COURTING DANGER AT RED ZONE



PHOTO: AFP

Malaysian joint military and police forces during an operation in Sabah.

If you want a walk on the wild side, I suggest visiting the Red Zone in Felda Sahabat near Lahad Datu town in Sabah. On a Tuesday, a few weeks ago, that's what my colleagues – PK Katharason and Muguntan Vanar – and I did. To be precise, we unwittingly drove into an area where the joint military and police forces were conducting mopping up operations against the Sulu gunmen.

About 20-km from the media centre in the Felda plantation, about four times the size of Singapore, is a junction to Kampung Tanjung Batu where remnants of the armed group were holed up.

Usually, there is a police roadblock manned by two or three policemen who are ordered not to allow civilians to enter the Red Zone. Unseen are snipers trained to blow your head off.

"Be careful, the snipers might get jittery," an irritated policeman armed with an M-16 warned me when I tried to dig information from him a few days ago.

On that day, there was no roadblock. Even the sand bags used for fortification were missing.

"Why did they (security forces) open it?" asked PK as we drove into the once restricted asphalt road.

"Not a single soul on the road," said Muguntan, who was driving a 4WD pick-up truck.

"Maybe it is safe already," said PK.

"Are you sure?" said Muguntan.

"Go, go, go, don't slow down. Go fast," said PK.

I launched Google My Tracks app on my smartphone as I wanted to record the journey and later watch it via Google Earth.