

East Coast is now very safe, assures Esscom

LAHAD DATU: Lahad Datu is back to normal following enhanced security after a terrorist intrusion in a faraway village earlier this year.

"In fact, it is safer today because of enhanced presence of security personnel on shore and at sea," said Eastern Sabah Security Command (Esscom) Director-General Datuk Mohammad Mentek. "The East Coast of Sabah is very safe."

He gave the assurance during a briefing for about 50 businessmen, mainly investors in the Lahad Datu Palm Oil Industrial Cluster (POIC Lahad Datu), at a hotel here.

The briefing was organised by POIC Sabah Sdn Bhd, the developer of POIC Lahad Datu. Also present were POIC Sabah Chairman Datuk Nasrun Datu Mansur and the company's Chief Executive Officer Datuk Dr Pang Teck Wai.

"Esscom was formed in April this year after terrorists from the southern Philippines attacked Kg Tanduo, a village about 150km from here. It is a unit under the Prime Minister's Department. It has its headquarters in Lahad Datu and its officers are divided

into five divisions and comprise high-ranking officers from the police, navy, armed forces and coast guards. Esscom's area covers 10 districts and more than 1,700 kilometres of coastline from Kudat to Semporna and some 480 islands.

"Mentek described the Kg Tanduo incident as a wake-up call insofar as strengthening security against armed intrusion was concerned.

"He said the wide area under its purview and the urgency of the situation has put Esscom officers on a hectic schedule since its creation, describing as 'doing a year's work in six months (since Esscom was formed)'."

"Aside from increasing security personnel and military hardware, Esscom has begun conducting security assessment and census in selected water villages here, in Sandakan and Semporna.

Describing some of these villages as haven for illegal activities with a mix of bona fide Malaysians and illegal immigrants, Mentek said the Government's aim is to relocate or deport them as the case may be.

"In response to participants'

comments, Mentek provided official channels through which they may seek clarification from Esscom on rumours on safety and security in and around Lahad Datu.

He assured them that aside from a few minor incidents such as boat-jacking in which some fishermen lost their outboard engines, peace and quiet reigned over Lahad Datu and its surrounding waters.

"Mentek blamed rumour-mongering especially through the social media as the cause of many false or exaggerated reports of unrest.

He advised the public to be prudent when forwarding information they received and be wary of infringing laws governing multimedia use.

"On recent attack on Zamboanga City in Southern Philippines by rebels from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), believed linked to the Tanduo attack, Mentek said Esscom has been closely monitoring the developments to pre-empt any potential spill over to Sabah or an exodus of Filipinos escaping to Sabah territories.



The briefing by Esscom.