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# Planes, ships to rescue

## Thousands of Malaysians to be sent to Jeddah first

Adrian David, Roy Goh and Darshini Balan

**KOTA KINABALU:** Seven Malaysian aircraft, a naval auxiliary escort ship and possibly three merchant vessels will be deployed to evacuate some 20,000 Malaysians, including 11,319 students, from troubled Egypt by Saturday.

The Royal Malaysian Navy multipurpose command and support ship *KD Sri Indera Sakti*, now in Malaysian waters, has also been ordered to prepare for deployment in Egypt.

This follows a directive from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to use all available resources for the task.

However, the plans depend on the report from a five-member advance observation and coordination team, led by Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Senator A. Kohilan Pillay, now in Cairo to assess the situation and prepare for the evacuation.

The Royal Malaysian Air Force is

despatching three Hercules C-130 transport aircraft to Cairo, the first of which left at 3pm yesterday.

The aircraft is expected to arrive at 3pm Egyptian time (9pm in Malaysia).

Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia have also answered the prime minister's call and have mobilised an aircraft each for evacuation purposes.

AirAsia flew an Airbus A320 to the United Arab Emirates

□TURN TO PAGE 4, COL 1



Royal Malaysian Air Force aircrew lining up at the RMAF base in Subang yesterday as they prepare to fly three C-130 Hercules aircraft to Cairo, Egypt, to evacuate Malaysians stranded there. The aircraft will airlift the evacuees to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to catch connecting commercial flights to Kuala Lumpur. — NST picture by Effendy Rashid

# 2,000 to be evacuated daily by RMAF

□ FROM PAGE 1

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yesterday and will commence evacuation procedures today, while MAS is scheduled to fly a 359-seat Boeing 747-400 to Cairo today.

The mission is being coordinated by the foreign affairs and defence ministries as well as the National Security Council (NSC).

The evacuation will also include Indonesians stuck in Egypt as the governments of both countries have agreed to cooperate in the matter.

Foreign Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman said he had struck an understanding with his Indonesian counterpart, Marty Natalegawa, to provide extra seats to citizens of either country on their aircraft during the evacuation process.

He said 3,000 Malaysians were expected to be flown out of Cairo to Jeddah daily.

Anifah also advised parents that the government was doing its best to

protect them. "Based on feedback, we understand that the tension will ease soon as President Hosni Mubarak has agreed not to seek re-election in September this year."

In Kuala Lumpur, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the advance team in Cairo was working closely with Malaysian embassy officials and the Egyptian Foreign Ministry to facilitate evacuation of Malaysians from Cairo and other cities such as Alexandria to Saudi Arabia.

"Once our citizens have reached the Saudi capital of Riyadh and Mec-

ca, our consulate-general and Tabung Haji officials will arrange for visas and lodging before arranging flights home to Kuala Lumpur."

Zahid said an 80-member team, comprising medical personnel, NSC members and staff from the foreign affairs and defence ministries, would go with the Hercules aircraft.

Each aircraft can take up to 300 people and will fly between Cairo and Jeddah round-the-clock until the

evacuation process was completed.

Armed Forces chief General Tan Sri Azizan Ariffin said RMAF chief Gen Tan Sri Rodzali Daud would direct the three C-130s under Operation Pyramid, planning to airlift 2,000 evacuees daily.

"The naval auxiliary ship, MV *Bunga Mas 5*, currently patrolling in the

Gulf of Aden, will be redirected to join the evacuation team by picking up the evacuees from Port Adabiya (two hours' drive from Cairo) on Friday to send them to Port Jeddah.

"We are also attempting to get the Malaysian International Shipping Corporation (MISC), whose cargo vessels ply the Gulf route, to sail in convoy with *Bunga Mas 5*. Each MISC vessel can carry 500 passengers."

Meanwhile, NSC secretary Datuk Thajuddeen Abdul Wahab, who is also in Cairo, said 150 students left Egypt on commercial flights on Tuesday night. He said the Malaysian embassy provided refreshments to citizens stranded at Cairo International Airport, known as the second most busiest in Africa after OR Tambo International Airport in South Africa.