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Changi plot suspect 'captured in Java'

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Indonesian report identifies him as Singaporean Husaini

JAKARTA: Indonesian police have nabbed a Singaporean, identified as Husaini Ismail, who allegedly plotted to hijack a plane in Bangkok and crash it into Singapore's Changi Airport in 2001, according to a report yesterday.

If his arrest is confirmed, it would mean that all five men involved in the failed plot are now in custody.

They were believed to be part of a five-man terrorist cell led by Singapore Jemaah Islamiah (JI) leader Mas Selamat Kastari, who fled Singapore that year when the Internal Security Department (ISD) rounded-up JI members.

The terror team included Mohammad Hassan Saynudin, 36, the leader of a group called Jemaah Palembang. In April, a Jakarta court sentenced him to 18 years' jail for killing a Christian teacher and plotting attacks against Westerners in the country.

Husaini was arrested in Central Java, on the same day that Indonesian terrorist suspect Saefuddin Zuchry was caught after attending a Quran recital service in Cilacap, according to a page one report in the Jakarta Globe yesterday.

'Finally we were able to arrest Husaini,' a police source told the newspaper on the separate arrests on Sunday. 'We have been searching for him since 2002.'

There were no details of Husaini's capture but the police source said that he would be dealt with in Indonesia instead of being deported to Singapore.

Asked to comment on the Jakarta Globe report, a spokesman for Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs told The Straits Times yesterday: 'ISD (The Internal Security Department) has been in close communication with the Indonesian Police. As investigations by the Indonesian Police are still ongoing, we are not able to comment at this point in time.'

Indonesia's national police spokesman Abu Bakar Nataprawira refused to elaborate when asked about the report. But he confirmed that several arrests had been made by Densus 88, the anti-terror squad.

'I am not able to reveal their identities at this stage because the investigation is still going on,' he said.

The Jakarta Globe said that police had arrested six suspects, including Husaini and Saefuddin, in different places in Central Java and Lampung in southern Sumatra.

The source told the newspaper that Husaini came to Indonesia with Mas Selamat and Hassan, also known as Fajar Taslim, by ship via Belawan port in Medan in January 2002.

Hassan had told The Straits Times in an interview earlier this year that two other Singaporeans - Ishak Mohamed Noohu and Mohamed Rashid Zainal Abidin, both in their 40s - were with them.

All five were on the run for months in Indonesia before they split up in Central Java.

Mas Selamat, who was arrested in East Java and deported to Singapore in 2006, escaped from a detention centre in Singapore in February last year. He was recaptured in Johor Baru on April 1 this year and has been detained under Malaysia's Internal Security Act.

Hassan moved around in Bali and Java before fleeing to Palembang in South Sumatra, where he founded the Jemaah Palembang terror group in 2006. He was arrested with nine others in June last year.

Ishak was nabbed in Kudus in Central Java in 2004 while Rashid was arrested two years later. Both were later deported to Singapore, according to sources.

Indonesian police believe the suspects arrested on Sunday were connected to JI, the terror network blamed for the series of attacks in Indonesia.

Saefuddin was believed to have supplied a gun and explosive materials to Abdurrahman Taib, the man that Hassan suggested to be the leader of the Palembang terrorist group.

Abdurrahman was convicted by a Jakarta court in a separate trial in April and sentenced to 12 years' jail for his role in the killing of the Christian school teacher. He was also convicted of planning attacks against Christian preachers and Westerners in Indonesia.

Security expert Rohan Gunaratna, the head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. **Rajaratnam School** of International Studies, described Husaini's arrest as significant.

He said that it illustrated the strength of Indonesia's counter-terrorism network and the close cooperation between the security forces in the region.

'JI has suffered very significantly because of the arrests in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore,' he said.

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LONG OVERDUE

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A police source, to the Jakarta Globe newspaper which ran a page one report yesterday

MAJOR BLOW

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