

PM: Talks ongoing to get group to leave peacefully
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PAPAR: Negotiations are ongoing to persuade a group of armed militants from the Philippines to leave Malaysia peacefully and to prevent bloodshed, says Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said he was informed that the group, believed to be between 80 and 100 people, could not move because the security forces had formed two separate barriers manned by the police and the armed forces.

The Prime Minister, who was briefed by Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Ismail Omar and Sabah police chief Datuk Hamza Taib on the latest situation, said attempts were being made to persuade the militants to return to the southern Philippines.

"We have surrounded the area and our police and armed forces have the ability to handle the matter.

"The Government choose to deal with it (issue) through negotiations and get the group to leave peacefully to prevent bloodshed.

"Negotiations between our authorities and the group are already taking place.

"We hope it will be successful and the issue will be resolved quickly," he said yesterday.

Malaysian security forces have surrounded the group, who landed in Lahad Datu on Tuesday.

Ismail had said the group had been ordered to lay down their arms and surrender, adding that the intrusion was related to problems in the southern Philippines.

Najib said there was no hostage situation in Lahad Datu and that the Philippine Government had been informed of the matter.

"We are also in the process of establishing the reason for them coming here so it is best if we do not speculate," he said when asked on talks that the group was unhappy over last year's Kuala Lumpur-brokered peace deal between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Manila.

Najib said the authorities were doing their best to protect Malaysian waters from illegal intrusions but due to its vast size, it was impossible for security forces to be everywhere at the same time.

"Nevertheless, we were able to get information (of the armed men encroaching Lahad Datu) fast and act upon it by surrounding the area," he said.

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