

Rakan Muda to take on new role

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Youth and Sports Ministry is working with the Education Ministry to use the Rakan Muda programme as a pre-national service for students.

Its minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said the move would provide the Rattan Muda programme with a "jump start" while at the same time consolidate resources to expand the national service programme.

"The Cabinet has agreed that the national service programme should begin in schools through uniformed bodies and Rakan Muda clubs," he said

yesterday at the Malaysian Teenager Awards 2003 ceremony at the International Youth Centre here.

The Rakan Muda programme, which focuses on mental, physical and spiritual development, was officially launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in October 1994.

Speaking to reporters later, Hishammuddin said pre-national service would not be mandatory, adding that details of the programme would only be worked out at a joint ministerial committee meeting to be held in August.

"Both ministries have instructed their officers to come up with recom-

mendations that we will discuss at the meeting.

"This initiative allows us to look at national service in a longer term, and we might also look at a post-national service programme later on," he added.

Hishammuddin said the ministry could use the RM16.5mil budget allocation under its national social service programme for the pre-national service programme.

"We are also discussing with the Finance Ministry for an extra allocation for next year's Budget," he said, adding that he hoped the pre-national

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service programme could be launched by next June.

To a question, Hishammuddin said national athletes might be exempted from national service during training and competitions, but would still have to fulfil the mandatory three-month service.

On Friday, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak had announced that the national service programme would be implemented next year.

Earlier, Hishammuddin presented awards to 61 teenagers for excellent achievements in various fields.

The Teenager Awards is the Malaysian version of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, where recipients are those active in social service, sports and recreation, skills and innovations.