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Mahathir-firearms

NATIONWIDE FREEZE ON FIREARMS PERMITS

KUALA LUMPUR, April 13 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today announced a nationwide freeze on the issuing of licences to own firearms for an indefinite period.

The Prime Minister said the decision was made by the Home Ministry recently because too many licence holders had not been taking care of their firearms and losing them.

"We have sometimes been too laxed (in issuing the licences) and too many people are losing their firearms. So we want to ensure that only those who are eligible get the licence," he told reporters after launching the "Jayawaris" programme organised by the Civics Bureau of the Prime Minister's Department, here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the Home Minister, said the freeze order was issued after the arrest in Taiwan of Sabah businessman Datuk Alfred Chin for alleged arms smuggling.

Malaysian police have confirmed that the arms were smuggled from Sabah following the arrest of former national shooter Vincent Teo, now an arms and ammunition dealer in Kota Kinabalu. Teo has been sentenced to one month's jail and fined RM6,000 for the illegal sale of 31 firearms to Chin who did not have a licence to own firearms.

The Public Prosecutor's office, through Senior Federal Counsel Nurchaya Arshad, yesterday filed an appeal in the Kota Kinabalu High Court against the sentence imposed by the magistrate's court on April 2, on the grounds that it was inadequate.

Teo, 50, was arrested on March 27 and charged in court on April 2 after he pleaded guilty to three charges of selling 23 pistols and eight shotguns to Chin who did not have a valid arms licence or permit, under the Arms Act 1960.

Dr Mahathir, when asked about the possibility of politicians being involved in issuing firearms licences in Sabah, said the matter must be handled in a more effective manner.

"So far I don't know how many firearms there are in Sabah. We must take action, probably through an operation, to ensure that firearms are not owned by anyone who did not get the approval of the government," he said.

Two days ago, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor ordered a team of police officers from Bukit Aman to investigate the possible involvement of senior officers and other staff of the Kota Kinabalu district police headquarters in gun running activities.

Asked if anyone found involved would be dealt with under the Internal Security Act, Dr Mahathir said the decision would be made only after police completed their investigations. --BERNAMA

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