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PM: Grossly unfair to accuse police of being trigger-happy

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Describing as "grossly unfair" the accusation that Malaysian police are "trigger-happy", Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the police had no choice but to use firearms when faced with armed criminals.

Speaking to reporters after calling on President of Burkina Faso Blaise Compaore at the Regent Hotel, Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, took to task National Human Rights Society president Raja Aziz Addruse who had described the police as acting as "judge, jury and executioner" and "trigger-happy" in combating crime.

"I would say that it is grossly unfair. I would like to see what Raja Aziz would do if people keep on pointing guns at him.

"These people beat a policeman to death, how do you expect the police not to react?" Dr Mahathir asked.

On whether he was referring to illegal immigrants, he said:

"Illegal immigrants, kidnapers and others ..."

A policeman was killed when illegal immigrants at the Semenyih Immigration Detention Centre clashed with police who were making arrangements to repatriate them on March 26.

In a letter which appeared in the New Straits Times' Saturday Forum on April 11, Raja Aziz, a former Bar Council president, criticised the police for being "trigger-happy" when apprehending criminals and not giving consideration to the safety of others.

He said the "alarming increase" in the number of suspected criminal fatalities "bespeaks the possibility of a police force that has forgotten the two crucial principles that define all legal and justified use of firearms - proportionality and discrimination".

"The police should uphold the maxim of 'innocent until proven guilty' when dealing with criminals," wrote Raja Aziz.

Responding to the letter, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor said on Monday that it would be insensitive to describe the police as "trigger-happy" as they placed themselves at great risk when dealing with violent criminals.

Rahim said those championing human rights should consider the dangers faced by policemen in protecting the public from criminals.

He said policemen had to make quick decisions during encounters with criminals, adding that never in the history of the force had a policeman ever "blindly shot" at innocent people.

Rahim had added that the letter was silent on the fact that the police were protecting the lives and safety of the public who were threatened by criminals who were "impetuous, jittery and whimsical in nature".

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