

**Eastern Sabah Security Command to be restructured, says
Najib
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BY ANISAH SHUKRY**

Stung by criticism over the ineffectiveness of the Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscomm), Putrajaya today moved to restructure the security agency which has received flak for its failure to protect the state from intruders.

"Even though Esscom has succeeded in preventing new intrusions, other forms of crime such as kidnapping still pose a security threat," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak (pic) told a press conference at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya.

"The government has decided to reorganise the security management in the Sabah eastern coast by strengthening Esscom by restructuring the organisation," Najib said.

Esscom covers 1,400km of the east coast of Sabah from Kudat to Tawau.

It was established in March 2013 by Najib following the Lahad Datu incursion by armed Sulu militants last year.

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

However, since its formation it has failed to stop a series of kidnappings on the islands off the coast of Sabah, drawing criticism

from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) party and opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

The decision to revamp comes following its failure to check a spate of kidnappings by Sulu terrorists.

Three weeks ago, a fish farm operator in Kampung Air Sapang in Sabah's east coast town of Kunak was kidnapped by armed men believed to be Suluks.

In May, Chinese national Yang Zai Lin, 34, was abducted by five gunmen from a fish farm in Pulau Baik.

Yang was the manager of the fish farm, which was owned by Wonderful Terrace Sdn Bhd, a Hong Kong-based company.

Despite engaging the police special action unit in a shootout, the gunmen managed to evade authorities and fled towards southern Philippines.

In another incident last March, 29-year-old Gao Hua Yun from Shanghai and 40-year-old Marcy Dayawan @ Mimi from the Philippines were abducted from the Singamata Reef Resort on Semporna island.

Both were freed after ransom was allegedly paid to the kidnappers, although Najib said no ransom had been paid.

Najib said Esscom would now be split into two main components: the Security and Defence Management component, and the Enforcement and Public Action component.

Escomm's director of security and public order, CP Datuk Abd Rashid Harun will be appointed Esscom commander starting July 15 2014, and will be in charge of the Security and Defence Management component.

"The Esscom commander will lead three main areas, which are intelligence, security and defence, and operations. The commander will be assisted by a deputy commander to hold administering operations," said Najib.

"The purpose of this component is to mobilise the security agencies to improve the operation's efficiency."

The second component will be led by the chief executive officer (CEO) and is divided into three areas: management services, enforcement, public action and secretariat services.

It will cover immigration laws, the National Registration Department rules, rules on controlled goods and matters related to the rakyat.

Both the CEO and the Esscom commander will help the Sabah chief minister in managing the Eastern Sabah Security Zone (Esszone) committee.

"The purpose of this restructuring exercise is to strengthen Esscom's chain of command; to improve and ensure the full involvement of the rakyat with the security agencies in ensuring the Sabah east coast is free from intrusion and crime; and for all officials to work in unison to make sure eastern Sabah is safe and harmonious," said Najib.

He said other efforts to strengthen security in Sabah's east coast include the 30 units of Rigid Hull Fender Boats handed to the police,

military and the maritime on May 29.

Bunga Mas 5 ships are also being used as part of the government's Forward Operation Base (FOB) to step up security in eastern Sabah.

"(Another step is) the enforcement of designated routes for boats to enter the Sabah waters. This step ensures that all boats which enter Sabah waters remain in permitted areas only," said Najib.

Najib said he also hoped the people would give their full cooperation to strengthen the security in eastern Sabah.

When asked why Esscom had failed to prevent kidnappings in Sabah's waters since its establishment in March 2013, Najib pointed to the vastness of the area and the complex society inhabiting it.

"The area is huge. The society there is accustomed to entering and leaving the area. In that situation, they do not see national boundaries as a barrier.

"So we need to cooperate with the locals. Those who own resorts should only hire citizens as staff and set up CCTVs (closed circuit television)," said Najib.

A number of BN and PR lawmakers have denounced Esscom as a waste of public funds following the string of security breaches that have happened since its establishment.

Gelang Patah MP Lim Kit Siang said Esscom was a "white elephant", while Kalabakan MP Datuk Seri Abdul Ghapur Salleh said Sabahans were fed-up and angry with the government's promises to boost

Esscom. – July 8, 2014.

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