

Cops: Malaysia transit for European jihadists leaving Syria
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Counter-terrorism chief relates how French citizen who carried out Brussels museum attack in 2014 left Syria and passed through Malaysia enroute to Belgium.

PETALING JAYA: The police believe that militants from Europe are using Malaysia as a transit point.

In an interview with Channel NewsAsia (CNA) yesterday, Malaysia's counter-terrorism operations chief said one French citizen may have done it to cover his tracks after leaving Syria, where he is believed to have joined the Islamic State terror group.

Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, who is principal assistant director of the Special Branch's counter-terrorism division, was quoted as saying that the French citizen behind the May 2014 Jewish Museum of Belgium shootings made his way to Malaysia from Istanbul, Turkey, after leaving Syria.

"On March 18, 2014, the suspect (Mehdi Nemmouche) left Syria via Istanbul, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong before entering Brussels via Frankfurt.

"He arrived in Malaysia on a flight. He was on transit here and did not meet with anyone. He came here to hide his tracks that he had been to Syria," Ayob Khan told the Singapore-based regional news network.

Mehdi's flight route traversing five countries had previously been reported following the attack in Brussels, where the French-Algerian jihadist had opened fire inside the museum with a Kalashnikov rifle, killing an Israeli couple, a French woman and a Belgian man.

Mehdi is reportedly awaiting trial for murder in connection with the Brussels attack.

Ayob Khan's statement on the terror attack in Brussels involving a French citizen, comes in the wake of a two-day visit by Francois Hollande to Malaysia, where the French president and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak discussed closer cooperation in the fight against extremism and global terrorism.

According to CNA, the counter-terrorism chief also revealed how another "high-level" French jihadist arrived in Malaysia from the Middle-East in 2016. The militant was believed to have been part of the Al Qaeda terrorist group operating in Yemen.

“JJW had previously been arrested in Yemen as it was believed he was involved with Al-Qaeda,” Ayob Khan was quoted as saying, giving just initials of the Muslim convert, who was arrested on Nov 3, 2016 and deported to France 20 days later.

He added that JJW had come to Malaysia specifically to get married to a Yemeni woman who had already been in the country as a refugee.

“The reason they came here is because Malaysia is one of the countries that allow refugees from Yemen to come in,” CNA quoted Ayob Khan as saying about the woman who had a UNHCR card.

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