

Shaky start for Najib in Sibu hustings
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It was a series of hits and misses for Prime Minister Najib Razak, as he completed his first day on the campaign trail of the Sibu by-election on Sunday.

Things got off to a good enough start for Najib with a rousing welcome by members of the United Association of Chinese Secondary School and United Association of Chinese Primary Aided School at RH Hotel, mostly due to the RM18 million allocation he gave to Chinese and mission schools in Sibu.

There, he pleaded with the Chinese community to give him and the Barisan Nasional their undivided support as the ruling coalition was the only "true friend" of Chinese education.

The funds are significant as it is the first time a prime minister has come to personally hand out aid to Chinese and mission schools in this town.

But it remains to be seen how far this would resonate within the Chinese community, who form 66 percent of the electorate and have been consistent in leaning heavily towards the opposition.

sibu by election 120510 najib at temple possession 1At a later function, the situation got a little sticky for Najib (left) as he attended the Tua Pek Kong triennial procession, with the crowd irked by some rough treatment by his security detail making way amidst the clamouring citizens as he went to launch the event.

PM's bodyguards cost him points

The crowd's interest and enthusiasm in seeing their prime minister in person turned to resentment as his bodyguards forcefully pushed them back despite many being the elderly and small children.

"Jangan tolak! Jangan tolak! Ada budak kecil! (Don't push! Don't push! There are small children)," screamed an elderly woman as she laboured to shield her grandchild from the sudden melee.

Some of the 7,000-odd people who turned up for the event were also disappointed by his brief three minute stay at the entrance of the Tua Pek Kong temple, as he rushed off to a meeting with Christian leaders at the Maslan Methodist Church nearby.

sibu by election 120510 wong ho leng lim kit siang at temple possessionDAP advisor Lim Kit Siang,(centre in photo right) who with their candidate Wong Ho Leng and a group of members took part in the procession, immediately sent out a tweet using his Blackberry describing it as a "three -minute lightning visit".

"If in vital Sibu by-election Najib can only spare 3mins 4 120yr TuaPekKong Temple after so much publicity what does it imply?," he tweeted.

Conversely, Najib spent about 20 minutes with the Christian leaders as he attempted to canvass their support, telling them that his 1Malaysia slogan is "the only spirit and

philosophy that can hold this country together".

"If we want to go our separate ways we will not achieve a peaceful and harmonious Malaysia.

"There is no reason why Muslims and Christians cannot work together under the spirit of 1Malaysia," he said.

Though the controversy surrounding the use of the name 'Allah' initially did not figure much among the 53 percent Christian electorate, it eventually became a sticking point especially after the government confiscated some 15,000 Kitab Injib, the Malay translation of the Bible, that were supposed to be used in Sarawak last year.

Dissatisfaction not addressed

Following the meeting with Christians, Najib headed straight back to RH Hotel for the launch of the 1Malaysia Computer and dinner with Sibul's business community.

azlanHere, Najib was met with lukewarm response as his speech, which was touted by the mainstream media as the make or break point for the BN campaign, failed to live up to expectations.

In no way did he touch on Sibul's business interests as he was expected to, focusing solely on access to information technology in rural areas.

Discontent has been long simmering within Sibul's business community, as they feel little has come from the government to help turn around the flagging fortunes of this once-prosperous logging town.

Najib's silence on the matter at a grand dinner with the mostly Chinese business community did little to alleviate the prevailing mood of discontent.

Today, the Prime Minister started his day with a visit and meet-the-people session at the Sibul central market at 9am.

He is then scheduled to visit a longhouse, Rumah Sebastian Onggoh at Pasai Besar along Jalan Teku at 10.30am before lunching with government officers at RH Hotel before flying back to Kuala Lumpur.

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