

**Why Perkasa wants Wee ISA-ed
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Wee Ka Siong is getting a taste of his own medicine. Last year in May, the deputy education minister had threatened to lodge a police report against a group of mostly Umno-sympathetic bloggers campaigning to abolish Chinese schools.

He was upset with their strong cyber campaign called '1Sekolah - Satu bahasa, satu bangsa, satu negara' to put all pupils under the Malay medium of instruction, ostensibly for the sake of national unity.

NONEThe project was the brainchild of an aggressive anti-Chinese, anti-Indian blogger - described as "another racial bigot" by political analyst Khoo Kay Peng.

However, Wee (left) failed to stand his ground and did not proceed with any further action against the well-organised bloggers that included some influential names like RockyBru, Jebat Must Die and Ibrahim Yahaya, the RTM director-general (whom I believe are well-meaning in their intentions despite the 'ultra Malay' reputation of the campaign's initiator).

But now the shoe is on the other foot and Wee at the receiving end. 'Arrest Ka Siong under ISA' blares the Perkasa headline; its inaugural publication making a most attention-grabbing debut.

Malaysia - rather uniquely in the world - harbours 'education extremists', it seems. Some of these alleged 'extremists' were previously rounded up during Operasi Lalang. Therefore Perkasa agitating against Wee will not be the first time that the spectre of ISA is raised due to ethnic tensions over schooling rights.

The controversy started with a June 15 announcement by Najib Razak that Public Service Department (PSD) scholarships for undergraduate studies abroad would be gradually phased out.

NONEWee angered Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali (right) when he was quoted in the MCA newspaper Star as saying: "If the government is only doing away with the PSD scholarships but retain the Mara scholarships, this will not be in line with the 1Malaysia concept that the government is promoting".

To understand why this mention of Mara touched a raw nerve, you can refer to the blog posting by a certain Mohd Ridhuan Tee bin Abdullah viz. the June 27 article he submitted for his Sunday column in Utusan.

Ridhuan wrote (my translation): "We can easily comprehend the insinuation [contained in Wee's statement] because Mara students are Malay. His thinking is only 'bangsa, bangsa, bangsa' and not putting national interests first. So ultra kiasu".

Quite typically, Ridhuan has up-ended reality. While the first half of his statement is factually correct, the second half contentiously begs the question of who actually merits his signature diatribe.

Article 153 quotas

Throughout the 1980s, enrolment in Maktab Rendah Sains Mara was almost 100 percent 'bumiputera' - a coined term, which for the purpose of state handouts, is synonymous with 'Malay'.

suaram human rights report 091209 kua kia song Prominent Chinese educationist Kua Kia Soong (left) remembers how a few years ago, an education minister told the Umno general assembly that as long as he headed the ministry, he would not allow a single non-bumiputera to be admitted into UiTM, the Mara university and biggest in Malaysia.

Kua, a former MP, also provided the following statistics he obtained in Parliament in 1990:

"An average of 90 percent of loans for polytechnic certificate courses, 90 percent of scholarships for diploma of education courses, 90 percent of scholarships/loans for degree courses taken in the country, almost all scholarships/loans for degree courses taken overseas were given to bumiputeras. Regarding the enrolment of students in residential schools throughout the 1980s, 95 percent were bumiputeras."

Article 153 of the federal constitution is the enabling mechanism for Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak to be given government scholarships.

At the press conference to introduce Suara Perkasa yesterday, the movement's vice-president Zubir Harun told reporters: "Wee Ka Siong cannot say that Mara (scholarships) have to be reduced ... he is against the constitution."

bumiputera economic congress 290510 congress secretary zubir harun Zubir (left) is misleading to insist that Mara funding cannot be slashed, which might have something to do with Perkasa's insistence that anyone who questions Article 153 must be arrested under ISA.

On the constitutionality of the scholarship quota and its limitations, please read "Article 153 on the 'special position' of the Malays and other natives: The way forward" by Art Harun. Art is a senior lawyer and his interpretation of Article 153 can be accessed at his blog 'ARTiculations', (incidentally, I'd translated the said article for him).

On the matter of PSD scholarships, I wrote in May last year 'Biasiswa JPA: Pengagihan yang tidak telus' where my opinion, strangely enough, coincides with Najib's recent announcement that if government students are sent overseas, the opportunity would be better given to those doing postgraduate courses.

It is not only over discussion on the 'sensitive' Article 153, however, that the minorities are threatened with arrest, detention, jail, sedition and ISA. The taboo is so severe that merely hinting at any illegitimacy pertaining to its over-zealous implementation is sure to get the person clobbered.

In fact, Article 153 is shielded within such a protective force field that for questioning the legislation, Hindraf is unfairly browbeaten as racists (when it is Malaysia that practises apartheid).

The Hindraf leaders - as we know- were ISA-ed too.

Chinese fending for themselves

Like Ridhuan, Utusan's other opinion-editorial writer Awang Selamat has accused the

Chinese of 'arrogance' and having a 'superiority complex' for their defence of vernacular schools.

Again, the incitement by Utusan is a twisted warping of reality. Chinese schools are really in a much inferior position. Independent Chinese Secondary Schools (ICSS) do not receive any financial assistance from the Ministry of Education; this stipulation comes under Section 64 of the Education Act 1996.

And while the ICSS are nonetheless still required to comply with the national curriculum, their O-level equivalent exam called the UEC is not recognised as a qualification for entry into local public universities.

Meanwhile at primary level, the number of Chinese schools according to Dong Jiao Zong was 1,287 in 1996, 1,283 in 1997, 1,283 in 1998, 1,284 in 1999, 1,284 in 2000, 1,285 in 2001 and 1,286 in 2002.

In other words, even though their enrolment has expanded and Chinese schools are taking in increasing numbers of pupils of other ethnicities including Malays, the total number of these schools remains stagnant. The Umno Youth assembly in 2001 furthermore explicitly opposed the building of new Chinese and Tamil schools.

In 1984, Chinese primary schools constituted 27.3 percent of all primary schools, but received only 3.4 percent of government allocation, according to Heng Pek Koon in the author's 1997 study 'The New Economic Policy and the Chinese community in Peninsular Malaysia'.

Not only is there little provision for new Chinese primary schools, grants accorded the existing ones are a pittance to say the least.

Sabre-rattling by Malay ultras

It was on-the-ground activity over an education issue that allowed the Mahathir regime its pretext to carry out Operasi Lalang and in the process put more than a hundred people, including the educationists (Kua Kia Soong among them) under ISA.

At the Umno Youth rally in the Kampung Baru stadium that was a prelude to the 1987 ISA crackdown, banners called for the resignation of the then MCA deputy president Lee Kim Sai and urged his party to 'pergi jahanam'. Other banners said 'May 13 has begun'; violent anti-Chinese sentiments were expressed by the Umno demonstrators.

NONE Presently ethnic tensions are simmering again. Yet the Home Ministry approved a printing permit for the incendiary Perkasa tabloid in double quick time when other organisations, including Malaysiakini, are not granted publishing licences despite repeated applications.

Last week, I observed how Perkasa spiritual guru Dr Mahathir Mohamad (left) is fond of accusing those who support Chinese education as "racialist" (see my CPI article, 'Challenging Ibrahim Ali's view of scholarships'). I also wrote: "The ex-premier's persecution of the Chinese educationists during his tenure is a matter of record."

Looking back, the public is not finished debating how much of the events leading up to Ops Lalang was engineered by Mahathir and Umno. From all appearances, Perkasa is a vehicle for our PM of 22 years. Rest assured there is a lot more to Perkasa than merely its front

man Ibrahim Ali.

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