

Manila gives Malaysia permission to pursue kidnappers into its waters

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The Philippines government has granted permission for Malaysian vessels in hot pursuit of kidnappers to enter Philippine waters.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said the approval was granted by Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte during a bilateral meeting held in conjunction with the Philippines president's two-day official visit to Malaysia yesterday.

Najib said if Malaysian vessels were in hot pursuit of kidnappers who cross into the Philippine waters, Malaysian vessels can continue their pursuit across the border.

"Duterte granted the permission to ensure kidnappers do not get away. Duterte only requested for the Malaysian enforcement unit to inform the Philippines army when on pursuit in the Philippine waters," said Najib after meeting Duterte and his delegation.

Najib said it was the latest approval given by Duterte and Indonesian president Jokowi before this.

The Prime Minister said the Defence Ministers of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia would meet in Vientiane, Laos on Nov 22 to discuss the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and the legal aspects involved during the hot pursuit.

Najib said the latest development was a sign of the commitment from the Philippines government to curb kidnapping incidents involving Malaysians in Sabah.

"Malaysia and the Philippines agreed that the issue (kidnapping) was very serious and affected the peace and harmony of the people in Sabah," he said.

This year alone, 10 Malaysians have been kidnapped for ransom and from the total five are still held captive by the kidnappers for ransom.

Asked when the "hot pursuit" could start, Najib said it would be enforced as soon as possible after the defence ministers had worked out the SOP.

- *Bernama*

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