

Newspaper	The Star
Date	5/3/2013

Horrible news to swallow

Word of beheading and torture sends shivers down spine

The Star - 5/3/2013



iSnap me for a video > <http://thestar.com.my/isnap>



Temporary evacuation: Simunul villagers leaving with their belongings.

SEMPORNA: Simunul villagers were horrified to hear news that one of the six dead policemen was beheaded and two others were tortured after an ambush by Sulu gunmen.

"It's terrible, it's cruel," said fisherman Azmi who has been living close to Lorong 5 of Kampung Simunul, where the shooting began on Saturday evening.

"We are Suluks living here for more than 50 years. They are bad people," said one woman, referring to the gunmen.

Other villagers claimed that they had heard of one gunman recording the beheading on his mobile phone and had sent the clip to the police.

Asked if revenge could be behind the barbaric act, Semporna district officer Abdul Mohd Ibnu Abdul Kadir said: "It is their culture."

Yesterday, Semporna town was deserted again from 1.30pm when businesses and shops pulled down the shutters. The only movements were of the police rushing to Kampung Salimbaangun, not far from Kampung Simunul.

One villager claimed that shots were heard at about 3.30pm.

"With that, the remaining villagers left the area," he said.

Throughout the day, security forces held onto defensive positions at strategic locations in the town.

However, no confirmation was available on the phone clip or the alleged torture of two of the six policemen who had gone with a

team of 56 on Saturday to check on information that sympathisers of the Sulu Sultan had stored weapons in one of the stilt houses in the village.

Police sources said as they approached a house at Lorong 5 of the sprawling seaside squatter settlement at about 7pm, shooting broke out with the gunmen.

They said at least 19 policemen were trapped for about 48 hours - till about 6.30pm on Sunday - as a

strike force painstakingly concluded a house-to-house search for snipers, booby traps and bombs strapped to bodies.

At about 9pm, the police announced that aside from the six and an equal number of the intruders killed, the other policemen had all been accounted for.

Three bodies of the gunmen were left lying at the scene - one in a boat, another on the walkway and the



third on a veranda at the village - until about 1pm yesterday when officers from the Islamic affairs department carried them away for burial at an undisclosed location.

The floors of several houses were splattered with blood, close to where the bodies were left, and no uniformed security personnel were seen in the areas yesterday as hundreds of families packed their household goods, including furniture, television sets and fridge, and left.

Several villagers said they recognised one of the dead men as a councillor from Pulau Sitangkai, in southern Philippines, who had often come to stay with relatives while the other two looked like local men.

Police are still hunting for other members of the group, who might have slipped out of Simunul as initial reports indicated that there were about a dozen or more from the group at the village.

The villagers - mostly Suluks who fled the Moro civil war in southern Philippines in the 1970s and settled in Simunul, which included a refugee settlement of the UNHCR - are believed to have maintained close family ties across the border.