

Putrajaya must tackle foreign monster in Sabah, says Kitingan Malaysian Insider

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Putrajaya has to address the problem of "inland foreigners" in Sabah, which is a potential breeding ground for undesirable elements who pose a security risk to the state, a leading Sabah politician said.

"Unless this monster is destroyed, Sabah will continue to face bigger security problems," STAR Sabah chief Datuk Jeffrey Kitingan told The Malaysian Insider.

But he doubted that Putrajaya had the political will to resolve this problem.

He said the latest shooting incident on Pulau Mabul by unidentified gunmen on Saturday night proved how critical it was that "this monster be destroyed before it destroys us".

Kitingan, who is Bingkor assemblyman, said the security lapses only pointed to Putrajaya's failure to address the real causes despite restructuring the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom).

"Criminals, intruders and kidnappers are laughing at us," he said.

Kitingan said this was because the monster was the creation of Umno leaders through project IC, "Melayunisation of foreigners and Islamisation of Sabah" for political expediency to control the state.

He said the huge number of foreigners, called "inland foreigners" with various documents, were trapped in Sabah with their human, socio-cultural as well as educational needs that have been neglected for years except during elections.

It was reported that the eight gunmen might have planned to carry out a kidnapping on one of the island resorts but instead, attacked the two policemen.

Corporal Rajah Jamuan was killed in the shoot-out with heavily armed Filipino gunmen in military fatigues while his colleague Zakiah Aliep, 26, was kidnapped.

The incident took place about 11pm at the Mabul Water Bungalows Resort.

Repeating his demand that Putrajaya release the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) report on illegal immigrants in Sabah submitted two months ago, Kitingan said: "We want the prime minister (Datuk Seri Najib Razak) to make public the contents of the report."

He said RCI would be meaningless without action and a solution to the "Project IC" problem.

The latest intrusion comes on the day Najib announced that several additional measures would be implemented to strengthen Esscom on top of the recent administrative restructuring.

The measures, he had said, would include deploying Malaysia International Shipping Corporation Berhad's (MISC) container freighter, the MT Bunga Mas Lima, to Sabah, where it would serve as a "mother ship" for maritime assets and personnel near the Philippine border.

In addition, Najib said, two Petronas platforms were being modified and would be set up by year-end as the last line of defence between the Lahad Datu and Semporna waters.

The platforms will be equipped with modern radar that would enable the

security forces to detect movements day and night in the area, he said.

Esscom, which covers 1,400km of the east coast of Sabah from Kudat to Tawau, was established in March last year following the Lahad Datu incursion by armed Sulu militants.

Its purpose was to strengthen maritime security in the eastern part of the state and to prevent terrorist activity in the waters off Sabah.

Kitingan said he has requested to meet Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman on various Sabah issues, including his proposals on setting up the state's own Homeland Security Ministry or Department, state troopers, border scouts and other security arrangements as well as issues relating to illegal immigrants and foreign labour in Sabah.

Meanwhile, PKR's Penampang MP Darell Leiking described Saturday's incident as a slap on the face for Barisan Nasional leaders who have praised Esscom.

"Sabahans will now be questioning the effectiveness of Esscom 2 and the BN state government's commitment to overcome the threat of terrorism emanating from our neighbouring country," he said in a statement.

He said whenever opposition leaders raised security issues with the state government, they were accused of "trying to get political mileage" or "inciting the people to hate BN".

BN's Kiulu assemblyman Datuk Joniston Bangkuai, however, believed the restructuring of Esscom and its new focus on weeding out terrorists and their sympathisers could stop the attacks on Sabah's east coast.

"It takes time. You can't expect instant results, but I'm sure with the restructuring of Esscom's intelligence gathering and its new focus, we will put an end to these inside job attacks.

“Even advanced countries like the United States, France and Italy are finding it hard to stop people coming into their countries illegally and terrorists attacks from within,” he added.

Bangkuai, who is also Sabah Tourism Board chairman, admitted that the attacks have had an impact on the state's tourism industry.

Kitingan said “thousands” of bookings by foreign tourists have been cancelled since the attacks started, adding that “people in the tourism industry have said it would take years to repair the damage”.

Bangkuai said although the 3.5 million target set for this year might not be achievable, Sabah was still a safe place for tourists.

“Tourists are still coming. In the first five months of this year, we had 1.5 million tourist arrivals.

“Sabah is a big state. It’s safe to climb Mount Kinabalu, go shopping and play golf in KK (Kota Kinabalu), tour Sandakan, Papar, Kundasang and many other places.”

The opposition, he said, was not helping Sabah when it painted the state as unsafe and insecure.

The Mabul attack is the fourth over the past two years.

In November last year, a Taiwanese tourist was shot dead and his wife kidnapped in a raid on a resort on Pulau Pom Pom, also off Semporna. She was released a month later.

In early April, a female Chinese tourist and Filipina worker were taken hostage from the Singamata Reef Resort, also off Semporna. They were later rescued.

In May, a 34-year-old Chinese businessman was kidnapped by five unidentified gunmen from a fish farm near a coastal town on Pulau Baik, Lahad Datu. He was rescued on July 10 after being held hostage for two months in the southern Philippines.

Last month, another fish farm operator and a Filipino worker were kidnapped during a midnight raid in Kampung Sapang, Kunak, some 60km from Lahad Datu. – July 14, 2014.

- See more at: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/putrajaya-must-tackle-foreign-monster-in-sabah-says-kitingan#sthash.dPITeCbo.dpuf>

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