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> Reports by P.K. KATHARASON, MUGUNTAN VANAR, RUBEN SARIO, PHILIP GOLINGAI, SHAHANA AZ HABIB, ABDUL RAZAK AHMAD, FARIK ZOLKEPLI, SJIRA HABIBU, RAHIMY RAHIM, SHAUN HO, R.S.N. MURALI, MANJIT KAUR, MOHD FARHAAN SHAH, TAN SIN CHOW, RASHITHA A. HAMID, QISHIN TARIQ, JOSEPH SIPALAN, M. KUMAR, YUEN MEIKENG, EDMUND NGO, STEPHANIE LEE, WONG PEK MEI, ZUHRIN AZAM AHMAD, TASHNY SUKUMARAN, EILEEN NG and PATRICK LEE with photos by AZHAR MAHFOF, NORMIMIE DIUN AND M. AZHAR ARIF. Videos by ARON RAJ and IBRAHIM HARRIS

# Successful strike on Tanduou

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## Troops secure half of village by nightfall



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**FELDA SAHABAT (Lahad Datu):** Half an hour of air strikes and heavy artillery fire has routed the Sulu armed group after a 23-day standoff.

Amidst claims of bodies being spotted, Malaysia's elite military and police forces have moved in to fully secure a 4sq km area of the bombed out Tanduou village.

By nightfall, the troops had secured half of the flattened village but the fate of the group's leader Raja Muda Azzimudie Kiram remained unclear.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Ismail Omar said there were "zero casualties" among the Malaysian security forces but believed that there were still "enemies" in the area.

"We hope they have not escaped," he said when asked about media reports from Manila quoting the family of Sultan Jamalul Kiram III as saying that Azzimudie was alive.

The blitz on Azzimudie's group, whose claimed numbers varied between 100 and 200, began at 7am.

Five F/A-18 and three Hawk 208 fighter jets dropped laser-guided bombs after which artillery bombardment took place for 20 minutes.

Immediately after the air and artillery assaults, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones were used to get a visual assessment of the damage in the village of about 15 houses, which was occupied by the armed intruders since Feb 9, two days before



**Air support:** A Nuri helicopter taking off for the military offensive on Kampung Tanduou. — Bernama

the standoff on Feb 12.

Police teams comprising members of the elite VAT 69 corps entered the area to finish off remnants based on the visual assessment, while soldiers from five of the eight army battalions provided back up.

At least 11 ships and 13 boats from the navy and marine police are patrolling the Tanduou coast and strategic locations along Sabah's east coast to prevent members of the Sulu group from fleeing by sea.

Possible retaliatory attacks by intruders from southern Philippines had been a constant concern of the security forces following reports of arrivals of armed men but there were no sightings or confirmations.

Although the police kept re-assuring the public that they were in control of the situation, fear was still felt in many Sabah towns as rumours of supposed sightings of gunmen in military fatigues, shootings and explosions continued.

Many people across the state were seen stocking up on foodstuff as news on the attack on Tanduou village spread. Most schools, offices and retail businesses were closed.

The Philippine security authorities, meanwhile, have claimed that they have prevented at least 70 armed men linked to the so-called Sulu Royal Army, which has a training ground in Basilan, from leaving Tawi Tawi for Sabah's coast, located less than a 30-minute boat ride away.