

Probe into how the killings went unnoticed

DE 25.3.14 1

**Mary Chin and
Jason Santos**

KOTA KINABALU: The State Tourism, Culture and Environment Ministry is despatching a team comprising Sabah Parks and Sabah Wildlife Department personnel to Pulau Tiga off Kudat to investigate media reports of a mass slaughter of sea turtles on an island there.

The island is located at the northern side of Balambangan-Banggi Channel and about two hours by speedboat from Karakit, the main town on Banggi Island.

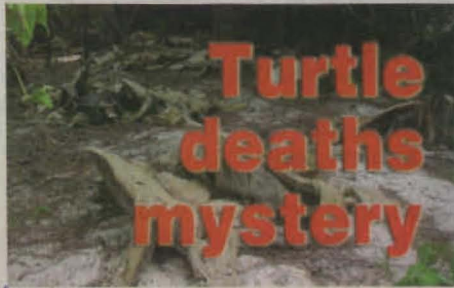
Describing the incident as unfortunate, Minister Datuk Masidi Manjun said one area of investigation would focus on why it (mass killing) was not reported to the relevant authorities.

"To be honest with you, I am shocked that destruction of such magnitude could happen. I am also saddened that this thing can happen right before our mainland.

"We have been talking seriously about conservation, we have done a lot on conservation but when this thing happens,



Masidi



obviously, something is wrong somewhere, somehow," he told *Daily Express*, Monday.

Masidi said the expose was an eye-opener for Sabahans and an educative experience for everyone that we must always be on guard.

Last week, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) researcher-lecturer Dr James Alin stumbled upon a mass "killing field" of some 60 protected sea turtles on Pulau Tiga.

"I saw 60 or more carcasses of sea turtles strewn on two sites and hidden under trees at the north-eastern tip of Pulau Tiga - ironically one of the islands included in the proposed million-acre Tun Mustapha Marine Park and a premier Coral Triangle site," Dr James Alin had said.

Dr Alin decided to make the matter public after doing field research on the island barely two weeks ago, following tip off from a fish towkay in Kudat last January. The poachers are said to comprise foreigners from Mangsee island in Philippines and locals from Manabuan and Dogotan Islands within the Banggi region.

Asked if it was a clear case of shutting one or both eyes due to corruption involving the enforcement agencies, Masidi replied: "I don't think so. The problem is that Sabah is a huge State and this (mass killing) happened on an island. So unless people talk about it, it may be assumed that there is nothing going on in Pulau Tiga.

"If people consider 'sea turtles' as our asset, they should report the mass slaughter to the authorities. I am sure they know who they should report to." While conceding that the Sabah Wildlife Department, which is under his Ministry, is responsible for the protection of sea turtles, Masidi said all Sabahans should be doing their part, too.

"Sea turtles are an asset to our State, a gift of God, everyone should feel responsible and play a role in conservation efforts. At least, alert the authorities by giving information if they are aware of what is happening," he pointed out."

According to Dr Alin, villagers told him that they reported the matter to the authorities but nothing came of it.

The role of the Sabah Wildlife Department in protecting the endangered species of fauna and flora in Sabah as well as controlling international trade of these species is stipulated in the Sabah Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997.

When told that the authorities have the tendency to pass the buck when something like this happens; Masidi quipped: "I don't think they can pass the buck because the 'bark' is too heavy to carry."

The Minister said according to the time line, the Government should be able to gazette the proposed Tun Mustapha Marine Park by next year. "And hopefully, that would put us in a better position to monitor activities within the designated Park."

Asked on the delay in gazetting, he said: "There are certain stages to go through when you want to gazette a particular place as a marine park. We need time to educate the kampung people on the implications of gazetting the area and for them to make sure that their best interests are always protected."

See Page 2, Col 4

Need to speed up gazetting: Nais

From Page One

SABAH Parks Director Dr Jamili Nais echoed the need to speed up gazetting of the Tun Mustapha Marine Park so the Sabah Parks Enactment can be enforced to protect the local wildlife there.

Sabah Wildlife Department Director Datuk Dr Laurentius Ambu refused to comment, saying it had come under Sabah Parks' purview due to the marine park proposal.

"Although the park has not been gazetted yet, tentatively it has been agreed," he said.

Kudat marine police chief Asst Supt Safardi Abd Samad refuted Dr Alin's claim

that the turtle carcasses were new, saying the images looked like "remnants" of a poaching case they had taken action on before.

He believed that the killing of turtles was done by the Pelauh - sea gypsies who lived all their lives on boats since August last year. "We have in our records observations up till in August last year," said Safardi, adding that they had received complaints from villagers before."

Safardi's claims, however, were refuted by Sabah Parks Research and Education Assistant Director Dr Maklarin Lakim, adding that the stench and flesh description made by Dr Alin revealed the poaching was actually new.