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\$1M BOUNTY ON MAS SELAMAT

Good idea, but it's not all about money

By Rebecca Givner-Forbes

THE decision in Singapore to offer a \$1 million reward for information leading to the recapture of Mas Selamat Kastari may yield results, if examples from other parts of the world are any indication.

Perhaps the most well-known reward scheme is the US State Department's Rewards for Justice programme, which offers large sums in exchange for information leading to the capture of international terrorists and war criminals. Since the 9/11 attacks, more than US\$77 million (S\$105 million) has been dispensed to more than 50 people.

The most recent Rewards for Justice fugitive to be captured is Serbian war criminal Radovan Karadzic, who is believed to have been responsible for the massacre of thousands of people during the Bosnian civil war. He had a US\$5 million bounty on his head under the programme.

A reward programme, however, does not always yield results. Multimillion-dollar rewards for more than 30 terrorists remain unclaimed, including US\$25 million each for the capture of Al-

Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri.

But the probable reasons for the failure of these particular programmes do not apply in the South-east Asian context. Al-Qaeda's leaders are thought to be in the Afghan/

Pakistani tribal areas - a unique environment not found in South-east Asia. The tribal areas have illiteracy rates as high as 97 per cent, rendering advertising the rewards ineffectual.

Officials suspect that people in these areas also may not believe they will actually be paid or may fear retribution. Furthermore, tribal ethos and the prevalence of radical Islam in these areas may have served to silence potential informants.

The social context is markedly different in South-east Asia, especially Singapore. The situation in this region may be closer to that of the US. When rewards are offered within the US for information leading to the capture of a fugitive, there are often positive results.

For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Ten Most Wanted programme has yielded tips leading to the arrests of more than 110 out of the 467 fugitives it has featured.

The decision to offer a large monetary reward is not without its complications. The first challenge is to run a convincing advertising campaign. Potential informants must believe that the government is sincere in its promise to pay out. This is especially important in cases where the informant may have a lot to lose by coming forward.

When a potential informant belongs to the community harbouring the fugitive, government guarantees of anonymity are also important.

In most of the instances where the US has paid rewards, the recipients have been kept anonymous.

Media coverage last month of the rewards dispensed to two former Abu Sayyaf militants and two civilians, who provided information leading to the killing of terrorist leaders Khaddafy Janjalani and Jainal Antel Sali Jr, described how the four men received briefcases of cash while wearing masks.

Amnesty or immunity from prosecution can also be important elements in a successful reward scheme. For militants who want to turn in Mas Selamat but are wary of being captured themselves, or for civilians helping to harbour him, these factors may be as important as a cash payment.

The authorities offer a reward out of hope that it will bring in that one key tip. But they can count on a reward offer to also bring in a glut of false leads. In less than a year following 9/11, the Rewards for Justice programme received more than 32,000 tips.

With large sums of money involved, there is an incentive to call in a tip on the slightest suspicion. If a government or agency does not have the capacity to sort through this glut of mostly false information, it would not be able to locate the proverbial needle in the haystack.

If security or intelligence services are eligible for rewards, then problems may arise when a terrorist's capture can be ascribed to joint efforts on the part of many agencies. The US ran into this problem following the capture of Jemaah Islamiah military commander Hambali by the Thai authorities. Several different Thai security, law enforcement and intelligence agencies approached the US Embassy in Bangkok to claim the reward offered.

The US government, which had planned to dispense a reward of US\$1 million, may have forked out as much as US\$10 million to appease all the different players.

Offering a reward for a terrorist's capture helps to communicate to the international community a government's commitment to recapturing him. This is part of the justification for a Bill introduced by 14 US congressmen to increase Osama's bounty by 20 times, from US\$25 million to US\$500 million. The latter would function as a signal of America's continuing commitment to capturing the Al-Qaeda leader.

There is a potential downside, though, to attaching a monetary value to a government's determination to catch a terrorist. The amount offered may be judged too small. In Mas Selamat's case, a reward of \$1 million is one of the smaller bounties to be placed on the head of a terrorist. The Singapore Government has managed to maintain a degree of distance from this reward, as it was two private businessmen who offered it.

However, the fact remains that the Government is managing the bounty, and the implication is that the amount has been deemed sufficient or the Government would have added to it.

Considering the success of reward programmes around the world, the decision in Singapore to offer a reward for Mas Selamat's capture is a wise one, provided it can navigate the attendant challenges.

A campaign advertising the reward should include a promise to respect the anonymity of a potential informant - and possibly an offer of amnesty as well. Ensuring sufficient institutional capacity to sort through the inflow of tips and deftly managing the public relations impact would also be necessary.

**The writer is a senior analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.**

## **IMPORTANT INCENTIVE**

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