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National service for school leavers may be introduced

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THE Government may introduce a national service programme for school leavers as a means to counter the country's growing problem of social ills, particularly among the Muslim community.

The idea of having such a programme was brought up during a special dialogue on social ills among Muslims with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"This suggestion was brought up by some of the participants who said the country should have some form of national service to eradicate the social ills.

"The Government will consider it," Dr Mahathir told reporters after the meeting.

He was asked whether the Government plans to implement a national service programme due to the alarming social problems faced by the Muslim community in the country.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abdul Hamid Othman said the Government has yet to determine whether the national service will involve strictly military training.

"The national service will not necessary be related to the military service... it can be outbound schools and other recreational activities.

"We have also yet to decide whether to make the programme compulsory but the important thing is to ensure that everybody is involved in it," he said.

It is aimed at exposing the school leavers to healthy activities while they wait to join the workforce, he added.

Asked about the integrated campaign launched by the Prime Minister to tackle social issues, Abdul Hamid said the Government feels that it is necessary because of late the situation has worsened.

Although the campaign itself is not new, it is the first such integrated approach to the problem and involves all ministries and government agencies, he said.

Government departments have for years been organising their own programmes through their respective religious units.

The progress of the campaign and other similar efforts will be monitored by the Cabinet Committee on Social Ills which is headed by Anwar.

"Since the Prime Minister himself wanted to attend the meeting, we decided to have all ministries, government agencies and departments gather for a special meeting to look at issues related to the social ills," he said, adding that the Government has agreed in principle to allocate funds for the campaign.

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