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May date for N-Service proposal

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The proposal for national service will be brought up to the Cabinet for approval in May, after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad returns from his vacation.

Cabinet Committee on National Service chairman Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today the committee would deliberate on the proposal till the end of April before submitting it for approval.

Najib, who is Defence Minister, said the legislation governing national service would be drafted following that and was expected to be finalised in June.

He declined to reveal details regarding the proposal.

"I do not want to make piecemeal announcements. This programme will definitely go ahead next year," Najib told reporters at the ministry after chairing the committee's fourth meeting.

On whether the committee was still seeking the views of other groups on the national service programme, Najib said it had consulted many quarters including non-governmental organisations and political parties.

"Until we finalise the proposal (at the end of April), anyone can give their views, including individuals," he said.

On what was discussed at today's meeting, Najib said the committee touched on the principles of the programme, target group, training facilities and laws.

He said the programme would not be similar to that practised in some countries such as Singapore, where the emphasis was on military training.

"This is a process with emphasis on nation-building. There will be military-style elements, but there are other factors involved as well," Najib said.

Some 450,000 school-leavers are expected to sign up for national service each year while waiting for their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examination results.

On Feb 18, Najib announced that the committee had identified 12 public and three private universities as possible training centres for the national service programme.

In the case of one of the public universities, Universiti Teknologi Mara, the committee proposes to use 13 of its campuses. Other training centres identified are 27 teachers training colleges.

The three private colleges are Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Multimedia University and Universiti Teknologi Petronas. Najib did not name the other 11 public universities.

He had said the committee would also recommend that the existing National Security Act 1952 be amended. Previously, it was proposed that the Act be replaced with a new one.