

Defence show takes off with PM paying homage to personnel on tour of duty in Sabah
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LANGKAWI: Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak opened the 12th Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (Lima) Exhibition, one of the world's major defence shows, lamenting that he had to do so under the cloud of a terrorist intrusion in Sabah.

"It was the first time troops had been deployed on Malaysian soil since 1989," the Prime Minister said, referring to the year when the outlawed Communist Party of Malaya signed a peace agreement with the Government, thus ending the communist terrorist threat.

Sharing his thoughts with delegates and military personnel from the country and abroad at the opening ceremony yesterday, Najib said what began six weeks ago had become the biggest internal security threat since the end of the communist insurgency.

Najib said as former Defence Minister he had made tough decisions to send Malaysian troops to Bosnia and Somalia and on peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, decisions that involved potential loss of life and deployment of resources.

"But they do not prepare you for a situation like that which emerged in Sabah," he said, adding that what started as a policing matter soon became an operation to protect the country's sovereignty.

He expressed his appreciation to those who were currently serving in Sabah, using their skills and professionalism to bring an end to what he said could have become a diplomatic incident. "I urge the men and women to remain steadfast and vigilant. Our prayers are with you always. There is no price higher than the sacrifices made by our security forces."

On Lima, Najib said military modernisation programmes continued to drive defence spending in Asean.

"Acquisition of ships and aircraft, drones and armoured vehicles will continue to be the focus of procurement within the region and is expected to form the majority of defence procurement spending till 2020."

He said the maritime and aerospace industries were key sectors for the country. "We've also pushed aviation to the centre of our industrial policy (and) through the Malaysian Aerospace Council, we have successfully steered the development of the sector," he said, adding that the industry that registered a RM8.2bil turnover in 1998 was now worth RM30bil, with more than 230 active companies and a workforce of 65,000.

At another press conference, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said new defence assets were needed to boost the country's security following the formation of the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone.

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