

NURTURING PATRIOTISM AND UNITY

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Mej-Jen Ya'cob: The purpose of PLKN is to train them to face future challenges with confidence and shape them into useful citizens who can contribute to the country and safeguard the nation.

IN AN era where screens often dictate connections and global narratives intertwine with local identities, Malaysia aims to rekindle a sense of national pride and unity.

The return of the National Service Training Programme (PLKN) marks a strategic move to imbue the next generation with the core values essential for Malaysia's progress and resilience.

Mejar-Jeneral Datuk Ya'cob Samiran, the National Service Training Department (JLKN) director general, shared that the decision to reinstate the program comes at a time when traditiona

Notions of community and shared national identity face unprecedented challenges from a digitally saturated world.

He said while technology bridges distances, it can inadvertently foster insular echo chambers, making the cultivation of genuine togetherness and unwavering patriotism a pressing national imperative. "Today, all over the world, we are seeing a generational change where many people are glued to their gadgets. The influence of technology has changed the way people live and created a generation that has 'unbothered' attitudes," he said. "That's why bringing back PLKN is so important, so we can nurture a generation of leaders that is more disciplined and responsible and has a sense of patriotism and nationalism."

The government's renewed commitment to PLKN is rooted in the belief that these values, often intangible and difficult to quantify, are the bedrock of a harmonious and progressive society.

The reinstated programme, called PLKN 3.0, kicked off earlier this year on Jan 12 after a seven-year suspension. A total of 116 volunteer trainees, aged 17 to 25, participated in Series 1/2025. Series 2/2025 took place from May 11 to June 24, with a total of 444 trainees participating, comprising selected individuals and volunteers. The third series will be held from Sept 7 till Oct 21. **Revamped modules** Mej Jen Ya'cob explained that PLKN 3.0's structure was developed based on public feedback from several studies by local universities and the Defence Ministry's think-tank, the Malaysian Institute of Defence and Security (Midas).

"The new training modules comprise 30% nation-building and 70% basic military training," he said. "The nation-building modules focus on three core principles: patriotism, volunteerism and unity. Conversely, the military-based training emphasises instilling core values like discipline, punctuality, organisation and independence.

"This new structure encompasses a four-phased approach, ensuring continuous engagement with national service principles from school up to adulthood."

Phase 1, known as pre-PLKN, is an introductory phase for Form 4 students, serving as a preparatory programme integrated into the school curriculum to familiarise them with PLKN 3.0.

Phase 2 involves the nation-building and basic military training. Those who complete this phase will be officially recognised as members of the National Service Force (AKN).

In phase 3, AKN members will proceed to specialised training, organised by various government agencies.

This phase will equip members with skills and knowledge to perform volunteer duties, contributing to national needs and community service.

Finally, in Phase 4, AKN members will act as volunteers to assist government agencies and ministries, to demonstrate their commitment and readiness to serve the nation in times of need.

Changing misconceptions Addressing past concerns regarding trainee well-being, Mej Jen Ya'cob highlighted enhanced safety measures, including comprehensive CCTV surveillance.

"We have over 50 cameras in each camp to monitor the trainees around the clock," he said. "Trainees are also allowed to bring their handphones with them into camp and can video call their parents or loved ones during their free time. This way, parents can see what the conditions are like in camp, getting rid of any anxiety they may have."

He added that male and female trainees are also separated to prevent any social issues arising. Currently, two main camps are being utilised. Male trainees are placed at the 505 Territorial Army Camp in Pekan, Pahang, while females are based at the 515 Territorial Army Camp in Kuala Lumpur. Beyond training, PLKN 3.0 also aims to be more flexible, providing pathways for trainees to pursue their education and careers, both during and post-training.

Recognising the diverse aspirations and academic commitments of youth, the flexible module system allows participants – particularly those pursuing higher education, vocational training or careers in national safety – to integrate national service seamlessly into their schedules without disrupting their studies.

This flexibility is critical in ensuring broad participation and minimising potential conflicts with educational pathways, addressing a key concern from previous iterations. Mej Jen Ya'cob shared that numerous trainees from Series 2/2025 were allowed to leave the camp to attend potential job or study placement interviews.

"After completing the second phase, trainees are allowed to choose whether to carry on with their training, further their studies or jump into their careers, and we will help to facilitate wherever we can," he said. "This way, their time in the training camps will not be wasted, and they won't have to 'start from scratch'.

"We are not trying to hold them back. The purpose of PLKN is to train them to face future challenges with confidence and shape them into useful citizens who can contribute to the country and safeguard the nation."

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