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Planning strategies to ensure national schools remain popular

ALOR STAR, Thurs. - The Cabinet is holding meetings with authorities to devise new strategies to ensure that national schools remain a popular choice among Malaysians.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi confirmed that a meeting of the Government's recently-established committee to look into the matter took place yesterday at the Prime Minister's office in Putrajaya.

Elaborating on a NST report today on the meeting which was chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and attended by Abdullah, several ministers and senior government officials, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"We had a discussion, but it was not to revamp the national education system (as reported) but on the continuation of the national school system."

He was speaking to reporters after attending a Hari Raya gathering organised by the Kedah Government at Wisma Darulaman today. (See P5)

Abdullah earlier opened the Kedah Maju 2010 convention at Dewan Seri Negeri at the same venue.

The Putrajaya meeting yesterday was a follow-up to an announcement by Dr Mahathir on Nov 29 that the Government would review the school system to ensure it is in accordance with the National Education Policy.

Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying that Malaysia's school system had deviated from its original aims.

The Prime Minister said the objective was to ensure that students attended national schools.

On a working visit to France the previous week, Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying to the Malaysian community that national schools had failed to bring about better relations among the races.

Asked whether any decision was taken during the meeting yesterday, Abdullah replied: "Not yet, because we will hold further meetings."

Among those present at the meeting yesterday were Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Abdullah declined to disclose when the next meeting would be held but said the general objective of the committee was to impress upon Malaysians that the national school system was established for all, not just the Malays.

"National schools need the support of Malaysians of all races."

Abdullah said the Government would continue to improve facilities at national schools and build new ones.

"All of this is being done because we want to provide our students with the best education as it is the only way we can produce a capable workforce which can make a meaningful contribution to the development of the country and the people.

"We hope these efforts will turn out well, because we want Malaysians to have no doubts about the credibility of national schools."