

PM: Cops negotiating with armed men in Lahad Datu to avoid bloodshed
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PAPAR: Malaysian police are in the midst of negotiating with the group of armed Filipino men holed up in Lahad Datu to get them to leave peacefully to prevent any bloodshed.

"The government is choosing to handle the issue through negotiation and to get the group to leave peacefully to prevent bloodshed," said Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"We have surrounded the area and our police and armed forces have the ability to handle the matter, said Najib who said he had been briefed by the Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Ismail Omar and Sabah Police chief Datuk Hamza Taib on the matter.

Meanwhile, a tight security ring has been thrown around the heavily armed Filipino group at Tandurou at Felda Sahabat in Tungku as negotiators ask them to surrender.

As the Malaysian security comprising of the army, navy, maritime and police give the group no escape route, the group is believed to be holding civilians as human shields.

Conflicting reports emerged about the situation on the ground with some intelligence officials claiming that "an explosive situation" has been brought under control and appear to have been resolved.

However, no official confirmation has come from any of the top security agencies involved in the joint operations against the Filipinos gunmen who landed in the Tambisan area in the east coast of Sabah over the past several days.

Roadblocks round the Tambisan area has kept journalists out the area but sources said emissaries were sent to meet the key leaders last night asking them to give up peacefully.

Although, there no clear indication as to which of the armed groups from the southern Philippines had entered the area, villagers and Felda settlers said that some of them had approached them asking for food and water.

"They were holding guns and we do not know why they were here," said a villager who refused to be identified.

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