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Mahathir-Service

NATIONAL SERVICE IN MOVE TO RESOLVE SOCIAL ILLS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said some form of national service will be considered for school leavers as one of the ways to resolve the social problems among youths in the country.

He said the government felt that such a national service could build inner strength among youths, preventing them from being influenced by negative elements around them.

"This idea was mentioned by one of the speakers from the floor that we should have some kind of national service ... and that is something that the government will consider," he told reporters after a special meeting with representatives of religious units of government agencies nationwide to discuss social ills within the Muslims at Pusat Islam, here.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, Cabinet ministers, Menteri Besar, politicians and social activists.

Asked whether the educational system had been ineffective in building the inner strength among Muslims, Dr Mahathir said there was a need to review the content and the way religious teachings were presented.

"It's not the failure of the system. Maybe, it's the failure of the content. What did we actually teach when we teach them about religions? Was it enough just to teach others how to pray and perform religious obligations?," he said.

Dr Mahathir said religious instructors should have stressed on how a Muslim should lead his life by giving priority to working and studying diligently.

The religious education system in schools might be stressing too much on the ritual aspects that it neglected those which could help build a strong character, he said.

He said today's meeting had discussed the social problems among Muslims and tried to find ways to resolve it.

Dr Mahathir said that during the dialogue session, many of the participants considered parents played an important role in guiding their children.

Some also felt advisors also played an important role in providing advice to couples intending to set up family life.

He said several measures adopted by the government to curb the spread of social ills such as tightening enforcement, reducing the number of entertainment centres and ordering nightspots to close by lam would help solve some of the problems.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said Muslims especially the Malays should not blame other parties or the country's rapid development for their social problems.

He said it was shallow thinking to blame social problems on the country's rapid economic development and technological progress.

"In this borderless era, Islam cannot isolate nor avoid itself from what is going on in the world," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Muslims only said in words but not in deeds that Islam was a way of life and if they had, it was only confined to certain matters to give the impression that they practised the teachings of Islam.

Dr Mahathir said exposure to new way of life as well as the luxury enjoyed could not be blamed for the social problems besetting the Muslims

because moral decadence among non Muslims was not that as bad as they Muslims', considering that they were also similarly exposed and in fact had greater wealth than Muslims.

He said 55 per cent of Malaysians were Muslims while 45 per cent non Muslims with 28 per cent Chinese, 10 per cent Indians and the rest other communities.

However, he said the number of Muslims involved in social problems were 67 per cent while Chinese 17 per cent.

"Non Muslims seem to be more capable of steering themselves away from the unhealthy influence although both parties were exposed to the same situation," he said.

He said various measures proposed to check social ills might not succeed in resolving the problems, except a strong personal defence.

He said parents were blaming the teachers and teachers blaming the parents because of the social problems affecting the young when in fact both parties had a major and important role to play.

He said various efforts had been carried out by the government to intensify the teaching of Islam but it still failed to curb the social ills.

But, the government could not shoulder the responsibility alone, needing cooperation of all parties to resolve the social problems, he said.

He said a change in approach should be made such as in the presentation of Friday sermon and religious ceramah to include those who had never stepped foot in mosque. -- BERNAMA

HS RAZ ABG