

Why didn't Najib listen to Pakatan on Esscom?
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MP SPEAKS Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's administration should learn more constructive suggestions from Pakatan Rakyat's memorandum that was submitted to his government to improve the security situation in Eastern Sabah.

Najib in announcing the restructuring of the Sabah Eastern Security Command (Esscom) said a senior police officer, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Rashid Harun, has been appointed to be Esscom commander and that he would be in charge of intelligence, security and defence.

In announcing the restructuring of Esscom on Tuesday, Najib said it would have two main components - security and defence management, and enforcement and public action.

This, I believe, shows that the prime minister has finally acknowledged the fundamental structural weaknesses that are already pinpointed by the memorandum, "Keselamatan Sabah Timur Tanggungjawab Siapa?" submitted to him on June 11 by Pakatan Rakyat.

The appointment of a senior police officer to head three special divisions of intelligence, security and defence, as well as operations, proves that the Eastern Sabah security is an internal security issue, as stated in our memorandum.

However, the appointment of Abdul Rashid Harun does not solve the weaknesses that lie in the Preservation of Public Security Regulations 2013 and its amendment. Other than the police force, can he command and control the defence, maritime and other enforcement forces?

Select committee on this is needed

That's why a parliamentary select committee should be formed to oversee the whole matter, to make recommendations and to take remedial measures to resolve this problem.

The imbalanced deployment of the Armed Forces and police in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak is another problem.

In the era of counter-insurgency, Peninsular Malaysia was the main battleground, where most of the police and military personnel and assets were deployed. The end of the armed communist threat shall lead to a revision of this strategy.

An analysis shows that the deployment of the police and military forces in the peninsula accounts for 70 percent, while Sabah/Sarawak account for the remaining 30 percent.

This is also why troops from the peninsula are sent to Sabah to reinforce the security strength. For example, the 21st Royal Malay Regiment based in Pengkalan Chepa, Perak, was sent to Sabah last year to reinforce the Ops Daulat.

Recognising the imbalance in the deployment of the police and military forces, it is timely to revisit the national threat perceptions and revise the strategy to adopt a rebalancing approach, that is, to put 50 percent of the police and military forces in the peninsula and 50 percent in Sabah and Sarawak. The parliamentary select committee can pick up the task.

The occurrence of the Lahad Datu tragedy and the series of abduction cases prove the complete failure of the country's intelligence collecting capability.

It is no more a secret that our security forces are infiltrated by foreigners. Information about the operations and deployment have been leaked to potential kidnapping or terrorist groups.

A Special Branch officer, Hassan Ali Basari, was convicted in August last year over the Lahad Datu tragedy, while two Royal Malaysian Navy personnel were arrested recently for their alleged involvement in illegal military activities in southern Philippines.

However, our police Special Branch is still maintaining a cold war mind set. As stated in the national budgets put up every year, monitoring the communist threat is one of the fundamental roles of the Special Branch.

In addition, Special Branch has put a lot of efforts in monitoring opposition leaders and their movements.

If the efforts can be diverted to prevention of crime and counter-terrorism, nationwide security will be improved tremendously.

As suggested in the Pakatan memorandum, the core business of the police Special Branch must be reviewed.

The Special Branch must be rebranded or replaced with a new intelligence unit, like a Criminal Intelligence Bureau, so as to concentrate on collecting criminal and national security related information, rather than embarking on collecting political information.

Despite our prime minister having taken the very first step, it is not too late for the Najib administration to pick up more constructive suggestions from the memorandum to improve the Eastern Sabah security situation.

