



Najib vs Pakatan in battle of CNY events
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Kuek Ser Kuang Keng

After Thaipusam, Chinese New Year is shaping up as another popularity contest between Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and the Selangor Pakatan Rakyat government.

Both sides have chosen to hold their celebrations 20km apart on Feb 20, the seventh day of Chinese New Year, in strategic locations.

The Selangor state government is hosting its state level event at Dong Zen Temple, Jenjarom, a Buddhist temple famous for its annual lantern and flora festival.

Selangor Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim will officiate the event which will showcase cultural performances and free vegetarian food.

20km north of Jenjarom, in Kampung Baru Pandamaran, the second largest Chinese new village in Malaysia, Najib (*left*) will officiate the BN national level open house.

Incidentally, Najib will be visiting Petaling Street, dubbed as Kuala Lumpur's 'Chinatown', this afternoon. This will be his third visit since becoming prime minister almost a year ago. Both the Dong Zen Temple and Kampung Baru Pandamaran have special meaning to the Chinese community, particularly during Chinese New Year.

The temple is a favourite location for many BN Chinese leaders to hold or attend activities because it enhances their religious image.

Najib was here last year to attend the Wesak Day celebration, making him the first premier to attend a Buddhist event.

Kampung Baru Pandamaran, one of the earliest Chinese new villages in the nation, sits next to Klang which also has a high density of Chinese.

BN's selection of Kampung Baru Pandamaran as the venue for a national function is seen as a hostile move by Pakatan as it is in the Pandamaran state constituency held by Selangor executive councillor Ronnie Liu.

Liu has said he will personally welcome the premier into his constituency with mandarin oranges.

Image enhancement

Najib's choice of celebrating the festival in a new income Chinese, and his programme which included dialogue with locals in a *kopitiam* (traditional coffee shop) planned to enhance his image among the Chinese. After BN suffered its worst ever electoral result in the premiership and launched his regime with the slogan 'Bersekutu Bertambah Mutu' (United we stand, together we flourish) for every citizen as Malaysian regardless of race or religion.

He dropped the conventional approach of reaching out to the Chinese through the MIC in favour of approaching the Chinese and Indians directly.

Najib's approach has broken new ground - he was the first prime minister to do so.



a Chinese independent school anniversary dinner and attend a Wesak Day celebration.

His visit to Batu Caves last month for Thaipusam made him the second Prime Minister to visit the Hindu temple. His late father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Malaysia's second premier, was the first.

Political battleground

The Selangor government function, purportedly planned well ahead of Najib's, during the same night and venue however turned the temple into a political battleground.

While Najib and MIC president S Samy Vellu addressed the masses from a vantage point within the temple compounds, their Pakatan Rakyat counterparts had to do without a stage, which was dismantled by orders of the police.

Khalid was forced to speak and hand over a mock cheque to Hindu temples on a makeshift stage attached to a Selayang Municipal Council truck.

Although the same scenario is unlikely to happen in the coming Chinese New Year celebration, the focus will be on how big a crowd either side can attract and the 'goodies' to be announced by the opposing camps.

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