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Mahathir-Arms

NATIONAL SECURITY NOT AFFECTED BY ARMS THEFT, SAYS MAHATHIR

IPOH, July 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said national security is not affected by the arms grab at two army camps in Perak yesterday.

However, he feared that the stolen weapons might be sold to certain quarters in need of them.

Asked whether the incidents could be a prelude to something big, the Prime Minister said he did not know.

"I don't know if it is a prelude to something bigger," he told reporters after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting at the Menteri Besar's residence here today.

He said this when asked to comment on the incidents where 15 men posing as senior army officers escaped with more than 100 weapons and some ammunition from the Sungai Rui outpost and 304th Battalion Territorial Army camp in Gerik.

The impostors, dressed in army uniforms complete with ranks and berets, carted away the arms in three green Pajero vehicles bearing military plates in the pre-dawn incidents.

Dr Mahathir said the Supreme Council discussed the incidents and took a serious view of the matter although the reasons behind them were not known.

"The army has been deployed to take the necessary action, and we are confident of controlling the situation," he said.

Asked whether the incidents could have been politically motivated, he said nothing could be ruled out yet.

"We cannot rule out any possibility until we have obtained clear evidence, but at the moment we do not see yet, but it is possible.

"We know that weapons are something with good markets," he said.

Asked whether weak procedure on weapons control was the cause of the incidents, Dr Mahathir said the government had already ordered security to be tightened following the theft of weapons from army and police facilities.

However, the latest cases were different, he said.

"This is because the culprits wore army fatigues and (some) used the rank of Lt Kol...high ranking. The rank and file were overawed," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AFY HK YBY