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THE TONE-DEAF DISSOLUTION OF THE JOHOR AND NEGERI SEMBILAN STATE ASSEMBLIES

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The conclusion of both Johor and Negeri Sembilan state elections mark the opening of a new chapter in Malaysia's political theatre. A chapter that is filled with countless stories that stir a wide range of emotions and was followed closely with great anticipation.

Behind all the excitement, however, lies a sobering reality. These two state elections represent yet another example of political leaders placing self-interest and political survival above economic prosperity and the well-being of the people. Despite the various justifications offered for the premature dissolution of the state legislative assemblies (DUN), are they truly compelling enough to warrant such a decision?

Both the Menteri Besar of Johor and the Menteri Besar of Negeri Sembilan argued that dissolving their respective DUNs was necessary to preserve political stability. Yet, in Johor's case, where Barisan Nasional (BN) commands a two-thirds majority in the state assembly, such a justification appears highly questionable. As for Negeri Sembilan, although tensions within the ruling coalition surfaced following the BN bloc's actions last April, the situation has since largely stabilised after the intervention of the BN Chairman. Rather than rushing to dissolve the DUN, the Pakatan Harapan (PH) leadership in Negeri Sembilan should have made every sincere effort to negotiate with BN's national leadership to ensure that the coalition remained intact for just a few more months until the 16th General Election (PRU16). Such a compromise, for the greater public good, was hardly an unrealistic expectation.



Picture 1: The dissolution of Johor's & Negeri Sembilan's State Assemblies

Apart from political stability, the Johor Menteri Besar also argued that the state election needed to be held earlier to avoid polling during the monsoon season or extended festive periods. While these reasons may appear reasonable at first glance, they are ultimately weak and unconvincing. Does holding the election earlier magically eliminate these risks altogether? Voters could still face exactly the same

circumstances if the 16th General Election (GE16) is held during the monsoon or festive season next year.

Every ordinary Malaysian is well aware that the conflict involving the United States and Israel in Iran has placed tremendous strain on the nation's economy, forcing the Federal Government to pursue every possible avenue to ease the burden. To contain public expenditure, the government has implemented a series of austerity measures, including work-from-home arrangements, the cancellation of official Aidilfitri open houses, and reductions in the BUDI MADANI subsidy allocations. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of the savings generated through these measures is now being consumed by the Johor and Negeri Sembilan state elections.

The Election Commission (EC) has estimated that conducting both elections will cost RM167.4 million. This considerable sum could have been channelled towards pressing national priorities, such as strengthening the severely understaffed public healthcare system, which has already forced a district hospital to suspend one of its specialist clinic services. Alternatively, these funds could have been invested in improving national food security or reinforcing the country's frequently breached border controls.

Regrettably, these public funds must now be spent on conducting two separate state elections—costs that could have been largely avoided had the elections been held concurrently with PRU16. Moreover, the RM167.4 million estimate does not account for the significant indirect costs, including reduced productivity, the large-scale deployment of manpower, and disruptions to government administration as well as local businesses.

Even more troubling is the possibility that the money spent on the Negeri Sembilan state election may ultimately prove to be entirely wasted. This scenario could arise if any party successfully challenges the legality of the DUN dissolution in court due to the ongoing state constitutional crisis. Should the courts later rule that the dissolution was unconstitutional, approximately RM80 million in public funds would have been squandered for nothing.

Perhaps the time has come to establish a more robust system of checks and balances governing the dissolution of state legislative assemblies. One possible approach would be to introduce constitutional amendments that empower the EC, working alongside other independent institutions, to assess the justification for any request to dissolve a DUN before granting approval.

Such a mechanism is not intended to curtail the constitutional powers of state governments. Rather, it would serve as an institutional safeguard to ensure that every dissolution is based on sound, reasonable, and genuinely necessary grounds. This level of scrutiny becomes even more critical when a premature dissolution results in the unnecessary duplication of election costs, particularly at a time when the nation is grappling with economic hardship. Ultimately, all that is required is the political will to place economic stability and the welfare of the people above short-term political interests.