

Thousands jeer deputy minister over Chinese school teacher shortage
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By Lee Wei Lian

KAJANG, March 25 — Loud jeers and calls for his resignation greeted Deputy Education Minister Datuk Wee Ka Siong at a rally protesting the shortage of Chinese school teachers here today.

The stark difference to the clapping that greeted his opposition lawmakers Chua Tian Chang and Saifuddin Nasution could be a reflection of the hardened sentiment against the Barisan Nasional (BN) amongst a large portion of the ethnic Chinese electorate.

A crowd of about 5,000 had squeezed in and around a field at an independent Chinese education institution here at the rally organised by the United Chinese School Committees Association (Dong Zong) to protest a shortage of Chinese school teachers.

As Wee (picture) approached the staging area, a crowd gathered around him calling out "Sia Tai" or "step down" as his security detail tried to clear a path for the MCA minister.

Although Wee announced on Wednesday eight long- and short-term plans by the education ministry to resolve the issue, Dong Zong said the next day the government has not kept its promises in the past and "this hasty announcement is an attempt to offset the 325 rally."

In supporting the rally at Dong Zong's headquarter's here, United Chinese School Teachers' Association of Malaysia (Jiao Zong) president Ong Kow Yee also said they had written numerous times to the education ministry for discussion but the matter remains unresolved.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had also announced on Thursday more Mandarin-speaking teachers will be trained to solve the shortage.

He said the government was committed to resolving the problem and had appointed Wee to speak to Chinese educationist groups to come up with a solution.

It was also reported that the Education Ministry had placed 1,482 temporary teachers in Chinese schools nationwide since January to address the shortage.

Wee had said there were only 392 vacancies left and headmasters needed to appoint temporary teachers according to their requirements.

Rally organisers claimed that 150 buses had arrived from all over the country carrying supporters to the event.

Attendees who spoke to The Malaysian Insider said they were frustrated by the lack of progress the government had made over the last fifty years and feared it was part of a calculated move to deny their children a Chinese primary school education experience.

"You think I have no better things to do than to come here? For 50 years the issue has been

going on, but now the government cannot hide," said Dr Wong Fort Pin from Malacca.

The United Chinese School Committees Association (Dong Zong) chairman Yap Sin Tian, who took to the podium during the rally, said that he feared the ministry was holding on to a monolingual education policy and engineering a change in the character of Chinese school by deliberately not training enough teachers with at least SPM Mandarin qualifications.

The Malaysia Tamil Foundation also lent its support to the event with its president, Pasupathi Sithambaram, giving a speech in support of vernacular education.

While a number of politicians were in attendance, none were invited to speak.

Apart from PKR's Tian Chua and Saifuddin, PAS vice president Datuk Mahfuz Omar also attended today's rally.

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