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Consider feedback on National Service

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THE announcement by the Cabinet Committee on National Service to introduce compulsory National Service for all Malaysians irrespective of race and gender who reach 18 in 2004 has evoked response from all quarters, including our youth.

This is a positive development considering that it is a programme of great significance for preparing our multiracial youth to meet the challenges of nation-building, social cohesion and national unity.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad should be complimented for setting the pace in getting Cabinet approval.

The Cabinet Committee on National Service headed by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is performing its task seriously, judging from its various proposals regarding the National Service programme which basically aims to mould patriotic Malaysians, foster a sense of belonging and contribute to character-building, civic-consciousness, leadership and national unity.

The proposed modified National Service is obviously not intended to follow the Singaporean and South Korean models.

It is not intended to draft soldiers for war, but is aimed at fostering patriotism, unity, national integration and character-building among Malaysians besides helping to instil discipline and address the many social ills besetting our nation's youth.

Now that the Government has decided to embark on the programme which involves some 400,000 youths, what is most crucial is to ensure the success of the programme.

It must not end up as a mockery for the nation.

With this in mind it is advisable for the Government not to implement the programme in haste, but to consider all practical measures needed and whatever constructive feedback and input will ensure its success.

Various public comments have been published in the media in response to the Cabinet Committee's proposals on National Service, some of which are worthy of the Government's consideration.

To ensure our National Service programme is well-planned, strategised and implemented, the proposal to implement it only in 2004 makes sense as time is needed to make preparations.

I have been following closely the various comments in the media and there is one opinion expressed by Wan Ahmad Shihab Ismail from Kuala Lumpur (NST, Nov 13) which is relevant and rational.

He commented that patriotism cannot be mass-produced by a short-term programme like National Service all by itself. He suggested that, apart from National Service, there must be a concerted effort by all parties to ensure our children and youth learn the virtues of patriotism from a very early age, adding that by the time our youth enrolls in National Service it becomes more of a finishing touch in bringing about the right attitude in them.

It is true that teaching patriotism must begin from an early age. The Ministry of Education should make suitable modifications to the current syllabus and teach students to be patriotic from the primary school level in tandem with the training provided during National Service.

To achieve discipline, our model of National Service, though not military-oriented, should incorporate some elements of basic military training.

A stint in National Service will not only inculcate the spirit of togetherness and good character-moulding, but also foster and strengthen the spirit of patriotism.