

PRIME NEWS

Security forces stay on full alert

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FORCEFUL RESPONSE: Strike by army and police sends a message to terrorists

LAHAD DATU

THE attack against the Sulu terrorists yesterday marked the first collaboration between the police and the armed forces in recent decades to protect the the country's sovereignty.

Called Ops Daulat, the strike sent a strong message against any party threatening the security of Malaysians.

In a joint press conference by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hus-



sein, both said this was the response Malaysians have been waiting for.

"Our patience was tested to the limit. We will not take our security and sovereignty for granted," said Zahid.

He gave an assurance that the security forces will remain on full alert and urged the people in Sabah to have confidence in them.

"Do not listen to rumours.

"This operation is focused on a few 'hot' zones

and if there are to be any intrusions the armed forces and the police will



Security forces heading for Felda Sahabat 17.

be on full alert."

Zahid said there have been many postings on the social media, most of which had created confusion among the public.

"We have checked all of it and we are closely monitoring it."

Yesterday's operation saw the government putting to full use some of its key assets such as three F/A-18D Hornet and five Hawk 208 fighter jets.

More than 2,000 armed forces and police personnel were involved in the operation which began at 7am.

Zahid also expressed his gratit-

ude for the understanding given by Philippine President Benigno Aquino on his stand against the group.

He said the Sulu terrorists who make up a small number in their country and Sulu people in Sabah were different.

"There are Sulu people in Sabah who are Malaysians with Sulu lineage, or those who are permanent residents, but this action is focused on terrorists who came from Sulu."

He also assured displaced villagers that their welfare will be looked into by the ministries and

the National Security Council.

"Their daily needs will be looked into, we do not want them to suffer for a long period," Zahid added.

Hishammuddin said the government wanted to avoid any loss of lives and bloodshed but as they waited, monitored and probed the incident, the situation became a threat and the decision to strike was made.

The Foreign ministry had also helped from the start of the stand-off to resolve the problem.

"This operation is not over and we will continue what we have started," the home minister added.

Fear of revenge attacks haunts residents

LAHAD DATU: Those living from Tawau to here are afraid the Sulu terrorists will return to exact revenge on them.

Indeed, the people of Felda Sahabat 17, here, were more concerned about that than the airstrikes and heavy bombings of terrorist positions yesterday.

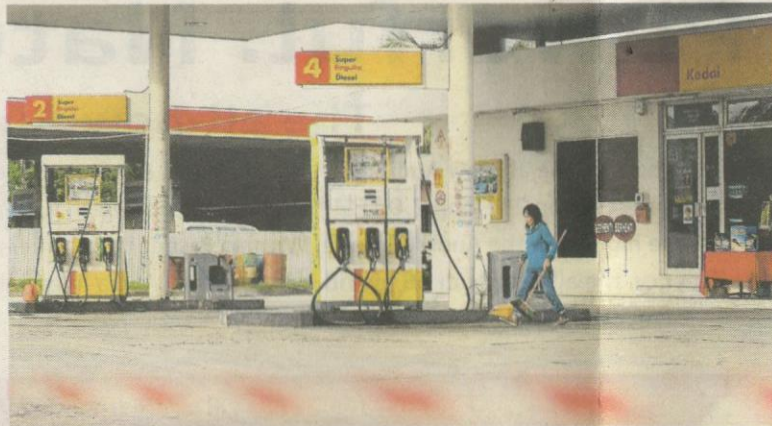
Except for those living within four sq km of Kampung Tanduo, which is close to the strike zone, many people in 11 villages in the oil palm plantation continued with their routine.

A village security and development committee member from one of the villages said the assault on terrorist positions did not worry them too much but possible repercussions were a different thing.

It was for that reason he did not want to be named when approached by the road with a group of villagers who had fled their homes after the explosions this morning.

Business went on as usual in most parts of Felda Sahabat 17, twice the size of Singapore and occupied by people of various ethnic groups, including those who were glued to television sets in coffeeshops for updates on the bombardment.

Security forces were spread out in the scheme, which has 57 plantations. Those moving about in the area had to go through heavily guarded checkpoints.



A petrol station in Lahad Datu is closed after being allowed to operate for only six hours yesterday.

Sabri Abdul Wau, 46, who was at work in a plantation, said he saw three jet fighters dive till the trees blocked his view, and reemerge seconds later before hearing explosions.

“That was when I ran out of the plantation.”

Another villager, Ramli Asrya, 42, said he was at home when he heard the explosions, which shook his wooden house.

In Kampung Sinakut, a coastal village 6km away from Kampung Tanduo, the explosions could be heard loud and clear but the noise did not seem to bother the people

The villagers, who are mostly from

the the Pala'u tribe known as sea gypsies in Sabah, were seen cooking and carrying on with their lives.

In Tawau, a local Suluk resident in Kampung Batu Payung said Tausug foreigners had been entering their village since January under the pretext of holding religious talks.

A retiree, who wished to be known only as Kak Nang, said the men, who had come several times, claimed they were *jemaah tabligh* (Muslim religious volunteers) and had asked the villagers to attend their programmes at the mosque.

The coastal village has more than 2,000 residents, comprising mainly of local Suluks.

She said the villagers did not condone the Sulu terrorists' actions but she could not say for sure whether their sentiment was shared by people living in the surrounding areas or villages.

“My late husband was a policeman, and most of the Suluks in our village have been or are serving in our security forces. It was hard hearing what had happened to the policemen who were killed.

“To tell the truth, us Suluks in our village feared for our safety as we live along the beach.

“What if the terrorists come back from the sea?”

Even worse, Kak Nang was afraid the retaliation would come from neighbouring villages, which are also Suluk-populated, if the foreign group succeeded in recruiting Suluks in Tawau for its cause.

She said one of the villagers saw three unknown men lingering in a hill near their village on Monday at 7pm.

However, as of yesterday afternoon, activities in her village had returned to normal.

The administrators of several schools have decided to shorten the school sessions since Monday.

SK Kinabutan, SMK Kinabutan and SK Batu Payung still end their morning sessions at 12.15pm and evening sessions at 4.30pm.

Kg Simunul villagers stay indoors

SEMPORNA: Four days after a fierce gunfight between police and Sulu gunmen took place in Kampung Simunul, here, residents still fear another attack.

Despite assurances by the authorities that the district is safe, residents have chosen to stay indoors.

A check by *New Straits Times* in Semporna town yesterday showed that about 80 per cent of its 300-odd shops were closed.

Several business operators were seen packing their goods and ready to close shop early as there were few customers. Several shops were seen opening only half of their doors.

Women apparels' seller Rosman Mohd Kasim, 32, said: “On normal days, I can earn between RM1,500 and RM2,500.

“But since Saturday, it has been hard to get any customer.”

Fitria Mohdalam, 38, who works in a floating resort 300m from Kampung Simunul, said the management closed up early since the attack.

The authorities heightened security measures in the district, its coastal areas and nearby islands in a joint operation by the armed forces and police yesterday.