

Kidnapping: Esscom powerless to act
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KUALA LUMPUR: The Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom), which has come under attack over the security breach on Wednesday when armed men in masks stormed a resort in Semporna and kidnapped a Chinese national and a Filipina, has no power to “give direct orders” to the 10 districts.

Esscom’s role is simply to “coordinate” inter-agency administrative efforts, said Esscom Corporate Communication head, Newmond Tibin.

Tibin said the 10 districts – Kudat, Kota Marudu, Pitas, Beluran, Sandakan, Kinabatangan, Lahad Datu, Kunak, Semporna and Tawau – are under the Eastern Sabah Safety Zone (Esszone) and had their own respective OCPDs.

All the OCPDs come under the power of Hamza Taib who is the Sabah police chief.

“Our role is to coordinate with various agencies such as the police and the military. We cannot give direct orders to the 10 district on what they have to do.

“Each district in the Esszone has its own OCPD and they receive order from the CP (Chief of Police) and thus the allegation that Esscom is not doing anything is not true.

“It does not reflect us. We did our part which is to coordinate and to cooperate with the authorities,” Tibin said when contacted over reports that Esscom was a failure following the second security breach since its implementation a year ago.

On Wednesday, the two foreign nationals were kidnapped from the Singamata Reef Resort in Semporna which is one of the districts in Esszone.

A 27-year-old Chinese national and a 40-year-old Filipino was abducted by the group who barged into the floating resort at 10.30pm.

Last November, a similar incident occurred in Pom Pom Island where a 57-year-old man was shot dead while his 58-year-old wife was taken away by a group believed to be connected to Abu Sayyaf. The woman Chang An Wei was eventually released a month later.

Esscom’s role misunderstood

Soon after the kidnapping incident in Pom Pom Island, the federal government, mainly the Attorney-General’s (AG) Chambers, was asked to clarify in detail Esscom’s actual jurisdiction, particularly in terms of security in the Esszone.

Nothing came forth.

In January Sabah social activist Patrick Sindu had reportedly suggested that the AG immediately study the possibility of giving appropriate additional powers to Esscom director-general

Mohammad Mentek to strengthen security control in Esszone.

According to Tibin, Esscom's role was misunderstood by many.

Newmond added that an immediate explanation was needed to inform the people of Sabah about the role of Esscom and Esszone as he said that it was unfair to pinpoint all mistakes directly to Esscom.

"I think we need to explain to the people of Sabah about our role. As I mention earlier we have no direct control. The Director-general (Mohammad Mentek) has no power to give command.

"It is not fair to pin all mistakes directly on Esscom," he said referring to the latest incident.

Asked if he had received any new information on Wednesday's kidnapping, Tibin said he had yet to receive updates as the case is still under investigation.

"I cannot reveal anything yet as this is a serious matter. It probably involves the locals but we will issue a statement this evening," he disclosed.

The kidnapping late Wednesday underscored the persistent security threats in Sabah, a popular tourist destination a short boat ride from the southern Philippines, which has long been home to a dangerous mix of Muslim militants and kidnap gangs.

Last October in the Budget 2014, Esscom was allocated RM75mil to boost security along Sabah's east coast.

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