



Experts fear terror attacks

By Jonathan Lyons in Jakarta
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SECURITY experts are bracing for a possible attack by Indonesian militants which would fit a pattern of yearly high-profile bombings dating from the 2002 Bali blasts that killed 202 people.

Three other big attacks have taken place since then, one each year and all between August and mid-October.

"There is no reason to think they will all of a sudden stop," Ken Conboy, a security consultant in Jakarta who closely monitors Indonesia's militants, said.

US-based analyst Zachary Abuza agrees. "We know there is tremendous pressure on them to pull off an attack by this fall," Mr Abuza said.

Proponents of this view say such regular cycles are dictated, in part, by the need for the bombers to go to ground for six to eight months after an attack, emerging just long enough to plan and execute their next operation.

But others question whether Jemaah Islamiah, blamed for the four earlier bombings in Bali and the Indonesian capital Jakarta, or any of its factions, now have the ability or the will to carry out a vigorous new strike.

Arrests, deaths, and what appears to be a "re-think" among some militants about the efficacy of violence in support of their stated goal of an Islamic superstate in southeast Asia, have all taken their toll.

So, too, has an apparent split within Jemaah Islamiah, into a political wing under the fiery preacher Abu Bakar Bashir and a pro-bombing wing led by Noordin Top, who remains at large.

Arabinda Acharya, of Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, said Bashir, released in June after serving time in jail for a role in the 2002 Bali bombing, was taking more of a political tack these days.

The emergence of what some are now calling JI Mainstream, under Bashir, may pose a greater danger than any would-be bombers on the loose, he said.

"Although JI mainstream places a high emphasis on proselytising, they also provide military training to their members."

Most senior figures were veterans of the same US-backed campaign against the Soviets in Afghanistan that gave birth to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

"Over time, their consolidated strength will be greater than the decentralised and ad hoc (pro-bombing) factions."

Meanwhile, the experts agree there is no shortage of recruits prepared to carry out attacks, including suicide missions. Sporadic religious clashes in Indonesia and an active radical movement provide breeding grounds for new militants.

"Unfortunately, the suicide volunteers is the easiest part," said Mr Conboy.

More daunting is the expertise to construct complex bombs. The death of Azahari bin Husin in a shootout with Indonesian police in 2005 deprived JI of a master bomb-maker, one of the few figures with the skill to wire and detonate powerful car bombs.

Other police operations in Indonesia and nearby Malaysia have further reduced JI's striking power, said Mr Abuza. But this has only spawned a new generation of unidentified militants.

"The good news is they are less capable as a result. The bad news is no one has ever heard of them," making detection by the authorities that much more difficult.

Widodo Adi Sucipto, Indonesia's chief security minister, said on Tuesday more incidents could be expected despite police successes.

"There have been significant results but we still have to prepare because... terrorism exists and Indonesia has become the target and the victim," he said.

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