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Rearguard action from all needed

IT was probably very much like a scene out of an action movie, as Defence Minister Tan Sri Najib Razak suggested, but in the cinema no matter how dire the situation, it ends when the lights come on. It was no make-belief on Sunday, however, when about 150 pieces of weapons were carted off two military bases in Grik, Perak, by a bunch of men in uniforms and armed with military-issued assault weapons. They took from the armoury what have been described as high-calibre weapons - assault weapons, grenade launchers, machine-guns, as well as high explosive shells. The security concern aside, the incident has served to highlight the fact that Malaysians can never take for granted what they have so painstakingly built up over the years.

How many countries can boast the record of peace and harmony Malaysia enjoys, and where people can be in the streets at all hours and not be mugged, robbed, knifed or shot at? There are no marauding warlords or separatist rebels in our jungles like in some neighbouring countries, just as there are no marauding street gangs preying on people who fail to reach home and bolt their doors before dark. There are also no random shootings of the kind plaguing the US, for example. And of course, there has been no security threat, from within or without, since the end of the communist insurgency and the "confrontation" with Indonesia in the 1960s, which were a whole generation ago. Coupled with the economic progress achieved by the country in the past 30 years, yes, it is unfortunately almost to be expected that the people of this country have come to take their very comfortable lifestyles as a given. We forget to lock our doors, snooze through things that go bump in the night, and feel no need to check things that lurk in the shadows. Najib acknowledged as much when he said the theft was least expected.

Malaysians bear reminding though, as Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has repeatedly done, that they must never let their guard down and be lulled into complacency, to the extent that they no longer feel the need to work at preserving the security, peace and harmony of their homeland. Together with the population's high level of education, these are the factors that are most often cited by investors for their decision to come to Malaysia. The motive behind the raid on the armoury has yet to be determined, but whether the stolen weapons are intended to be sold in the black market, used in robberies, or for politics-related purposes - as some quarters were quick to suggest - it is not something which the people should make light of. Only several months ago a group of men, including former military personnel, went on a robbing spree using what is believed to be weapons stolen from another armoury. The band was even dubbed the Styer Gang, so named because of the military-issued assault weapons of their choice.

And ironically, things are more straight-forward in times of war: the enemy is known, the battle lines are clear, and weaknesses and strengths of both sides can be determined and strategies worked out. Not so in times of peace; you do not always know the extent of the threat, where it is coming from or when, and who is mounting it. There is simply no substitute for vigilance when it comes to independence and sovereignty of the nation. It is far too easy to put the episode down as a case of lax security at the military camps, as in the previous incidents involving weapons theft. The responsibility to maintain peace and order, in truth, is not that of

the armed forces alone. These uniformed men and women are in the front line, but they have constantly to be supported by rearguard action from all Malaysians, not least in respect of having confidence in the authorities to get to the bottom of the matter.

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