

No fallout from vernacular schools issue, says Wee
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 14 — MCA has dismissed the warning from Chinese associations that continuing unhappiness over vernacular schools will see the party being punished at the polls.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Wee Ka Siong (picture), the government's pointman for Chinese vernacular education, said yesterday the government has already found solutions to problems faced by these schools.

"Chinese vernacular schools have never been sidelined and I disagree that MCA's position will be affected because it did not address this issue because the government has the solution," the MCA Youth chief was quoted as saying by Sinar Harian.

The Malaysian Insider reported yesterday that the Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH) said MCA would likely secure even fewer votes in the coming election for failing to ensure Chinese vernacular primary schools were treated fairly by Putrajaya.

Stanley Yong, secretary-general for the umbrella group of 420 associations in the Klang Valley, said he had "a strong feeling" that MCA would be rejected by voters, judging from the hostile reception given to Wee at a rally two weeks ago.

Wee, who is deputy education minister, was chased out of the rally after being taunted and jeered by the angry crowd, but not before he was allegedly assaulted by a disgruntled protester.

The rally, which drew a crowd of over 5,000, was organised by the United Chinese School Committees Association (Dong Zong) to protest the shortage of qualified Chinese school teachers in the national education system.

"They were saying that MCA, to them, was totally irrelevant... I think the rejection of the MCA in the government is actually on the increasing side," Yong told The Malaysian Insider.

MCA suffered its worst outing at the polls in 2008, which saw its representation in Parliament slashed by half — to 15 seats from 31. The Barisan Nasional (BN) founding party performed no better at state level, only managing to clinch 31 seats.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin accused Chinese educationists on Thursday of telling "big lies" for claiming the government had sidelined Chinese vernacular schools for decades.

Muhyiddin, who is also education minister, said that all national schools had problems, and not just Chinese schools, before citing a shortage of teachers who were proficient in English.

He also said the government spent an average of RM2.24 million per Chinese school,

RM1.99 million per Tamil school and RM2.26 million on national schools teaching in Malay.

During its March 25 rally, Dong Zong accused the government of compromising Chinese education by "deliberately" not training enough Chinese school teachers, resulting in a shortage that has lasted for up to 40 years.

Dong Zong president Yap Sin Tian told a crowd of over 5,000, who had chanted for Wee to resign, this was so the government could send in those without SPM Mandarin qualifications to fill the gap.

Wee responded by saying he was willing to quit as deputy education minister if this could resolve the teacher shortage in Chinese primary schools.

He has also insisted the teacher shortage in Chinese primary schools has declined since he became deputy education minister in 2009.

The MCA Youth chief told Parliament early this month that when he joined the Education Ministry in 2009, there was a shortage of 4,991 teachers in Chinese schools that has been reduced each year to 1,870 this year.

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