high-profile incident involved a Hindu temple located in Shah Alam, the capital of Selangor. As it had previously caused dissatisfaction among residents, who complained of its location being too close to their homes, the Selangor government tried to rectify matters by relocating it to another area. Instead, the action caused greater protests from Muslim residents who argued that a Hindu temple had no business being within a Muslim-majority area. The relocation has since been shelved. The state government is also dealing with 144 abandoned projects, remnants of the past government, many of which were abandoned because the companies had financial problems.

Internal Problems within the Pakatan Rakyat Coalition

With the exception of PAS in Kelantan, Pakatan Rakyat politicians suddenly found themselves in a new position needing to manage the nation's richest state. Lack of experience and expertise has been the major stumbling block. Doubts were cast early

on whether the three component parties could cooperate and agree on policy positions. Although largely amicable, several incidents have arisen that highlight the differences still existing between parties in Pakatan Rakyat. A PAS Selangor commissioner, for example, urged the banning of alcohol at convenience stores in Shah Alam, stating that religious officers had the right to arrest those selling and purchasing alcohol. DAP balked at this suggestion, stating that local councils would be in breach of national law as it does not prevent vendors from selling alcoholic drinks (Chua, 2009b). The Muslim party's religious stance seems to be at polar opposites with the secularist party on selected issues.

Conflicts within the member parties have also been widely publicised. Individuals within PKR, for example, lashed out against the Selangor government for its inefficiencies and even called for a reshuffle of its Exco, insinuating it was not performing up to standard and questioning the state's financial position (*Bernama*, 2009a). PKR's national-level reputation has suffered from apparent factions within the party, and this has spilled over into the public's impression of Selangor's governing abilities. The conservative–Erdogan split within PAS has reared its ugly head with its Kelantan Chief Minister Nik Aziz calling for an Extraordinary General Meeting to remove selected PAS leaders from their positions, including President Hadi Awang and Selangor Exco Hasan Ali for their inclinations towards unity talks with UMNO. The spillover effects of national politics and events in other states cannot be underestimated, where the impacts of any misconduct in one Pakatan Rakyat-led state are felt in any of the other similar Pakatan states.

Ethnocentric Attitudes

Malaysia has long suffered from ethnocentric politics and power-play. This is not helped by the Barisan Nasional coalition's component parties being defined along racial lines. Each party is obliged to ensure their respective ethnic communities are well cared for through sufficient financial aid and attention. Using ethnicity as the key marker, however, creates an environment of distrust. UMNO, by virtue of claiming to represent the Malays, has used 'race' as a powerful bargaining political tool to control and manipulate other parties. The Malays are 'made to believe that their survival (lies) in accepting that ... the Chinese ... allegedly continue to control the economy' (Rahman, 2009, p. 429) and are held in mental and economic bondage through national affirmative action policy, thereby creating a culture of dependency. The Pakatan Rakyat government in Selangor has attempted to remove some of these crutches by suggesting that a tertiary institute originally formed to help Malays gain upward mobility could now open up its admission to 10% non-Malays. This proposal by the Chief Minister attracted negative reactions from the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students themselves, who demonstrated on campus against the idea, considering it a threat to their 'special rights'.

The same kind of reaction was aroused when the position for head of a state government-linked company Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Selangor (PKNS) was vacated and the Chief Minister appointed a non-Malay as a temporary replacement. Although the Chinese appointee was financially knowledgeable and had years of experience in the corporation, she had to be replaced by a Malay owing to the negative reaction. Pakatan Rakyat's desire to break out of the ethnocentric mould

and to practise affirmative action on the basis of need and meritocracy, not ethnicity, faces hurdles. Ethnic Malays are often led to believe, however, that they should continue to fear their privileged position being usurped by non-Malays if power-sharing and economic equality is practised.

The Selangor state government recently announced that it would bar any of its staff within the state subsidiaries or state civil service from participating in the federal government's '*Biro Tatanegara*' course, run by the National Civics Bureau. This course is mandatory for all government civil servants and has been criticised as being a brainwashing indoctrination course by the Barisan Nasional, which promotes racist sentiments and brands opposition parties negatively. This is considered part of Pakatan Rakyat's attempt at flushing out elements of ethnocentrism, although it will face some obstacles because a majority of its state staff is in fact federal government-appointed civil servants.

Political Pressure from the Barisan Nasional Coalition

After Prime Minister Najib Razak was appointed as the new head of UMNO Selangor, he stated in no uncertain terms that he wants Selangor back (*The Sun*, 2009). UMNO's information machinery launched a 'Conquer Selangor Initiative Programme' to wrest Selangor back from the Pakatan Rakyat coalition (*Bernama*, 2009b). This includes information campaigns once a month, oratory competitions and banners, and announcements to use all means possible to take over.

Political mudslinging was at its worst when semi-nude pictures of Selangor Exco Elizabeth Wong were circulated to the media. Issues of privacy and individual morality were discussed widely, and the incident was used to discredit the morality of the state government. The state opposition leader called for her resignation, given the risk of tainting the image of the party PKR and state government.

Barisan Nasional continues to discredit Pakatan Rakyat in Selangor through a number of means. The attempts by the Chief Minister Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim to declassify documents related to the Bukit Antarabangsa landslide incident in 2008 under his powers of Section 2(c) of the Official Secrets Act were overturned when the Works Ministry stated that the document was classified by the Cabinet and hence only the latter was able to declassify such documents. This proved a frustrating point of legality, as residents waited anxiously for the report's contents to be revealed. Five lives were lost in the landslide incident, destroying 14 bungalows and causing millions in damages.

In a 49-page booklet titled *The Real Face of Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim: The Plight of the Selangor Malays*, the Selangor Chief Minister was accused of sidelining the Malay community in the state. The anonymous booklet alleged that many members of the Chinese community were being appointed to key positions in the local councils and within the Chief Minister's Office, implying that Malay interests were abandoned under his rule. Although the publisher is unnamed, it is speculated to be the work of Barisan Nasional as it was widely circulated during the Bagan Pinang by-election campaigning period, a state seat in Negeri Sembilan.

Responding to the politically targeted attacks against the Selangor state government, Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim of the Peoples Justice Party, former Malaysian Finance Minister, was himself appointed as the State Economic Advisor in November 2009 as an

attempt to 'prevent' the Selangor government from being wrested away from Pakatan Rakyat rule. He openly challenged Barisan Nasional in his speech, saying that he was merely responding to Umno's declaration of war against Selangor (Mahmood, 2009).

Long-term Prospects for Pakatan Rakyat and Political Transition in Selangor

Selangor is a microcosm of Malaysia, with its multi-ethnic and multi-religious make-up. The changing political milieu over the months since March 2008 has brought both disillusionment and hope, the former due to intense political battles being fought between the Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat, and within the parties of each coalition. The reforms Pakatan Rakyat has attempted to introduce in Selangor as well as the challenges faced in executing them reflect the fundamental problems Malaysia experiences today. The transition towards a 'new politics' involves a deeper understanding of elements required in a flourishing democracy, namely, moving away from parochial politicisation of race and religion, patronage and cronyism in the business-politics web, and towards a more decentralised system of governance. Some have argued that a federal system that shares power between central and state authorities is the preferred way to promote and institutionalise democracy by ensuring local participation in the decision-making process (Loh, 2009c, p. 16). In this respect, a key reform measure that Pakatan Rakyat can consider in Selangor is reinstating local council elections and employing means to seek alternative sources of funds other than those allocated by the federal government. Although there are legal limitations, a pilot project could be conducted in a selected area. In his 2010 budget speech, the Menteri Besar announced the Selangor government's commitment to moving towards this, although some agreement among the parties would be needed to bring this to fruition.

Despite several incidents in the first two years of administration highlighting the political sensitivities of trying to change the entrenched system, it is interesting to note that according to an opinion poll, 64% of Selangor residents are satisfied with the Pakatan Rakyat state government's performance compared with 22% expressing dissatisfaction (Press Secretariat, 2009b). Among those satisfied, the ethnic breakdown of this category (59% is Malay, 69% Chinese and 69% Indians) marks non-Malay residents as strong Pakatan Rakyat supporters. In contributing towards nation-building, the Pakatan Rakyat government in Selangor has to balance between manifesting its policy of an equal society with the political demands and insecurities of the Malays. However, 'spontaneous cosmopolitanism and ethnic integration over time has to be effectively acknowledged in the national discourse and in policymaking' (Ooi, 2009a, p. 461), which one would expect Pakatan in Selangor to actuate. In the long run, ethnic inclusivity is the theme of new politics that is required before Malaysia can blossom into a true democracy. Pakatan Rakyat, although weighed down with the burdens of an 'old politics', will have to pave the way for a new national discourse, which can be executed very well in the modern state of Selangor—if only with sufficient political will.

In the largely urbanised and highly educated state of Selangor, residents have ready access to information and alternative media. The March 2008 elections empowered citizens with the knowledge that they can change governments, which has in turn spurred on a more active and vocal civil society in the ensuing months.

These are positive signs towards increased levels of public accountability. Nevertheless, in order for Pakatan Rakyat to galvanise and sustain itself politically over a long period, it will have to formulate cross-party substantive policies to counter those of Barisan Nasional. In response to this need, the Pakatan Rakyat coalition has recently launched its Common Policy Platform which establishes concrete positions that all three coalition parties have committed to on issues ranging from economic to social policies.

Conclusion

The Pakatan Rakyat political experiment continues to be on trial. After nearly two years of governing four states, the public's expectations are growing. Although somewhat deflated by the March 2008 results and the subsequent consecutive by-election losses, Barisan Nasional has shown a remarkable ability to rebound, as suggested by its by-election win in Bagan Pinang, a state seat in neighbouring Negeri Sembilan in October 2009. This enhanced confidence coupled with the existing centralised system of governance will most probably see Barisan Nasional continuing to target Selangor. Prior to March 2008, Barisan Nasional as a single political entity controlled all three tiers of government—central, state and local—for more than 50 years, thereby adding to the federal government's centripetal forces. Pakatan has also to contend with deeply entrenched federal government allegiances of its civil service, the culture of corruption and the lack of institutional independence.

What will probably emerge in the next few years is greater political competition between Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat in Selangor, manifested in both positive (better transparency and accountability) and negative (increased levels of political power-brokering) ways. In order for true competition to happen, however, the playing field must be made more level. Decentralisation through granting greater autonomy to the state governments would allow the practice of federalism in its original meaning and intention. The creation of more autonomous states can also serve to hinder political parties from exploiting ethnicity for vested purposes (Gomez, 2009, p. 174). The manner in which the federal government allocates funds to the Pakatan state governments must transcend political considerations because the development of Selangor will also lead to greater national development. It is this symbiotic relationship for co-survival that needs to be acknowledged.

Internal problems within and between Pakatan Rakyat parties are detrimental to its survival in Selangor. PKR's factions, personality clashes and resignations are constantly highlighted in the media. Although the ideological rifts between DAP, PKR and PAS are not expected to be bridged instantaneously, communication strategies that deliver a more consistent and consolidated message throughout programmes across parties will ensure sustainability at the next state elections. Both mainstream and alternative media, however, will continue to be harnessed by the Barisan Nasional coalition to deliver its messages. Najib's recent launch of the 1Malaysia slogan of 'People First. Performance Now' has, for example, created a media frenzy. Without a convincing menu of policy frameworks, performance management, service delivery and co-ordinated communication infrastructure as a response, Pakatan Rakyat will continue to be placed in a disadvantageous position.

This is not to say that the path towards greater democracy is completely closed off. The challenges on the road to reform are many, but with right and timely

strategies, they are not insurmountable. Pakatan Rakyat in Selangor has attempted to circumvent the many obstacles through innovative means such as its alternative media channels, adopting unique financing structures for its economic stimulus package programmes through partnerships with the private sector and even possible financial arrangements with foreign countries (it is exploring arrangements with Korea), therein bypassing any dependency on developmental funds from the federal government, and proposing a system where residents pay taxes directly to the state government. In short, institutional reform is key for the advancement of democracy in the long run. It remains to be seen, of course, whether or not the Pakatan Rakyat model of new politics and governance will succeed in the state of Selangor given these current circumstances, the outcome of which only its voters can determine in the next general elections.

Notes

1. The DAP has, however, recently launched the party's first Malay-led branch in Selangor (*The Straits Times*, 2009), although critics note that this very fanfare speaks of its multi-ethnic deficiencies.
2. The *Merakyatkan Ekonomi Selangor* consists of a 'Children of Selangor' fund, a 'Free Water for the first 20m³' programme, a 'University Entrants' Gift' programme, a programme for the elderly, a programme to increase the yield of stone and mineral mining, a 'One Stop Crisis Centre' for abused women and children, and an 'Education Fund for Plantation Workers' Children' (Selangor Website, 2008).
3. Former Chief Minister Khir Toyo and his wife were summoned to testify at the Selcat hearing but failed to attend, leading to his suspension for one year along with seven other Barisan assemblymen who subsequently protested to his suspension.
4. This move, however, seemed to backfire as allegations arose that the state government was allocating the contracts to the Pakatan Rakyat parties instead. A local councillor claimed that PKR was receiving 40% of the deals while PAS and DAP were given 30% each (Chua, 2009a). The Chief Minister called for proof of impropriety of such claims. This conflict, occurring in June 2009, was a foreshadowing of other issues that arose later.
5. The Shah Alam High Court held in 2002 that the indigenous group of Temuans had native title under common law over their lands. It also ordered the four defendants—the Selangor state government, United Engineers (M) Bhd (UEM), the Malaysian Highway Authority (MHA) and the federal government—to pay compensation to the Temuans affected, and for UEM and MHA to pay trespassing damages for taking over Orang Asli land for the construction of a highway.
6. The federal government set up a separate institute named Pengurusan Aset Air Berhad (PAAB), or Water Asset Management Limited, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water to purchase these assets and then lease them out, respectively, to the state governments in Malaysia.
7. Two concessionaires, Abass Sdn Bhd and Syarikat Pengeluar Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (SPLASH) accepted the state government's offers whereas Puncak Niaga Sdn Bhd and Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor Sdn Bhd (SYABAS) rejected them. The offers were dated 25 June 2009 and have since lapsed.
8. The Selangor state government appointed well-known Thai forensic pathologist Dr Porntip Rojanasunan, Director-General of the Central Institute of Forensic Science under the Thai Ministry of Justice, to provide an expert opinion on the death of Teoh Beng Hock based on existing reports and photographs. Her opinion differs radically from that of the federal government-appointed pathologists who conducted the official autopsy and prepared the post-mortem report. The second autopsy involved local forensic pathologist Dr Shahidan Md Noor who conducted the exercise, observed by Dr Porntip Rojanasunan and MACC-appointed forensic pathologist Dr Peter Vanezis from Britain.

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