

Najib: Between Diplomacy And Firm Leadership
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 8 (Bernama) -- When Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak landed with the Nuri helicopter in Felda Sahabat 16, Lahad Datu, Sabah Thursday, he looked serious when received by the two most senior security officers in the country, the Inspector-General of Police and the Armed Forces Chief.

At a media conference later, the Prime Minister warned Sulu intruders still hiding in Sabah that they had no choice but to surrender.

Najib also sent a clear message to the heirs of the Sulu Sultanate in the southern Philippines that 'Sabah belongs to Malaysia perpetually' and not to view lightly the commitment of the government and the people of Sabah in defending the state.

Najib's statement highlighted his firm leadership even though during the initial stage, Kuala Lumpur was seen as being prepared to resolve the intrusion crisis by about 200 terrorists from southern Philippines who landed on the shores of the east coast of Sabah on Feb 12.

The crisis in Lahad Datu may be Najib's biggest test after taking over the national leadership four years ago.

His father, the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was confronted with the May 13 incident in 1969 and the Emergency to eradicate communist terrorists which resulted in Razak forming the People's Voluntary Corps (Rela) and Rukun Tentera to ensure the people's security.

Now it was Najib's turn to take on the challenge like his father.

His past experience as Defence Minister twice from 1990-1995 and from 1999-2008 assisted Najib to better understand the aspects of security and the military.

Under Najib's leadership at that time, Malaysia sent military assistance to help the United Nations in the war in Bosnia in 1993 before following up with peacekeeping missions in several countries.

Najib also came out with the idea of the National Service Training Programme (PLKN) in December 2003 which is still being carried out.

When Najib announced the formation of a Special Security Area involving six districts in Sabah, it brought a sigh of relief among the people of various races in Sabah.

Najib's announcement meant a defence wall would be created in the entire east coast of Sabah, over 1,000 kilometres to prevent any intrusion of country's national border.

The Prime Minister also ordered the mobilisation of five more army and police battalions to be based at strategic locations with Lahad Datu as the command headquarters.

The strategy is seen as curbing security risks similar to Rascom (Rajang Area Security Command) in Sarawak in 1972 to eradicate communist terrorists.

Najib's firmness was actually demanded by the people, more so when the intruders did not heed the government's call for them to withdraw and return to their country of origin.

The authorities were also patient and gave them ample time right to the final deadline for them give up peacefully.

But when members of security forces were shot dead after being tricked by the white flag tactic, followed by more casualties in Semporna, an offensive was launched with aerial attacks using the F18 and Hawk fighter jets on March 5 and the commencement of "Ops Daulat" to flush out the terrorists.

It was also because of that, Najib flatly rejected their offer for a ceasefire.

To date, 52 intruders have been confirmed killed by the security forces.

Najib also did not put aside diplomacy and gave priority to the spirit of neighbourliness when he was in constant contact with President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines in finding the best solution in the standoff.

The Prime Minister also hoped the crisis in Sabah would be resolved well before the general election which will be held soon.

His hopes are that the people especially Sabahans would rally strongly behind him in the hour of need.

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