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Character-building plan for students (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Youth and Sports Ministry will recommend to the Government to make it compulsory for students to attend a special character-building programme after their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination.

Its Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, said today a working paper on the programme - to be known as national social service - would be submitted to the Government by the end of the month.

He said a task force, set up a few months ago by the Ministry, had been entrusted with formulating a programme module and infrastructural facilities.

"The duration of service should not be too long. Probably, it can be held during the months before the SPM results are released or, if this is not enough, a maximum of one year will do.

"The services of experts in various fields have to be obtained in formulating the modules. A lot of details have to be considered like whether participants have to be grouped together or allowed to stay at home."

Speaking at his Ministry, Muhyiddin said such considerations were crucial as they would then help determine the actual cost - expected to be huge - of implementing any compulsory programme.

He said it was up to the Government to decide whether to adopt the Ministry's plan as one of the measures to enhance national resilience.

He was commenting on a statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday that the Government might consider introducing national service for youths who leave school as one of the means of character building.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman had said that the proposed national service could be something like summer camps or character-building courses.

Muhyiddin said the Ministry was willing to become the implementing body of the proposed programme.

"Such a move should be supported in view of the various social problems affecting the society.

"However, because of the nature and scope of the programme, which would be targeting 400,000 students completing their Form Five education annually, the Ministry would need further assistance from the Government in its implementation."

He agreed that the programme need not have to be tailored along the lines of the national service practised by some countries, which was more military in nature.

On the Ministry's national social service, Muhyiddin said although it would involve some military elements like marching, the focus would be on character development, self-discipline and a healthy lifestyle.

Asked whether the implementation of such a national service would affect the Rakan Muda programmes which were also centred on the development of positive values, Muhyiddin said:

"Perhaps what needs to be done is to refine and streamline the implementation of both programmes. The most important thing is to ensure there will be no duplication."

On Rakan Muda, Muhyiddin said the Ministry would soon meet chief executives of major manufacturing companies, especially those based in the

Klang Valley, to discuss the implementation of the programme involving factory workers.

Similar talks would also be held with the administration of universities and student associations on the extension of the programme in institutions of higher learning.

The Rakan Muda programme has now entered its third phase with the focus on specific target groups or areas.

Apart from factory workers and institutions of higher learning, the other target groups are non-governmental organisations, public agencies, the private sector, shopping complexes, housing estates and land schemes.

On its implementation at factories, where an initial allocation of RM1 million has been approved mainly to meet expenses of providing the facilitators, Muhyiddin said the factories were free to implement programmes on their own according to their capabilities. He said some of them had already done this at their own initiative.

He said the management of the factories had to match the contents and nature of the programmes to their operations, especially as their workers worked in shifts.

They would be provided with a Rakan Muda manual which, among others, will include information on those who can assist them.

"In some areas, committees will be formed which will be responsible for co-ordinating such programmes."

Muhyiddin said the focus on factories was important due to the large number of workers in the industry, with some two million of them being youths.

"There have been numerous reports of workers involved in social problems and hopefully Rakan Muda will provide them with a positive alternative."

For a start, the emphasis would be on one main industrial zone in each State such as Pasir Gudang in Johor and Seremban in Negri Sembilan.

On the implementation of Rakan Muda in institutions of higher learning, and later in private colleges and teachers' training colleges, Muhyiddin said it was hoped the students would become the role models. He said they should play a leading role at their own institutions or outside their campuses, especially in projects to help the needy.

The Ministry has allocated RM500,000 for the programme expected to begin in April.

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