

Najib: We won't interfere

No invite from Thailand to help out

BY FARIDAH BEGUM

PEKAN: Malaysia will not interfere in the internal affairs of Thailand as efforts are under way to start peace talks in its troubled southern provinces.

"The Government cannot interfere in this matter. We have not been invited by the Thai government to help in the peace process," said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, commenting on a report in a Bangkok English daily.

The Nation had reported that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had arranged peace talks in Langkawi between the conflicting parties to resolve problems in Thailand's volatile south.

The report said the former prime minister had engineered

at least two meetings involving Thai officials, generals and leaders of Muslim groups but no breakthrough had been made.

A senior Thai security official had commented that Dr Mahathir was not in a position to mediate the peace talks as he was no longer a government representative.

Najib, who is Defence Minister, said Dr Mahathir arranged the meetings in his capacity as the leader of the Perdana Leadership Foundation, a non-governmental organisation.

"As for the Government, we cannot interfere in the affairs of a neighbour unless expressly invited to help out.

"In this case (the efforts to initiate a dialogue), it is up to Thailand to determine its stand on the matter," he told reporters after presenting alms

provided by Bank Rakyat to 1,000 single mothers and the needy at the Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Convention Hall here yesterday.

Najib said he was confident the new Thai administration would be more receptive to resolving the problems in southern Thailand and that a peace plan would soon be signed to end the violence and sufferings of the Muslim community there.

"We believe the new government will strive to ensure that peace descends upon southern Thailand again," he said.

"As we know, under the old government, it was difficult for talks to be held between the conflicting parties.

"Hopefully, peace and harmony can be attained in southern Thailand under the new leadership," he added.