

No one country can fight terrorism alone - PM Najib

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SYDNEY, March 17 (Bernama) -- ASEAN member countries and Australia should step up and intensify cooperation in preventing the spread of terrorist ideologies and to hone even more effective approaches to counter the threats of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Asia-Pacific, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"No one country can fight terrorism alone. The more united we are, the more effective we will be in combating this terrible and inhumane scourge. None of us are safe from it. But together, we will be safer," he said in his keynote address at the closing ceremony of the Counter-Terrorism Conference held at during the International Conference Centre (ICC) Sydney here Saturday.

The Counter-Terrorism Conference is one of the major lead-in events during the two-day ASEAN-Australia Special Summit which began today. The conference highlighted the importance of regional collaboration to address the shared threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

Najib is the only ASEAN leader invited to deliver a speech at the closing ceremony of the conference. The other leader to address the conference is Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Najib said this region was not only at risk of cross-border crimes, but many other issues, including terrorism and irregular movement of people, that are no respecters of borders.

"The more we work together on these issues, the more successful we will be. As examples, I would mention the annual Redback Operation between the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and the Australian Border Force, and the Malacca Straits Patrol initiative, which brings together Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand.

"Similar mechanisms have also been set up in other strategic waterways - such as in the Sulu Sea, where Malaysian, Indonesian, and the Philippines authorities work closely to curb kidnapping and piracy in those vast territorial waters," he said.

Relating Malaysia's experience in counter-terrorism, Najib said Malaysia had a long and consistent record in combating the challenges of terrorism and violent extremism.

"We have passed a number of laws, including the National Security Council Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, because we were determined not to wait until an atrocity was committed, and only act later. If we want to be effective in saving lives, it is essential that we have legislation that prevent acts of terrorism, rather than just deal with the aftermaths," he said.

The prime minister said the legislation had saved numerous lives, both Malaysians and non-Malaysians, and that he was proud to say that not one single terrorist outrage leading to loss of life had been committed on Malaysian soil.

"We are committed to upholding that record, and let me express my deep gratitude to all the Malaysian counter-terrorism forces for their commitment and devotion in keeping us safe, at considerable risk to themselves," he said.

Najib said what was also very important was promoting a culture in which radical ideologies would find it hard to take root and Malaysia had established the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (GMMF) in Kuala Lumpur, as a centre for the consolidation and dissemination of information and materials to underpin this.

"Their work thus far has contributed to Malaysia's global reputation for promoting moderation, deradicalisation, and countering violent extremism," he said.

Najib said the setting up of the King Salman Centre for International Peace in Malaysia also aimed to rectify international misperceptions about Islam, as well as to counter the all too seductive narratives that Daesh and other extremists put out online.

"Daesh online propaganda can reach out to more than 300 million Muslims in our region. I believe that this is our main battle ground ? to win the hearts and minds of our youths especially through social media, so that they are not easily succumbed by the warped and perverse ideology of Daesh, which is the antithesis of true Islamic teachings that protect the sanctity of all human lives, regardless of religion," he said.

He said over the years, Malaysia had taken a number of steps to ensure peace and stability not only of Malaysia, but also the region.

The prime minister said Malaysia and Australia have close bilateral relations, particularly with regard to security and countering terrorism and these close ties were reflected by both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of transnational crime in 2014.

"Under this MoU, there has been a strengthened focus on counter-terrorism, civil maritime security, border management, combating human trafficking, and on information and intelligence exchanges," he said.

During the conference's closing ceremony, the leaders also witnessed the signing of the MoU between ASEAN and the Australian government on International Counter-Terrorism Cooperation.

The MoU was inked by ASEAN Secretary General Datuk Lim Jock Hoi and Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop.

Earlier, Najib and other ASEAN leaders were formally welcomed by Turnbull to the summit.

They also had a New Colombo Plan afternoon tea session at which the ASEAN heads of state and government met Australian students who have pursued higher studies under the plan.

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