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Peacekeeping role preferred

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysia will study the implications of joining the multinational security force in Afghanistan as it does not want to be involved in "fire-fighting" or military action.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia preferred to be peace-keepers under the United Nations.

"Yesterday, the Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Salim Hashim and the defence attache Kol Kamaruddin Mattan in London attended a meeting with British officials to discuss the details of the operation.

"They discussed the issue of how many countries would be sending troops, the implications of sending the troops from Malaysia, and what they are supposed to do and the cost."

He told the New Straits Times that Salim and Kamaruddin were scheduled to submit a detailed report on the meeting to him soon.

"As soon as I get the report, I will study the matter in depth before presenting it to the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Cabinet for discussion and decision," he added.

Najib said although he was informed that Malaysia was one of the countries selected to be part of the multinational security force in Afghanistan, he had not made a decision as "we want to know the implications."

According to agency reports, senior military officials from 16 countries, including Malaysia, who were willing to contribute to a multinational security force in Afghanistan, had gathered in London yesterday to thrash out details of an imminent deployment.

The countries that participated were the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Turkey, Australia, Canada, Jordan, New Zealand and the United States.

The round-table talks, at the crisis management bunker at the Ministry of Defence, were to assess what each side could offer in terms of troop numbers and hardware.

Also on the agenda was the issue of the kind of UN mandate they want to operate under.

As to who would lead the multinational security force, Najib said he had learnt that it would be UK-led and that the European Union had decided to participate.

"Malaysia wants to contribute a meaningful role to the peace process in the multinational security force which is sanctioned by the UN security council," he added.

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