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Praise for army and police action

THE army and police came in for praise yesterday from both Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for ending the Grik arms grabbing and hostage-taking drama without a bloodbath.

The Prime Minister conveyed his appreciation to both agencies after being informed of the success of the operation.

"A very clean, efficient and well-co-ordinated operation," the Deputy Prime Minister told a Press conference at the Home Ministry in Kuala Lumpur.

He said that although the incident claimed two lives, the Government was grateful that its aim of avoiding clashes with the armed robbers had been achieved.

A policeman and an army ranger taken hostage by the gunmen were executed by their captors. Another detective and a farmer were rescued.

Abdullah extended condolences to the families of the policeman and the ranger executed by the robbers. "The necessary assistance will be extended to both families. They died serving the country."

Abdullah said the success of the operation showed close co-operation between the police and the army. "From the beginning, the method adopted to end the drama was through persuasion and appealing to the robbers to surrender. I am happy to say this was achieved."

On whether the authorities had made any concession in persuading the gunmen to surrender, Abdullah said: "There had been no negotiation, no offers made to them. The Government would also like to thank residents in the area for their understanding and other agencies involved."

Appearing relieved, the Deputy Prime Minister recounted how he was kept informed by the minute on the progress of the operation by Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai who was at the scene. "First, he called to say four had surrendered, then seven, then 10, 16 and finally all 27 of them."

Asked about the robbers' motive, he said they belonged to a martial arts group called Al-Ma'unah dedicated to setting up an Islamic state. "After we finish talking to them, we will know better (on their motives). Right now, it will only be speculation."

He confirmed the group had no foreign connection. "The process of the law will take its course," when asked what would happen to the robbers.

To a question whether Pas members were among the group, Abdullah said at the moment, there was no information pointing to that.

The Deputy Prime Minister said the arms heist would serve as a lesson to the authorities, especially the army.