

Umno man wants Najib to head Esscom

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By P Ramani

MP Abdul Ghapur Salleh urges Prime Minister Najib to head Esscom to give more weight to it.

KUALA LUMPUR: The Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom) must be headed by Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak or else it should be shut down says, Kalabakan MP Abdul Ghapur Salleh.

According to Abdul Ghapur, the security command should not be headed by a civil servant as he has no powers to command either the Inspector General of Police or army chief.

Abdul Ghapur said that someone powerful should head this command centre or else it will defeat the purpose of establishing it.

Bintulu MP Tiong King Sing meanwhile suggested a new Act be introduced under the National Security Council and a commander be placed to head Esscom, and he must report to the Prime Minister's Department.

The Dewan Rakyat earlier passed an Opposition MP's emergency motion to debate the lax security in Sabah which led to last week's kidnapping incident in a resort in Semporna.

In tabling the emergency motion, Stephen Wong (DAP-Sandakan) told the House that the people had a right to know how taxpayers' money was being spent on the Esscom.

Wong highlighted that a huge fund had been spent to setup and increase the strength of the command centre, but claimed the command centre had failed miserably.

He said that the repeated incidents of tourist abduction and the encroaching of Sabah waters had put the country in the spotlight and this situation should be immediately rectified.

Wong also emphasised that the Sabah tourism industry will be affected if the security lax was allowed to continue.

He called for the government to take full responsibility of Esscom's weakness and to solve the abduction case.

Meanwhile Kota Kinabalu MP Hiew King Cheu suggested that the government placed a permanent navy and air force squadron in Sabah as part of a rapid responsive action to counter imminent threats.

Batu MP Tian Chua suggested that Esscom director general should be given a chance to explain his command failure to counter the multiple threats faced by Sabah's Eastern

Zone.

In concluding the motion debate, Minister in Prime Minister's department Shahidan Kassim disagreed that Esscom should be closed down and stated that assets should instead be increased to strengthen the loopholes.

Shahidan also reminded his fellow lawmakers that Esscom only covered the Eastern Zone and did not affect other parts of Sabah's boundary.

He added that joint patrols by the marine police, navy and the Malaysian maritime enforcement agency (MMEA) will be beefed up to counter the recurrence of undesired incidents in Sabah waters.

On Wednesday, several armed gunmen, believed to be from the Abu Sayyaf group, stormed into Singamata Reef Resort in Sabah and abducted a Chinese tourist and a Philippine resort worker.

Esscom director general Mohammad Mentek said Malaysian authorities believed the two hostages were safe, and the kidnappers have already made contact with the family of the Chinese tourist.

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