

Mas Selamat rebuilding terror network in Malaysia, say experts

By May Wong, Channel NewsAsia | Posted: 08 May 2009 1911 hrs

SINGAPORE : Terror experts said fugitive Mas Selamat was rebuilding his terror network in Malaysia and was planning to relocate to Indonesia.

They believe he managed to escape with the help of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operatives in Malaysia.

While Singaporeans can finally come to rest with his capture, experts said they must continue to be vigilant.

Dr Rohan Gunaratna, a terrorism expert, said: "Mas Selamat is a terrorist with a very high degree of experience, and a man with tremendous determination. There are very few terrorists of that competence and capability, and it demonstrates that Singapore and the region faces a continuous threat. JI is a group that's constantly growing,... constantly active and he's been able to link up with a number of JI members,"

Experts believe that fortunately, Mas Selamat was not able to execute his dangerous operations while in hiding.

"The Malaysians only invoke ISA (Internal Security Act) if it was close to execution stage. So (there's) enough evidence for them to invoke the Act to make the case, that there's a need for the Act to be implemented for Mas Selamat," said terrorism expert Dr Kumar Ramakrishna.

"It's very important for these agencies to find out who Mas Selamat was in contact with, whether these are people already known, whether there are new individuals who are clean skins who have never had records before but are now radicalised and forming support cells, and (whether they have) plans laid for Singapore or anywhere else in region," he added.

Dr Rohan believes the Malaysians have discovered vital information which could lead to more arrests, although getting more out of Mas Selamat won't be easy.

"In terms of breaking Mas Selamat Kastari would require a very significant period of time because he's a very hardened terrorist," said Dr Rohan.

Experts warned that the JI group still poses a profound threat, so authorities need to continue to keep a close watch on them.

Experts said governments should also work more closely with schools and religious institutions to educate the public that JI is a deviant group and that the community should come together to fight such extremism. - CNA /Is



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Mas Selamat bin Kastari, seen here in 2003