

Low-key affair for Tee Yong in MCA's Labis stronghold
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LABIS, May 3 — Almost two hours away from the campaign noise in central Johor, Datuk Chua Tee Yong is heading the MCA's quiet defence of Labis, a seat he took on in 2008 when his father and MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek was mired in controversy.

Preferring to rely on his incumbency and Barisan Nasional's (BN) traditional campaign style of daily walkabouts and nightly dinner functions, Chua junior has been moving slowly on Labis voters since campaigning kicked off on April 20.

But while admitting that no seat in Johor would be an easy victory for his party, the 39-year-old trained auditor has maintained an optimistic, almost confident outlook of his chances in the Labis federal seat.

Tee Yong had won the seat in Election 2008 with a sizeable 4,094-vote majority, earning a spot in Parliament for his first term at a time when many MCA big guns were axed from the race.

"I still feel positive about the current situation... despite the fact that there is this talk that the urban seats are all gone (to the opposition).

"I think most of our candidates will probably try to change some things in their campaign in the next few days but whether it works or not, I can't tell," the boyish-looking politician told The Malaysian Insider while on his campaign rounds in Pekan Air Panas here yesterday afternoon.

"For me, I always work hard. I have the view that nothing is secure and nothing is certain."

Tee Yong shakes hands with a patron (right) in a coffee shop while on his campaign rounds yesterday. Tee Yong was nonchalant about reports of the mammoth turnouts at Pakatan Rakyat (PR) events in central Johor where DAP bigwig Lim Kit Siang is leading the opposition's charge, claiming of information that many participants were curious onlookers out for a good time.

He noted that PR's, particularly the DAP's, campaign in the south has been particularly aggressive in comparison with the 2008 polls and cited this as the possible cause for the almost fanatical responses the pact has received from Johor's Chinese community.

"I don't know... because when we go house to house, we move around here... the feedback that we get is different.

"Sometimes the attendance may be because of the carnival air... so it become more like a family activity so since they are there, they decide to stay and probably, to listen to the

speeches," he said.

"But what is the impact? No one knows. Seriously."

Gelang Patah is in the eye of the Election 2013 storm in Malaysia's southernmost state Johor, the birthplace and bastion of Umno and the ruling BN pact.

With political veterans like Lim and caretaker Johor Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman pitted against each other in the contest, the urban seat and its surrounding areas have been the focus of the election from the get-go.

Unprecedented crowds of up to nearly 30,000 have been turning up for PR's events, most of them even garbed from head to foot in colourful party merchandise from T-shirts to caps shaped like the DAP's "Ubah" bird, the hornbill mascot that the party first created during the Sarawak state polls.

A banner with Tee Yong's picture greets motorists as they enter Labis town. Believing that the May 5 polls is its best chance yet at wresting federal power, the opposition pact has pulled out all the stops for its electoral campaign and in central Johor, the response appears to have been rewarding so far.

But the noise has not cowed Tee Yong in Labis.

He admitted his was a "low-key" affair but said it was more meaningful than blaring promises from microphones and loudhailers as it lends the personal touch that voters need to feel connected to the candidate in their area.

Tee Yong is using his five years of ground work in Labis and rapport with local villagers to carry his campaign through to the end.

"It is not so much about just attending functions. All this time, I've come to do walkabouts, to find out what is happening.

"Because some people don't complain to your office... they do it in coffee shops where they feel they can be more open.

"So I think in terms of my edge, you can say that it is because I was here, I have done my work," he said.

Tee Yong is facing former Senator S. Ramakrishnan from the DAP in the contest for Labis, which observers in the opposition have now listed as a seat it is likely to win.

Before he was elected as the MP here, Labis was held for a lengthy six terms by two prominent MCA presidents, Tun Dr Ling Liong Sik and Soi Lek himself.

Most of its residents work or operate in rubber estates or oil palm plantations, while the

others are petty traders, government servants or merely passing through to the busier parts of Johor.

For a federal seat Labis has a small electorate, numbering just 37,787 voters with the Chinese forming the majority at 46 per cent, Malays at 36 per cent and Indians at 15 per cent.

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