

Government happy with NS programme
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There are no immediate plans to revamp or 'shake up' the National Service (NS) training programme as the government is satisfied with its current implementation.

However, Deputy Defence Minister Zainal Abidin Din said that the government will strive to bring improvement to the training programme, which is into its fifth year now.

Zainal was replying to Fong Po Kuan (DAP-Batu Gajah) who asked the Defence Ministry to state whether the NS training programme will get a total shake-up and the reasons for all the problems and complaints as raised by various quarters, including trainees.

The training programme falls under the purview of the defence ministry.

Zainal (BN-Bagan Serai) said that government has received positive feedbacks about the programme from parents, and teacher or lecturers, and trainees themselves.

"Parents whose children had undergone the programme are able to see the positive changes in their children especially in how they treat their elders," said Zainal.

"The teachers and lecturers of the trainees are also able to see changes in their commitment and ability in generating ideas and producing good quality of work," he added.

Trainees have also provided positive feedbacks with 90 percent of them agreeing that National Service programme has given them valuable knowledge and experience, he said.

Thus, he said, the government will continue with the current implementation while taking steps to improve the programme.

For starters, the ministry has ordered the NS to strictly follow the rules and regulations as set by the ministry in screening the trainees.

More male trainees

The ministry has also selected special consultants to audit and certify the equipments that are currently used in the physical modules of the programme, even if the equipments have already been certified as safe by previously appointed consultants.

Apart from that, Zainal also indicated that government has decided to increase the intake of male trainees to make a ratio of 60 percent male trainees and 40 percent female trainees in NS camps.

"This move is to encourage more teenage boys to join NS because we've identified that they are more prone to be involved in negative activities," said Zainal.

He added that the ministry has instructed the NS department to ensure the commandants in each camps maintain highest level of professionalism to avoid problems involving trainers and trainees.

Zainal also assured that the military personnel chosen as camp commandants are experienced and have good service records.

"We are organising open day for parents to tour the camp and look for themselves the facilities that we provide.

"We are collaborating with National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and Health Ministry to ensure safety and cleanliness in the camps," he added.

'We don't let them to die'

Not satisfied with Zainal's lengthy explanation, Fong asked him who would be responsible for the deaths of trainees during the training and why the government was hesitating to suspend the NS programme.

Zainal answered that the deaths were not due to the loopholes in the NS training or the carelessness of trainers and the management of the camps.

As such, he said, the programme will not be suspended.

"We have done all we could, we have a form that requires parents and guardians to state their children's illness if they have any, but many leave this column blank.

"If we know that a trainee has a specific illness like asthma or low blood pressure, we will observe the trainee closely and will not let the trainee engage in strenuous physical activity," he added.

"It is not our plan to let a trainee die during the program."

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