

Misplaced faith of jihadists

COMPLEX: When Muslims fight against Muslims, 'concept of jihad is questionable'

KUALA LUMPUR

THE Malaysian militants fighting in the Middle East may not be fighting on the side of Islamic State (IS) at all but for unknown groups, said a local academic.

"The government is convinced that Malaysians are involved (with IS).

"They are worried they would cause trouble when they come back. It is not good for the country's rating, especially in the eyes of America," said Prof Dr Ahmad Tarmizi Talib, head of the Department of Government and Civilisation Studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

However, he said Malaysians should not be quick to jump to conclusions and create associations.

"Why must we be influenced by the name? So far, nobody knows who they are.

"Why are the so-called jihadists (Malaysians) going to this group? Is it true they are fighting in the spirit of jihad?"

He said conflicts in countries like Syria were complex and multifaceted.

There are five distinct groups vy-

ing for power there.

"Firstly, there are the Bashar loyalists, then there are the rebels, the Sunnis and the Shias. Finally, there is the Islamic State."

Tarmizi said no one actually knew for sure whether the Malaysian militants were fighting on the side of IS. This is because of the complexity of the situation.

"The person who is the middleman, does he truly know that he is sending that person to a proper jihad?"

"How about the person who goes there? Does he know he is truly going for jihad or he just *belasah* (going about it recklessly). Then he will be dying for nothing.

"By raising these questions, we are raising concerns.

"I believe (even now) there are groups wishing to go. Hopefully, they will be wiser.

"If you capture journalists and behead them — is it Islam if you are killing the innocent?"

"Even according to conventions, you can't kill (journalists). There, they not only kill journalists but also show everyone the process."

Tarmizi said there were reports stating that once you joined IS, you could not leave the group.

The involvement of Malaysians fighting overseas wars is not a new phenomenon.

"There were Malaysians fighting in Afghanistan in the past, but that fight was more clear cut.

"It was defending the Afghan people against the Russians. (In Syria) it is not only against Russia but against groups of Muslims."



Prof Dr Ahmad Tarmizi Talib says conflicts in countries like Syria are complex and multifaceted

Tarmizi said when Muslims fought against Muslims, "the pure concept of jihad was questionable".

He said IS was likely supported by a party with a bigger agenda.

"I assume there is somebody behind that group who has a bigger agenda to control the Middle East. Syria from beginning was with Russia.

"They created this group and categorised them as supposedly radical Islamists, but they are helping from the back to create more chaos.

"The force was suddenly raised out of nothing. It seems like they are supported by a giant superpower.

"The way they operate is very sophisticated and they are strongly supported."

He said Malaysians needed to be wiser on the interpretation of jihad.

"Jihad could be interpreted in a

wider sense, not just this narrow interpretation."

Tarmizi said there was a lot more jihad to be done in Malaysia.

Jihad for example, could be interpreted as to achieve greater success with technological achievements, rather than in battlefields.

"Even today, when it comes to manufacturing mobile phones for example, we rely on Korea and America.

"Why don't we have our own Malaysian brand that penetrates the world?"

This was part of "Fardhu Khifayah" or the Islamic obligation to community, he added.

"We can build the biggest hospital in Southeast Asia, but where does the equipment come from? We cannot produce our own equipment. That is the bigger jihad.

"Even the microphone that the imam uses on the *mimbar* itself is not made by Muslims."

Tarmizi said the susceptibility to this narrow interpretation of jihad could come from those of the *pondok* orientation.

"This system does not integrate with modern education. (Some of them) learn religion and go against secularism. But the irony is the *pondok* is secular in nature. They are separating religion and real life. They are not teaching them (the students) science. Therefore, they are separating religion from life."

He said the media was often blamed for leading people astray.

"But do you have your own media? If you don't have then don't blame others. It is your mistake. To estab-

lish your own media and to be well accepted is not easy."

Tarmizi said some were influenced by an incomplete understanding of the religion.

"They try to understand Islam through the way they choose. But they became caught and trapped. There are people waiting to grab us in for their own benefit and capitalise on your mistake.

"The people joining these groups, maybe they do not know. The middleman also doesn't know. It is a 'cycle of the unknown'."

The IS controls many territories in northern Iraq and eastern Syria. Its influence has spread to Middle-Eastern and African countries, like Libya and Nigeria.

The government has been cracking down hard on suspected militants in the country.

In April, police launched a special operation in Kuala Lumpur and Kedah on cell members who are believed to have links with IS groups and allegedly planned to launch attacks in the country.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar said police arrested 17 suspected militants during the operation. He said the 17 suspected militants, aged between 14 and 49, were nabbed while they were having a secret meeting, allegedly to launch attacks in the Klang Valley.

The number of Malaysians arrested for suspected involvement in militant activities in Syria is 92 since February 2013.

