

Najib risks infamy with alleged Sabah abuses, Philippine writer warns
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 14 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak risks joining a human rights rogues' gallery if Malaysia continues to allegedly maltreat Filipinos in Sabah amid the armed Sulu conflict there, warned a Manila Standard Today (MST) opinion piece today.

Atty. Harry Roque Jr, the columnist from the Philippine newspaper, told Prime Minister Najib to put a stop to such "crimes against humanity", lest the latter joined the ranks of former despots such as Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic as international criminals.

"It's increasingly becoming clear that Malaysian authorities have no regard whatsoever for their duty under international human rights law to protect and promote the right to life of the Filipinos in Sabah, and their right to a judicial determination of guilt before the imposition of the death penalty," Roque wrote on MST's website today.

"But Malaysia better think twice before it proceeds to commit further criminal acts under international law," he added.

The Philippine media has reported allegations of abuse and arbitrary killings during raids by the Malaysian authorities to hunt down Sulu sympathisers, since some 200 armed followers of the Sulu sultanate invaded Lahad Datu, Sabah, last month.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer reported last Tuesday that a Filipino was allegedly gunned down in Sandakan after he was forced by the police to run as fast as he could.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, however, denied the reported violence last Monday.

Bantilan Esmail II, a brother of Sulu "Sultan" Jamalul Kiram III, was quoted by the Philippine Daily Inquirer last Tuesday as saying that the Malaysian authorities have allegedly been abusing Filipinos in Sabah long before the Sulu incursion began.

Roque said that almost 100 Filipinos have been arrested on suspicion of being Sulu sympathisers.

He added that Malaysia's "extreme paranoia" about Filipinos over-populating Sabah has caused "inhumane" mass deportations of Filipinos from Sabah.

There are some 800,000 Filipinos working in Sabah, mostly in oil palm plantations, according to Philippine media. About 28 per cent of Sabah's population are foreigners, or 889,000 out of a 3.2 million-strong population, based on a 2010 census.

Roque pointed out that a Malaysian guard allegedly raped a 13-year-old girl in an immigration facility in Malaysia, while 62,000 Filipinos were deported from Sabah in 2002.

"While there is still a dispute on whether the current stand-off is now governed by international humanitarian law — the 200 individuals sent by the sultanate of Sulu to reclaim Sabah are not state agents — international law still penalises acts which are systematic or widespread attacks against civilians. This is known as crimes against

humanity," he said.

He added that crimes against humanity included widespread and systematic deportation, arrest and inhumane treatment, besides imprisonment, torture, rape and persecution against an identifiable group.

"The list appears tailor-made for the inhumane acts that Malaysian authorities have been committing against our countrymen in Sabah," said Roque.

"Interestingly enough, no less than Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak may incur liability for these crimes if it is proven that he knew or should have known about these crimes being committed and he did nothing to prevent them or to investigate, prosecute and punish the perpetrators of these crimes," he added.

The Philippine media also reported that more than 1,000 Filipinos, many of whom are MyKad holders, have fled Sabah after the Sulu incursion.

The Philippine government has said it will query Malaysia over the alleged abuses. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao's Department of Social Welfare and Development has been tasked to compile information from the Filipino refugees before lodging a complaint in Malaysia.

A total of 66 people were killed in the Sulu incursion as of last Tuesday, including 56 Filipino militants, eight Malaysian policemen and one Malaysian soldier, and a teenage boy of unknown nationality.

Iraqi dictator Saddam was hanged for crimes against humanity in 2006. Former Serbian leader Milosevic died of natural causes in his prison cell in 2006 while being tried for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

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