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Picking up the pieces in Kedah

TOUGH ACT: Mukhriz juggling damage control with new programmes

THEY had pledged to make Kolej Universiti Insaniah (Kuin) the best in the country. In doing so, the former Pas-led state government had big plans to turn the state-owned university college into a self-reliant and prestigious private institution of higher learning.

Through Insaniah Holdings Sdn Bhd, the administration of Kuin set out to bring big business by privatising some faculties.

New faculties with obscure intentions were also set up.

All these were in the name of greater professionalism and better management with the aim of turning Kuin into a world-class institution.

However, there was hardly any professionalism involved in the running of Kuin. The management of Kuin, including the scores of subsidiaries under Insaniah Holdings Sdn Bhd, was by and large led by cronies.

The net result, four years of Pakatan-led state government proved disastrous.

Some 500 Kuin staff, academic and non-academic, got their salaries late. Many almost lost their houses and cars after they missed making their monthly payments on time.

In some cases, Kuin staff were blacklisted by banks.

Disgruntled Kuin employees, many of them strong Pas supporters, became disheartened, especially after their cries for help fell on deaf ears among the university college's senior management.

Cries of nepotism, cronyism and corruption reverberated in the corridors of power at Wisma Darulaman, the seat of the state government, which was already shaky because of internal fighting among senior Kedah Pas leaders.

The Pas-led state government was very slow to respond and if

there were any reaction, they were far and few in between.

For more than five years, Kuin staff languished in agony.

Promises made to the staff and students for a better Kuin were never honoured.

Fast forward to July 9, newly appointed Menteri Besar Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir announced that Kuin, the pride of Kedah Barisan Nasional, which mooted its formation in 1995, would be run as a statutory body.

In short, it meant that Kuin's employees would enjoy better perks and monetary rewards.

Mukhriz, although considered a greenhorn menteri besar, also announced that some 26 general workers of the rogue Insaniah Holdings, would be absorbed into Kuin.

That meant that the staff, all of them in the support category, would enjoy the same benefits as all Kuin employees.

The benefits include salary increments and bonuses — all that they had been denied of by the former Kuin management under Pakatan.

Whatever the previous state government had bungled with Kuin since 2008, it took the Mukhriz administration barely two months to resolve them.

The task before Mukhriz & Co is far from over.

He has actually hardly started, observed Universiti Utara Malaysia's Md Shukri Shuib.

According to him, Mukhriz is doing a good job juggling between car-

rying out damage control and trying to introduce his socio-economic development programmes for Kedah.

"Kedahans have suffered a lot under the former Pakatan government," he said.

He said Mukhriz, despite being a new kid on the block, has well-thought-out priorities.

"The rookie menteri besar still has much to do on damage control, considering the former Pakatan state government had left behind a trail of botched programmes," he said.

One of them is the proposed sale of raw water to Penang which Mukhriz' predecessor had dumped on him.

Mukhriz has passed with flying colours on the Kuin mess and he now has to win over his Penang counterpart, Lim Guan Eng, with his win-win deal proposal on the raw water sale plan.

It will not be easy, not because it is undoable, but because of the strong resistance Lim had been putting up, including when his former ally in Kedah Pakatan first broached the matter.

Going by his record in dealing with the mess left by his predecessor, Mukhriz should be able to add another feather on his cap with his raw water sale plan.



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Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir (left) chatting with foreign students during a recent visit to Kolej Universiti Insaniah.