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Looking into proposal for modified national service

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - The possibility of a "modified" national service has drawn cautious approval from various segments of society.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said while national service would help instil patriotism and integration among youths, the Government would have to look into the most suitable form.

"It is still early to comment as I would have to see what would be discussed in the Cabinet."

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the Government would study a proposal to introduce a "modified" national service for the country's youths in an effort to instil patriotism and selfdiscipline.

Najib said in countries with national service, trainees were provided with military training as part of the country's defence policy.

"However, in the context of Malaysia, we have to come up with a form of national service or something equivalent to national service which is suitable to the needs and interest of our country.

He added that if all Malaysians were required to perform national service without exemption, the Government would have to set aside a huge allocation.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said a law would have to be enacted if the Government wanted to introduce compulsory national service.

Rais said the law would have to state clearly the discipline and scope for enforcement of national service and related aspects such as recruitment.

Rais said several countries, including Singapore and Switzerland, had made national service compulsory for youths.

Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said there had to be a study to see if the national service would be viable in terms of cost, implementation and returns to society.

"As of now, the nearest to a national service is the Program Khidmat Sosial Negara.

Annually, the programme attracts 1,000 members. There are plans to increase this figure to 20,000.

Last year, the Cabinet had said the programme could be the best way to inculcate patriotism and integration.

"We will monitor this and see if the response is good," he said.

Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam, who is also 4B Youth Movement president, welcomed the proposal, saying the system should be implemented before youths entered the workforce.

"The national service could be implemented after they finished their schooling or university studies," he said.

People's Progressive Party Youth chief T. Murugia said the plan would be one way of recruiting Chinese and Indian youths for the armed forces.

Kinta Consumer Association vice-president N. Prebakkaran Nair said the proposal was a step in the right direction.

Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation vice-chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said he was pleased that the Government was receptive to a "modified" national service.

"I believe a modified form of national service can help instil self-discipline, moral values and character building," he said.

