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4 arrested under ISA for links to conflicts abroad

One sought to fight for Kurds against ISIS, while three were involved in Yemen conflict

Lim Yan Liang

Four Singaporeans have been arrested under the Internal Security Act for engaging or intending to take part in violence abroad.

But in a departure from the script of previous terror-related arrests, none of the four had planned to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and one had actually hoped to fight against it.

Wang Yuandongyi, 23, was detained for his efforts to join a Kurd-

ish militia that is battling ISIS.

The other three were involved in Yemen's armed sectarian conflict.

The Ministry of Home Affairs said Mohammad Razif Yahya, 27, and Amiruddin Sawir, 53, were detained in August last year for voluntarily fighting in Yemen while at a religious institution there.

Mohamed Mohideen Mohamed Jais, 25, had done armed sentry duties in Yemen and was placed under a Restriction Order (RO) this month, which limits his activities.

Wang's case, meanwhile, is the

first known one of its kind. He left Singapore in January for a third country, and intended to make his way to Turkey and Syria to join a Kurdish militia fighting ISIS.

Wang is a naturalised Singaporean of China origin. He came here as a child and went to school here. He also completed national service and became a citizen in 2014.

He took along Singapore Armed Forces-issued military gear, such as his uniform and boots, which he planned to use on the battlefield.

The ministry said yesterday that

Wang began to empathise with the plight of the Kurds in Syria and started detesting ISIS late last year.

He was also looking to escape personal setbacks such as his debt from a failed business venture.

Last December, he got in touch with a Kurdish militia group online and discussed possible travel routes.

Wang's plans were thwarted when someone reported him to the authorities. At Singapore's request, he was located by the third country's officials and sent back. He was placed on an RO this month.

"The Government takes a stern view against anyone who supports, promotes, undertakes or makes preparations to undertake armed violence, regardless of how they rationalise such violence ideologically, or where the violence takes place," said the ministry.

It noted that even though Wang was not driven by ideology, the fact remains that he intended to engage in an armed conflict overseas.

"Geography does not mask the fact that such individuals would have demonstrated a dangerous tendency to support the use of violence," the ministry added.

"Their involvement in overseas conflicts can also jeopardise Singapore's national interests."

The ministry noted that Razif had begun studying at a religious institution in Yemen in January 2010, and Amiruddin went there in July 2013.

The two signed up for armed sentry duties against possible attacks by Houthi rebels, who are Shi'ites.

Razif went through sniper training, and was armed with an AK-47 assault rifle and a Dragunov sniper rifle. Amiruddin was equipped with

an AK-47 rifle. Both of them were involved in fighting the Houthis.

"They demonstrated a readiness to use violence to pursue their religious cause. As such, they are assessed to pose a security threat to Singapore," the ministry added.

As for Mohideen, he did armed sentry duties while studying in Yemen from 2009 to early 2011.

While he did not use his arms, he "understood that he had to return fire using the AK-47 assigned to him, with the aim to kill if there was an incursion by the Houthis".

While some might question the need to stop people who take up arms against rebels and ISIS, security analyst Susan Sim said the Government's stand is clear.

"You cannot take up arms on behalf of any group, for any cause," she said. "Once a person gets used to the idea of killing to achieve objectives he has decided for himself, what's to stop him from doing the same thing in Singapore?"

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Fire in coffee shop, residents evacuated



A fire broke out in a coffee shop at an HDB block in Bukit Panjang at 10.30am yesterday. Residents living on the second and third floors of Block 257, Bangkit Road were evacuated as a safety measure. The Singapore Civil Defence Force put out the fire in 20 minutes using two waterjets. There were no injuries reported. Meanwhile, nearly 350 guests were evacuated from Mandarin Orchard hotel late on Tuesday night after a fire in a sixth-floor kitchen. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

Changes to protect pay-TV customers

Upcoming changes to the Media Market Conduct Code will mean a better deal for pay-TV consumers.

They will get shorter 12-month contracts for packages or bundles and the option to exit without penalty if the service provider makes changes such as raising subscription fees or removing material content.

This sometimes happens so cus-

tomers are forced to sign up for paid content like sports coverage. They will now have the option to cancel a contract within 30 days.

Operators must also provide customers with a summary of their contract that highlights critical information clearly and accurately.

Operators are not allowed to force customers to upgrade their non-

pay-TV services in order to make changes to their pay-TV plans.

The changes were announced by the Media Development Authority yesterday.

Pay-TV operators said they are reviewing the changes to see how to implement them.

SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

Economists cut S'pore growth forecast to 1.9%

Singapore's economic prospects this year have dimmed even further amid a weak global outlook, according to a new survey.

Growth is likely to come in at a modest 1.9 per cent this year, down from an earlier forecast of 2.2 per cent, say economists polled by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) in its quarterly survey out yesterday.

Singapore's manufacturing and finance and insurance sectors have been hit the hardest, with

economists giving these industries the sharpest growth downgrades in the latest survey.

The latest poll, which was sent out on Feb 24, reflects views from 24 economists who closely monitor the Singapore economy.

They said the outlook has worsened since the beginning of this year but some remain hopeful that prospects will brighten in the second half.

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