

# DAP vs Najib in Johor polls

Walloping 'Bossku' is one thing but has Damansara MP Tony Pua's attack on a premier Chinese high school in Johor backfired?

**Analysis by JOCELINE TAN**

SUPPORTERS of DAP's Tony Pua have flooded his Facebook page in full force over his criticism of Datuk Seri Najib Razak's presence at the prestigious Foon Yew High School in Johor Baru.

The Damansara MP has a fanatical fan base, especially in the Klang Valley.

They also applauded his insistence that the school's board of governors must resign for allowing Najib to visit the school.

It is a major issue in Johor because Foon Yew is the most eminent Chinese independent high school in the country and the pride of the Chinese in Johor while Najib, is, to quote a judge in one of the former premier's court cases, a "national embarrassment".

The setting was ripe for a controversy - a famous institution hosting a "national embarrassment" against the backdrop of a critical state election.

But has Pua, as his party elder Lim Kit Siang puts it, gone too far?

Pua's attack on Najib is not surprising. The DAP leader had staked his political career on exposing the 1MDB scandal and Najib's role in it.

But demanding the resignation of the school's board of governors hit a raw nerve among those in the Chinese education movement.

"I don't blame the school for hosting him because Najib approved two of its three campuses. Being grateful to those who help you is a Chinese virtue," said an education practitioner who is active in the Dong Zong movement.

The first campus in Stulang Laut was approved when Najib was education minister and during a time when the ultra-Malay voice in Umno was very fierce. The third campus in Masai received the green light when Najib was prime minister.

However, the education practitioner said that Najib going there during an election campaign sent a misleading signal that the school was taking sides in the election.

"There would be no problem if Najib went at any other time," he said.

To Pua's credit, he has always pushed the Malaysian Malaysia agenda.

He is not trapped in a typically Chinese worldview, so much so that Chinese educationists often view him as being less than sympathetic to their cause.

However, Pua's outburst may have backfired in Johor where the reputation of Foon Yew High School is far greater than that of any politician or party.

The people behind the school include bigwigs from the influential Johor Baru Tiong Hua Association,

also known as the "five clans", which is recognised by the Sultan of Johor.

The school's board of governors are not appointed but elected by its life members.

"Education is education and politics is politics. It is not mature of politicians to attack the school like this," said Johor Baru Hokkien Association president Datuk Seri Tey Kim Chai.

The Chinese vernacular media has also jumped to the defence of the school, tearing apart the argument that in receiving Najib, the school was teaching students to accept corruption and wrongdoing.

They asked if it also meant that people supporting DAP are condoning corruption given that Pua's own party leader is facing corruption charges.

A *Sin Chew Daily* columnist questioned whether DAP was encouraging young people to be racist given that the party leaders worked with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad whom the columnist described as "the great racist",

Politicians certainly need more mirrors in their homes so that they can also see their own faults and weaknesses.

On Chinese social media, some asked DAP leaders not to preach to Chinese schools after failing to deliver their promise to recognise

the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC).

They also defended the Chinese educationists as having "eaten more salt than (Pua) has eaten rice", meaning that the educationists have been through many ups and downs for the cause.

Walloping Najib was fine by the senior Lim but he has pulled the hand brake on Pua's attack on the school.

Lim knows the Chinese mood is not similar to 2018 and the Johor Chinese attachment to education is not to be under-estimated.

It is often said that Chinese education to the Chinese is like what Islam is to the Malays.

A Penang politician campaigning in Johor pointed out that the community's support for mother tongue education in the south is "10 times that in Penang".

For instance, Pakatan Harapan's decision to cut government funding for the Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) is still an issue among the Chinese.

It blew up in Pakatan's face during the Tanjung Piai parliamentary by-election in 2019 and the seat fell to MCA's Datuk Seri Dr Wee Jock Seng with a whopping 14,000-vote majority.

DAP has also been put on the defensive over the 10 new Chinese primary schools and the relocation of six other Chinese schools which

Barisan Nasional approved for the country before the general election but were thrown out by the Pakatan government on the grounds that it needed to review the matter.

In an election quite absent of hot issues, Chinese education has quite unexpectedly become a hot button to press.

But there could be a strategic purpose to Pua's outburst.

Is Pua trying to revive anti-Najib sentiment by reminding the Chinese of his misdeeds?

Najib has become some sort of X-factor among the Chinese in Johor. He has been getting the kind of reception that DAP leaders used to get from the Chinese.

It is worrying for Pakatan and especially given that the Chinese business sector is leaning towards Barisan.

Pua has also accused Najib of lying in Parliament and has submitted a motion to refer the Pekan MP to the privileges committee. The attacks in Parliament are primarily targeted at Johor voters.

DAP leaders are looking for the silver bullet to aim at Najib and to neutralise his new appeal among the Chinese.

There is so much at stake in Johor and it is ironic that DAP seems to be battling Najib for the Chinese vote.

**The views expressed here are the writer's own.**