

Important bilateral ties with Saudis kept me from Sabah, says Najib
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By Mohd Farhan Darwis

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he had little choice but to keep to his scheduled visit to Saudi Arabia while Sabah dealt with the aftermath of an earthquake over the weekend because Malaysia's bilateral ties with the kingdom were important.

Najib told a crowd during his visit to Kundasang in Sabah today, near where Friday's quake struck, that he had really wanted to go to the state earlier.

"I had intended to come earlier after hearing news about the earthquake. But that day was the birthday of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong and then I had to leave for an official visit to Saudi Arabia as the king and the crown prince were involved.

"Because our bilateral ties are very important, I could not come to Sabah, specifically to Ranau, earlier," he said in a speech at a ceremony today where aid was given to families of guides working on Mount Kinabalu.

The 5.9 magnitude quake struck Sabah at 7.15am on Friday, with the epicentre near Ranau.

It caused rockfalls on Mount Kinabalu and claimed 16 lives at the most recent count, while two more people are still missing.

Saturday was the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong's birthday celebration, and Najib left for Saudi Arabia on the same day.

Najib today said he had postponed a meeting with chief ministers and menteri besar meant for today in order to visit Sabah.

"I felt it was important to come here even though the operations are almost ending to express the federal government's deepest sympathy to the people of Sabah.

"Through thick and thin, the federal government will remain with the people of Sabah," he said.

Najib also said the government will confer awards to the mountain guides who showed outstanding bravery and sacrificed their own safety in rescuing victims trapped on Mount Kinabalu after the earthquake struck.

He said the Sabah government would come up with the list of the mountain guides deserving the awards.

At today's event, Najib also witnessed the handing over a cheque for RM1 million from the Sarawak government to the Sabah government for its earthquake disaster fund.

Sarawak Minister of Resource Planning and Environment Minister II Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan handed over the cheque to Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman. – June 9, 2015.

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