

'325 protest rally' may set off new waves against BN

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Despite Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's promise yesterday that his administration is committed to solving the decades-old issues raised by Chinese educationists, they will go ahead with their mega rally planned for Sunday.

Observers say that the rally, organised by United Chinese School Committees Association or its acronym Dong Zong and dubbed '325 protest assembly', could well create a larger political wave against the BN in the coming general election.

NONE To be held at 11am at the New Era College in Kajang, Selangor, the rally is expected to attract more than 3,000 participants from all over the country, including 250 Chinese guilds and associations and a number of education groups from people of other races and opposition parties.

The event at the private college owned by Dong Zong also aims to unite the Chinese community in demanding that the government transfers out hundreds of teachers who do not have Chinese language qualification out of Chinese primary schools.

It also aims to highlight the enduring discrimination the educationists says Chinese schools face, particularly the shortage of teachers, which has been haunting the schools for more than three decades.

According to Chinese newspaper Sin Chew Daily, the organisers have set up huge tents at the college field and prepared a mega 100-metre banner as well.

Non-Chinese groups to take part as well

Dong Zong president Yap Sin Tian called on all participants to arrive before 8am to avoid traffic congestion, as Najib is scheduled to attend a Police Day celebration at Kajang at 10am, which is likely to be attended by many police personnel.

djz postcard to pm 271107 yap sin tianYap (left) said representatives from non-Chinese groups, such as Tamil Education, Research and Development Foundation and People's Religious Schools Council will also join the rally to show their solidarity with Chinese education.

Last week, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng pledged to mobilise his party to back the rally, while PKR vice-president Tian Chua said today he, together with another vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar and secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution, would lead PKR leaders to the rally.

The rally was called after the Education Ministry failed to address various problems Chinese primary schools have been complaining about after they reopened early this year, especially on the huge number of teachers without Chinese language qualification.

Chinese educationists have always seen such a policy as a move to weaken the development of Chinese primary schools.

A déjà vu for veteran educationists

The rally is a déjà vu for many veteran educationists because Chinese primary schools were hit with the same problem in 1987.

A similar rally was then called at the Thean Hou Temple in Kuala Lumpur, which partly led to the

infamous Operasi Lalang in which 108 activists were detained under the draconian Internal Security Act.

After the announcement of the '325 protest rally' on Feb 26, the Education Ministry was seen scrambling to defuse the anger of the Chinese educationists.

NONE On Wednesday, Deputy Education Minister Wee Ka Siong (left) announced eight long- and short-term measures to address the problem, including immediately transferring out the non-qualified teachers, giving power to Chinese primary school headmasters to hire temporary teachers and training more teachers with Chinese qualification.

Yesterday, Najib, during a live interview with the MCA-owned radio station 988, also reiterated that these measures have been accepted in principle by the cabinet, and that his government was serious about solve the matter once and for all.

However, Dong Jong responded yesterday that the eight measures announced were merely "hasty and expedient attempts" to offset the rally, and that they did not address the root causes of the problems from a structural perspective.

The coalition added that it remained cautious, since the Education Ministry officials had failed to honour many promises made in the past to solve the long-standing issue of insufficient teaching manpower the Chinese schools faced.

Wee, who is also MCA Youth chief, denied that the measures were announced to offset the rally because they were from a special committee set up to solve the teacher shortage problem, which had been formed on Feb 22, four days before the announcement of '325 protest rally'.

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