

## **PM says tee off with Obama 'golf diplomacy'**

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today defended his trip to Hawaii where he played a round of golf with US President Barack Obama, saying that this was a recognition of Malaysia's role as chair of Asean next year.

It is called 'golf diplomacy', he said, and this was also done by his father and former prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein.

"Actually, during President Obama's visit to Malaysia, he had said that if coincidentally I were in Hawaii together with him (Obama), he would like to play golf with me (Najib).

"And playing golf is not something strange or extraordinary... because during the times of Tun Abdul Razak (Malaysia's second prime minister), Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman (second deputy prime minister), playing golf with world leaders could be described as golf diplomacy," he said, according to Bernama.

Despite taking his holiday overseas since Dec 20, Najib said he checked on developments in Malaysia constantly and he decided to return when the flood worsened.

"Every day when I was there (in Hawaii), I received the latest report on the flood situation... as it became more serious, I decided to return to the country as soon as possible and went directly to Kota Bharu.

"I have not even returned home yet. And (I) made the immediate visit to demonstrate that the government is very committed to continue to assist the flood victims," he added.

The prime minister had been heavily criticised for golfing overseas as a crisis grew at home. He flew into Kota Bharu at 1.40pm today.

Najib also defended the government's decision not declare an emergency in the flood-hit regions, saying that this is so that flood victims can still file insurance claims for their losses.

"Nevertheless, the federal government had acted as though there is an emergency by mobilising all assets to aid flood victims," he said on Twitter today.

Najib is responding to calls for a state of emergency to be declared, especially from DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang and publicity chief Tony Pua.

RM500 mil flood aid

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that Najib announced RM500 million in aid for states that

were affected by the floods.

This would comprise of aid for victims whose homes and vehicles were damaged by flood waters, but does not include money to be allocated for repairs on infrastructure, educational institutions, government buildings, mosques, suraus, and others.

"The aid will be distributed through the MKN (National Security Council) based on the criteria to be specified...

"The JKR (Public Works Department) will coordinate repair works (on public infrastructure) that need to be done as soon as the floods have subsided," he was quoted as saying.

Eight states including Kelantan, Terengganu, Johor, Negri Sembilan and Perak have been hit by floods so far, displacing 132,684 persons as of this morning.

To aid flood victims, Najib said the payment of BR1M cash handouts scheduled for the end of January next year will be brought forward to mid-January.

He also urged financial institutions and agencies managing loan funds to reschedule the repayment period of the borrowers, Bernama reported.

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