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Cabinet panel to discuss handcuffing of juveniles

PEKAN, Sun. - The handcuffing of schoolchildren suspected to be involved in dadah will be discussed by the Cabinet Committee on Social Ills chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at its next meeting.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today the matter would also be discussed at a meeting between Ministry officials and the police tomorrow.

He said he had spoken to Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor following unfavourable reaction from the public and parents over the handcuffing of the children and the publication of their photographs in some newspapers.

Najib, who is also Pekan MP and Pekan Umno chief, said the Ministry wanted to identify schoolchildren involved in social ills but at the same time it wanted to ensure that these children were not emotionally or psychologically affected by such treatment.

"We do not want them to be emotionally affected because of the embarrassment and subjected to ridicule by the public," he said at the Pekan Umno Hari Raya open house.

"We also want to get parents involved as they must be told of the behaviour or wrongdoings of the children before action is taken against them."

He said the Cabinet committee would also decide on more appropriate guidelines and procedures in dealing with social ills among schoolchildren to ensure efforts achieved the desired results.

"We have no intention to hide this problem. What is important is that we have to make sure that our action is effective," he said.

Najib was asked to comment on a statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday that it was unnecessary to handcuff schoolchildren suspected to be involved in dadah.

While saying that police should use their discretion when dealing with juveniles, Dr Mahathir hoped that such action by the police would not recur as it would put the children under tremendous pressure.

In another development, Najib dismissed an allegation that the presence of children of foreign workers had affected the performance of some primary schools in public examinations. He said the overall performance was improving every year.

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail said recently that the presence of 44,000 children of foreign workers was the main reason for the drop in schools' performance.

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