

PM: Dialogue key to South China Sea issue

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PARLIAMENT Malaysia's position is that differences and conflicts should be tackled through dialogues and consultations including the South China Sea dispute, said Najib Abdul Razak.

The prime minister said this was because the issue involved two major aspects including the need to ensure peace, security and stability as well as the freedom of sailing or flying as well as duplicating claims involving several countries namely Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and China.

"Malaysia's stand on the South China Sea is clear and consistent. All nations must ensure peace and stability. Any action that could jeopardise peace and stability, causing fear and doubts, as well as provocative in nature must be avoided," he told the Dewan Rakyat today.

He was replying a question from Hasan Arifin (BN-Rompin) who wanted to know Malaysia's stand on the Chinese population on the Spratly Islands in the issue on the tussle in the South China Sea and whether there was an agreement with the United States and Australia on the matter.

Najib said the issue on the overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea must be resolved peacefully, with all the claims and settlements made based on international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (UNCLOS 1982).

In handling the issue, Najib said the government always emphasised on national interest as the main basis for all action taken.

No deal with USA, Australia

Thus, he pointed out that there was no agreement made with any nation including the United States and Australia on the issue.

"As such, patrols, supervision and monitoring of enforcement are always carried out to ensure that national security in the South China Sea is always preserved.

"In addition, diplomatic efforts at the bilateral and regional levels and especially within the Asean framework must be implemented and intensified," he said.

With regard to the issue on inhabiting and reclamation and construction activities carried out by China, including the construction of an airfield at the Fiery Cross Reef, the prime minister said the issue did not involve Malaysian maritime areas.

Najib said differences of opinion with China on the South China Sea issue should not hinder economic and business ties as well as other matters including defence.

This was because China was Malaysia's biggest trading partner as well as a very important source of investment and tourism for the country, he said.

Overdependence?

Responding to a supplementary question from Hasan whether Malaysia was too dependent on China, which could be misinterpreted by other major powers, Najib said Malaysia maintained good relations with all countries.

"The fact is that China's economy is the largest in the world. This reality cannot be denied and refuted by any country. Thus, if we need export markets for our commodities, oil palm and so on, if we need investments from any country, if we need tourists and so on, the biggest source must surely be from China.

"Thus it's not a matter of being over-dependent, but the reality is that China is the largest economy in the world," he said.

Replying to a supplementary question from Nurul Izzah Anwar (PKR-Lembah Pantai) on future measures by the government if it faced the possibility of facing any incursion, Najib gave the assurance that it would not compromise on the issue of national sovereignty.

"Although we have strong ties in the field of the economy, we still hold to the principle of being firm in terms of Malaysia's national sovereignty.

"The only difference is that we maintain a non-confrontational attitude. But in terms of principles, we are very firm. I give the assurance that we will not compromise on Malaysia's sovereignty," he added.

- *Bernama*