

Shahidan rapped

Ministry decides school hours, PM and DPM remind Perlis MB

KEPALA BATAS: Perlis cannot just go ahead and implement its controversial plan to extend school hours.

Although Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim defied Education Minister Datuk Musa Mohamad and announced plans to have "extra classes", he was brought down to earth by both the prime minister and his deputy yesterday.

Their message: any plan to change school hours must be endorsed and approved by the Education Ministry.

Under the national school system, school hours come under the jurisdiction of the federal government, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

However, he said, no one can be prevented from having extra classes to teach other subjects, such as Arabic.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, echoing similar sentiments, said the move is bound to confuse the people.

"Shahidan should not go it alone ... he should discuss the matter with the Education Ministry ... we do not want any confusion among the people," *Bernama* quoted him as saying.

Any change in school hours for whatever reason, he said, should be discussed with the ministry first.

Asked to comment on claims by Shahidan that the plan was not his but that of the prime minister himself, Mahathir said: "We have not made a decision yet because it is still at discussion stage."

"We are studying whether the religious school system introduced in Johor can be extended nationwide."

Johor has a religious school system with its own buildings and administration. Students from national schools attending the morning session will go to the religious school in the afternoon and vice-versa.

Mahathir also reiterated that the country needs its people to be trained and skilled in diverse disciplines.

In **IPOH**, secretary-general of the Congress of Teachers Union in the Education Service Shahul Hamid Mydin

SUN 13 FEB 2003

'Don't over-burden teachers'

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Shah said education is a federal matter and there should be uniformity in terms of school hours.

"Any extended school hours by Perlis will have legal problems. It can create other problems as well for students, teachers, parents and the community at large," he said yesterday when commenting on Shahidan's decision to go ahead with his plan on March 1.

Shahul Hamid said the congress received many calls and letters from its members in Perlis, who are

worried and feel it is unfair for them to work extra hours while the rest of the country enjoys normal school hours.

"We cannot burden the teachers anymore ... they have a lot to prepare for the next day. If they have to stay until 4.30pm, they will be over-burdened, have less time for family, and no overtime pay as well," he said.

However, he said the move could get support from teachers and parents if such classes are limited to UPSR, PMR and SPM students or for critical subjects such as science and languages.