

Malaysia Announces the Arrest of 12 Darul Islam Members

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The Malaysian government recently announced that between March 16 and April 3 they had arrested 12 individuals who were part of the Darul Islam (DI) organization; authorities allege that they were planning a string of bombings (The Star, May 31). The Malaysian authorities went to great lengths to insist that the 12 individuals—three or four Indonesians, two Filipinos and six Malaysians—were neither members of Jemaah Islamiya (JI) nor the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) [1].

DI was founded in 1947 by Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwiryo and its espoused goal was to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia). To that end, Indonesia's anti-colonial war against the Dutch was in reality a triangular war, with Kartosuwiryo's forces battling Sukarno's nationalists as well as the Dutch. Kartosuwiryo was captured and executed in 1962, and the group fell into disarray and factionalized. Under Suharto's New Order (1965-1998), DI in some ways paralleled the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood under Anwar Sadat. Although the organization was illegal, it had become non-violent and individual membership was quietly tolerated by the regime. The founders of JI, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, were both members of the organization and quit in frustration over the organization's quietist approach to the New Order. They founded JI while living in exile in Malaysia in 1992-93.

JI is a direct offshoot of Darul Islam and many JI members are the children of Darul Islam members. JI has also been able to effectively tap into DI networks for operations, including the JW Marriott bombing in Jakarta in August 2003, which has extended the group's reach. In many ways, DI is the foundation upon which JI has been built, although it is clear that many—but not all—in DI reject al-Qaeda's strategy of targeting the far enemy.

The group arrested in Malaysia appears to have been playing a logistical support role for JI. They were arrested off the coasts of Sandakan and Tawau, on the eastern coast of Sabah, on the island of Borneo (The Star, May 31). Tawau is near the Indonesian port city of Nunukan, which has always been a center of smuggling and illegal immigration. Tawau and Nunukan are both jumping points for trips across the Sulu archipelago into Mindanao, where JI has had sanctuary in territory controlled by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). "The role of Darul Islam Sabah was to help Indonesian militants transit to the southern Philippines, smuggle weapons from the southern Philippines to Indonesia and obtain military training in the southern Philippines," Malaysian police chief Bakri Omar explained (Sun Star, June 1). Among the people that the group helped to move to Mindanao are two of the Bali bombers, Dulmatin and Umar Patek [2]. The group was arrested while in "transit" in Malaysia, according to authorities, en route to an un-disclosed neighboring country. The group's relationship with the Abu Sayyaf Group and MILF are still being investigated (ABS-CBN News, May 31; The Manila Times, June 2). Malaysian authorities disclosed that one of the Indonesians had been trained by al-Qaeda and had conducted training for JI in the southern Philippines (The Star, May 31). Authorities asserted that the group was planning a "string of bombings."

The Malaysian government has significantly stepped up its surveillance along the Sabah coast to considerable effect. They detained one of JI's top leaders, Zulkifli, who was returning from a MILF camp in September 2003 with five other JI members. Indeed, the tri-country maritime border has proved to be JI's Achilles heel, with a number of key operatives and shipments of explosives and detonators captured.

The 12 men were captured with firearms and documents, including bomb-making instructions, although the Malaysian government did not believe that Malaysia was the target of the group's operations. The small arms appear to be destined for the sectarian conflict zones in Indonesia. Malaysian authorities have not revealed the degree of DI operations in Malaysia. Eleven of the 12 are being held under Malaysia's Internal Security Act that allows them to be detained for up to two years without charge or trial; one Filipino was released. While the arrests are important, they will not cripple JI. It will slow things down, but establishing logistical support networks is very easy for them as JI has a large pool of supporters, and the economic conditions are dire enough to encourage recruitment.

Notes

1. The Malaysian nationals are A Artas A Burhanuddin (38), Francis Indanan (38), Mohd Nazri Dollah (31), Mohd Arasad Patangari (37), and Adzmi Pindatun (22), all are from Tawau, Sabah, while the other, Idris Lanama (31), is from Klang, Selangor. The three Indonesians are Aboud Ghafar Shahril (38), Zainuddin Suharno (28) and Jaki Hamid (28). The two Filipinos were Jeknal Adil (22) and Binsali Omar (40), who has permanent resident status in Malaysia. Bernama, June 1.

2. Dulmatin has a US\$10 million bounty on his head and Umar Patek a \$1 million bounty as part of the U.S. government's Rewards for Justice program. Sun-Star, June 1.

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