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Esszone set up to **halt** incursions

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PM: East and west covered to ensure Sabah security

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Eastern Sabah Safety Zone (Esszone) to prevent incursions and ensure the security of the state has been formed.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said that it comprised 10 districts – Kudat, Kota Marudu, Pitas, Beluran, Sandakan, Kinabatangan, Lahad Datu, Kunak, Semporna and Tawau.

The zone, he said, would be administered by the Esszone Committee chaired by Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman, with its headquarters in Lahad Datu. "He (Musa) will be assisted by a chief executive officer and other members to be announced later," he said during the 206th Police Day Celebrations at the Police Training Academy yesterday.

Najib said the formation of the safety zone was in line with the setting up of the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom), aimed at safeguarding eastern Sabah.

"The establishment of Esszone does not constitute a declaration of emergency. It will not prevent free and democratic elections from taking place in the area involved."

It is learnt Esscom would act as an authoritative body for the Esszone. For example, any activity, be it social or security efforts in the safety zone,



Safe hands: Najib shaking hands with a VAT 69 member at Pulapol in Kuala Lumpur. Looking on is VAT 69 commander Datuk Azizan Abdul Aziz (right). — Bernama

would be coordinated through Esscom.

He said that seven new police stations would be included in the Esszone. The areas are Tambisan, Tanjung Labian, Cenderawasih Felda Sahabat in Lahad Datu, Pulau Bum Bum and Pulau Mabul in Semporna as well as Pulau Gaya and Pulau Banggi.

He also explained that the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, used to investigate cases involving terrorists in Sabah, was merely pro-

cedural and that every arrest made under the Act would involve prosecution based on regular laws similar to other criminal cases.

The Prime Minister also announced a resettlement initiative for people living in certain areas in eastern Sabah due to their vulnerability to intrusions by illegal immigrants and stateless persons.

"Part III of the Preservation of Public Security Regulations would enable the Government to resettle any person or group especially ille-

gal immigrants or stateless persons.

"The Government will take into account not just the safety of those resettled but also residents living in the resettlement area," he said, adding that discussions would be held with district, native or village chiefs about their resettlement and source of livelihood.

The resettlement initiative would be extended to the rest of Sabah if there was a need to do so, he added.

"I want to stress that the Government has never doubted the

loyalty of Malaysians of Suluk descent," he said.

At a press conference later, Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said five battalions and a brigade consisting of police and the armed forces would be deployed to Esszone.

"The Police Motorcycle Unit will also be deployed there. The Prime Minister has even agreed to increase the number of motorcycles nationwide due to the success the unit has yielded," he said.