

Selected News Articles

NEWS#1

Aid rolls in for ponoh school after registration

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Thursday, April 28, 2005 09:52

24993 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Apr 28--Bangkok Post

Yala _ Bamrungsat Islam, a ponoh school in Yala's Krong Pinang district, now has 10 new houses, a one-storey school building, a flag pole and a school nameplate, thanks to financial support from the Education Ministry.

It is one of 214 ponoh schools registered with the ministry in the wake of the bloodbath at Krue Se mosque in Pattani province last year.

State authorities have accused some private religious schools in the Muslim-dominated far South of using distorted Islamic teachings to brainwash their students into having hostile attitudes towards the central government.

Private Muslim religious schools were then told to register with the Education Ministry if they wanted to receive financial support, in a bid to bring them under control.

In the first phase, an initial budget of 55 million baht was set aside to help 214 registered ponoh schools develop their basic facilities

Niloh Jehleh, owner of Bamrungsat Islam, said his school received 400,000 baht in aid from the ministry.

Before this the school had never received any financial support from the state, he said, and for the past 12 years it had to rely on donations from Muslims in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur.

In those days Bamrungsat Islam had no school building and its students had to study at the school owner's house, he said. Also, their living quarters were just old thatched houses.

However, Mr Niloh said, his school had never taught distorted Islamic teachings or allowed separatist militants to use it as a terrorist training camp.

"Although it has already been one year since the Krue Se incident, I feel most of the people in this government still have no clear understanding about our duties and responsibilities," he said.

Ponoh students spend most of their time at school. Every day, they get up early in the morning to pray and study. Then they have a break to cook food. After that they resume studying until late in the afternoon when they are allowed some time to play sports. Then it's time for more study and prayer until 10.30pm when they go to bed.

To prevent future misunderstandings, Mr Niloh said, only state officials with clear understanding of the ponoh school system should be assigned to work in the deep South. They should also treat local Muslim leaders with respect, he added. Mr Niloh also would like the ministry to help ponoh schools with vocational training projects so both the schools and their students could earn enough income for their self-development efforts.

Bagrudeen Sema, 24, a student at Nassarin Witthaya ponoh school in Narathiwat's Bacho district, said his school also wants a sports field and vocational training projects.

The student said he now earned a small income by praying at funeral rites, for which he was paid about 40-50 baht at a time.

Nassarin Witthaya, which received 300,000 baht in aid from the ministry, now has 10 new houses, a flag pole and a school nameplate.

Usen Daoh, an officer at the Yala-based office of the 12th education inspection zone, said the ministry was considering allocating another 18 million baht in aid for the remaining 80 ponoh schools already registered with the ministry.]

NEWS#2

Eight Muslim teachers face terror charges

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Thursday, March 10, 2005 08:50

47488 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Mar 10--Bangkok Post

Eight Islamic teachers from Yala have been arraigned on terrorism and related charges for their alleged involvement in murder, weapons theft and setting fire to schools, temples and government offices in the deep South from 1993-2004.

Public prosecutors from special litigation division 1 yesterday filed a lawsuit in the Criminal Court against Waeyusoh Waedueramae, Muhamad Kanafi Doloh and Abdulrohseh Hayidoloh, former teachers at Thammawitthaya School, Ahama Bula, an assistant headmaster at the same school, Masukri Hari, manager of Pattana Islam Witthayalai School, Salae Deng and Hama Jehteh, religious teachers at private schools, and Torleh Disa-eh, a Malayu language teacher at a private school.

According to the suit, the eight were members of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) which aims to gain independence for the deep South.

The group has allegedly killed many monks, police officers, soldiers, teachers, students and other innocent people.

It has also allegedly set fire to 38 schools, as well as many temples and government offices. It is accused of the robbery of state-owned guns in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla's Sadao and Saba Yoi districts.

The suit alleges that, with Mr Waeyusoh as leader, the accused men supplied insurgents with weapons and terrorist training, lured others into the terrorism and funded and carried out violent attacks with the aim of forcing the government to give political autonomy to Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkhla and parts of Satun.

The suit alleges they were involved in a June 2002 gun robbery at Bang Lang National Park in Songkhla's Bannang Sata district, April 2003 weapon thefts from the 5th military development unit in Yala's Than To district and the 12th military development unit in Narathiwat's Sukhirin district and the January 2004 gun robbery at the 4th military development unit in Cho Airong district, Narathiwat.

The eight have denied all charges during interrogation. If found guilty, the accused face penalties ranging from one year in jail to death.

The court accepted the case for consideration and set today for the defendants to testify in court. This case would be the first in Thai history that the prosecution would

present case details by playing video CDs in court instead of reading opening statements and other documents.

Atthapol Yaisawang, director-general of the special litigation department, said prosecutors believe there is enough evidence against the eight to proceed, but all depended on the court's decision.

Meanwhile, authorities in Narathiwat are building three large concrete cranes as statues to patriotism.

The sculptures will be made of cement mixed with paper cranes from all over the country and will be completed on April 13, the Thai New Year.

Governor Pracha Terat, attending the sculpture-building ceremony with about 300 officials from all 13 provincial districts, said the cement cranes would be made from the 10 million paper cranes dropped from the sky over the South on Dec 5, His Majesty the King's birthday. At three metres high and six metres wide they will be the world's largest peace cranes.

Unrest, meanwhile, continued in the province as motorcyclists were seen throwing Molotov cocktails at a campaign billboard of the Southern Border Provinces Peace-building Command in Ban Sakor village of tambon Sakor in Narathiwat's Sungai Padi district at 12.30am yesterday.

NEWS# 3

Islamic schools face curbs

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Tuesday, January 13, 2004 09:38

13001 XCLUSIVE XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jan 13--Bangkok Post

The Education Ministry wants state intervention in private Islamic schools, known as ponoh, which are widespread in the deep South despite being banned five years ago.

Deputy Education Minister Sirikorn Maneerin said a proposal would go to the government tomorrow via a special panel chaired by Interior Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha, which is in charge of ending unrest in the region.

Mrs Sirikorn said it was time the state intervened in the education management of ponoh schools, known as pondok in southern Yawi dialect.

They were banned by a 1999 cabinet resolution and did not come under the supervision of any state agency, but there were still more than 100 of them in Songkhla, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, with about 8,600 students.

Independent ponoh schools differ from state-regulated private schools which teach Islam in that they teach only Islamic ways of life and most of the students are adults.

She said the state would have to decide if ponoh schools should come under the Education, Interior or Culture ministries. ``Most Islamic teachers want ponoh schools registered, but registration should be of the founders' free will. Also, they don't want the state to change the way the schools teach their students," Mrs Sirikorn said.

The Education Ministry would also seek 198 million baht from the central budget to improve education in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, including building laboratories and digital libraries.

A curriculum would also be developed for all 128 state-regulated private Islamic schools, which have about 80,000 students. ``It will be designed to fit the students' Islamic way of life," she said.

More than 1,600 Islamic teachers would also be encouraged to pursue a degree in education management. Community colleges were planned for Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat and mobile education services for people with physical disabilities.

Mr Wan Nor yesterday defended the need for checks on Muslim religious schools by security forces, saying there was evidence that agitators were using some schools as bases or hideouts.

That did not mean all ponoh schools were bad, he said. Inspections would be carried out with all due care and consideration for Muslim people's feelings.

The director and students of a ponoh in Pattani, one of 30 schools blacklisted by the military, meanwhile, have challenged security forces to raid their school, saying they would find there was nothing wrong going on there.

A source at the Fourth Army said there were almost 500 ponoh schools in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat and Satun, 300 of which were running illegally, and 30 were blacklisted by the military on evidence some teachers and students were involved in terrorist movements.

Yesterday, about 50 police raided Iftida Witthaya school, a private Islamic school in Narathiwat's Rueso district. After a two-hour search they left empty-handed.

In the same district, the headmaster of Nahatatusaan ponoh school, Pradab Pulaihulu, said police and military officers from several agencies had asked for a list of school teachers' names, without mentioning the purpose.

The school would welcome any inspections to prove its innocence, although its teachers and students were frightened by the raids on ponoh schools, he said.

In Pattani's Yaring district, the director and students of Somboonsart Doloh school, a blacklisted 110-year-old, all-male ponoh school, challenged the security forces to make an inspection.

School director Kareem Naknawa said: "My school gives no weapons training and does not teach students to join separatist movements. We have taught only religious principles for more than 100 years. All our teachers are screened.

"I feel sorry the military and security agencies think my school is involved in terrorist movements. The government looks on us as second-class citizens and bad people," he said.

Yahya bin Abdul Manif, a 29-year-old student, said he wanted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to raid all ponoh schools and discover for himself there was nothing going on. His school was open to military inspection at any time, as it had neither weapons training nor guns, and its students were studying only the Koran holy book and the Arabic language. Student Gor Desh Hadden, 26, insisted there was no military training or teaching of any other ideology _ only religious and moral principles. End.

NEWS# 4

Muslim clerics warn Thaksin to take care investigating schools

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Monday, January 12, 2004 08:39

12008 XCLUSIVE XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jan 12--Bangkok Post

Muslim religious teachers have reacted with dismay to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's plan to investigate private Islamic schools in the South for links to terrorist groups.

Mr Thaksin said yesterday some ponoh schools _ private schools teaching Islam _ may be operating as a front for the training of militants.

Authorities would investigate the schools, he said, but gave no further details.

There are more than 300 ponoh schools in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla provinces.

"No one is above the law," the prime minister said. "We allow people to practise their religion freely, but they must also abide by the law."

Some government and military leaders viewed the renewed violence in the South as a move to revive a separatist insurgency in the region.

They suspected insurgents might be persuading young Muslim men to join them.

Yala Islamic Committee vice-chairman Nimu Magajae warned the investigation was a sensitive matter and must be "handled with care".

He said the government must check and recheck its intelligence reports before carrying out searches on ponoh schools, or interrogating Islamic religious teachers.

Mr Nimu said he could not guarantee that all ponoh schools and their teachers were innocent, but asked the government not to use police or the military to raid schools and arrest teachers.

"This is a delicate issue," he said.

"The schools and the teachers must be dealt with politely, and with respect."

Once authorities were certain their information was accurate, they should ask Islamic religious leaders and managers and principals of the schools to help arrange the investigation, he said.

Waedueramae Maminchi, manager and headmaster of the Pattani Triam Sueksa Witthaya ponoh school, said he was saddened that the credibility of Islamic religious teachers was in doubt.

He said his school instructed students in morals and ethics every morning, lessons that urged them to be upstanding members of society.

“Our teachers always tell the kids to study hard to prove that we are not training them for terrorist groups,” he said.

Mr Waedueramae, who is also chairman of the Pattani Islamic Committee, said he was aware that none of the 20 schools that were set ablaze by arsonists in Narathiwat was ponoh.

The arsonists could be viewed as being followers of a certain religion, he admitted. However, he made the point that ponoh schools were not immune to attack, and that several had received bomb threats in the past week.

Mr Waedueramae said the government extended scholarships and subsidies to many students of southern ponoh schools.

Graduates of these schools were entitled to apply for scholarships to study overseas, mainly in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, before they turned 30.

Mr Waedueramae said many of those who studied abroad returned to work as teachers at ponoh schools. End.

NEWS# 5

Muslim student held over arson attack

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Wednesday, June 02, 2004 09:01

58223 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jun 2--Bangkok Post

A Muslim student was detained for questioning yesterday following pre-dawn arson at Pattani's famed Lim Kor Niew Shrine.

Sakareeya Tayeh, 20, was arrested five hours after an unknown group of young men set fire to the shrine-keeper's living quarters in the early hours of yesterday.

The shrine, a popular tourist site, is a stone's throw from Krue Se Mosque, the scene of a bloody clash between separatist militants and government troops on April 28.

Police said they had reasons to suspect Mr Sakareeya took part in the arson attack which caused partial damage to the shrine. He was spotted among people who came to look at the shrine after the attack.

Police seized him when he told a television crew at the scene that he supported vandalism. He also chanted messages glorifying separatism, saying Pattani should be freed from Thailand's rule.

"It's high time we exacted revenge. We believe in the history of an independent Pattani state. We won't be fooled by the lame legend of Lim Kor Niew. We want Pattani liberated," said Mr Sakareeya, a student of an Islamic ponoh school in Pattani's Ya Rang district.

He added: "History has taught us that Thailand took away our Pattani. We want the state to be ours again." As Mr Sakareeya was about to be handcuffed, one of the police making the arrest appeared to have lost his temper and was close to giving Mr Sakareeya a kick. The policeman was restrained by other officers.

Mr Sakareeya was taken to a police unit at Ban Krue Se for questioning. He was later released but police were keeping him under watch. No charges were pressed against him yesterday but he still could face prosecution for allegedly supporting a separatist

cause and torching public property.

The young Muslim later told the Bangkok Post he may have been too blunt in expressing his views. "That is what I think and I dare speak my mind. But it doesn't mean I did it (burning the shrine-keeper's quarters)," he said.

Urai Suthimas, 52, the shrine-keeper, said a group of young men broke into the premises around 4am and began smashing up everything in their path. They also set alight her living quarters next to the shrine. She and her son ran for safety and did not recognise any of the attackers, Mrs Urai said.

Area residents claimed they saw Mr Sakareeya among a group of men who gathered inside Krue Se mosque on Monday. The men acted suspiciously and were overheard saying that they wanted to die inside the historical mosque, they said.

Pol Col Pothi Suaysuwan, superintendent of Muang district police station, said the shrine attack might be a bid to stir up trouble ahead of Visaka Bucha Day today. It looked like an attempt to drive a wedge between local Buddhists and Muslims, he added. End.

NEWS# 6

Muslim teacher says he took militant training in Malaysia

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Thursday, September 02, 2004 08:31

28837 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Sep 2--Bangkok Post

An Islamic religious teacher in Yala has confessed he was among Muslim militants trained in Malaysia before they returned to stage the April 28 violence in the deep South, said army interrogators.

Abdul Wahub Datu, 40, alias Babor Wahub, principal of Malayu Bangkok ponoh school in Yala's Muang district, said in recorded questioning yesterday that he travelled to Malaysia's Kelantan state last year to meet leading separatists and discuss separatist strategies, undergo self-defence training and learn how to make himself invulnerable.

The training was held at a jungle cave and a cemetery in Malaysia, said the Islamic teacher.

He admitted he and Isama-il Jaafar, or Pohsu, a leading separatist arrested recently in Malaysia, had jointly written the book *Berjihad Di Pattani* (Fighting for a Pattani State), to encourage southern Muslims to fight for an independent Pattani.

After learning that the religious teaching was distorted and the work had little to do with the separatist ideology, he withdrew from the movement, said the school principal.

"I have regrets. It's my mistake. I was lured to undergo self-defence training and we learned how to make ourselves invulnerable to harm, like we were put under a magic spell. I joined because I was curious," Mr Abdul Wahub said, in tears.

He made his confession during the interrogations at Inkhayutthaboriharn military camp in Pattani.

He was interrogated by Fourth Army commander Lt-Gen Pisarn Wattanawongkeeree and Abdullahmae Jehsae, chairman of the Yala Islamic Committee.

His confession was recorded and yesterday presented to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

The arrest of the school principal came after Malaysia had handed the written confession of Mr Isama-il to Lt-Gen Pisarn. Mr Isama-il implicated several religious teachers in the deep South.

Mr Abdul Wahub said Isama-ae Rayarong, alias Ustaz Soh, persuaded him to join his group.

He was then taken to meet Mr Isma-il. They discussed the separatist movement and self-defence training.

According to Mr Abdul Wahub, Mr Isma-il took Mr Isama-ae to the South of Thailand to meet teachers and students at religious schools. They persuaded them to join the movement.

He said Mr Isma-ae had been paid hundreds of thousands of baht to mobilise youths to join the separatist movement.

He distanced himself from the movement after finding that those separatists had not shared the same ideology with him. He was also afraid of being used as a tool by the separatist group.

"More importantly, Mr Isma-ae had lured youths from many religious schools to undergo training and join his group. I had warned him not to persuade my students," said Mr Abdul Wahub.

However, his warning had gone unheard after he found that several students at his school had taken part in the April 28 attack on government security forces in the deep South.

"The April 28 uprising at Krue Se Mosque [in Muang district of Pattani] shocked me. Several students at my school had been lured to join the separatist movement, which destroyed their future and the country," said the school principal.

Lt-Gen Pisarn said although Malaysia could not hand Mr Isma-il back to Thailand since the suspect held dual Thai-Malaysian nationality, it had supplied useful information to Thai authorities, particularly a list of 10 religious leaders who were members of the Ustaz rebel group.

There are many ponohs in the deep South. The ponohs teach only Islam. Several ponohs have changed their status to Islamic private schools, accredited by the Education Ministry. These schools now teach secular subjects and receive government financial assistance.

NEWS# 7

Muslim teens to be trained in patriotism

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Sunday, February 08, 2004 07:30

8060 XCLUSIVE XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Feb 8--Bangkok Post

Young Muslims in three southernmost provinces will be trained under the army's "patriotic youth" programme, to help them ward off the separatist ideology of bandit groups.

The idea was proposed by Defence Minister Gen Thammarak Issarangkura na Ayudhaya and army chief Gen Chaisit Shinawatra.

Gen Thammarak said Muslim youths from Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat would be trained to act as "united front" members of the army in its fight against the separatist movement.

The proposal was prompted by reports of 700 Muslim youths having been recruited by the separatist movement to undergo weapons and military training. They are thought to be behind a spate of attacks here.

Gen Thammarak and Gen Chaisit spoke to the chairmen of Islamic committees of the three provinces. Those committees will call a meeting of local leaders to select three youth representatives from each tambon or mosque to join the programme.

The first batch of 500 trainees, aged 15-25, would be trained at Chulabhorn military camp in Narathiwat, Sirindhorn military camp in Yala and Ingkhayuthboriharn camp in Pattani.

Waedueramae Maminchi, chairman of the Pattani Islamic Committee, and Abdullahman Abdul Samad, chairman of the Narathiwat Islamic Committee, supported the programme.

"We don't want our young people to be misled into joining the bandits and cause problems. We will try to get students of ponoh schools to join as well," Mr Waedueramae said.

Muslim leaders would meet Gen Thammarak, Gen Chaisit and Interior Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha ahead of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's visit to the South soon.

"We are looking forward to meeting the prime minister.

"We have many issues to discuss," Mr Waedueramae said.

Meanwhile, in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Lt-Gen Pongsak Ekbannasingha, the 4th Army commander, said the situation in the South was improving steadily thanks to support from local people.

People were more organised and were ready to fight alongside the government, he said. End.

NEWS # 8

Ponoh official takes blame for murder

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Sunday, September 19, 2004 09:30

64379 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Sep 19--Bangkok Post

Chairman of the Pattani Islamic Committee Waedueramae Mamingji says his Triam Seuksa Witthaya school, a ponoh school, is also to blame for the Friday murder of a judge as one of the three accused gunmen is its student.

Police arrested suspect Abdullah Pahsee, 20, at his dormitory _ a hut _ at the school located in Pattani's Muang district on Friday evening. They believe he took part in the murder of Rapin Ruankaew, 37, a Pattani provincial court judge, at an intersection in downtown Pattani in the morning.

The police seized from him a 9mm pistol and a bullet.

Police Region 9 deputy chief Thani Thawichsri said Mr Abdullah had confessed to killing the judge, along with Abdul Kama and Ibrohim Mamah, who are still at large.

Mr Abdullah said an unidentified ustaz _ Islamic religious teacher _ wanted him to liberate Muslim-dominated southern provinces from the Thai kingdom and urged him to kill police, soldiers and government officials.

Mr Waedueramae said he was sorry and hurt that his student was a murderer.

"He killed a judge. I am the Pattani Islamic Committee chairman. How can I hide myself from all these shames?" he said. Mr Waedueramae admitted security measures at his school were lax and that he himself also was negligent.

He said Mr Abdullah had graduated since 2002 but was allowed to stay at the school. Mr Waedueramae said the school would step up security at its gate and check the records of its 1,000 students, 200 of whom are in school dormitories, and examine the backgrounds of 60 Islamic religious teachers.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said troubles in the South kept erupting partly because authorities had not checked if Islamic schools were breaking any rules.

Mr Thaksin said many Islamic religious teachers strongly believed in segregation and passed those beliefs on to their students.

"They made those children harm state authorities and the people who help them, so no one will want to be on the same side as the government," he said.

Mr Thaksin asked the public to be patient as ending the violence in the South was not easy.

Authorities had to be careful not to act in a way that could be seen as a violation of the constitution.

He expressed his condolences to the family of Mr Rapin and promised full protection for the late judge's wife, Duangnapa, who is also a judge working in Pattani.

Pattani court chief Justice Chamras Phetsuwan said all 11 judges in the troubled provinces now carried guns for self-protection.

Charan Pakdeethanakul, secretary-general of the supreme court president, said he was worried about Betong court in Yala, which was in a remote spot and could be targeted.

"Everybody there now wants to move elsewhere," Mr Charan said.

News # 9

Ponoh school's fate sealed

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Monday, June 13, 2005 08:30

40469 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jun 13--Bangkok Post

Jihad Wittaya School, a traditional ponoh in tambon Takokapo of Pattani's Yaring district, has been completely abandoned following its closure on May 23. There is no talk of reopening the school.

The ponoh used to have 110 students. After its closure, the students were reassigned to other ponohs in Panare district.

Ponohs, or pondoks, are generally temple-like boarding schools which offer free schooling to students in a traditional Islamic way. They are regarded as an institution where students are instilled with Muslim traditions and way of life.

Jihad Wittaya was raided and searched by police and soldiers on May 19. In the search, they found an arms training field, VCDs on arms training of members of the al-Qaeda terrorist group, documents on making of explosives and records of times of vehicles arriving and leaving government offices. The Fourth Army ordered the school closed permanently on May 23.

Aduenan Che-asae, 33, the school manager, said he was the only person left at the school.

"The students occasionally return to ask when it would reopen. I said I don't know. The students have no idea why their school was closed," he said.

Mr Aduenan was taken by the military for interrogation for two days. During the course of the interrogation he insisted the ponoh had nothing to do with al-Qaeda. "Although the interrogators said three students had confessed to the al-Qaeda suspicion, I insisted on my innocence. The three students were later released, but I don't know where they have gone," he said.

Mr Aduenan said the students bought the VCDs on al-Qaeda training from the market at 40-50 baht each. "They were available in abundance, so were VCDs on wars in Bosnia and Iraq. But this did not mean we were engaged in any training," he added. The former school manager said what was said to be an arms training field was in fact a coconut plantation. What were seen as bullet holes were only natural marks on coconut trees, he said.

However, Dulloh Waemahano or 'Ustaz Loh,' the 46-year-old former school headmaster, who is his brother-in-law, has fled. "I can't tell whether he had anything

to do with the al-Qaeda. From my association with him since childhood, he was not a radical. I don't know where he went," said Mr Aduenan.

Concerning his second-hand BMW car, Mr Aduenan said he paid a 100,000 baht down payment to buy it on instalments from a finance company. The money was from his 14 years of savings as an employee at a restaurant in Malaysia. "It was my own money and not from abroad. Our school never received financial support from abroad. We collected a yearly fee of 300 baht from each student and that was the only source of our income," he said.

Although Jihad Wittaya has been closed, police suspect the torching of schools and tyres and the spray-painting of separatist messages on roads and the destruction of signboards in Yaring district, were the work of former students of the school.

"Police and soldiers searched the school twice, but found nothing. It would be unfair not to allow the school to reopen," Mr Aduenan said.

In a related development, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra reiterated in Chiang Mai yesterday that Masa-i Boonpol, former chairman of the Islamic Group of the Prince of Songkhla University, was a prime suspect in the murders of Pattani judge Rapin Ruankaew and three other people as well as other violent incidents in the deep South. Mr Masa-i was arrested on Friday and is being detained in Bangkok.

Mr Thaksin said although the man was a university graduate, he had been instilled with wrong ideologies by a local ponoh.

NEWS # 10

Ponohs slam police indoctrination claim

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Monday, May 03, 2004 09:00

51464 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--May 3--Bangkok Post

Islamic school administrators reject the police theory that foreign teachers from Arab-speaking countries may have indoctrinated Muslim youths and students to attack officials in the deep South, saying the suspicion was groundless.

Police were keeping a close watch on 21 foreign Arabic-language teachers working at Islamic schools and colleges in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, according to a police intelligence report, which says some Arab teachers were involved in criminal activities such as smuggling arms and contraband goods.

Authorities were looking into the involvement of some local Islamic teachers after the body of Ustha Yaya, a Muslim teacher at an Islamic boarding school in Pattani's Yarang district, was found in Krue Se Mosque after the bloodshed on Wednesday.

The school administrators questioned why security agencies still accused their schools and personnel of being behind any current violent incidents, particularly in the three Muslim dominated provinces.

"It is a baseless accusation. I have carefully checked their backgrounds [of foreign Islamic teachers] before employing them, and they have been vetted by state authorities too, otherwise they would not have been permitted to enter the country," said Ismail Lutfi Japakiya, director of Yala Islamic College, which employs teachers from Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Jordan to teach Islam and Arabic.

They were well-behaved and had no extremist ideas, Mr Ismail said, adding they worked only to send money back to their families in their home countries.

"I don't understand why the government thinks negatively about Muslims and Arab nationals despite the fact there are millions of foreigners such as British and Americans residing in the country," he said.

Of the 21 foreign teachers on the police watch-list, nine were reportedly working at Yala Islamic College.

Abdul Hamid Japakiya, the principal of Bamrung Islam private school in Muang district, denied the school had one Pakistani teacher under police watch. The school had hired Arab-speaking teachers five years ago but now it had none, Mr Abdul said, adding: "The [police] accusation is not fair to me and my school."

He said Islamic extremists, and not Arab-speaking or Islamic teachers, were the ones who had brainwashed the Muslim youths to attack authorities which led to the tragedy last Wednesday.

“Our Islam never teaches us to die for God in this way,” he said.

About 106 militants, mostly Muslim youths armed with knives and machetes, were shot dead on Wednesday in separate attacks on officials in Saba Yoi district of Songkhla, Muang and Mae Lan districts of Pattani and Muang district and Krongpinang sub-district of Yala.

While authorities were targeting those teachers who could be behind the youths' behaviour, Worawit Baru, deputy rector of Prince of Songkhla University in Pattani, believed the violent situation reflected the government's ignorance of education opportunities for youths in the three Muslim-dominated provinces.

Mr Worawit said poverty and lack of adequate support from the government frustrated several young Muslims as their families could not send them to study in state schools in town.

This left the children no alternative but to study at local Islamic ponoh (religious) schools.

“I believe every Muslim family wants to send their children to study in good schools in towns but only a few of them have the opportunity to do that.

“The rest are poor and are ignored by the government,” Mr Worawit said. End.

NEWS # 11

Ponohs told to check staff records, watch their conduct

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Friday, September 03, 2004 08:31

40600 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Sep 3--Bangkok Post

Owners of ponohs and privately-run Islamic religious schools have been told to keep a close watch on religious teachers to prevent separatist elements from luring students into the movement.

The warning was issued yesterday by Abdullahmae Jehsae, chairman of the Yala Islamic Committee, after a school principal in Yala said he had been lured into undergoing self-defence training by separatist members. Reports had also come in that some religious teachers were involved in violent attacks in the deep South.

Abdul Wahab Datu, 40, principal of Malayu Bangkok ponoh school, said he travelled to Malaysia's Kelantan state last year to meet separatist members and train in self-defence.

Mr Abdullahmae said Abdul Wahab withdrew from the movement after learning the religious teaching was distorted.

The Islamic committee chairman maintained Mr Abdul Wahab was not a member of any separatist group, but was once misled.

He denied Mr Abdul Wahab had written the book Berjihad Di Pattani (Fighting for a Pattani state), to encourage southern Muslims to fight for an independent Pattani.

The principal only studied the book, he said. Mr Abdullahmae and other army officers interrogated Mr Abdul Wahab.

Mr Abdullahmae said he had consulted the Islamic committee chairmen in Pattani and Narathiwat to seek cooperation from owners of ponohs and managers of Islamic religious schools in the deep South to check the records of religious teachers.

"This doesn't mean those teachers are bad people or involved in unrest. But there are some people whom we do not want. Now, we have obtained information (about their activities) and are working with the Fourth Army," said Mr Abdullahmae.

Earlier, Malaysia had handed a written confession by Isma-il Jaafar, author of Berjihad Di Pattani, to Lt-Gen Pisarn Wattanawongkeeree. The suspect implicated Abdul Wahab as a member of the separatist movement.

Mr Abdullahmae said Mr Isma-il implicated Mr Abdul Wahab as he was angry the principal did not cooperate.

Teachers and students at Malayu Bangkok school were not convinced that their principal had been involved. Abdullah Datu, 32, younger brother of Mr Abdul Wahab, defended his brother, saying he had been lured to undergo training.

NEWS # 12

Released Islamic teacher insists he is not a terrorist

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Sunday, January 11, 2004 08:23

11008 XCLUSIVE XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jan 11--Bangkok Post

One of the Islamic teachers caught by the military for suspected involvement in the arson attack on 20 schools in Narathiwat on Jan 4 insisted yesterday he was not a terrorist.

Muhammad Haji We Sahak, 44, reunited with his family after being freed with the other suspect. Santi Doloh, 54, said he had been asked by the military during two days of intense questioning if he knew anything about the gun robbery in Narathiwat. He said he knew nothing about the incident.

He taught Islam by day and stayed home at night. Authorities should have talked to him instead of arresting him at his home. The arrest affected his image but his release confirmed his innocence, he said. Several Islamic teachers had been invited for questioning, he said.

"It was a big affair _ like they were riding elephants to catch a grasshopper," Mr Muhammad said, speaking of his detention.

"They said their boss from the army camp wanted me to speak with them," he told reporters from his simple cinder-block house near the neighbourhood mosque. Mr Muhammad said he hardly slept at the camp.

The military said there was no evidence to link them with the raid although a military source insisted there was information linking Mr Muhammad with terrorist movements and relatives in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. "I am not a Bersatu ... I learned of it only from newspapers. The word Bersatu in Yawi (a southern dialect) means a gathering of Buddhist and Muslim Thais. It's not a terrorist movement. But I'm not a Bersatu," Mr Muhammad said.

Defence Minister Gen Thammarak Isarangkura na Ayudhaya said on Friday that the teacher was a leader of the Bersatu separatist organisation in Pattani.

According to the source, Muhammad is a relative of Waedueramae Maminchi, chairman of the Pattani Islamic Committee. Waedueramae, who is close to Interior Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha, complained about the arrest.

Mr Wan Nor said the teachers had been invited for questioning and sent home. Local Muslims were afraid that the teachers would be framed.

Nura-inee Doloh, a 13-year-old student, said Mr Muhammad was a good, kind and capable teacher. Kasem Promsri, the principal, said Mr Muhammad had taught at Wat Suwannakarn school for more than 10 years.

Both teachers were detained at Inkha Yuthaboriharn military camp. Mr Muhammad said he was treated well although some military officers had tried to make him answer questions for which he had no answer. He would be willing to help if they needed his help again.

Deputy Premier Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said the arrest of local people, especially Islamic teachers, was a sensitive matter and authorities concerned had to prevent their actions from opening chances for some other parties to instigate disunity. End.

NEWS # 13

Religious schools told to fly national flag, submit to checks

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Friday, August 06, 2004 09:02

5901 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Aug 6--Bangkok Post

Islamic religious schools and ponoh schools in three southern border provinces must fly the national flag and submit to inspections by ministerial patrol teams, the Education Ministry says.

Deputy Education Minister Sutham Saengprathum said the Office of the Private Education Commission would tell Muslim religious schools and ponoh schools in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat to fly the flag, after some schools refused.

The military had passed on reports that 27 teachers from 10 Islamic religious schools were involved in violent incidents in the South and had been arrested.

The ministry would send patrol teams consisting of ministry inspectors-general and staff from the education permanent secretary's office and the commission to inspect the schools to improve their quality and stop the schools being used as youth training centres by people wanting to incite chaos in the South.

"We admit we have neglected to control the quality and standards of these schools. Our patrol teams will now look into their curriculum, administration and student rolls. "We have found at least two Islamic religious schools are on only 6-10 rai of land, but have up to 6,000 students each which has led to student control problems. We will also register teachers and students at Islamic religious schools and ponoh schools," Mr Sutham said.

NEWS # 14

Religious teacher arrested on charges of ordering arson spree

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Wednesday, August 18, 2004 08:32

15854 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Aug 18--Bangkok Post

A religious teacher has been arrested on charges of plotting and ordering 14 arson attacks in three districts of Pattani province last week.

Nimahamud Haji Samae, 40, a religious teacher, or usta, at two ponoh schools in Pattani _ Mah-addarulma-a-ref and Pattana Islam _ was arrested on Monday by soldiers.

It followed an accusation by another religious teacher, Wae-arong Woh, 23, arrested on Friday, that Mr Nimahamud had ordered the arson at 14 different spots in Muang, Nong Chik and Yaring districts on the night of Aug 11.

Mr Nimamud, of tambon Baraheng, Muang district, Pattani, has a bachelor's degree in education from Usini University in Indonesia.

Lt-Gen Pisarn Wattanawongkeeree, the Fourth Army commander, said authorities were also closing in on other religious teachers involved in a violence in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat provinces since the beginning of this year.

In Narathiwat, an oil palm farmer was shot down in Rangae district by two men on a motorcycle. Police said Abdulrosa Chemaie, 39, was hit three times and died on the way to hospital.

In Yala, police rushed to the train station yesterday morning after an unidentified man phoned railway staff and said a bomb had been planted in the area. It turned out to be a hoax.

Later in the day, provincial police headquarters in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat sent an urgent radio message to all police stations, telling them to be on full alert as information had been received from a reliable source that insurgents were planning violent attacks in the three provinces during Aug 17-Sept 5.

The source said attacks would include the laying of bombs at important and strategic locations and police and military outposts.

In Bangkok, the cabinet yesterday approved the Labour Ministry's proposal to make a special payment to employees of state enterprises in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.

To be entitled to the special payment, employees must have been permanently assigned to work in these provinces, not be on temporary duty.

NEWS # 15

Schools 'are not breeding unrest'

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Monday, September 12, 2005 08:31

57821 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Sep 12--Bangkok Post

Labelling private Islamic schools breeding grounds for separatist unrest is unfair, say students and teachers at the schools.

Armad Hama, 13, decided to study at Dalor ponoh or pondok in Pattani's Yaring district as he wanted to gain more knowledge about Islam. The boy dreamed of becoming a religious teacher.

He was not shaken by allegations that several ponohs, including his school, were on a police watch-list for alleged involvement in violence in the three southernmost provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat.

"I am not worried. Islam teaches us to be good people," he said.

Muhammad Abdulloh, 23, who has been studying at the school for four years since graduating from high school, said learning about Islam was the most important thing for Muslims.

"I want to be a good Muslim so I decided to study Islamic teaching. This school [Dalor ponoh] is the best for me. Most graduates become community leaders," said Mr Muhammad.

He dismissed claims that ponohs were a breeding ground for separatists and said the army had failed to bring the real wrongdoers to justice.

Instead, they tried to blame ustazes or religious teachers for being behind the unrest, which forced them to flee their communities, he said.

Dalor ponoh opened 106 years ago on land which once belonged to the former Pattani state. The school provides Islamic religious courses for free and survives on donations from Muslim parents.

Most Islamic religious schools teach 15 subjects in Islamic-related studies. They also teach the Arabic language so learners can understand more about the Koran, which is written in Arabic.

A string of violent attacks in the deep South has prompted the state to review the role of ponohs and tadikas, or Islamic schools for young children. It wants schools to add more Thai language courses so students can communicate in Thai.

The government also planned to ask state-run schools to provide courses on Islam, to encourage Muslim students from religious schools to study at public schools instead.

Administrators and teachers at religious schools said the government's plan to include Islamic courses in non-religious schools was not the solution.

Nimuktar Waba, director of Daroonsartwitthaya religious school in Pattani's Sai Buri district, said the government should turn state-run schools into learning centres where Muslim students and local people could search for knowledge not taught at religious schools.

As for religious schools, the government should ask them to provide courses which reflected the Muslim way of life rather than focusing on Thai language courses, he suggested.

Muslim academics and religious teachers denied ponohs received overseas funding to stage unrest in the deep South.

Solae Talae, vice-chairman of the foundation for Islamic studies in the South, said teachers and students at Islamic Yala College, which received funding from Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries, were not involved in unrest in the region. Claims that the college was involved in violent attacks hurt its reputation, he said.

NEWS # 16

Tadika school transfer worries

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Saturday, August 13, 2005 08:42

57434 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Aug 13--Bangkok Post

Yala _ Teachers at tadikas _ weekend Islamic schools for children _ are unhappy at the prospect of the supervision of their schools being transferred from the Interior Ministry to the Education Ministry.

Russadee Borkor, chairman of the Tadika Islamic Religious Schools Association, said 1,400 teachers have signed a petition opposing the move. There are about 4,000 tadika teachers in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala.

The petition, calling for a review of the transfer plan initiated by Deputy Education Minister Rung Kaewdaeng, will be submitted to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Authorities have claimed that teachers in tadikas had perpetrated the violence in the South and encouraged their students to join the separatist movement.

The Education Ministry hopes to deal with the educational problem and ensure that students fully understand Islamic teachings and principles.

However, Mr Russadee said tadika teachers were uncertain that the Office of the Private Education Commission under the Education Ministry would be able to ensure educational quality and benefits for teachers in tadika schools amidst a shortage of local staff.

He claimed that hundreds of ponoh religious schools for older children and private Islamic schools were now facing a similar problem.

The Education Ministry last year asked the operators of these schools to register with the ministry, which then allocated a budget for them to develop their schools. However, the ministry did not have enough local staff to monitor whether the schools actually spent the budget for development purposes. At the same time, the ministry had never asked them about their needs, nor had it recommended to them how to properly develop curricula to meet local needs, Mr Russadee said.

"The Education Ministry is like parents who are spoiling their children. They never cared about the true feelings and needs of these ponoh and private Islamic schools, and we don't want our tadika schools to face the same situation," he added.

Tadika schools offer after-school religious courses at weekends for Muslim children in grades one to six. They were originally supervised by the Religions Department of the Education Ministry.

Mr Russadee said the department, which has been transferred to the Culture Ministry, had never fully supported the schools in terms of educational curricula, teaching media and equipment, and budgets.

The schools were last year transferred to the supervision of the Local Administration Department of the Interior Ministry, by then-minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha. Tadika schools are located in community mosques which are supervised by the ministry.

Mr Russadee said tadika schools were community learning centres, and as such all members of the community should take part in the development of learning and teaching. He said the Interior Ministry has been taking good care of tadika schools during the past two years as it has sufficient numbers of staff to oversee local needs and the quality of education.

NEWS # 17

Teacher, student arrested

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Friday, August 13, 2004 09:03

40966 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Aug 13--Bangkok Post

A religious school teacher and a student were arrested following one of nine arson attacks in two Pattani districts on Wednesday night.

Ahama Samah, 23, an assistant religious teacher or "ustah" at Sart Samakkhi ponoh school in Pattani's Nong Chik district, and Mamud Heembu, 20, a native of Songkhla and student at Ma-abdarul Maharef ponoh school in Pattani's Muang district, were arrested after a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a shop.

Witnesses told soldiers that the two were on a motorcycle in Muang district when Mr Mamud, the passenger, threw the firebomb. Two other attackers, dressed in athletics gear, managed to flee on another motorcycle.

Mr Ahama denied being involved when he was brought before a press conference at Ingkhayuthaboriharn camp in Pattani yesterday. He said he and other religious teachers were returning from a football match.

Lt-Gen Pisarn Wattanawongkeeree, Fourth Army commander, said they were part of a team of assistant religious teachers and ponoh students who on Wednesday night launched simultaneous arson attacks on nine targets in Muang, Nong Chik and Yaring districts.

The targets included a house of Pol Col Somsak Nakayokhi, deputy superintendent of Muang district police, and a hut at a shrimp farm in Muang district. The targets were damaged slightly.

"Religious leaders in the South call assistant religious teachers who have joined the separatist movement 'ustah rebels' because they defy warnings from the Chularatchamontri," he said.

The Chularatchamontri is leader of the Muslim community in Thailand.

Lt-Gen Pisarn said the so-called ustah rebels, considered mid-level leaders among Muslim dissidents, had taken action because many other separatists had given up.

The ustahs were recruiting ponoh students to replace militants killed in the failed April 28 uprising, he said.

Earlier, Isma-ae Longsen, a religious teacher, was shot and seriously wounded when he attacked a military outpost. He is being treated at a military hospital in Ingkhayuthaboriharn camp.

A military source said about 30 ustah rebels at the core of the southern separatist movement had studied in Middle East countries, some on scholarships.

Some spent up to 12 years abroad, returning in 1990-92, and took part in arson attacks on 36 southern schools in 1993.

NEWS # 18

Teachers blamed for shootings

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Friday, July 30, 2004 09:01

43392 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jul 30--Bangkok Post

About 20 Muslim religious teachers are behind the almost daily shootings of security officials in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, a local intelligence source said yesterday.

The teachers carried out attacks themselves, hoping to win back the support of local Muslims after many youths who had received armed training from them had defected to state authorities, the source said.

Yesterday, Pol Snr Sgt-Maj Pin Rattanasongkroh was shot dead in Pattani by two men on a motorcycle, reportedly wearing dawa _ a long white robe worn by Muslims.

Police arrested four suspects, two of them students at an Islamic ponoh school in Yarang.

Earlier this week, a policeman and a TAO executive were killed in Yala and another policeman died in an attack in Pattani.

Last week, an army private was killed in Yala's Yaha district. Abdulloh Akoh, a Muslim religious teacher, was arrested and charged his murder.

Yala police yesterday searched 10 rented houses and apartments in Yala's municipality for the gunman who shot a policeman at his shophouse on Wednesday. The gunman reportedly also wore dawa.

NEWS # 19

Three Muslim teenagers with 'marked' city map detained
Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Saturday, November 12, 2005 10:00
18941 XENGLISH XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Nov 12--Bangkok Post

Security officials have detained three male Muslim teenagers for questioning following their arrest at a Bangkok amusement park with a map of the capital with 43 large public gathering spots and the Defence Ministry marked out.

However, the three Muslims, whose names were withheld, denied any involvement in subversive activities, military security sources said.

The teenagers, who were students at a Muslim ponoh school in the deep South, insisted the marked spots on their map, mostly tourist venues and shopping malls, were places they wanted to visit and they had nothing do with any sabotage plot. The Defence Ministry was also one of the 43 marked locations on the map.

"The three teenagers claimed they wanted to visit Bangkok and see the Phya Tani cannon at the Defence Ministry," a source said. The ancient cannon originated from the southern region.

The teenagers were sent to the Southern Border Provinces Peace-building Command in Pattani for further questioning.

The teenagers were spotted on Nov 7 at Siam Park in the Bang Kapi area and were detained for questioning after security officers became suspicious about their activities. The map of Bangkok was taken from one of them.

Intelligence gathering agencies had warned security authorities about possible insurgent attacks in Bangkok and tourist towns following the Hat Yai airport bombing in April.

The Defence Ministry has stepped up security at its headquarters, particularly at its front section which is near a main road and has no fences.

The army also has beefed up security at important venues in the capital since last month. Intelligence reports warned that insurgents might shift their targets to big cities and tourist areas.

Deputy army spokesman Col Thanathip Sawangsaeng said army chief Gen Sonthi Boonyaratglin plans to give security officers and motorists tips about what to do if there are car bombs at government offices.

Lt-Gen Palangkul Klaharn, head of the Supreme Command's Directorate of Joint Civil Affairs, urged mobile phone subscribers in the three southern provinces using pre-paid SIM cards to get their phones registered by Nov 15, or their service will be cut off.

Meanwhile, a group of militants fired an M79 grenade launcher and a rifle at the Chanae police station in Narathiwat's Chanae district.

But the grenades and bullets missed their target. The militants fled after police returned fire. There were no casualties.

NEWS# 20

Islamic teachers held

Source - Bangkok Post (Eng)

Friday, January 09, 2004 08:27

9002 XCLUSIVE XGEN V%PAPERL P%POSD

Bangkok--Jan 9--Bangkok Post

Two Islamic religious teachers believed to have aided a separatist group which raided the army camp in Narathiwat on Sunday are being detained for questioning.

They have denied any involvement in the attack.

Muhamad Hayeewea Sohor , 44, and Santi Sama-ae, of Suwannakorn school in tambon Bor Thong of Pattani's Nong Chik district, were yesterday taken by soldiers and police to Ingkhayud Boriharn military camp.

Deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and 20 officers from the police and military intelligence agencies took part in the interrogation.

Another 51 draftee soldiers who recently completed their military service were also being questioned, though none has been detained.

After the 15-minute interrogation, the two teachers were taken to a secret room for further questioning.

A source said both Mr Muhamad and Mr Santi denied any involvement in Sunday's violence in Narathiwat province, in which a group of armed men raided an army camp and killed four soldiers on guard duty before looting the arsenal.

The two teachers also denied any knowledge of names of suspected raiders.

"During intense interrogation, Mr Muhamad broke down in tears. He insisted he was not involved in any way," the source said.

The source said Mr Muhamad and Mr Santi had some links to the Bersatu separatist group.

Intelligence officers had closely monitored their movements and believed the two teachers knew the attackers.

"When we raided their houses, the two men tried to flee. They were later caught by soldiers," the source said.

Gen Chavalit said warrants were likely for the arrest of 2-3 more suspects, adding authorities had obtained information about those involved in the recent violence.

Army chief Gen Chaisit Shinawatra has offered cash rewards as an incentive to arrest the men responsible for the camp attack and the torching of 20 schools in Narathiwat, and the bomb explosions in neighbouring Pattani.

Gen Chaisit said a cash reward of 500,000 baht would be given to whoever provided information about the attackers and one million baht for their arrest. The money would come from his own pocket.

The military yesterday announced the cash rewards in leaflets dropped from a helicopter.

Written in Thai and Arabic, the leaflets urged people to give information via PO Box 29 in Narathiwat.

Defence Minister Gen Thammarak Isarangkura na Ayudhya yesterday said 10 more people would be summoned for questioning.

The armed men who looted the army camp's arsenal were bandits living in the jungle and in town, the minister said.

He said the 200-strong Sinchai Task Force, comprising infantrymen, rangers, navy officers and officers from a special combat unit, has been dispatched to hunt down bandits and search for the stolen weapons in mountainous areas such as Khao Ta-ngor in Jor Ai Rong district, Narathiwat. It was reported the stolen firearms had been hidden in several caves.

Five task forces which were recently formed began patrolling high-risk areas yesterday.

Gen Thammarak said the armed men who stole the weapons were members of small bandit groups which had formed gangs. Some were involved in the separatist movement, he said. End.