

## **No joy for Chinese education from PM's historic visit**

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**By Lee Long Hui**

Najib Abdul Razak today became the first prime minister in more than 50 years to attend the Chinese New Year open house held by the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong).

However, expectations that the prime minister would announce greater recognition for Chinese education during the unprecedented visit faltered, for no such announcement materialised.

Despite Dong Zong being constantly at odds with the government in recent times, the prime minister, clad in a bright red traditional Chinese attire, graced its event in Kajang at 9.45am, 15 minutes earlier than scheduled.

Flanked by Dong Zong chairperson Yap Sin Tian, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Koh Tsu Koon and MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek, Najib was welcomed with a lion dance performance as he made his entry.

He was greeted by some 5,000 attendees, who stood up and applauded.

Najib's presence today came after the Chinese educationist group invited the prime minister to grace their event.

Dong Zong in its invitation letter listed three demands it has long been making: the recognition of the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC), the building of more Chinese independent schools and a review of the National Education Blueprint.

However, the premier's office played down any expectation at the unprecedented visit, with one of Najib's political secretaries, Wong Nai Chee, stating that the prime minister would not come with gifts.

Wong said he was not certain whether Najib would make any impromptu announcement at the function.

More independent Chinese schools wanted

Despite this, speculation has been rife that Najib would at least announce the recognition of UEC, with Deputy Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah yesterday expressing a similar hope on Twitter.

"Tomorrow Najib Abdul Razak is first PM in 50 years (to) attend Dong Zong's CNY (Chinese New Year) do.

"A new leaf in (the) government's recognition on Chinese issues, including UEC, I hope," Saifuddin had said.

However, Najib, who joined the Chinese leaders present at the open house today in calligraphy and lou shang, did not make any announcement and he departed some 45 minutes later.

Dong Zong has in past year organised a series of protests against the government to push for approval to build Chinese independent schools in Kuantan and Segamat.

The government agreed for one such school to be built in Kuantan, but rejected the Segamat request.

Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim arrived at 11.20am, 20 minutes latter than scheduled, along with his wife and PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and PAS vice-president Mahfuz Omar.

DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang had arrived earlier, at 10.50am.

VIDEO| 2.23 mins

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