

Foreign
Singapore boosts security over threat

associated press
363 words
6 March 2010
The Boston Globe
BSTNGB
A.3
English
© 2010 New York Times Company. Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning. All Rights Reserved.

SINGAPORE - Singapore raised its security alert and bolstered its defenses yesterday after receiving information about a terrorist plot to attack vessels off the coast of the city-state in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, a Cabinet minister said.

Malaysia and Indonesia have also stepped up maritime and air patrols in the Malacca Strait, where millions of barrels of oil pass daily. Singapore's navy warned Thursday that a terrorist group was planning attacks on oil tankers and other vessels but provided no details.

"All alert levels have been raised," Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng told Parliament, saying that the government has increased security at border crossings, airports, seaports, and at high-risk targets such as two new casino resorts.

Wong did not say which terrorist group was planning the reported attack. "We received intelligence from our liaison partners about this possible plot to go and attack vessels coming through Singapore waters through the Malacca Strait," Wong said. "As a result, the various security agencies have been working very closely with one another."

Until about a year ago, the strait was infested with pirates that hijacked ships, and such attacks were a regular occurrence. But joint operations by security forces of countries around the waterway have all but ended such attacks there.

A Singapore-based terrorism specialist said Al Qaeda and the Southeast Asian militant group Jemaah Islamiyah - blamed for twin bombings last year on hotels in Jakarta - would be the most likely to carry out such an attack. "Certainly we know that in the past Al Qaeda has had not only the intentions, but the capabilities to operate in the maritime environment," said John Harrison, assistant professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

Suspected JI operatives have been previously arrested in Singapore. Yesterday, Indonesia's Police Chief General Bambang Hendarso Danuri, who earlier told reporters that they were investigating whether militants they had arrested in Aceh were tied to the threat, said that no link had been found. Officials have effectively ruled out the possibility that the suspects were the source of intelligence for Singapore's navy.

06singapore.ART