

# Bandits in southern Thailand flee with guns

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BANGKOK: Four masked and armed bandits have stolen a large quantity of guns and ammunition from a national park office in Thailand's south, police said yesterday, as the premier blamed Thai nationals holding Malaysian citizenship for ongoing regional unrest.

The bandits broke into the Banglang National Park office in the Bannangstar district of Muslim-majority Yala province, around 1,000km south of here, on Thursday, and made off with 15 shotguns and 25 assault rifles, as well as an undisclosed amount of ammunition, police said.

The lone security guard at

the office was tied up and blindfolded, they said.

"We do not understand why park officials required such a large number of war weapons, nor why only one security guard was standing watch," national police chief Gen Sant Sarutanond told reporters.

The theft follows the shooting deaths of 12 police officers this year in the south, including two shot dead last week in Narathiwat province.

The spate of killings, for which no arrests have been made, have alarmed and confounded police as well as the administration of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Yesterday Thaksin blamed

the ongoing problems in the south on up to 60 Thais who also hold Malaysian citizenship.

He said Thailand was considering revoking their citizenship, and the issue would be discussed with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his visit here early next month.

"Although we know who the suspects are, we cannot make any arrests because they hold dual citizenship, so they can enter both Thailand and Malaysia," Thaksin said, referring to the fact they can slip back into Malaysia at will.

— AFP