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'We will defend every inch of Sabah'

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Prime Minister dismisses Duterte's plan to revive Sulu claim on state

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LAHAD DATU: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak has dismissed talks of the new leadership in Manila pursuing Philippines' claim over Sabah, vowing to defend every inch of the state's sovereignty.

Speaking to reporters after a ground-breaking ceremony for a new Helicopter Forward Base at the airport here, Najib said no one could stake a claim on Sabah that had gained its independence through Malaysia with the agreement of the United Nations in 1963.

The findings of the Cobbold Commission, he said, reflected the wishes of the people and, as such, this was accepted by the international community.

"As such, no group can make any claim on Sabah," said Najib, adding that Malaysia would "defend every inch of Sabah's sovereignty".

He said Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman had also stated his stand clearly on Friday that Sabah would remain part of Malaysia and had never recognised any claim by the Philippines on the issue.

Philippines president-elect Rodrigo Duterte was reported as saying that he planned to pursue the country's claim over Sabah.

The Government, said Najib, was committed towards defending Sabah from any threat but urged the people to be the eyes and ears of the security forces against anything that might emerge internally.

There were also concerns there were people inside working with groups from the other side, he said.

"We know that there are those who met with people behind the Tanduao intrusion," he said, referring to the invasion into Kg Tanduao in February 2013 which saw 11 security personnel and 70 Sulu gunmen killed.

"It is important to be patriotic," he said, adding that cooperating with the enemy could jeopardise the security of the nation.

With the formation of the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom), Najib said the Government was taking a three-dimensional strategy – maritime, air and land – to secure the state.

Air power, he said, had been beefed up and would be further strengthened with the setting up of the forward base, adding that 10 helicopters, including six EuroCopters – four of which were equipped with rapid fire close range Gatling machine guns – and four Black Hawks would be stationed there.

On the sea front, Najib said two



Ready for action: Najib, Musa and other officials looking at the Royal Malaysian Navy fleet at the Tun Sharifah Rodziah naval base in Semporna.

fully equipped sea basing commands – Tun Azizan base and Tun Sharifah Radziah base in the east coast – had been operational since 2015.

For the land defence, he said the Felda infantry battalion in Sabah would be upgraded, having been already beefed up with, among others, tanks and mobile infantry

fighting vehicles.

Steps, said Najib, were also being taken to work with both the Philippines and Indonesia to ensure that the Sulu Sea was secure and for threats from kidnapping groups linked to the Abu Sayyaf to be eliminated.

The multi-faceted defence arrangements would ensure that

people could live in peace and security while enjoying the benefits of tourism along the east coast of Sabah, said Najib, who also visited the forward base there.

Later, at the launching of the Sabah's phase of the Pan Borneo Highway in Tawau, he said they would never allow Abu Sayyaf or the Sulu forces to invade.