

Shahidan: I'll take the advice of PM and DPM

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KANGAR: Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim will abide by the advice of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister on the issue of extending school hours here.

"I respect the call made by both Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi), so I intend to meet the education authorities for a second time to fully explain our decision," he said.

Without specifying if the proposal to extend school hours would be dropped indefinitely, Shahidan said he had contacted Abdullah yesterday and had been instructed to resolve the issue with the Education Minister.

Shahidan said he also planned to see all the other parties involved to clarify the situation, describing it as "simply a misunderstanding."

"It is actually a small matter but I will explain fully and clearly the entire issue to those concerned," he said when met at his home yesterday.

Shahidan had said on Tuesday that Perlis was going ahead with its plans to extend school hours until 4pm from March 1 despite the Education Ministry's rejection of the move.

Shahidan, who met Education director-general Datuk Abdul Rafie Mahat last week, had said the programme involved tuition classes and not an extension of teaching hours.

Earlier yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the Government had not made any decision on the matter.

Asked if the Government would give the nod for Perlis to go ahead with the move, he said: "I want to know what the proposal really means. We do not know what the real plans are."

He added that national schools

came under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government.

"We must also be aware that the time for learning is limited and you must ensure that the lessons will bring benefits," he said after hosting a Hari Raya Aidiladha open house at Dewan Wawasan in Jitra.

On Shahidan's statement that the extended school hours reflected the Prime Minister's idea of teaching people's religious school (*sekolah agama rakyat* or SAR) subjects in the afternoon in government schools, Dr Mahathir said:

"We have the idea but have not yet agreed on it. We are still discussing it."

In Kepala Batas, Abdullah said Shahidan should not have decided the matter on his own and should have discussed it with the ministry.

"When it comes to matters concerning education, it is better if he discusses them with the ministry."

"This advice is meant for all states and not only Perlis as we do not want any confusion," he said after attending a Hari Raya Aidiladha feast with villagers in Permatang Pak Elong.

Earlier, Shahidan said Perlis wanted to close down all nine SARs in the state.

"These schools teach the national curriculum in the morning and religious studies in the afternoon while our 4P (Student Performance Enhancement Programme) provides tuition classes in the afternoon."

"By having additional hours, we can prove to SAR students, teachers and parents that national schools can offer a comprehensive programme incorporating religious subjects," he said.