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Education group urges caution in NS programme revival

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Parent Action Group for Education (Page) has cautioned that the revival of the National Service (NS) programme may not achieve its intended outcome as it only involves a small number of students. - NSTP file pic

KUALA LUMPUR: Parent Action Group for Education (Page) has cautioned that the revival of the National Service (NS) programme may not achieve its intended outcome as it only involves a small number of students.

Page chairman Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim said the high expenses involved made the programme not likely to be sustainable.

Instead, she said, it would be easier if unity is honed from primary school level, as most school-leaving youth were only interested in getting good jobs to enjoy a better quality of life than their parents.

"A cheaper alternative to unite students would be to give the Dual Language Programme (DLP) a development budget.

"Parents will make a beeline for DLP schools and students will unite naturally. DLP schools are a cheaper way to learn the English language, the language of technology, and will give youth the edge in securing better jobs with the ability to grasp state-of-the-art science, technology and innovation (STI).

"With STI we can build our own defence systems and even export our (defence products)," she said.

Earlier today, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan announced that the NS Training Programme would be making a comeback soon, pending approval from the National Security Council

He said the training session would only be held for 45 days and can be organised at the existing 13 army camps and one police camp.

In the new NS, he said, there would be three phases: Phase 1 at school level with the involvement of uniform units under co-curricular activities, followed by a 45-day camp under Phase 2, and then Phase 3 where the trainees would be welcomed by the agencies.

Under Phase 2, 90 per cent of focus will be on military-style identity building and another 10 per cent on nation-building, with the budget for the programme being set at RM100 million.

Azimah also cautioned the viability of Phase 1 at school level to meet the desired standards to prepare students for Phase 2 which is 45 days of training.

"Not every student is built for gruelling army training. The army is merciless. We must remember and never forget the deaths of youth who participated in the previous NS.

"We also caution the purpose and intended outcome of army training. Is it discipline? Is it defence? Or is it to protect ourselves from each other?"

However, she commended the government for being able to cut down the cost significantly.

Meanwhile, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Faculty of Education Associate Professor Hasnah Toran said the finances that would be used for the NS programme should be channeled instead to other more pressing sectors such as schools to improve their facilities.

"Our schools need a lot of funds to improve. The school infrastructure for example. Please have a look at our Special Education Programmes in schools. We need to highlight how cramped the classes are and some need to improve in terms of disability accessibility.

"(Many) years ago, we didn't have the NS programme but we were all patriotic. What is it that parents and schools are not doing enough in ensuring that our youths are patriotic?

"The question to ask is, how effective was the previous NS. Did they do an outcome study? I don't think the rakyat will be favourable to the idea as the issue now with most rakyat is economic survival," she said.