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Armed Forces sending medical team to Pakistan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Malaysian Armed Forces will be sending a 30-member medical team to assist Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The team would be headed by surgeon Lt Kol Dr Jaseemudin Abu Bakar and will be accompanied by a lightly armed 36-member platoon.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who announced this in a Press conference at his residence today, said the team was tentatively scheduled to leave this Saturday.

He said the idea was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday.

"When I visited the Prime Minister at his (open house) residence yesterday, he expressed his wish that the Armed Forces send a medical team to assist the refugees in Pakistan," he said.

Najib said he then discussed the matter with the Armed Forces chief. A plan was drawn up and the proposal was submitted to Dr Mahathir yesterday.

"The Prime Minister agreed to the proposal ... He viewed seriously the plight of the refugees and asked for the plan to be implemented as soon as possible," he said.

Najib said Dr Mahathir would contact Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf personally to obtain permission as the team members were from the Armed Forces.

The team will include an anaesthetist, medical officers, paramedics and support staff.

The team and platoon members are scheduled to depart in two Royal Malaysian Air Force Hercules C-130 planes.

Najib said the team would be fully equipped and be able to handle about 200 outpatients.

They will also be able to carry out two major and five minor surgeries daily.

He said the team would have an operational capability of two months, and if their stay was required further, replacements of personnel would be planned.

Najib said the team would have the capability to set-up an operating theatre, a ward, basic laboratory and x-ray facilities, a medical store and attend to medical problems and diseases.

Asked whether Malaysia would join a multinational security force in Afghanistan, Najib reiterated that Malaysia preferred a peacekeepers role under the United Nations.

He said more meetings would be held with the parties concerned and the final decision on the matter would be made by the Cabinet.

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