

PM Announces Setting Up Of Eastern Sabah Safety Zone

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today announced the establishment of the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone (ESSZONE) covering 10 districts to provide the legal basis for the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) effective, Monday.

He named the districts as Kudat, Kota Marudu, Pitas, Beluran, Sandakan, Kinabatangan, Lahad Datu, Kunak, Semporna and Tawau.

These 10 districts would be administered by an Eastern Sabah Safety Zone Committee, set up under the Preservation of Public Security Regulations 2013, and chaired by the Sabah chief minister, he said.

The chief minister, as the chairman, would be assisted by a chief executive officer and members of the committee to be announced later, he said at the parade in conjunction with the 206th Police Day at the Police Training Centre (Pulapol) in Jalan Semarak, here.

Najib said ESSZONE would also safeguard the democratic rights and the democratic process pertaining to the people of Sabah as well as strengthen security, public order and prosperity in eastern Sabah.

He also said that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had given his consent for the establishment of the ESSZONE under the Preservation of Public Safety Ordinance 1962.

The ESSCOM was established following the Sulu terrorist intrusion in Lahad Datu on Feb 12. The terrorists killed eight policemen and a soldier. One soldier was killed in a road accident. An ongoing government offensive, dubbed Ops Daulat and launched on March 5, has resulted in the deaths of 65 terrorists.

Najib said the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone Committee would have its headquarters in Lahad Datu and would be directly responsible to a Monitoring Committee chaired by the prime minister himself.

"By setting up the ESSZONE committee, the government is adopting a holistic and not a purely military approach to protect eastern Sabah and find a solution to the intrusion issue.

"I am happy to inform that today three cabins, which will be the basis of the establishment of ESSCOM, have arrived in Lahad Datu and will become functional soon," he said.

Najib also said that the establishment of ESSZONE did not constitute the declaration of an emergency.

Neither would it prevent the holding of elections nor the enforcement of regulations in a free, transparent and democratic manner, he added.

He also said that the ESSZONE did not give additional powers to the police.

"Anyone who feels that his (or her) rights have been undermined can take the government

to court. Life will go on as usual in the designated area but with heightened security to ensure the people's well-being," he said.

The prime minister explained that the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA) applied to conduct investigations and make arrests in all cases involving the terrorists in Sabah right now was merely procedural.

"It was not formulated to provide for the declaration of a security area, like the Internal Security Act 1960. People arrested under SOSMA will be charged under ordinary laws and subjected to trial just like in other criminal cases," he said.

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