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## Soldiers urged to buy houses

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Soldiers should take advantage of the Government's new economic package to buy houses.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today that the new package announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday was a golden opportunity for rank and file soldiers to own their own homes at a cheap rate.

"We have always encouraged our soldiers to purchase at least one house before they retire," he said.

On the whole, he said, the new package was a positive step and would go well toward strengthening the economy.

Najib added, however, that for the plan to work, all quarters involved must co-operate.

He said banks and Government agencies should ensure that the funds allotted should be distributed as quickly as possible following the set criteria.

As for the public, Najib said they should spend wisely to encourage the positive growth of the economy.

The Minister was speaking after jointly chairing the 43rd Malaysia-Thai General Border Committee (GBC) meeting together with Thai Defence Minister Gen Thamarak Isarangura at the Renaissance Hotel in Jalan Ampang.

Najib said there needed to be greater sharing of information between Malaysian and Thai agencies for the sake of peace across the common border as well as in the region.

"There needs to be greater co-operation between the two sides. The GBC talked about joint patrols, standard operating procedures between the two sides, the continuation of joint exercises.

"They also talked about having more entry points along the common border," he said.

Najib said Malaysia was also concerned that militant groups were using southern Thailand as a sanctuary.

"We cannot allow any of these groups to take sanctuary on either side of the border. The Thai Defence Minister has stated that Thailand is equally committed to solving this problem," he added.

On the Indonesian Government's military campaign against the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and its repercussions, Najib said his Ministry was keeping an eye on the situation.

"This is entirely an internal and domestic problem for Indonesia. So far there has not been any spillover effect, in terms of refugees, but we are monitoring the situation," he said.

Earlier, Najib told the GBC that in the wake of the United States-led invasion of Iraq, the world had fallen into a period of uncertainty where terrorism was concerned.

This, coupled with the fight against the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, should strengthen the GBC's resolve to "expeditiously and firmly deal with any form of security threat, be it from internal or external sources".

Meanwhile, Thamarak said investigations into two armed attacks in southern Thailand in the past month were carried out by bandits and not terrorists.

"These people are still in southern Thailand and we are getting arrest warrants for them."

Thai authorities had earlier claimed that the armed groups which carried out the attacks had crossed the border from Malaysia.

Malaysia and Thailand take turns in hosting the annual GBC meeting.

Among the Malaysian members of the GBC who were present at the meeting were Defence Ministry secretary general Tan Sri Hashim Meon, Armed Forces chief Mohd Zahidi Zainuddin, Deputy Inspector-General of Police Datuk Seri Mohd Bakri Omar, Armed Forces chief of staff Lt Jen Datuk Adenan Mohamad Zain and Military Intelligence director general Lt Jen Datuk Paduka Wan Abu Bakar Omar.