

Be bridge between govt and people, headmen told

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STRONG PILLAR: Village chiefs must also support transformation programme, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: VILLAGE chiefs must go beyond their traditional roles in improving the community and act as the "bridge" between the government and the people.

In making the call, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday said they must also support the government's policies towards the nation's transformation.

Najib said that "if before, the village chiefs were the loyal supporters of the sultanate, today they must be the tiang seri (main pillar) of the government".

He said village chiefs must also ensure that whatever programmes or benefits from the government to the people must reach the intended beneficiaries.

"We don't want it to be a case of where the government has good intentions but the implementation doesn't reach or only partially reaches the intended group.

"In the old days, village chiefs were like the father of their areas. They knew everyone and their doors were always open 24/7. As a wakil rakyat, I understand that people will always come to see us at any time of the day to share their problems or requests.

"That is why when I became prime minister, I said people must come first."

Najib said this in his speech at the Seminar Memperkasakan Penghulu/Penggawa Semenanjung Malaysia, held at the Putra World Trade Centre.

He said as there was no other party closer to the people than village chiefs, many wakil rakyat were selected from this group in the past and hinted that the musim memilih (polls season) was near.

Najib said village chiefs could go beyond their traditional roles in improving the community by adapting and changing their approaches according to the current situation.

"Village chiefs can also help to ensure that the moral values of the local community remain intact. Drug issues, youth-related issues, even extremism in religion -- these are some of the things in which they can play a role in."

Najib made reference to the incident involving a man who ran amok with a samurai sword in Putrajaya on Monday, adding that "there are many challenges faced by village chiefs today. If this can happen in Putrajaya, it can also happen in your area".

In the incident, the man and a woman, also armed with a sword, were shot by police when they refused to lay down their weapons. The man later died in hospital while the woman was detained.

Najib said by playing a bigger role, village chiefs could further raise their image.

He announced an allocation of RM500,000 for the association to conduct programmes nationwide.

Answering the request by Kesatuan Penghulu dan Penggawa Semenanjung Malaysia chairman Ahmad Fuad Zainal Abidin for the allowances of village chiefs to be revised, Najib said the matter would be brought up at the cabinet meeting tomorrow.

Present was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Jamil Khir Baharom.

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