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Robbery - Mahathir

PRIME MINISTER REGRETS INJURY TO CIVILIANS

TAIPING, March 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed regret over injury to civilians in the shootout involving a band of robbers and police in Semporna.

"It is most unfortunate that civilians were injured in the incident," he said when commenting on the armed robbery in the Sabah east coast town.

Five civilians were injured, three seriously from stray bullets fired by the robbers and police. They have been admitted to Tawau Hospital.

One of eight robbers was shot dead by police and two were captured when they raided the town and robbed a goldsmith's shop this morning.

The Prime Minister said he had not received a full report on this morning's incident in Semporna but regretted the injury to civilians and the fear that gripped the town.

He said the Federal Government would step up security in Sabah waters in view of the frequent pirate attacks in the area.

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters after inspecting the RM1 billion Bandar Tasik Bukit Merah project about 15km from here.

In KOTA KINABALU, Sabah Chief Minister and State Security Committee Chairman Datuk Mohd Salleh Said Keruak urged Semporna residents to remain calm.

He said police were taking the necessary measures to tighten security in Semporna to prevent a recurrence of the incident.

"This incident is unfortunate particularly when civilians become victims and are injured," he said.

Salleh said police had launched a large scale operation to get all the robbers involved in the incident.

Member of Parliament for Semporna Datuk Shafie Apdal, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Information Ministry, urged the people in Semporna not to be alarmed.

He said the people should cooperate with the police in their efforts to nab the remnants of the robbery gang and ensure peace and security in the town.

Shafie was confident that the robbers could be captured with assistance from the military who were conducting an exercise in the area. -- BERNAMA

OPP AAM