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National social service good way to solve ills

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I HAVE observed with keen interest the recent expose of the nation's multifarious social ills and the call by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Pusat Islam to do everything within its power to alleviate the problem which has been most acute among Muslims.

The open-mindedness and frankness of the Prime Minister and his Deputy (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) in speaking up on the realities of the problem is highly commendable.

They should be given the fullest support in follow-up action that needs to be taken not only by law enforcement agencies but also concerned NGOs and the public.

The fact that Malays form the majority of those afflicted by social problems clearly necessitates Pusat Islam and other Islamic authorities to re-examine their approach in dealing with these problems and to do more to strengthen the religious and moral resolve of Muslims.

Non-Malays, though making up a far smaller percentage of those involved in social problems, should continue to strengthen their character with emphasis on discipline and rectitude.

One of the proposals to deal with these problems that interests me is a non-military national service for students after the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination.

Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said recently that the Government would be asked to make it compulsory for students to attend a character-building programme after taking this examination.

According to the Minister, a working paper on the programme - to be known as national social service - will be submitted to the Government by the end of this month.

I am in favour of such programmes that can develop students' moral fibre, discipline, wisdom and ability to discern right and wrong, accept the good and reject the bad.

The youth should be asked to perform social service for a specified period but this should not disrupt their work plans or studies.

The type of service can include community projects like helping the aged in the repair and maintenance of their homes or rehabilitating public amenities in rural areas on a gotong-royong basis.

The proposed programme will enable students between the ages of 17 and 18 to undergo physical and spiritual training, mind-building and skills development while waiting for their results.

By supporting this proposal, I would also like to remind the authorities concerned that while it is pertinent to emphasise such character-building, they (Education Ministry) must also ascertain why our schools have not been successful in producing strong and disciplined students.

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