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Security forces patrolling a road in Sungai Merah in Felda Sahabat, Kampung Tanduo, yesterday. Pic by Fathil Asri

Immigration Dept to help tighten security in Sabah

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STEPPING UP COOPERATION: It proposes working with other agencies to detect illegals, set up more offices and promote greater use of border passes

SANDAKAN

THE Immigration Department will work with other agencies in securing the 1,400km-long coastline from Kudat to Tawau during the implementation of the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom).

Director-general Datuk Alias Ahmad said they would be cooperating with the police, the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and Customs Department.

They would also work with the Sabah Water Board and Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd.

He said the involvement of the two state utility companies was essential as they could assist in detecting illegal immigrants when they made illegal electricity and water supply connections.

"We estimate about 70 per cent of the illegal immigrants in Sabah are

residing in 10 districts in the special security area and 35 per cent of them are from the Philippines," he revealed yesterday.

He was speaking after a meeting involving civilian agencies for the second time over the establishment of Esscom. The meeting began on Saturday.

As part of ramped-up security measures under the command, the department will set up Customs, Immigration and Quarantine complexes at Lahad Datu and Kudat within a month. These are additional to the existing complexes in Sandakan, Semporna and Tawau.

"Our meeting today has identified 31 illegal entry points in Sandakan alone, through 10 water villages that have both registered and illegal immigrants.

"Some activities such as drug trafficking at the said settlements are also threatening the security of the villagers.

"The bottom line is, outsiders who come here, including *kumpit* (barter trade ships that carry passengers) have to pass through the Immigration complex here."

Alias also said the department's role was like a gatekeeper at the country's borders.

"This is a free country that welcomes bona fide or genuine foreigners with valid documents."

On his meeting with civilian agencies on Saturday, Alias said the department had proposed setting up three new offices and control posts at Esscom areas.

This was to encourage foreign workers to enter the country legally

as well as for them to get permits.

He also said the Malaysian government, together with the Philippines, would implement the use of border passes for citizens of both countries. Alias denied foreign media reports that the department's personnel had torn up or confiscated the working passes and other travel documents of foreigners.

"They might have a misunderstanding on the way our officers cut off the old IMM13 document to replace for new ones."

On the evacuation of illegal Filipino immigrants from Lahad Datu, Alias said he had yet to receive an official statement from relevant authorities.

"Those immigrants, depending on the offences that they have committed, will be detained under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill or Sosma, or under Immigration laws."

