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Tightening the security cordon to capture Mas Selamat: The need for Preventive Surveillance

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This Commentary provides an analysis on the possible options escaped terrorist Mas Selamat may consider if he manages to evade capture in Singapore and makes a break for Indonesia. It also provides suggestions on how more targeted and focused searches conducted by the Indonesian authorities could be embarked upon if informed with a better understanding of the geography and social environment of the Riau Archipelago.

A report in the Indonesian daily the *Jakarta Post* dated 18 March claimed that *Jemaah Islamiyah* fugitive Mas Selamat Kastari who had escaped from preventive detention in Singapore on 27 February was seeking refuge in Tuban, East Java. We believe there is little substance to that report, and feel that the Indonesian Police would be better advised to concentrate their surveillance resources in the Riau Archipelago Province (KEPRI).

Presuming Mas Selamat had managed to evade capture and slip out of Singapore he is likely to have headed to the Riau Archipelago for the following reasons: (1) its accessibility and close proximity to Singapore; (2) the large numbers of transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia living in the area allows a foreigner to 'disappear' in such a setting and stay undetected; (3) its inhabitants are well known for their hospitality and the region is famous for its secluded and quiet houses.

To evade local authorities there, Mas Selamat would have to find a 'non-locked door', that is, a village well-known for its overindulgent customs, so as to enter easily and furtively into Indonesia. Moreover, KEPRI's many 'mouse havens' ('*pelabuhan tikus*') lie on the coasts. These unofficial harbours provide access from the main waterways to isolated small and poor kampungs while weak law enforcement has made these areas a haven for smugglers.

Why KEPRI?

To become operationally ready to plan his terror attacks, Mas Selamat must link up with his *Ji* associates. Much depends on when he could have entered Indonesia. The longer he is in KEPRI the better his chances of contacting the *Ji* network there. If he has reached these would-be base camps and

found accomplices, would he consider moving deeper to the South? There are only two plausible options for him: either he goes back to Java or decides to hide in the Riau Archipelago. In the first case, he should follow the exfiltration track in the opposite direction, from Batam to Java *via* Lampung and the Sunda Strait in the South of Sumatra. In the second case, he could take advantage of the strategic depth and of the hinterland in Batam, where more than 700,000 inhabitants live. Triad leader ‘Mr Pang’ is still hiding in Batam and has eluded capture. For him as for Mas Selamat, nature may be a precious ally to ensure a lengthier stay in the province. However, he is unlikely to hide in the jungle due to the lack of concealment because of deforestation – but rather on the numerous islands – so plentiful that the local population are apt to say that ‘there are as many islands in the archipelago as pepper spots in a cup’.

Unlikely routes/destinations

Although the KEPRI area is large, it is possible to eliminate some areas from the escape equation. Entering via the wings of the Riau Province – among them Selat Baru on Bengkalis and Concong on Basu – would be difficult due to their distance from Singapore. Among these ‘mouse havens’, Pongkar, on Karimun Island, is more connected with Johor state and villages around Kukup than with Singapore.

Another possible but doubtful landing point would be another Riau Island Mas Selamat is very familiar with – Bintan. Its northern coast, Berakit is also a famous base camp for local smugglers, regional procurers and exporters of Javanese prostitutes. In fact, some reports suggest that Hambali fled Indonesia from this very village. However, Bintan is an unlikely destination as it is easier to access this location from Malaysia rather than Singapore.

As for the Batam district just opposite Singapore, some ‘mouse havens’ like Kampung Tanjung are located on Pulau Belakang Padang in the Northwest of the district. This island though is too small and everyone knows each other. As such, moving discreetly among stalls and warungs will not be easy. Moreover, there is only the Market Street and one jetty to leave the island meaning if he was detected there are no easy alternatives for him to make a quick escape.

Likely entry points and infrastructure/ support groups

To live discreetly in KEPRI, Mas Selamat could opt for remote Jemaja Island where myth suggests the Bedung people live in a mysterious and secretive city in the middle of Natuna Island. Alternatively, smuggling havens in the North of Batam may also be very active – especially Tanjung Uma and Batu Ampar. Its proximity to Singapore, with the Singaporean skyline clearly visible from it, may make it of interest to Mas Selamat. Fragile houses and dense mangroves get tangled in these labyrinths and smugglers interviewed on this subject are in agreement that these harbours are the best places to enter Indonesia.

The abundance of unofficial and organized transport infrastructure - by ferry and public or private *bemo*, *oplet*, *ojek*, bus – would greatly aid his ability to move from one locality to another. Furthermore, in the towns, villages, slums, and, more importantly among the 40,000 *ruli* (wild houses), he would mingle easily in communities which have seen an influx of newcomers in recent years.

Possible contact points would be local *pesantren*. The Baitulrahman Qur’an school based in Sekupang managed by a bearded Javanese imam who preaches a hard-line salafist creed may be a possible contact. He sends his students to Yemen, Southern Thailand and Syria with the financial help of Muslim associations from London and would not be averse to sheltering Mas Selamat. Another *pesantren* not too far from the Hang Nadim Airport which has a reputation for radicalism could also be an option. Also, in Batam, Mas Selamat could find allies to aid him. In 2000, *Jemaah Islamiyah*

was able to find people in Batam to fire bomb churches on Christmas Eve. Likewise, local militants had invited Abu Bakar Ba'asyir to give a lecture on the island.

Conclusion

In summary, if Mas Selamat has indeed left Singapore for Indonesia, it is logical that he would take advantage of the KEPRI trans-strait network which is as old as the Srivijaya thalassocracy. If he is in KEPRI, he would possibly go into hiding for a period of time, following which with the help of former associates, attempt either to create his own terror cell or attempt to re-group with Noordin Top's breakaway faction in Java. Based on our recommendations on what would be the possible entry points for Mas Selamat into KEPRI, the Indonesian Police may want to devise a preventive surveillance operation to apprehend him if he does make a break for the region.

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