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my life
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SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS

Al-Qaeda's Internet threat

Exclusive report by terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna on how terror group's online call to spread jihad is gaining momentum in Asia



AL-QAEDA propaganda via the Internet is spawning home-grown terrorist cells and gaining momentum for terrorism across Asia.

The terrorist organisation and other deviant Islamic groups are using online channels to propagate violent ideologies with "profound" impact, says renowned terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna in an exclusive report for my paper.

The core of the Internet indoctrination is that the US, its allies and friends are "purposely killing Muslims and deliberately attacking Islam", he adds.

As a result, he says, waging *jihad*, or holy war, to defend the faith and the faithful is gathering momentum in Asian Muslim countries.

"The impact of such calculated propaganda is profound. It is spawning homegrown cells throughout Asian including in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and even Mainland China," he points out.

In Singapore, the dismantling of the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) in 2001 means the predominant threat now is from cells instead of well-structured groups like JI, Dr Gunaratna told my paper.

Dr Gunaratna heads the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School for International Studies and has over 20 years of experience in counter-terrorism.

He was invited to testify before the 9/11 Commission on the structure of Al-Qaeda. He also spearheaded the establishment of the UN database on Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

Dr Gunaratna writes in the report that on a global scale this year, the Middle East and South Asia will face the highest levels of terrorist violence due to the scheduled partial withdrawal of

US troops in Iraq, as well as stepped-up Pakistani military operations against Al-Qaeda following the murder of Ms Benazir Bhutto.

Nonetheless, Singapore faces a low probability threat from groups based overseas, particularly from Indonesia, and it must work closely with foreign police, intelligence and immigration services to counter the risk.

"Future Singapore security depends on the ability and the willingness of the Singaporean government to replicate its domestic successes regionally," Dr Gunaratna told my paper.

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WORLD

East Asia's growth mitigates regional extremism

Terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna on regional terror threats in 2008 in part 1 of a 2-part series

THE Asian security landscape faces many threats in 2008. Asia will suffer from political and religious extremism and — its vicious by-product — terrorism.

Despite Asian governments developing intelligence cooperation and creating tactical units to hunt terrorists, Asian Muslim communities face the growing challenge of radicalisation.

To fight the dominant security and societal threats of terrorism and extremism governments, in partnership with community institutions and leaders, must develop robust community engagement programmes to counter the radicalisation of their communities.

A tiny portion of Asia's vast Muslim mainstream population is susceptible to indoctrination by deviant Muslim groups.

The violent ideological streams of Al-Qaeda and its associated groups are being disseminated through the Internet and other means to poison the minds of Asian Muslims against their fellow citizens.

At the core of Al-Qaeda propaganda is that the United States, its allies and friends are deliberately killing Muslims and attacking Islam.

As this message spreads, waging jihad, or holy war, to defend the faith and the faithful is gathering momentum even in Muslim Asia.

The impact of such calculated propaganda is profound. It is spawning homegrown cells throughout Asia including in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and even in mainland Chi-

na. In countries where terrorist groups have been dismantled or do not exist, like-minded individuals either radicalised or self-radicalised by exposure to propaganda are gravitating to action.

After forming clandestine cells to avenge the suffering and death of fellow Muslims, they seek to contact foreign terrorist groups to obtain training overseas to mount attacks in their own homelands.

In the spectrum of security threats, Asia is challenged by nuclear proliferation, organised crime, human smuggling and terrorism.

Asian countries, especially those in East Asia, depend on foreign investments, trade and tourism and they realise the harm a terrorist attack can have on their economies. So countering terrorism dominates Asia's security landscape.

However, the pace of economic growth in Asia will continue throughout 2008, led by the rise of China and India. The overall economic prosperity of Asia will dampen the potential for ethnic and religious strife.

On a global scale, the Middle East and South Asia will suffer from continuing instability. The scale of violence in Asia as a whole will be higher than Sub-Saharan Africa and the Lat-

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Heavily armed: A member of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (PHOTO: REUTERS)



MY WORLD IN

6 SECONDS

S'PORE RATIFIES ASEAN CHARTER

SINGAPORE yesterday became the first Asean member to formally complete its ratification of the 10-nation grouping's new landmark charter. The charter, accepted by Asean leaders at a summit in Singapore in November, aims to commit the region's disparate nations to promote human rights and democratic ideals. It also transforms Asean, 40 years after its creation, into a legal entity, which will give the group greater clout in international negotiations.

PUNISHED FOR HAVING MORE KIDS

500 Communist party members were expelled and 395 more stripped of their government posts last year in the central Chinese province of Hubei for having more than one child, Chinese state media said yesterday.

ESTRADA TO WRITE BOOK

DISGRACED former Philippine president Joseph Estrada, yesterday said that he would be writing a book about his life and planned to name prominent officials he claims conspired against him.

Mr Estrada, 70, was released from two weeks ago after being granted a pardon by President Gloria Arroyo. The book would be in print by the end of the year, said Mr Estrada.

JAPAN BANS SMOKING IN TAXIS

Once smoker-friendly Japan got less sympathetic to tobacco lovers on Monday when a ban on lighting up in Tokyo taxis went into effect, part of a nationwide trend.

Two Tokyo taxi groups instituted the ban out of concern over lawsuits from drivers suffering the effects of second-hand smoke and in response to demands from passengers.

Wikipedia boss launches search engine

FED up of having search engine results point you to websites that are a far cry from what you are looking or?

You can now trawl the Internet with Wikia, an Internet search engine, that is driven by human recommendations.

Launched yesterday by Jimmy Wales, the man behind online encyclopedia Wikipedia, one of the 10 most visited sites



on the Internet, Wikia will let users rate the relevance of results on a five-star system, then apply that information to shape future search results shown to others.

Information will also be culled from online social net-

working to try to establish reputations for its users and decide whose ratings should carry the most weight, The Financial Times reported.

Mr Wales said that he aimed "to build a completely freely licensed, open-source search engine" that would be far more transparent than Google and other existing services.

However, Mr Wales admitted that it will take "a minimum

of two years" for his service to yield results that were competitive with existing search giants.

Unlike the encyclopedia, Mr Wales hopes eventually to make money from selling advertising.

But some sceptics are quick to point out loopholes in the idea, saying that Mr Wales's more open approach will expose his service to the "spammers" who try to trick search engines into promoting their sites.

Waging of *jihad* in Asia gains momentum

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A18

in America. The West — North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand — will suffer the least levels of violence.

Compared to the Middle East and South Asia, the rest of Asia will experience lower levels of violence. In the order of decreasing incidents, South-east Asia will follow Central Asia. North-east Asia will experience the lowest levels of violence.

In South-east Asia, despite stepped up violence in southern Thailand and intermittent attacks in Indonesia and southern Philippines, the threat of terrorism will decrease. This is because governments have built counter terrorist capabilities in the past five years. They have also established mechanisms for sharing threat data, exchanging personnel, and conducting joint training and operations. More than ever before governments in South-east Asia are talking to each other on terrorism. This is a marked departure compared to in 2001 when Indonesia and Thailand were in denial of the terrorist threat.

The current sources of support for extremism and participation in violence are both within and outside Asia.

They include the continuing violence stemming from the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, the conflict in the Middle East over the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Russian presence in Chechnya and violence against Indian Muslims in Gujarat.

Following the pending withdrawal of US-led coalition troops from Iraq and an escalation in the civil war in Iraq, the spectre of global terrorism and extremism is likely to rise and spread in 2008.

Furthermore, stepped-up Pakistani military operations against Al-Qaeda and its associated local and foreign groups in the tribal areas of Pakistan after the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto will lead to greater Muslim resentment, including Asian Muslim anger, against the US and its allies and friends.

The more enduring violence affecting Asia is from groups trained, financed and ideologised by Al-Qaeda.

They include the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Moro Islamic

Liberation Front in the Philippines; Jemaah Islamiah in Indonesia; Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement in China, and multiple groups operating in India especially in Kashmir.

Under Al-Qaeda influence, some groups such as Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have turned into groups that marry religion with a political agenda — separatism.

Other similar groups trained by Al-Qaeda, such as Jemaah Islamiah and Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, campaign for instituting Islamic law.

The threat by Al-Qaeda to influence other separatist groups, such as those in Southern Thailand is very real.

For instance, Jamiatul Mujahidin Bangladesh conducted 459 attacks in 64 of the country's 65 districts in one single day on Aug 17, 2005.

In response to the coordinated simultaneous attack, the Bangladesh government was swift not only in dismantling but also executing its leaders in 2007.

Asia is also witnessing violence by leftist groups in Nepal, the Philippines, and in Eastern India and separatist groups in north-eastern Sri Lanka, southern Thailand and in eastern India.

In 2008, the violence from south Thailand is likely to spread to the north with attacks even in Bangkok.

Over 80 per cent of the at-

tacks in Asia have made use of the gun and the bomb.

Suicide terrorism has been adopted by most Muslim groups. Nonetheless, the group that has conducted the largest number of suicide attacks is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist group in Sri Lanka.

Rohan Gunaratna is head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School for International Studies, Singapore. He is the author of Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror.

TOMORROW: ASIA'S FUTURE SECURITY

HELPDESK 我的字典

➤ **Extremism:** 极端主义
jí duān zhǔ yì

➤ **Terrorism:** 恐怖主义
kǒng bù zhǔ yì

➤ **Jihad:** 圣战
shèng zhàn

➤ **Indoctrination:**
教导, 教化
jiào dǎo, jiào huà

➤ **Al-Qaeda:** 卡伊达组织
Kǎ Yī Dá Zǔ Zhī

➤ **Separatist:** 分离份子
fēn lí fèn zǐ

DEADLY: Suicide terrorism has been adopted by most Muslim groups
(PHOTO: REUTERS)

