

**National service revival 'irrelevant' at time of Covid-19 pandemic, says**

**Patriot**

**Malaysiakini**

**29 November 2020**

Persatuan Patriot Kebangsaan (Patriot) president Mohamed Arshad Raji said the government's announcement to revive the National Service Training Programme (PLKN) has come at a most irrelevant time due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"While its objectives on paper might be good, serious consideration must be given to affordability, timing, and the possibility of better and cheaper alternatives.

"Whilst Patriot agrees that PLKN is a good programme, its revival at this time when the country is facing economic and financial woes made worse by the ravaging Covid-19 pandemic is not necessary," said Arshad in a statement today.

He pointed out that there was much criticism towards the training programme, which saw more than 20 trainees losing their lives.

Among the criticisms include that the main objectives to instil patriotism, foster understanding, harmony, unity, and create a caring Malaysian society had failed, said Arshad.

"Although studies might show the PLKN was successful in achieving a score of about 80 percent in instilling patriotism, societal behaviour among our populace for both youths and adults does not show," he said.

On Tuesday, Defence Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob told Parliament that the government plans to revive the programme that was terminated by the Pakatan Harapan administration in 2018.

"The National Service was abolished in 2018, but based on the positive impact it had in the development of patriotism in youths who participated in this programme, the ministry will recommend to the cabinet to implement this project again.

"We will prepare a cabinet memorandum paper (on this issue) to be submitted to the cabinet," Ismail Sabri had said.

The National Service programme started in 2004 at the time when Najib Abdul Razak was the Defence Minister and was dissolved in 2018 by the PH

government.

It was reported that RM8.43 billion of taxpayers' money was spent throughout the 14-year period. This amount includes 43 percent that went towards paying for the rental of training camps. A total of 885,956 youths had participated in the training.

On Wednesday, former youth and sports minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman objected to the revival of the programme, saying that the funding could be better used.

The Muar MP said the previous Pakatan Harapan-led administration had terminated the programme because its cost of RM700 million per year was excessive, and its directly negotiated contracts benefited the Umno leadership.

"There was also the accusation that the PLKN was to enrich cronies, and with nearly half of the total cost towards paying for the rental of training camps. PLKN cannot and should not proceed until these criticisms are addressed," said Arshad.

The Patriot president did back the objectives and design of the training programme, saying they were well crafted and relevant to our multi-racial and multi-religious society.

"However, we believe that the training should begin at primary school level and continue moving up to the tertiary level. The Japanese and Korean educational models in nurturing patriotism and other good values beginning at an early age are examples that we can emulate.

"Western models may not suit us because their societies are too liberal, and it may run counter to our conservative Asian values," he said.

Arshad also proposed an alternative to PKLN where the Education Ministry could focus on developing extracurricular activities that may produce similar results as PLKN, and at a much-reduced cost.

"Activities such as scouting (Brownies, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides), outdoors motivational camps, military and police school cadets, and school choirs, are good examples.

"Red Crescent and St John's Ambulance are good examples too," he added.

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