

## **Students returning from Syria tomorrow**

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**By PUNITHA KUMAR**

SAFETY FIRST: Malaysian armed forces to help in evacuation exercise

THE first 50 Malaysians to be evacuated from Syria are expected to arrive home on a special flight tomorrow, said a Wisma Putra spokesman.

She told national news agency, Bernama, that the Malaysian embassy in Damascus had gathered all Malaysian citizens there to safeguard their security.

Contacted by the New Straits Times yesterday, National Security Council (NSC) secretary Datuk Mohamed Thajudeen Abd Wahab said Malaysian authorities were working closely with the Syrian government in acquiring all the students' exit visas.

KUALA LUMPUR: "We hope to at least acquire half of the students' exit visas by today and will book the next available flight to Malaysia."

Thajudeen said once all the students had been flown back to Malaysia, the embassy in Damascus would then work on temporarily withdrawing its ambassador and four embassy officials there, who will be returning to Malaysia.

Armed Forces commander General Tan Sri Zulkifeli Mohd Zin said they were prepared to assist in the evacuation exercise.

"The armed forces have received orders from the NSC, but we cannot reveal the details yet," he told Bernama.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said that the government had decided to immediately bring home all 138 Malaysian students and 10 expatriates in Syria registered with the embassy there.

He said the evacuation exercise was being coordinated by the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the NSC and the Malaysian embassy in Damascus. For more information, the Foreign Affairs Ministry has set up an operations room and the public can call 03-88874570 to get details on the evacuation.

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