

03 JUL 2000

Shafie-Heist

WEAPONS HEIST BELIEVED DONE BY LOCALS, SAYS SHAFIE

GERIK, July 3 (Bernama) -- All 15 men involved in yesterday's weapons heist at the Territorial Army's 304th Battalion Camp here are locals and they are believed to be still in the country, said Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal.

He said based on reports received, no foreigner was involved in the heist in which the group made off with more than 100 weapons including M-16s and Steyr rifles.

"I strongly believe that they are still in the country," he said when met after he was given a briefing at the 304th Battalion Camp here today.

Asked if it could have been an inside job, Shafie said: "I'm not so sure about that. This is being investigated by the Police and the Army".

In the early morning heist, 15 men in army uniform complete with rank insignias and berets made off with more than 100 firearms from two separate places here.

In the first incident at 2.15am, the group took 14 M-16 rifles and communication equipment from the Sungai Rui Army Outpost.

The same group was believed to have then trespassed into the 304th Infantry Battalion Camp at 4.15am and made off with 80 M-16 rifles, two Steyr rifles, four general purpose machine guns and six light machine guns.

Also taken from the camp were 40 ammunition for the MMHE mortar, 80 ammunition for the M-16, six pairs of ammunition pouch, 98 machine gun magazines, 26 bayonets and 54 flare tripwire units.

Shafie said authorities have not ruled out the possibility that the firearms stolen might be used by the group for hostage taking or other purposes.

"All these possibilities cannot be ignored. That is why we have to be alert all the time," he said.

Media representatives were kept out of the camp grounds while photographers were barred from taking pictures.

Shafie, who declined to say if authorities have received any information on the group concerned, said it was more important that the case be solved as soon as possible.

He urged the public to report anything suspicious in their neighbourhood to the authorities.

He said the security situation, especially in Gerik, is well under control.

On the level of security checks at all army camps in the country, Shafie said all have been directed to be on the alert and to step up checks.

In IPOH, security was tight in the vicinity of the Menteri Besar's residence where the Umno Supreme Council meeting, to be chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will be held.

The Umno Supreme Council meeting here, initially scheduled to be held at the State Operations Room and moved late yesterday to the Menteri Besar's residence, is the first to be held outside of Kuala Lumpur.

Heavy police presence was seen in Ipoh and several General Operations Force (GOF) vehicles, including armoured cars, were stationed at strategic places.

Police, when contacted, declined comment on the tight security.

-- BERNAMA

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