

'Keep rank-and-file better occupied'

By TAN KAH PENG

LONDON: The Army Command has been directed to step up more activities to keep the rank-and-file better occupied, both professionally and academically, said Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"We want to open up more avenues to help them acquire academic qualifications such as in IT," he told Malaysian journalists on Monday after presenting Kol Kamaruddin Matan, the

Defence Attache, with the stripes of Brigadier-Jeneral.

Najib, who was responding to the latest bank robbery by two soldiers, who held up a bank in Malacca last Thursday, said the ministry took a serious view of such incidents as they tarnished the good name of the armed forces.

He said after having "excelled" in the fight against the communists and during overseas operations under the United Nations flag, the army faced new challenges

in peacetime.

Besides equipping the rank-and-file with new skills, the army has been directed to make the training programme "more meaningful".

On his talks with British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, Najib said their discussions centred on future collaboration in the area of procurement and joint ventures as Malaysia required "strategic partners" in building up its defence industry.

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We have the technical manpower but lack the experience in our efforts to develop a credible indigenous defence industry," he said, adding that bilateral defence ties with Britain were "very sound".

Next week, Najib would be accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on an official visit to Russia where he would seek long-term Kremlin support for the RMAF, which has MiG29 fighters in its squadron.