

Gov't drafting biological weapons bill, says PM
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The government has drafted a biological weapons bill that will be a part of Malaysia's legislative framework in ensuring the effective implementation of biological weapons convention, Najib Abdul Razak said.

The prime minister said that the government was confident that the resulting legal framework would facilitate a secure and safe regime in handling hazardous biological materials.

At the same time, it would ensure that the requirements did not short change and demotivate life sciences researchers, advocates and business entities in the country, he said in his speech at the opening of the three-day International Congress on Biosecurity, Biosafety and Biodefence 2011 in Kuala Lumpur today.

The text of his speech was read out by Defence Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Najib also said the government was also seeking input and feedback on how it could accelerate biotechnology development while ensuring that biosafety and biosecurity concerns were addressed and taken into account.

He said that besides detection of disease outbreak as well as up-to-date laboratory analysis, emergency response and communication systems, there was also a need to put in place international collaboration to effectively combat bio threats.

He admitted that the country's bio defence science and response capabilities needed improvements, saying there was a "striking insufficiency in vaccines and therapeutics".

Najib also called on countries to identify appropriate methods, plans and procedures in establishing and executing defensive measures against either natural occurrence or attacks using biological agents.

"Bio defence responsiveness is a national and international security matter as bio threat could take place at any time," he noted, adding that although no state had used a biological weapon in battle since the end of World War II, a number of subnational groups had attempted to acquire and use such weapons in attacks against civilians.

Ministry to work with stride

Meanwhile, Ahmad Zahid told reporters that the Defence Ministry would spearhead the drafting of the biological weapons bill in collaboration with the Science and Technology Research Institute for Defence (Stride).

Stride would gather information from various agencies, including the Health Ministry, he said.

The proposed legislation would be used to prevent abuse of such weapons by any group, he said, adding that the ministry might be able to table the bill in the Dewan Rakyat by middle of next year.

- Bernama