

# JI, Abu now merged, <sup>NOV 17 2011</sup> says antiterror expert

By **Dona Z. Pazzibugan**

THE JEMAAH Islamiyah (JI) regional terror network and the local Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Sulu Archipelago are already so integrated they operate almost as one organization, according to an international counterterrorism expert.

The link between the JI and the ASG is "almost complete," said Prof. Rohan Gunaratna, head of the management staff of the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore.

"They co-exist, they work together, their leaders operate together as one organization. The integration of these two structures is almost complete," said Gunaratna, one of the resource speakers at the two-day intelligence exchange among military analysts in the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) which concluded yesterday.

A brainchild of the Philippine military, the forum was the first ever Asean militaries analyst-to-analyst intelligence exchange which allowed experts in the region to share best practices and analytical tools in combating terrorism.

Gunaratna said ASG extremists are collaborating closely with about a dozen JI terrorists who came here from Indonesia.

He said the ASG has been able to carry out bomb attacks because of training and support given by the JI.

He said the two key JI leaders who worked with the ASG were Omar Patek who was arrested this year in Pakistan, and Dulmatin who was killed in Indonesia in March 2010.

Both are Indonesian nationals who are on the international

terrorist wanted list.

"There are still about a dozen Indonesian and Malaysian terrorists still operating in the Sulu archipelago. They are planning and preparing terrorist attacks, they are working together with the Abu Sayyaf to conduct terrorist attacks," Gunaratna said.

He praised Philippine security forces for preventing many planned bomb attacks due to "excellent" intelligence work.

"The terrorism threat has been very significantly reduced in the Philippines because the Armed Forces of the Philippines have generated high-quality, high-grade intelligence," he said.

"The human intelligence capability of the Philippine armed forces and the Philippine police is excellent," Gunaratna added.

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