

POACHING SAGA

ITD chief 'hasn't fled Thailand'

POST REPORTERS

Premchai Karnasuta, the president of Italian-Thai Development Plc (ITD) accused of poaching wildlife in a Kanchanaburi World Heritage sanctuary, is still in the country, his lawyer has insisted.

Lawyer Withoon Yamprai yesterday denied reports that Mr Premchai had already fled via a natural border. Mr Premchai is still in the country and performing his normal duties inspecting construction sites every day, Mr Withoon said, adding that the ITD boss was not worried about the case.

Deputy national police chief Srivara Ransibrahmanakul yesterday said the Immigration Bureau had no information about Mr Premchai fleeing to a neighbouring country.

But if there is proof of him escaping, police can ask the court to revoke his bail, Pol Gen Srivara said.

Mr Withoon said Mr Premchai will appear in court on March 26.

Thong Pha Phum police have pressed nine charges including poaching against Mr Premchai, 63, and three other members of his hunting party. All denied the allegations.

They were arrested last Sunday in a no-camping zone in the western part of the Thungyai Naresuan wildlife sanctuary in Kanchanaburi province

after they were found in possession of the carcasses of protected wild animals, including a 1.48-metre-long rare black panther, a Kalij pheasant and a common muntjac, also known as a barking deer, as well as three long-barrelled guns and ammunition.

The four were released by the court after they posted bail of 150,000 baht each.

Mr Premchai has been the target of public criticism after his arrest.

Authorities yesterday also began reviewing a land encroachment case in Loei's Phu Rue district. A fresh sound clip has emerged believed to be a conversation held while Mr Premchai and his group were in officials' custody. In the clip, someone said Mr Premchai owns a house on a mountain in Loei's Phu Rua district.

The Natural Resources and Environmental Crime Suppression Division will investigate whether the house in question was encroaching on forest reserve land, Pol Gen Srivara said.

Atthapol Charoenchansa, deputy director-general of the Royal Forest Department, yesterday said an initial check has found the house is located outside the forest reserve.

Suwat Inthasit, deputy commander of the Natural Resources and Environmental Crime Suppression Division, yesterday said Noppadon Prueksawan, a former official of the Department of Natural Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, told police he will report to police on Thursday or Friday in response to a summons. Mr Noppadon was implicated as the person who sought permission for Mr Premchai and his entourage to visit the sanctuary.

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