

Citizenship option for border folk

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BANGKOK: People with dual Thai-Malaysian citizenship can opt to become Malaysian citizens, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

He said this offer was in line with an agreement between Malaysia and Thailand to resolve the issue of dual citizenship, a perennial problem involving people living in the border area.

"When we have finished comparing the personal identification databases of the people staying along the border, we would like those with dual citizenship to de-

cide which nationality they preferred," he said.

"We will accept them since they are also Malaysian citizens except that they have two citizenships.

"We are still not very sure of the total number of people involved, but I would think that those who have their properties, homes and families mostly on the Thai side, would prefer to remain Thai nationals."

Najib, who attended a General Border Committee meeting which ended yesterday, was asked if the Government would accept Thais

with Malaysian and Thai citizenships if they applied to become Malaysian citizens.

Yesterday, he announced that a joint committee comprising representatives of the National Registration Department and its Thai counterpart would check the identities of people living along the border to verify their citizenship.

Asked on the status of the 130 Thai nationals who entered Malaysia illegally last August, Najib said the Government had allowed the Thai authorities to meet with them at the detention camp

in Terengganu in an effort to get them to return voluntarily.

Asked if it was true that the Thais were not willing to return to Thailand, he said: "Maybe they will once the situation in southern Thailand has returned to normal."

Earlier, at a joint press conference with Thai Defence Minister General Thammarak Isarangura, Najib said both countries were committed to enhancing their co-operation and intensify efforts to restore peace in troubled southern Thai provinces.