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PRIME NEWS

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Two 'red zones' declared

NST-5/3/2013

HEATING UP:
Villagers evacuated under military escort, Philippine foreign secretary to arrive today

LAHAD DATU

HEAVY reinforcements are in place as new flashpoints were identified in the east coast of Sabah where armed Suluk gunmen had been locked in a stand-off with Malaysian security forces.

The *New Straits Times* yesterday learnt that two areas — Tanjung Labian and Tanjung Batu — had been declared as "red zones" following the intrusion of a group of about 100 armed men there.

Sabah police commissioner Datuk Hamza Taib, in confirming this, barred reporters from visiting these two areas.

Scores of villagers fled the villages and were spotted waiting by the roadside for security forces to escort them out. Some claimed that the gunmen had appeared at their doorsteps, raising fears that they would resort to violence or take them hostage.

Military vehicles were spotted everywhere.

Seven infantry battalions have since been deployed to the troubled areas. Five of them were based in Lahad Datu, and one each in Sandakan and Tawau.

To date, eight Malaysian security personnel had been killed after Su-



Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Najib Razak**, his deputy, **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin**, and former prime minister **Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad** with security forces officers at the **RMAF Subang** airbase yesterday accompanying the coffins bearing **Superintendent Ibrahim Lebar** and **Lance Corporal Mohd Azrul Tukiran**. Ibrahim and Azrul were among the six police officers killed in an ambush by gunmen near Semporna.



luk gunmen, who brought with them women and children, landed in Kampong Tanduo on Feb 12. Nineteen Suluk gunmen have been killed in two major engagements with security forces.

Prior to the fatal clashes, the Malaysian government had repeatedly said it was seeking a peaceful solution as it wanted to avoid bloodshed.

However, the death of the eight policemen had forced the govern-

ment to take a tougher stand in the crisis.

The bodies of the dead policemen were yesterday sent back to their hometowns amid a national outpouring of grief.

Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario, however, had appealed for Kuala Lumpur to "exercise tolerance" in dealing with the rest of the armed intruders, said to be members of the Royal Sulu Army.

Del Rosario is expected to arrive

here today to meet his counterpart Datuk Seri Anifah Aman to seek more time to deal with the situation without further bloodshed.

Philippine President Benigno Aquino, meanwhile, was yesterday quoted as saying that those who conspired with the Sulu sultan in pressing a claim on Sabah would be dealt with.

"I am aware that certain personalities conspired and brought us to this situation, one that has no

quick solution. Some of these people have not yet been identified.

"But I assure you that these people will not succeed and that they will be brought to justice."

Page 1 pic: Wife of **Sergeant Baharin Hamit**, **Sumiati Suarah**, and daughter, **Nur Izzati**, grieving over the death of the policeman at their home in Kota Kinabalu. **Baharin was killed in the ambush in Semporna on Saturday.** Report on page 9