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`Make Warriors' Day more meaningful'

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Blaming poor publicity for the perennial lack of public participation in commemorating Warriors Day, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said it was time Malaysians observed every July 31 more meaningfully.

Remembering the nation's fallen heroes was a recognition of the sacrifices made by those who gave their lives for the country, Najib said.

As for the public, there should be more to Warriors' Day than a mere wreath-laying, bugle-blowing and poem-reciting ritual at heroes' monuments, he said.

"As we remember our fallen heroes on July 31, we must also contribute in cash and kind as a token of our appreciation of their services," he said when approached by reporters after attending this year's Warriors' Day commemoration at the National Monument here.

Ex-servicemen also needed financial assistance, jobs and other facilities when they returned to civilian life and this was where the public could come in, at least on Warriors' Day, he said.

Najib was certain that if Warriors' Day was given wider publicity, Malaysians would honour their heroes in a big way.

"Wide publicity is needed to impress upon the citizenry the significance of Warriors' Day."

Creating such awareness also required enlightening young Malaysians on the country's struggle for independence and the sacrifices made by its soldiers, said Najib.

Ex-Servicemen Association of Malaysia president Senator Datuk Mohamad Abdul Ghani, who was also approached after today's ceremony, said he wished to see large public attendance at future Warriors' Day observance.

"We are not doing enough in observing the day. It's just remembrance. We have to do more," he said.

Several out-of-towners visiting the National Monument admitted they were unaware the nation commemorated Warriors' Day today.

"I only knew about it when I asked fellow visitors why are there so many wreaths today," said a man from Johor Baru visiting the monument with his family.

Earlier, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, armed forces chief Jen Tan Sri Mohamed Zahidi Zainuddin and Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai, among others, laid wreaths at the monument.

In Ipoh, Worrior's Day was celebrated on a moderate scale with the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Azlan Shah, taking the salute from some 400 security personnel and uniformed groups at Dataran Bangunan Perak Darul Ridzuan.

The personnel comprised members of the Army, Royal Malaysian Navy, Royal Malaysian Air Force, Fire and Rescue Department, and school cadet corps.

Also present was Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali. A former member of Harimau Malaya or Force 136, Wan Nik Wan Ngah, 76, who fought the Japanese during the Japanese Occupation was among those present at the function.

Wan Nik, who received three medals for his meritorious service to the nation from the British Government, urged the young of today to appreciate peace and harmony achieved through the efforts of warriors who had sacrificed their lives.

The new generation must remember the difficulties of those who fought to free the country from colonialism and the obstacles they had to cross, he said.

In Johor Baru, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the people were not doing enough to honour and recognise the sacrifices of servicemen who fought valiantly to defend the country during war and the Communist insurgency.

Launching the State-level Warriors' Day celebrations at Bukit Timbalan today, Abdul Ghani called on the public to donate generously towards the welfare of war veterans and their families.

He said although the State Government allocated RM100,000 annually for the welfare of retired soldiers and their families, the funding was inadequate to support them.

"Last year, only RM40,000 was collected from all eight districts in the State. We must do more to show our gratitude towards these brave men who defended our country," he said.

In Port Dickson, the celebration in the State was graced by the Yang di-Pertuan Besar Negri Sembilan Tuanku Ja'far at the Basic Army Training Centre (Pusasda) in a simple ceremony.

The Ruler, who led a gathering of top military brass, State VIPs including Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad, inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 120 soldiers of the 24th Royal Malay Regiment, led by Major Zamberi Abdullah, on arrival at the centre.

Tuanku Ja'afar later placed a garland at the war memorial at the camp followed by the four Undangs, Mohamad Isa, State Secretary Datuk Mohd Ali Abdul Samad and top army brass.

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