

05 JUL 2000

Weapons-Najib

GOVT APPEALS TO ARMOURY RAIDERS TO SURRENDER

KUALA LUMPUR, July 5 (Bernama) -- The government is appealing to the group of criminals who stole a cache of weapons from two army camps in Gerik on Sunday to surrender.

In making the call to the group, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said: "We appeal to their good sense, if they have any, to surrender and give up whatever they are doing."

He said this at a news conference after a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the Home Ministry here, today.

Najib was asked on the options that the government would consider to resolve the situation.

On how the government would go about handling the surrender offer, he said the details would be jointly determined by the police and the armed forces.

Najib said no formal contact had been established with the criminals so far and that they had not made any demands.

However, he said the government would not give in to demands made by criminals, if there were any.

"But they must be given the option to surrender," he said.

Najib also did not rule out the possibility of ex-servicemen being involved in the arms heists.

Najib said from the assessment made, there was a big possibility that all members of the group were still together at their hideout on a hillock at the small town of Sauk near Kuala Kangsar.

"However, we are not ruling out the possibility that this is a decoy, and the possibility of their supporters and sympathisers outside this area," he said.

He said their hideout had been tightly cordoned off by security forces to the extent that there was no possibility for the criminals to get out from the area.

"We have adequate security forces to ensure the cordon was very tight and was impossible to be penetrated by the group. Yesterday, they tried to do so but was unsuccessful," he said.

Najib said the shoot-out occurred today between the security forces and the group as the criminals wanted to test the effectiveness of the cordon.

In the 10.30am incident, one of the raiders was shot by the security forces but the extent of his injuries could not be ascertained as the group retreated into the jungle with the injured man.

Najib said the presence of three hostages complicated matters and the government was sensitive to the situation.

He added that if the offer to surrender themselves was not taken up the government had the right to take whatever action necessary.

"And there's no limit to that action because the government is firm in this matter and we don't want this group of robbers and criminals to achieve their aim," he said.

He also denied foreign media reports that the Malaysian security forces had used mortar fire in the area.

Najib said what was used was "thunder flash" which could have caused the loud noise which was mistaken for mortar fire.

He said he would submit a report to the cabinet based on the findings of the board of inquiry to be set up by the ministry to probe the incident,

including the rules for arms storage and safety.

"Any proposals will be made known to the public because they have a right to know the actions taken by the government," he said.

The minister said he was always in consultation with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as well as Abdullah, who is Deputy Prime Minister, regarding developments in the incident.

Najib also said that to facilitate media coverage, briefings for the press would be done at the operations centre in Kati.

In KUALA KANGSAR, police called for cooperation from the families of the criminals to help in negotiations between the security forces and the group.

Inspector-general of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said police had also identified several families of the owners or drivers of six vehicles found in a rented house in Sauk, near here, last night.

The vehicles included two commercial vehicles -- a Cherokee jeep owned by a telecommunication company (DiGi) with registration number BEM 3287 and a Land Rover owned by a tow truck company (Anuar Dungun Workshop) with registration number CB 2130.

The other four vehicles were private-owned cars -- a metallic grey Honda Accord with registration number JBA 2561, a Proton Saga 1.5S (BCS 833), a Ford Laser saloon (BCF 1913) and a Proton Saga 1.3 (BCS 2830).

Norian said relatives of the vehicle owners should contact the police at 05-7521759 or 05-7521757 as soon as possible.

He said the vehicles were impounded at the police station here.

He said police found several documents in the vehicles which could not be divulged yet but no weapons were found.

-- BERNAMA

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