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Board of inquiry being set up

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Ten days after the arms heist at two military installations in Grik, Perak, the Defence Ministry is still "in the process of setting up a board of inquiry".

The ministry has neither identified nor appointed members of the board.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today the ministry was in the process of setting up the board and its members would be announced in two days' time.

He said it was important that a board of inquiry be set up as, besides the Home Ministry, the Defence Ministry had to have its own input on any White Paper to be drawn up.

Najib said a thorough inquiry would be conducted to identify who or what was at fault in the ease with which the Al-Ma'unah group, led by former soldier Mohd Amin Mohd Razali, managed to stage the arms robberies on July 2.

"We have to find out whether human error allowed the incident to take place, or whether there is a fault in standard operating procedures governing the security of armouries.

"Should it be found that certain people were careless in allowing the heists to take place, stern action will be taken.

"They may even have to face a court martial," he said after receiving a courtesy call from the Republic of Indonesia Air Force chief of staff Air Marshal Hanafie Asnan at the ministry at Jalan Padang Tembak.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would draw up a White Paper detailing the events of the Bukit Jenalik incident last week.

The paper will contain a detailed report of the incident, beginning with the arms heists by members of the Al Ma'unah cult at a military outpost and the Territorial Army camp armoury in Grik.

Meanwhile, the New Straits Times learnt that Najib was expected to hold a Press conference at his office tomorrow, after a post-Cabinet meeting with ministry officials.

It is understood he may announce the formation of the board of inquiry, following a meeting held at the ministry this evening.

Asked whether other soldiers, besides the two who were part of the 27 Al-Ma'unah members detained in Sauk, Perak, last Thursday, were identified as followers of the movement, Najib said the group's members included civil servants, police and soldiers.

He said the ministry was trying to identify whether other soldiers were just followers or active members, or had provided any "inside information" to the group.

"We will question soldiers who have been identified as followers of the group before we decide what action to be taken against them... whether they will be asked to retire from the service or whether we will allow them to continue serving the armed forces."

Asked whether the morale of TA members was affected by the arms heists, Najib said it was probably so.

He said steps should be taken to boost their morale, adding that TA battalions should strive to improve their image and show that security at their camps was indeed tight.

"I hope they (TA members) do not take this incident to heart, but learn from it and do whatever is possible to ensure that security at their camps

is always tight."

Earlier, Najib presented an honorary Pingat Gagah Angkatan Tentera to Hanafie.

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