

Masidi: Tri-nations pack can minimise, solve issues at hand

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KOTA KINABALU: A regional conference to resolve transnational issues should be held between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, a state minister suggested yesterday.

State Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun said: "To me the current problem can only be solved and minimised if all three countries have a definitive plan and how to combat this problem can be executed properly."

"I think we need to come to terms to help each other within the spirit of Asean. I think it is time for action now," he told reporters after officiating at the 3rd Pillar Workshop (Marine Environment) KESBAN at Sea between Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and National Security Council (MKN) at UMS yesterday.

He was referring to the current military conflict between Abu Sayyaf militants and the Philippines government in Mindanao and other issues between Malaysia and Indonesia.

He said the current military

operations in the southern Philippines is a cause for concern as it could end up seeing the people fleeing to Sabah like in the 1970s and this is a big challenge for Sabah to control and manage the influx.

He added: "In this case, managing the full force of the law should be utilised meaning to say that the welfare of Sabahans should be the first consideration while I can understand the humanitarian is another issue."

He said the remnants of the militants who are fighting against the Philippines government could also slip into the state as the military onslaught intensified and this could pose a problem as "we don't know them in our midst."

"I think we should be more humane to our own people first, because we also have to deal with the challenge of those found with fake Mykad," he added.

Masidi said the law enforcement personnel also needed to be trained to identify between a bona fide Sabahan and illegal foreigners.

"To me, humanitarian need to be balanced out with the security of our state. To me, as a Sabahan the overriding concern is the security of our own people, I think that should be



TIME TO ACT... Masidi (3rd left), Sairin (5th left), Dr Harun (6th left) and Chin (2nd left) together with the participants attending the workshop.

the consideration," he pointed out.

"We need to balance up our humanitarian responsibility as well as the need to manage our sea border which is the biggest problem," he said.

Despite the kidnapping incidents and travel advisories issued by various countries

warning their citizens not to visit the east coast of Sabah, Masidi noted that it had little effect to the tourism industry.

"Australia, United States, France and other countries have issued travel advisories against visiting Sabah's east coast, but so far it seems the people are ignoring it and this

was reflected in the first six months (of tourist arrivals) this year.

"The international arrivals from Europe actually went up by 12 per cent compared to the same period of last year.

"I believe if you look at the travellers' trend, they are actually making their own in-

dividual decision," Masidi noted.

Also present were Agriculture and Food Industry Assistant Minister Datuk Sairin Karno, UMS vice chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah, MIMA director general First Admiral Dato' Chin Yoon Chin.