

Dr M a hot button issue in DAP polls

The former prime minister has been portrayed as the central problem to a number of issues that the party's Chinese base felt strongly about.

Analysis by JOCELINE TAN

DAP leader Senator Liew Chin Tong was the blue-eyed boy of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Everyone in Pakatan Harapan knew that the former deputy defence minister had the ears of the former prime minister who was drawn to Liew's intellect and ideas.

There were even rumours that Dr Mahathir was so impressed with him that he had thought of making the younger man a ML minister.

As such, many are surprised that Liew is now taking a rather adversarial stand towards Dr Mahathir.

Liew seemed to blame Dr Mahathir for many of Pakatan's problems in Putrajaya, going by news reports of his book, *Lim Kit Siang: Patriot. Leader. Fighter*.

The book to mark Lim's 80th year has captured public interest for providing a glimpse into Pakatan's term in power.

It is not as thorough as former Attorney-General Tommy Thomas' *Justice in the Wilderness* but it is yet another fascinating account by someone who had walked the corridors of power.

Can Liew be faulted for blaming it all on Dr Mahathir? Well, the buck has to stop somewhere.

Dr Mahathir has been portrayed as the central problem to a number of issues that DAP's Chinese base

felt strongly about - be it the Lynas plant in Pahang, the teaching of the Jawi script in schools or the United Examination Certificate (UEC).

The blame game did not stop at Dr Mahathir. The media was censured for playing up the Jawi calligraphy policy as an attempt to Islamise the Chinese, an accusation that drew a fierce rebuttal from the Association of Editors.

The then foreign minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah was also not spared.

Liew claimed that Dr Mahathir's pledge to ratify Icerd or the International Convention on the Elimination of All Racial Discrimination when addressing the United Nations in 2018 was done on Saifuddin's advice, which the latter has denied.

History, it seems, does not only belong to the victors but also to those who write about it.

The book is immensely readable but the timing of its publication has raised questions as to whether it is a means for DAP to explain away its shortcomings when it was the government.

This is an election year for DAP. The state level election began in March and will go on until June when the party elects its new national leadership.

Perak, the first to hold its election, is now under the control of the powerful Perak cousins Nga Kor



At odds: Liew was once the blue-eyed boy of Dr Mahathir.

Ming and Datuk Ngeh Koo Ham.

The Penang election saw the Lim family and its allies holding firm.

The Johor and Selangor polls in the coming weeks will be intense.

"The objective is there for all to see. The book is an opportunity to provide an insider version of those 22 months, to present the picture that DAP was unfairly criticised.

"DAP did not betray its supporters - that is the underlying message by Chin Tong," said a Chinese intellectual who is active in the Dong Zong movement.

The undercurrents in Selangor are intriguing.

There is a whisper campaign against those who were seen as too subservient to Dr Mahathir and had failed to stand up to him on policies close to the Chinese heart.

Dr Mahathir's image among the Chinese electorate has sunk.

They think he triggered the collapse of the Pakatan government by resigning as prime minister.

The anti-Mahathir sentiment runs deep among those in DAP who are Chinese-educated or the "Chinese First" group, as they are known.

The "Chinese First" group is exploiting the anti-Mahathir mood in their campaign to make it in the party election.

This is despite the fact that many in the "Chinese First" group had also rallied behind Dr Mahathir in the general election.

For instance, the ultra-Chinese ideologue, Hew Kuan Yau, also known as Superman, had gone all over the country in 2018, telling Chinese voters that if they want to get to Putrajaya, they need to ride on Lao Ma or the old horse, a reference to Dr Mahathir whose name sounds like horse in Chinese.

Liew, on his part, is facing a challenge to his leadership as Johor DAP chairman.

In the 2018 state election, he was almost toppled by his former aide Tan Hong Ping.

The Johor situation is not as messy as in Selangor; there are less big names clashing like thunder and lightning.

But there are three camps in Johor and two of the camps may gang up to oust Liew.

Liew has big name allies in Johor

such as Kulai MP Teo Nie Chin and Bakri MP Yeo Bee Yin but they are not grassroots leaders.

Teo, who was the deputy education minister is still struggling to defend herself on the UEC issue.

Yeo, a former minister whose portfolio oversaw the Lynas issue, had tried but failed to shut down the Lynas plant.

Even party elder Lim Kit Siang seemed rather defensive over the Jawi issue.

He posted on Facebook a few days ago: "I am still waiting for evidence as to how my stand on Jawi in 2019 had betrayed the rights, interests and future of the Chinese in Malaysia."

It is apparent that the once pro-Mahathir group in DAP is under pressure.

Liew was one of them and his book has provided a vehicle to distance himself and the party from Dr Mahathir.

It will not be easy for him because many of his pro-Mahathir arguments had been published in the media.

Capturing Putrajaya was a dream come true for DAP. But its inability to meet the expectations of the Chinese plus the anti-Mahathir mood have become hot button issues in their party election.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.