Terror risk level in Singapore up for first time in 10 years: Report

By ANGELA TENG

30/6/2020

SINGAPORE — For the first time in a decade since the project began, a political violence and terrorism risk map developed by global consultancy Aon has raised Singapore’s risk level from “negligible” to “low”. This is in light of the heightened terrorism activity in the region and recent arrests of self-radicalised individuals in the country.

Elsewhere in South-east Asia, this year’s risk level for the Philippines — an area of the country was cited by Law and Home Affairs Minister K Shanmugam earlier this week as a base for returning fighters — remained “high”. Aon’s report also noted the Islamic State (IS) promoting the Philippines as a “regional hub for militants not able to travel to Syria or Iraq”.

Indonesia was in the same band as the Philippines, while Malaysia’s overall score has been raised to “medium”.

Popular travel destinations for Singaporeans, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan, were ranked “low”, while Thailand and South Korea were at “medium” risk, according to the report. At the other end of the spectrum, Bhutan and New Zealand are among the handful of countries with “negligible” risk.

ADVERTISEMENT

The 2017 Risk Maps report released by Aon on Thursday (April 7) and produced in conjunction with Roubini Global Economics and The Risk Advisory Group noted that Singapore has the potential risk of terrorism and sabotage. This is a reflection of the increased terrorist activity in neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia, said Mr Julian Taylor, head of crisis management (Asia) at Aon Risk Solutions.

He added that the threat of terrorist organisation Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Isis), also known as IS, is a serious threat in the region.

“With the emergence of Isis, (there is) the radicalisation of local populations in Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, even China. These are real issues we face in 2017, and that has gotten worse since 9/11 ... There’s just an overriding sense that this is going to be exported sadly to these shores.”

A radicalised Islamist in Singapore would be watching the events around the world and may consider doing something similar. It is now extremely difficult to narrow down to individuals to carry out the attack, said Mr Taylor.

“These terrorists are selling a concept, an idealogy. It does not necessarily have to be a structured. It’s not a military operation.”

Across the Causeway, the report said that the risk level of Malaysia was raised from “low” to “medium” following the first Isis-linked attack in the country, a grenade blast last July that wounded eight people at a nightclub in Puchong, Selangor. There was also an increase in the number of terrorist arrests last year, and multiple kidnappings by Philippines-based militants in the eastern province of Sabah. The report added that Indonesia faces the additional risks of insurrection, revolution and civil war.

Mr Taylor noted that the efforts by the Singapore Government to step up terrorism awareness, as seen in the national movement SGSecure, shows “a real mindset shift” for Singapore.

“It is not a question of if, but when ... They are not talking about terrorism that is something that may happen one day, they are saying it is going to happen. And they are really trying to educate the population here to be prepared for that. That is the intention of the campaign, and a reflection of what is deemed to be an increased threat.”

“In 2017, we expect to see a further increase in terrorist activity in Asia,” said Mr Taylor. “This is associated with the rise of the Islamic State throughout Asia, and the number of Asian citizens who have returned from fighting in the Middle East, radicalised, to their home countries.”

“Terrorist attacks are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of their modus operandi. We have seen a shift away from a physical property risk towards an increased people risk, as attackers move away from large-scale bomb attacks towards highly motivated individuals or groups using hand-held weapons or vehicles,” he said.

Read more at https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/greater-terrorism-risk-asia-amid-rise-isis-presence-report