

Najib: I risked more for Chinese than Anwar
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 27, 2007
Andrew Ong and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today claimed he risked losing Malay support when he repealed a number of provisions in the Education Act involving Chinese vernacular schools.

Speaking at a dinner hosted by MCA in Ijok this evening, Najib told a packed hall that Anwar had the authority as education minister in the late 80s to repeal Section 21 (b) of the Education Act.

The provision pertained to an education minister's unilateral power to turn national-type vernacular schools into national schools, which Najib said had worried the Chinese community then.

"Anwar didn't repeal the provision because he wanted to be popular among the Malays... He wanted to maintain his position. That's why he did not want to repeal the provision.

"When I was entrusted to be education minister in 1995, I took a risk because I decided, based on the wishes of the Chinese community raised by BN component parties, that the community was uncomfortable with the clause and wanted it revoked," he said.

Najib, who is heading the BN campaign in Ijok, then had a poser for Anwar: "If you now say that you fight for Chinese rights, tell us what exactly did you do when you were education minister?"

MCA compares Anwar, Najib

In the run-up to the Ijok by-election this Saturday, Anwar has come under intense scrutiny by BN component parties Gerakan and MCA over the former's role in sending non-Chinese speaking assistant principals to Chinese schools in 1997.

He has responded to the matter, but would neither defend the move nor apologise on the matter, citing limitations imposed by Umno then.

Preserving mother-tongue education is among Anwar's agenda in his campaign speeches in Ijok.

About 20 percent of the voters in the Ijok state seat - about 50km northwest of Kuala Lumpur - are Chinese Malaysians.

They voted for the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition three years ago in the 2004 general election and the opposition need a significant swing among Chinese voters if they are to win this by-election.

Earlier today, MCA party president Ong Ka Ting continued his attacks on Anwar's policies on Chinese education - specifically the relocation of schools with insufficient enrollment.

In contrast, he said Najib made necessary arrangements to allow such schools to be

relocated to more Chinese-majority areas.

"How can you say that was an Umno policy?" asked Ong in reference to Anwar's assertion that Umno was out to suppress vernacular education.

Ong added that the number of Chinese schools had increased during Najib's tenure as education minister, but no new schools were built when Anwar helmed the ministry.

Later in another ceramah, Anwar's record was defended by DAP leader Lim Kit Siang, who said that the former deputy prime minister had done better than Najib in the protection of vernacular schools.

The by-election - seen by many as a proxy battle between Najib and Anwar - will pit Barisan Nasional K Parthiban against Parti Keadilan Rakyat's Khalid Ibrahim.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/66530>