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Perlis extends school hours (HL)

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KANGAR, Tues. - Perlis is going ahead with its plan to extend schooling hours in all schools from March 1, except that they will be called "tuition classes".

Expressing regret that his intentions had not been viewed in the proper perspective, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said the move was in line with the Students Performance Enhancement Programme proposed in 1996.

"Whether called 'extended school hours' or 'single session', it is the concept of providing tuition in line with the programme," he said at a Press conference at his office.

Referring to Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad's statement that the State's decision could have serious implications as education was a Federal matter, he said his intentions had been misconstrued.

He said it was not his idea but that of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to teach Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) subjects in the afternoon at government schools.

"The schools will follow the national syllabus in the morning while subjects such as Arabic, moral education, Fardhu Ain and English will be taught in the afternoon," Shahidan said.

He reiterated his call that the Government should take over all SAR schools "lock, stock and barrel".

"This way, the problem of SAR schools will be solved, as not only the students but the premises and teachers will be absorbed into the national school system."

He said non-Malay students could learn English, moral education and their mother tongue.

Asked whether teachers would be overburdened, he said the teachers for the afternoon session would not be the same ones teaching in the morning.

"We are proposing that they be given coupons or vouchers by the Education Ministry to teach the subjects on an hourly basis.

"The ministry had announced such an allowance earlier and we would like to request that it be given out earlier as we want to implement the classes in March," Shahidan added.

Asked if the State would face financial constraints in implementing the move, he said the State Government would look for sources of financing.

Meanwhile, Education Director-General Datuk Abdul Rafie Mahat today cautioned Perlis that any plans it had to extend schooling hours must not involve schools under the ministry.

"Even if what they want to implement is tuition classes - which is all right - the move must first be accepted by Parent-Teacher Associations and the teachers involved."

Rafie had issued a statement on Feb 9 stipulating that no decision had been made on extending school hours and that the status quo would remain for all government schools.

Teachers' unions, too, have said the move would be a disaster if it is implemented before various other factors, such as the welfare of teachers and students, are considered.

Musa yesterday shot down Perlis' plan, saying any decision on longer school hours needed to be considered carefully and required the ministry's approval.

Musa added that the Perlis Government had been informed of the ministry's stand.

"Any change in school hours must be implemented simultaneously in all States.

"It must be a uniform policy as it has serious implications for teachers, students, the curriculum and examinations," Musa said.

On Feb 5, after chairing his weekly State Executive Council meeting, Shahidan said Perlis was set to be the first State in the country to implement schooling hours from 7.45am to 4.30pm in all its primary and secondary schools.