



Security forces hunt surviving Burkina hotel attackers

TRUMP TRENDS AMONG EVANGELICALS FOR CHRISTIAN VOTES

ISLAMIC STATE 'BRAND' SPREADING WORLDWIDE

JIHADISTS RALLYING OTHER GROUPS UNDER THEIR BANNER

PARIS: The Islamic State group may be losing ground in its strongholds of Iraq and Syria but as the attack in Indonesia this month showed, the jihadists are rallying other groups under their banner, analysts say. In most cases, these groups have no direct contact with the leadership of IS's self-proclaimed caliphate, but the group is happy to claim responsibility for the blood spilled in its name, the experts say.

"From the start, Islamic State has vowed to take its fight globally, but until recently it has been focused on managing its caliphate in Iraq and Syria," said Michael Kugelmann, of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. With the Iraqi army re-taking some of the territory the group had taken, IS "has re-dedicated attention to focusing on a more global approach," he said.

"The big question, after the Jakarta attacks and all of these attacks around the world in recent months that have been claimed by ISIS is-are these militants only inspired by ISIS or have they been directly managed by ISIS?" he said, using another name for the group.

Kugelmann, like all of the experts questioned by AFP, believes that IS is for now content to take credit for the attacks, using the "brand recognition" of its name that has spread across the world, partly through social media, without necessarily dedicating resources or manpower to these groups.

"What you have here are disillusioned, alienated militants, who have been fighting with a different organization, who are interested in identifying themselves with a more dynamic cause. And they see ISIS as a very dynamic cause — they are in the media all the time and commit spectacularly brutal attacks."

'Seeking new identity'

That is why in Afghanistan and Pakistan groups claiming to be IS have appeared in

recent months, claiming attacks or posing on the Internet with the group's black flag. "There are breakaway local militant groups seeking a new identity who are joining IS," Pakistan-based analyst Hasan Askari said.

"The IS ideology already exists in Pakistan, it is an extreme Salafi tradition and people are now following them for a new identity, (even though) they might not have direct links with the real IS leadership," he said, referencing a strict form of Islam. He said there was no evidence to suggest that the IS leadership had visited the groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are both strongholds of Al-Qaeda.

Amedy Coulibaly, the French jihadist who killed four Jews in a kosher supermarket in Paris in January 2015, pledged allegiance to IS, but the investigation has so far found no evidence that he had ever been in contact with the organization, apart from viewing its propaganda videos on the Internet.

'This is new'

Indonesian police investigating Thursday's attack on a busy street in Jakarta lined with shopping malls, luxury hotels, and foreign embassies that left five assailants and three other people dead, have pointed the finger at Katibah Nusantara, a militant unit of Malay-speaking IS jihadists. Yet Kugelmann said: "In Indonesia, I heard no indication before these attacks of any form of formal ISIS presence. This is new."

IS has put on record its allegiance with extremist groups in eight countries-in Algeria, Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan-and claims it has directed or inspired attacks in at least 17 countries, killing around 1,000 people. Security services have long feared that IS will work with the equally bloodthirsty Boko Haram move-



SURABAYA: In this June 18, 2014, file photo, a man wears a headband showing the Islamic State group's symbol during a protest calling for the closure of a local prostitution complex. Experts say it is difficult to know how much of a foothold the Islamic State group has established in Indonesia. — AP

ment, which since 2009 has wreaked havoc as it seeks to impose Islamist rule in northern Nigeria. In May last year, IS accepted a pledge of allegiance from the group.

"For Boko Haram in Nigeria, there is no clear evidence of operational contacts, but there has been a clear sophistication in its

attacks," said Peter Pham, of the Atlantic Council in Washington, suggesting that the IS planners are having some influence.

Pham is worried by IS's advance into the Sahel region of North Africa. Pummelled from the air by a US-led coalition and by Russian jets in Syria and Iraq, IS has been rapidly

spreading into Libya, where affiliated groups have profited from the anarchy in that country to take control, and to secure the considerable oil reserves in some areas. "We have to bear in mind that Sahel is a very permeable region, so it's really a concern for the continent," Pham said. — AFP

JAPAN MARKS 21ST ANNIVERSARY OF DEADLY KOBE EARTHQUAKE

TOKYO: Japan yesterday marked the 21st anniversary of a devastating earthquake in the western city of Kobe that killed more than 6,400 people, as bereaved families looked to keep memories of the victims alive.

An estimated 9,000 people gathered for an annual early-morning commemoration at a public park in the port city, where a 7.2 magnitude quake hit at 5:46 am on January 17, 1995. It killed 6,434 people and leveled much of the city, forcing the quake-prone nation to conduct major upgrades of its disaster preparedness.

"Sadness never heals. But everyone is doing his or her best to continue living," an elderly woman told national broad-

caster NHK at the pre-dawn memorial. Participants held a candlelight vigil and observed a moment of silence at the park, which served as an evacuation centre after the 1995 jolt. But over time, memories of the quake have faded in the community.

A total of 59 civic events were planned this year for the anniversary, roughly half as many as a year ago, when the nation marked two decades since the disaster, the Yomiuri Shimbun said in its editorial. About 40 percent of Kobe's residents were either born after the quake or moved to the city in the years following the disaster, according to the top-selling daily. "How can the memories of that day be passed on to the next gen-

eration? That's an issue that the city that recovered from the disaster must face," the Yomiuri editorial said. NHK echoed the sentiment and said: "The city faces a challenge of providing support to those who experienced the disaster while also passing on the memories and lessons learned to the next generation." Japan suffers about a fifth of the world's most powerful tremors.

A 9.0 magnitude quake struck the nation's northern area in March 2011, triggering a huge tsunami that smashed into the country's northeast coast, killing around 16,000 people while some 2,600 people remain missing. The disaster also triggered the world's worst nuclear emergency in a generation. — AFP



KOBE: This overhead photo shows candles indicating "Future 1.17" during a memorial service to mark the 21st anniversary of the "Great Hanshin Earthquake" at a park. — AFP

SRI LANKA TURNS TO SOCIAL MEDIA TO HELP WITH NEW CONSTITUTION

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's prime minister yesterday announced officials would use social media to seek public opinion on a proposed new constitution aimed at preventing a return to ethnic war. Ranil Wickremesinghe said Sri Lanka will use social media to help draft a new statute to devolve more powers to minority Tamils and ensure unity after decades of war.

"Sri Lanka could be the first country to get views expressed on social media (to contribute to) drafting a new constitution," he said. "We want to seek the view and opinions of young people. Participate in this process."

Sites such as Facebook and Twitter played a key role in supporting Wickremesinghe's election in August as well as during the January 2015 presidential election at which he supported Maithripala Sirisena.

Since coming to power, the new government has set up free wi-fi zones in many public places to encourage the use of web-based services. The government is opening a new office in Colombo Monday to start receiving

written proposals from the public for the new constitution.

Wickremesinghe travelled to the former war-torn zone of Jaffna in the north Friday to pledge to devolve political power to minority Tamils. He has also promised to prosecute both state forces and Tamil rebels accused of war crimes in the final stages of the island's 37-year-old separatist war, in line with pledges to the UN Human Rights Council last year.

Sri Lanka's year-old government has begun drafting a new constitution aimed at resolving the drawn-out ethnic conflict which ended in 2009 and claimed 100,000 lives. The issue has been fraught, however, with hardline members of the Sinhalese majority opposing a federal system that would ensure more political power for minority Tamils. Some minorities fear a "unitary" constitution would see them lose out while moderate Tamils who want to remain in a single union have pressed for greater power in areas where they are in the majority. — AFP

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