

Najib: I will take on 'The Punisher' to defend Sabah
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said he has no qualms defending the sovereignty of Sabah, if he came face to face with Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, popularly dubbed 'The Punisher' after the gun-toting criminal-killing comicbook vigilante.

"If I meet Duterte, I would defend Sabah's sovereignty," he said at the joint opening of four Sabah Umno divisions in Kudat today, reported *The Star Online*.

Duterte, the former mayor of Davao City, is infamous for his hard-line anti crime policy, having declared war on criminals and drug traffickers, soon after coming to power.

He was nicknamed 'The Punisher' for this, and specifically for allegedly bankrolling vigilantes, namely the Davao Death Squad, who targets drug offenders in extrajudicial killings.

Manila has continued to press its claim on Sabah basing it on the authority of the now defunct Sulu Sultanate, which used to rule the territory which historically includes northern Borneo state.

Duterte has been reported by Philippines media in May, expressing his desire to press Manila's claim on Sabah.

And while the reports stated that Najib did not mention Manila's claim on Sabah directly, he was reported to have said the sovereignty of the state in Malaysia could not be questioned, and would be defended.

The report also quoted Najib telling the audience at the Umno function, that Sabah's sovereignty and security will always be a top priority, to ensure the state develops economically and physically,

The prime minister said the government had spent large sums of money for the development of the state's economy and infrastructure, and this along with Umno's strong presence there, had brought political and economic stability to the state.

Naib was there to open the AGMs for the Tuaran, Kota Belud, Kota Marudu and Kudat divisions.

In 2013, one of the many heirs to the Sulu sultanate, a private citizen living in the Philippines, bankrolled over 200 militants in an armed incursion into Sabah's Lahad Datu district to reclaim what they argued were the sultanate's ancestral lands. This short-lived 'occupation' led to a stand-off with Malaysia's military forces.

This eventually leading to the death, incarceration and expulsion of the Sulu-linked fighters. Malaysia then instituted the Eastern Sabah Security Command, to administer the Eastern Sabah Security Zone, to head off any future incursions.

However government critics say this is for show and allege it can't even address ongoing issue of cross border kidnappings, let alone stave-off any serious incursions.

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