

Najib: Have nerve centre for relief efforts

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AN East Asian co-ordination centre made up of civilian and military personnel that could deploy humanitarian relief swiftly in the event of a major disaster is urgently needed, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said.

"If we're able to set up anti-terrorist centres all over, then I'm sure we could create a regional humanitarian relief co-ordinating centre.

"If we can put our minds together and create this centre, then this could be a positive manifestation of building a security environment," he said.

Speaking at the Japan Institute of International Affairs forum here yesterday, Najib said East Asian countries could be organised and co-ordinated for a much more effective response than the aid provided during the 2004 tsunami and the recent Yogyakarta calamities.

He said the military was proven to be the only viable organisation to handle natural disasters as its

personnel could be sent within 24 hours to any affected area.

Najib floated the idea about a year ago but countries in the region seemed to give the proposal lukewarm response.

On Tuesday, an earthquake in west Sumatra, whose tremors were felt across the Straits of Malacca, claimed at least 70 lives. Yesterday, it was reported that the United Nations offered help, with an aid team on standby while victims claimed that they had yet to receive any help.

The deputy prime minister reiterated his proposed idea as part of

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his views on a comprehensive security environment that would include a framework of workable plans of action.

He said there must be a change of mindset based on a more altruistic perspective rather than power politics alone.

"There is perhaps a need to have a more robust dialogue on Northeast Asia and for discussions to move forward on issues of security co-operation," he said.

Najib also proposed that the region increase economic, financial, trade and investment dealings, saying that economic inter-dependency had a way of moderating tensions, smoothening the rough edges of distrust and making states see beyond self-interest.

"We need to enhance military diplomacy which is fast becoming a recognised form of diplomatic activity as it complements and even provides direction towards resolving political hiccups.

"Contrary to a skewed public perception, the military is probably the most mindful and cautious of any institution about going to war," he added.

He said Japan's military history, particularly its role during the Second World War, was never an obstacle for Malaysia in working together towards world peace.

Najib said Malaysia did not have any historical baggage with Japan and accepted the country as a responsible member of the international community.

"History is the past. We welcome the role of Japan, including its military forces, in peacekeeping operations as well as humanitarian relief efforts."

He added that Japan had no territorial ambitions and Malaysia considered the country "a friend and a true partner."

Najib is on the last leg of his official visit to Japan. He leaves for South Korea later today.