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National service will promote patriotism

Lee Lam Thye

I AM elated by the Cabinet's decision to introduce a compulsory Malaysian-form of national service to inculcate patriotism and discipline in youths.

It was reported that a special Cabinet committee headed by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had been formed to study the details of the scheme.

I am pleased to note the quick response by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to get the Cabinet to act on the matter.

Arising from a question I raised at the recent National Patriotism Congress and supported by Chang See Ten (BN-Gelang Patah), Dr Mahathir was agreeable to the idea of having some form of national service to instil a greater sense of patriotism and discipline in youths.

When I brought up the subject of national service, what I had in mind was not to make all youths don military uniforms and take up military training for two years, as is done in Singapore.

What I had hoped to see was a modified form of national service for youths, particularly those who had just completed their SPM.

While waiting for their results for about three months, these youths should be occupied with some form of national service, which will better equip them to take on the challenges of personal and national development.

This is all the more relevant in view of the many social ills afflicting youths, including moral decline and the emergence of racial barriers among youths, including schoolgoing children.

By exposing them to discipline and good character-building, it will lay the foundation for them to be responsible and more disciplined.

What is equally important is to bring about camaraderie and togetherness to strengthen volunteerism and provide a better understanding of another's culture and way of life.

As Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has said, no quarters should have any qualms or apprehension about the proposed service.

To ensure its success, it has to be made compulsory, otherwise it would not serve any purpose. And all Malaysians must be involved.

Now that the Government has agreed in principle to introduce a Malaysian-form of national service, what remains to be done is to work out the appropriate approach, the form of legislation it should take, the time involved and the type of training.

The Government should provide time for various groups, such as non-governmental organisations, to give feedback.

Youth bodies, including students who are affected, should also be heard.

Views from all strata of society should be considered before implementing it.

Although the national service we propose is not completely militaristic, some elements of military training could be considered for the programme.

I share the view expressed by J.D. Lovrenciar of Semenyih that politicians, the authorities and the public should not waste time in debating what can go wrong with national service.

On the contrary, what should be done is a full-scale publicity blitz about the benefits that can be accrued from national service.

Hesitating to introduce national service will further erode values which are needed for building patriotism and love for the nation.