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Mopping up after offensive

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Troops scour Kg Tanduo after 12-hour strike against invaders

LAHAD DATU: Malaysian troops were scouring an area of four square kilometres at Kampung Tanduo, more than 12 hours after an offensive against Sulu "terrorists" which began with air strikes at 7am.

Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Omar Ismail said despite receiving heavy fire from the Sulu gunmen, there were no casualties as yet among Malaysian troops comprising VAT 69 commandos, police troops of the General Operations Force and military commandos.

"Our personnel are carrying out mopping up operations and conducting house to house checks.

"We cannot ascertain casualties on the enemy side for now," he said, adding that no civilians were hurt in the operation, code named 'Ops Daulat'.



He said Malaysian security forces were left with no other choice but to launch the offensive to defend the nation's sovereignty and security.

"They were determined not to surrender despite our best efforts, including negotiations and carpeting the area with thousands of leaflets urging them to lay down their arms," Ismail said.

Armed Forces Chief Tan Sri Zulkifeli Mohd Zin said enemy posi-

tions were bombed to ensure the safety of Malaysian security forces.

In another media conference later, Ismail said security forces were painstakingly combing through the combat zone in search for the remaining Sulu gunmen.

"I believe there are still enemies in the area," he said, explaining that the slow progress of the mopping up operations was partly due to the uneven terrain at Kampung Tanduo in addition to a cautious approach.

"I have ordered the commanders on the ground to be cautious. I do not want police or military casualties," he said.

"There has been zero casualties so far because our forces are taking it slow and being careful and methodical," he added.

Asked about the possibility of

some of the gunmen slipping through the security cordon during the offensive, Ismail said: "I hope not."

He also dismissed reports from Manila quoting the self-proclaimed Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III as claiming that members of his "royal army" had found bodies of Malaysian security personnel and that slain members of his "soldiers" had been "abused" by the Malaysian forces.

"It is regrettable that a person can make such a claim without knowing the facts. It's accusations like these that are threatening safety in Sabah," the IGP added.

He said he had not received any news of Malaysian security forces personnel being injured or killed in the offensive.