

## **Outsiders and Their Political Allies Should Stay Out - Najib**

**Bernama**

**Sept 9, 2016**

**By Mohd Haikal Mohd Isa**

BANGKOK, Sept 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak gave a stern reminder to 'outsiders' and their political allies in Malaysia not to interfere in the country's democratic process.

In a hard-hitting opinion piece in Thailand's leading English daily, Bangkok Post titled 'Building on Thai-Malaysian links' on Friday, he stressed that the government of Malaysia was elected by the people.

"The people of Thailand recently voted for a new constitution. That is their right, it is not for outsiders to say otherwise.

"Likewise, the government of Malaysia was elected by the people and it is not for outsiders and their political allies in Malaysia to try and subvert democratic process in between elections," he said.

According to the prime minister, both nations were committed to working for improvement of their people's lives.

Despite being criticised by certain foreign governments, Thailand held a referendum on the draft constitution last month, where more than 61 per cent of the voters said 'Yes' to its latest constitution.

Najib and wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor arrived in Bangkok on Thursday night after attending the ASEAN and Related Summits in Vientiane, Laos.

The prime minister will lead a Malaysian delegation of seven ministers as well as senior officials at the sixth Malaysia-Thai Annual Consultation later today.

Thailand's delegation to the consultation will be headed by Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Najib said the days of old powers coercing developing nations into doing what they wanted were over.

"We are proud of our history and culture and we will defend our values against those who try to impose theirs on us - just as we will defend the sovereignty of our nations at all costs," Najib said.

He also cited the increasingly new and unprecedented threats to peace and security faced by governments, including in Malaysia and Thailand.

Both neighbouring countries, he said, were not immune to the threats with Thailand having been rocked by bombings last month while Malaysia suffered its first attack linked to the Daesh terror group in June.

He said the government of the two countries understood not only on the necessity of working together but also on the need for firm government action to address these threats.

"As Malaysian premier, my first and foremost priority is the safety and security of our nation and its people. I will never apologise for that. This means putting national interest first," he said.

Najib pointed out that the balance between liberty and safety had always been delicate and it was clear that this balance had shifted in recent years following the nihilistic threat of extremism.

However, the Malaysian government would always protect the rights of its citizens, including safeguards such as an independent court process, he said.

The prime minister noted that governments across the globe had to put in place new legislation to deal with new threats and could not afford delays in order to save lives.

Despite that, he said, there were still some who would endanger the people by insisting on supposed freedoms which in fact facilitated terrorism and accusing Malaysia and Thailand of using the threat as a pretext to introduce related legislation.

"This is an ill-informed and often politically-motivated view that vastly underestimates both the dangers we face and the many terrorist atrocities that have been foiled because of the work of the brave police and armed forces in Malaysia and Thailand," said Najib.

He said many of these critics hailed from far away places and had little knowledge or understanding of the security environment in Malaysia and Thailand.

"To them, I say that Malaysia and Thailand are sovereign states, where the governments of the day should be allowed to pursue their agenda for the betterment of the people without foreign interference," Najib said.

The governments of Malaysia and Thailand were committed to furthering the existing strong bilateral cooperation, he said, noting that Kuala Lumpur was ready to help Bangkok achieve peace in southern Thailand.

"This is a major responsibility and one that we take very seriously. But we are honoured to be the facilitator of the peace process," he said of Malaysia's role in the informal peace process between Bangkok and southern Thai militant groups.

He said under the Joint Development Strategy for Border Areas, both countries were working to bring capacity building programmes and vocational training to vulnerable groups in southern Thailand, especially single mothers and youths.

Malaysia, he said, would continue to participate in these confidence building measures and hope the resulting stability and prosperity would reduce the likelihood of those on the margins falling prey to extremists.

Najib said the country was grateful to the Thai authorities for their help and assistance over border, maritime and intelligence sharing issues.

Besides security issues, the prime minister said both countries had also agreed on the goal to raise bilateral trade to US\$30 billion by 2018 which would create new jobs and support families in Malaysia and Thailand.

Najib said as co-signatories of the Bangkok Declaration which founded ASEAN, both nations were the driving force behind greater economic integration across the region that would result in huge benefits for citizens of the two countries.

Malaysia, he said, wanted to strengthen ties and partnership with Thailand even further so that both could not only celebrate the long history and friendship but also continue to play a leading role in ASEAN and beyond.

"Stable.Secure.Peaceful.Prosporous. I believe this is the future of our two countries and with our governments united and determined, I'm sure it is the destiny we will build for our people," he said.

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