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'Instability will give IS a foothold'

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Malaysia committed to ensuring peace in southern Philippines, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: A de-stabilised southern Philippines will open the door for the Islamic State (IS) to establish a foothold in the region, warned Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said Malaysia had invested a lot of effort, money and time to find a comprehensive long-term peace in conflict-wracked southern Philippines.

"Let me make this clear that we wish and we want the next president of the Philippines to continue the good work of President (Benigno) Aquino," he said during the opening of the Putrajaya Forum 2016, which was held in conjunction with the 15th Defence Services Asia (DSA) Exhibition and Conference 2016.

He described the recent kidnappings of Malaysian citizens by Filipino gunmen off the coast of Sabah as "despicable", adding that he had visited the families of the four kidnapped victims in Kuching on Sunday.

"We owe it to them (the victims' families) to prevent such incidences from happening," he said, referring to the kidnapping of Malaysian sailors from a tugboat at Pulau Ligitan near Semporna on April 1.

Following the incident, Philippines ambassador to Malaysia Jose Eduardo E. Malaya was asked by Wisma Putra to help secure the release of the Malaysians.

Najib said the theme of the forum "Regional Cooperation in Addressing Security Challenges" was timely.

He pointed out that while non-traditional threats had been making headlines of late, such as the recent attacks in Paris, Istanbul and Brussels, the possibility of non-conventional threats had not disappeared.

Territorial disputes and issues of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, the potential rise in nuclear escalation in the Korean peninsula and the de-stabilisation in the Middle East were global con-

cerns, he said.

"The age-old scourge of piracy had also not been consigned to history," he added.

Malaysian-registered tankers *MK Orkim Harmony* and the *MT Orkim Victory* were attacked by pirates within weeks of each other in June last year.

"It was only through working together with neighbouring countries that we had successfully located the hijacked vessels, which shows why we must continue to improve our communications, coordination and cooperation in the region," he said.

Najib attributed the peace in the Asean region to the movement's convention of non-interference in the domestic affairs of another member country.

But a line had to be drawn when domestic affairs became a humanitarian issue or tragedy, like the Rohingya refugee crisis, he said.

"That affected all of us and we had to do something," he added.

On the Asean Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), he said the ADMM had further strengthened the capabilities of member countries.

"I personally have special interest in ADMM as I had the honour of chairing the inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2006," he added.

Since then, ADMM had helped promote military cooperation across the region.

Four years later, ADMM Plus was formed to include Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States.

Najib said Asean on its own could not guarantee peace in the region and as such, the support of friends and partners were needed, adding that the ADMM Plus mechanism played a critical role in balancing major power influences.

"These mechanisms will help guide us in the decades to come, long after Asean turns 50 next year," he said.

Najib also called on Asean to step up inter-country and agency cooperation to combat transnational crimes.

Malaysia, he said, had set the example of inter-agency cooperation and collaboration, whereby the armed forces and the police had worked together to defeat communist terrorists.

Today, he said both forces had conducted joint patrols to keep streets and malls safe.

He said Petronas had donated old oil rigs to be used as forward operating bases in the sea for security forces to monitor Malaysia's maritime zone.

"We must embrace the fact that defence and security is no longer the business of governments alone, but all stakeholders who have common interests and goals," he added.

But, above all, he said regional security and stability was a prerequisite for prosperity, safety and growth.

