

**INTERVIEW-Malaysia says has dismantled Islamic terror cells**By Mark Bendeich and **Chaitanya Kalbag**

642 words

21 June 2005

20:30

Reuters News

English

(c) 2005 Reuters Limited

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Reuters) - Malaysia declared victory on Tuesday in its internal campaign against Southeast Asia's most feared Islamic militant group, but said there was room for improved U.S. cooperation in the global war on terror.

"We have dismantled the JI basic structure," Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak told Reuters, referring to Jemaah Islamiah, a group blamed for a series of attacks in neighbouring Indonesia, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people.

"But we cannot be too complacent," he added.

"There could be certain cells (that re-establish themselves) later on if we don't monitor the situation carefully."

Malaysia is viewed as having effectively used skills it acquired in ending a bitter communist insurgency in the 1960s against Islamic militancy, but some of its most wanted militants fled to Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation.

Malaysians Azahari Husin, a bomb-making expert, and Noordin M. Top, another JI member, are thought by Indonesian police to be planning another attack there. Police suspect Azahari made the bombs used in Bali and in the suicide bombing of a Jakarta hotel.

"We would like them arrested as soon as possible," Najib said in an interview in his parliamentary office.

"When we started to pursue them, or when they realised they were being pursued, they ran away to Indonesia. We have given the Indonesians as much information as we know about them but the actual interdiction of these people must be done by Indonesia."

Australia and the United States recently issued warnings to their citizens in Indonesia, saying intelligence suggested that terrorists were in the advanced stages of planning attacks.

But Washington has been accused by some security experts of not fully cooperating with other nations in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia and mainly Muslim Malaysia.

CAN'T USE BOMBS ON BOMBERS

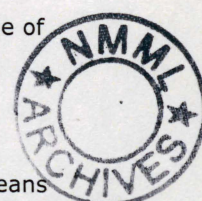
The issue has been highlighted in the case of Indonesian JI member Hambali, a suspected bombing mastermind who is in U.S. custody but wanted for questioning across Southeast Asia.

But Washington, which suspects Hambali of helping to plot the September 11, 2001, attacks on U.S. cities, has not given these countries direct access to the Muslim preacher, though it has sought access to militants held across Southeast Asia.

"We have pretty good exchanges with the U.S. between our own intelligence agencies, but the principle of reciprocity is also important," Najib said. Asked if this was happening, he added:

"It might not happen comprehensively. I think there's room for improvement."

Malaysia says winning the hearts and minds of Muslims is vital to defeating militancy, which in turn means



government policies that are "consistent with the aspirations of Muslims" and finding an end to conflict in the Middle East.

"You cannot bomb terrorists into submission," Najib said.

"That's one thing we learned: military power alone cannot defeat terrorism. It's about people feeling that they are part and parcel of society, have a stake in society."

Malaysia has used a harsh Internal Security Act (ISA), a legacy of its counter-insurgency against the communists during British colonial times, to detain dozens of Islamic militants. But Najib said the numbers in detention were dwindling now.

It even recently released a militant who had been branded JI's Malaysian "treasurer", a vital part of its funding network. Wan Min Wan Mat now lives under close surveillance in the strongly Muslim state of Kelantan, in Malaysia's northeast.

"They are put under ISA, they are given counselling and if we deem that they are no longer a threat to national security then we will release them. They are being watched very, very carefully."

SECURITY-MALAYSIA (PICTURE)|LANGEN|AFA|CSA|LBY|RWSA|RWS|REULB|GNS|RNA|G|RBN|SI|IF|SXNA

Document LBA0000020050621e16I0010d

© 2006 Dow Jones Reuters Business Interactive LLC (trading as Factiva). All rights reserved.

