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Soldiers' welfare is PM's priority

'NATIONAL DEFENCE FRONTLINERS':
Continuous assistance reflects govt's gratitude, says Najib *NST - 27/3/2016*

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DATUK Seri Najib Razak had two stints as defence minister, covering 14 years, and yesterday, it was apparent that the welfare of soldiers remains close to his heart.

As defence minister, Najib frequently introduced programmes for the good of the armed forces, increased their allowances and benefits, and repeatedly modernised all three services — army, navy and air force.

As prime minister, Najib has continued the policy of empowering the armed forces and families of soldiers, launching a school bus programme for children of soldiers yesterday.

When talking about programmes and policies to boost the livelihood of armed forces personnel and their families, it was clear to those present that the matter was a personal one to Najib.

"I was defence minister for 14 years, and the welfare of military personnel and their families has always been my priority and the government's concern.

"This 'tradition' has been inherited by the current defence minister,

Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, because the government wants to ensure continuity in programmes aimed at improving the livelihood of members of the armed forces and their families.

"Even after I assumed the role of prime minister, the welfare of armed forces personnel continues to remain a priority. In fact, I immediately agreed when a proposal to adopt time-based promotion was mooted to me.

"Apart from the facilities enjoyed by military personnel and their families, those enlisted in the armed forces with a low rank can now retire with the ranks of corporal and sergeant," he said during a gathering with Sarawak armed forces personnel at Camp Oya here.

Present were Hishammuddin and state Land Development Minister Tan Sri Dr James Masing, who represented Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem, Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Mohd Johari Baharum, Defence Ministry secretary-general Datuk Seri Abdul Rahim Mohamad Radzi and Army chief General Tan Sri Raja Mohamed Affandi Raja Mohamed Noor.

Najib gave an assurance to the 1,600 military personnel stationed in the state, who attended the gathering, as well as all members of the



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, accompanied by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, arriving at Camp Oya in Sibu yesterday. Pic by Muhd Zaaba Zakaria

armed forces that the government's commitment to looking after their welfare was not political rhetoric.

He said the continuous assistance was a manifestation of the government's gratitude and recognition of the pivotal role of the nation's defenders.

"The government previously introduced a slew of programmes to improve the livelihood of military personnel, and this commitment will continue to be reflected in future policies and initiatives.

"You are national defence frontliners, and we, the government, recognise this. In whatever circumstance, members of the armed forces will always willingly come forward

to defend the country.

"However, how will armed forces personnel focus on executing their responsibilities if the welfare of their spouses and children is not ensured? This is why it is imperative for the government to continue looking after their welfare," he said to applause and cheers.

He said besides keeping Malaysia secure, soldiers also ensured political stability in the country through continuity in the leadership.

Najib said the nation would suffer the same fate as countries affected by the Arab Spring movement if political stability was not intact.

"If we focus only on security without paying attention to political as-

pects, the nation will be in chaos, similar to (the situation in) countries affected by the Arab Spring, and then, there will be nothing we can do.

"With political stability, a clear vision and an effective plan, the country will continue to prosper and develop."

He said many Sarawak folk, especially the Iban community, who are known for their traditional warrior spirit, were keen to join the Border Regiment that manned the Sarawak-Kalimantan border.

Najib later announced a RM500,000 allocation to upgrade SK Batu 15, which houses 410 pupils, including 50 preschoolers, at the camp.