

**Puad Zarkashi blasts 'racist' Dong Zong**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 30 — Deputy Education Minister Dr Puad Zarkashi today slammed the Dong Zong educationist group as racist for demanding that only qualified Mandarin-speaking teachers be allowed to teach in Chinese vernacular schools.

"Dong Zong's demand that only teachers who can speak Mandarin should teach at the SJKCs smacks of racism and does not reflect the 1 Malaysia spirit," Puad was reported as saying by Bernama Online today.

The minister was remarking on the mass rally held last week to protest a pressing shortage of qualified Mandarin- and Tamil-speaking teachers, in which United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) was a key mover.

Puad today also denied Putrajaya was neglecting vernacular schools, despite the continued complaints of insufficient teachers at such schools.

Instead, Puad insists the government is working hard to address this and other grouses related to vernacular education.

"We have called the stakeholders including the United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (Dong Zong) to give their opinions and they needn't hold a demonstration, as a solution to the problem has been found," the deputy education minister was quoted further by Bernama Online.

"The short-term solution is appointing interim teachers while we will also be implementing the Additional Option Intervention Programme."

On Sunday, Dong Zong and other vernacular educationists group organised a public rally to protest against what they said was a "50-year-old problem" for vernacular schools.

The group later accused the Ministry of Education of a "deliberately" creating a dearth of trained Mandarin-speaking teachers as part of a larger conspiracy to re-engineer the identities of vernacular schools.

Puad's colleague, Deputy Education Minister I Datuk Wee Ka Siong, was jeered continually by attendees of the rally and chased away from the field after the event. Wee later alleged he was assaulted by an unidentified man in the crowd.