



**Najib:  
Independence  
for southern  
Thailand not  
viable  
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Independence demanded by separatist groups in Southern Thailand is not viable, but Thailand should offer a certain degree of autonomy to people in the predominantly Muslim region, said Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

In separate interviews with Thailand's English dailies, the *Nation* and *Bangkok Post*, conducted during the 15th Asean Summit in Hua Hin, Najib said demands for independence or secession was totally out of the question.

He said any demand on the Thai government must be within the Thai constitution.

"A lasting resolution is a question of trust - "trust and, eventually, winning the hearts and minds of the people in the South," said Najib, who is due to visit the restive region in December with his Thai counterpart Abhisit Vejjajiva after their Annual Consultation in Bangkok.

Najib said some form of autonomy could be a solution to end the violence, adding that the Thai government could offer self-determination for people in areas that are important to them such as the selection of local leaders, employment, religion and education.

"It is Thailand's decision to consider how far such autonomy in the deep south should go, and Malaysia, as a neighbour, would not intervene in the matter. You may not want to call it autonomy but there could at least be some form of involvement," he said.

More than 3,600 people have died since armed groups resumed their campaign in January 2004, to seek independence for the Muslim-majority provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, bordering Malaysia.

### **Dual citizenship issue**

Najib said during the planned visit in December, he would tell them that Kuala Lumpur would not condone extremists who violate Thai laws.

"Look, you know you just have to be good Thai citizens. Don't expect Malaysia to back any violation of Thai law. You are on your own and if they (law breakers) come over, we will send them back," he told the *Nation*.

He said one of the major issues affecting the bilateral ties between the two countries and that needed to be resolved, is the dual citizenship where between 20,000 and 25,000 people are believed to be holding nationalities of both Thailand and Malaysia.

The premier told *Bangkok Post* that resolution of the violence and extremism can occur if the Thai government engages with "the right people" and acknowledges that it can, and should address, legitimate grievances.

"If you can develop their trust and they feel that the government is genuinely concerned about their interests and their plight, then I think you will see the situation improving. Once the majority of the people are with you, then you can eliminate the extremists," he added.

- *Bernama*

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