

Najib: Set up Asean haze fund

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has reiterated its call to its Asean partners to pool their resources in a haze fund to fight forest fires.

"We cannot go on pointing fingers. Rather, let's find a long lasting solution to ensure that such phenomenon does not recur or is lessened," said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"By having a fund, those

countries affected by the haze will be able to take measures to nip the problem in the bud," he added.

Najib, who is also Defence Minister, was speaking to reporters after receiving Hari Raya goodies worth about RM1mil for the armed forces from private and government companies at the ministry here yesterday.

He said while Indonesia was

committed to solving the haze problem originating from there, it was helpless on its own as operations to put out the fires were costly and it lacked the necessary resources.

On another matter, Najib said a reconnaissance team would be sent to southern Lebanon by Sunday to look for a suitable place to set up the Malaysian command centre.

He said heavy equipment

would be sent there on commercial ships.

"When the area has been established and secured, the first batch of soldiers, numbering 360, would leave to start their peacekeeping work," he added.

In **Penang**, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Azmi Khalid said Malaysia would bring up its fund proposal at a meeting in

Pekan Baru, Indonesia, today among countries affected by the haze.

"A fund and a control centre to monitor and solve the haze problem need to be set up collectively by affected countries," he told reporters during a tour of the BIOECODS pilot project at the Universiti Sains Malaysia Engineering campus in Nibong Tebal yesterday.

"It is not fair if we just depend

on Indonesia to solve the problem.

"They have had their share of natural disasters, such as the tsunami and they have limited financial resources.

"We want Indonesia to have stronger political commitment.

"It's for the better if we work together and set up the fund. The haze not only harms the tourist industry but also causes damage to agriculture."