

'Suspend NS training' pending probe on death
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Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has been urged to suspend the National Service (NS) programme following the death of another trainee.

In a statement today, DAP parliamentarian Fong Po Kuan said the programme should be suspended pending an investigation into the death of E Prema yesterday.

Prema, one of 402 trainees comprising former students of Sekolah Menengah Cheras, Batu 11, died after being found unconscious in a public toilet at the Jeram Linang recreational area in Kelantan.

She was found in a seating position with her head bent downwards by a NS instructor. The trainees from the camp were undergoing training at the recreational area since Tuesday.

Prema, 18, was said to be complaining of stomach ache shortly after dinner. She was confirmed dead by a doctor who treated her at Hospital Tengku Anis at 3.30am.

Since the programme commenced in 2004, a total of 19 trainees and trainers have died. This is the second death this year.

Saving lives

"Something must have gone very wrong in the running of the programme because since its implementation, it has taken away 19 lives," said Fong.

"Furthermore, is Najib going to react the same, which is to call for a full report, tender an apology or visit the family of the deceased?" she asked.

The opposition politician also said that no amount of compensation would bring back the family's happiness.

She said if Najib, who is directly in charge of NS, is concerned about saving lives, he should suspend the programme and not be worried about 'saving face'.

Fong also promised to raise this issue when the Parliamentary select committee on unity and national service meets on March 7-9.

Meanwhile, Najib extended his condolences to Prema's family yesterday.

NS Training Department director-general Abdul Hadi Awang Kechil said Najib, who was currently abroad, had conveyed the message through him over the phone.

According to Bernama, he told reporters this after handing over RM3,000 to Prema's father R Elenchelian at Hospital Tengku Anis.

"The money is contributed by the insurance company which is under the auspices of the NS training programme to help the family of the deceased," he said.

Limbongan state assemblyperson Dr Zainuddin Awang Hamat donated RM500 to her family.

No chronic illness

Meanwhile, Elenchelien told reporters that before joining the NS training, Prema, the eldest of four siblings, did not suffer from any chronic disease.

Abdul Hadi said despite the incident, the Hutan Wira Jaya training, which was compulsory for each NS trainee, would not be cancelled, but would instead be closely monitored for their safety.

The training would allow them to be resilient and strong both physically and spiritually, he told reporters at the hospital morgue.

"Each time the training is held, we have to conduct three stages of monitoring to ensure the participants' safety," he said.

At the same time, Abdul Hadi said the NS programme would review the safety level of each area to be used for training in future.

On the incident, Abdul Hadi said the cause of Prema's death would only be known following an investigation by a forensic team from Kuala Lumpur.

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