

**Esszone's Security is a Priority, says Najib**  
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LAHAD DATU, Dec 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today gave an assurance that the government would continue to accord high priority to security in the Eastern Sabah Security Zone (ESSZone).

To this end, the efforts and commitment had borne fruit with the latest being the case in which security forces killed three kidnappers in a shootout on Dec 5, he said.

He attributed the latest success to a tactical change by the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCom).

"We hope this will serve as warning that we are very serious and will use every means to safeguard the people in Sabah, particularly here in the east coast," he told reporters after launching the Pan Borneo Highway, Lahad Datu Bypass here today.

Also present at the function were Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman, Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan and Works Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof.

On Dec 5 around 9pm, Malaysian security forces killed three cross-border criminals and nabbed two others after a shootout off Pulau Gaya, Semporna that lasted about a minute.

The culprits in the incident had kidnapped a local fisherman who was fishing in the area at the time.

Meanwhile, Najib acknowledged the important role played by the local community in helping to keep the state secure.

"As we know, among the roles that the residents could play in this regard, is to provide information to the security forces and secondly, to refrain from giving any support to parties that have bad intentions.

"If these parties fail to get any support from the residents, they would find it hard to move about and would not know the whereabouts of our security forces. That's why the role of the people is so important," he stressed.

The prime minister also noted the progress of the Royal Malaysian Air Force's Forward Operations Base project in Lahad Datu, aimed at reinforcing ESSCom's assets.

He said he was informed by the Defence Ministry that the project was scheduled to be completed in October 2017.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the RM16 million project sited on 0.48 hectares at Lahad Datu Airport was officiated by Najib himself in May 2016.

The facility will comprise a shelter and apron that can accommodate six helicopters.

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