

Prime News

JI splinter factions the main suspects

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Attack has JI hallmarks; police looking at links to Malaysian-born fugitive

JAKARTA: The splintered Jemaah Islamiah (JI) is the prime suspect in yesterday's bombings in Jakarta. One security report predicted only a day earlier that the group was poised to strike.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute said in a paper released on Thursday that tensions in the group's leadership and the release of former members from prison raised the possibility that splinter factions might now seek to re-energise the movement through violent attacks.

But it added that the possibility remained low.

Less than 24 hours later, two explosions rocked Jakarta.

No one has claimed responsibility for yesterday's bombings but experts said they bore the JI hallmark.

'The intelligence and security services have been caught by surprise,' said analyst **Rohan Gunaratna** of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). 'The only group with the intention and capability to mount attacks upon Western targets is JI. The bombings show that JI is revived.'

JI is linked to the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and blamed for numerous attacks between 2002 and 2005 in Indonesia.

Indonesian police are looking at possible links between the bombings and Malaysian-born terrorist Noordin Mohammed Top, who remains at large. Sources in the counter-terrorism unit said the bombings bore all the hallmarks of the master bomb-maker, a former engineer who is the chief ideologue of JI's most violent wing.

Police said the bombs were 'identical' to those used previously by JI and had been triggered by suicide bombers who left traces of DNA including a severed head at the scenes of the attacks.

'If it was a suicide bombing, then it's certainly a possibility that this was done by Noordin's network,' International Crisis Group think-tank terrorism analyst Sidney Jones told Agence France-Presse. 'Noordin is no longer acting in the name of JI. He's a splinter of JI.'

At its peak, JI was believed to have a network of several hundred members across Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia.

So far, more than 200 JI militants have been arrested in Indonesia, and at least four have been executed. The rest have been sentenced to terms of between three years and life.

Malaysia and Singapore have also arrested alleged JI members under the Internal Security Act, which allows for indefinite detention without trial.

The security measures in Indonesia forced the terrorists to lower their aims, terrorism expert **John Harrison** of the RSIS told The Straits Times.

'A determined JI may have surveyed for the weakest locations but, given what could have happened, the overall security may have forced the terrorists to change trajectory,' he said.

The authorities have also succeeded in weakening JI by using former militants to negotiate with Islamic extremists and convince them to abandon violence.

The experts noted yesterday that several hardcore JI militants remained at large and appeared committed to terrorism.

Additional information from Associated Press, Agence France-Presse



Islamic militant group JI could be behind Jakarta attacks: experts

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The deadly Jakarta hotel bombings could be the work of a radical faction of Southeast Asian Islamic militant group Jemaah Islamiyah, which draws inspiration from Al-Qaeda, an official and experts said.

At least nine people were killed and more than 40 injured Friday when bombs exploded at two luxury hotels in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia -- where JI sealed its notoriety with the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed 202 people.

"Jemaah Islamiyah is the only group with the intention and capability to mount such an attack," terrorism analyst **Rohan Gunaratna**, from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, told AFP.

Ji's ultimate goal is to unite Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and the southern Philippines into a fundamentalist Islamic state, using terrorist attacks to destabilise governments across Southeast Asia.

The group, whose name means "Islamic community", has its roots in Darul Islam, an organisation which fought for an Islamic state in Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s and survived a military defeat in the 1960s.

Ji has carried out more than 50 bombings in Indonesia since April 1999, according to the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, including the 2002 Bali bombings and similar attacks on the resort island in 2005 that killed 20.

The group is also blamed for Christmas Eve 2000 bombings that targeted churches and priests, killing 19 people, and the August 2003 attack on the JW Marriott hotel in Jakarta -- again struck on Friday -- that left 12 dead.

A suicide car bomb outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta in September 2004 killed 10 people.

Ji is also suspected of involvement in bombings in the Philippines, where its followers have attended training camps, and of bomb plots in Thailand and Singapore.

An Indonesian counter-terrorism officer pointed the finger at Malaysian-born former accountant Noordin Mohammed Top, the alleged mastermind of the 2002 Bali bombings who is believed to be running a radical Ji faction.

"There must be a link with Noordin Top. There's a big possibility. But we still need to investigate how far he is involved," the officer said on condition of anonymity.

Sidney Jones, a terrorism analyst with the International Crisis Group in Jakarta, also said Noordin

could be involved in Friday's carnage, but noted: "Noordin is no longer acting in the name of JI. He's a splinter of JI."

If the organisation is confirmed as the perpetrator of Friday's bombings in Jakarta, it would be its first major attack since the 2005 bombings in Bali.

JI was nurtured by Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir and his countryman Hambali, who is also known as Riduan Isamuddin and the "Osama bin Laden of the East," while they were in exile in Malaysia after fleeing Suharto's Indonesia.

Hambali, an Afghan war veteran, was arrested in Thailand in 2003 on suspicion of being both a top Al-Qaeda and JI operative. He is currently in detention at the US prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Bashir, the alleged spiritual head of JI, was jailed in March 2005 for involvement in a conspiracy that led to the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings but was released the following year. His conviction was later overturned on appeal.

Self-proclaimed JI leaders Zarkasi and Abu Dujana, arrested on Indonesia's Java island in June 2007, were each sentenced to 15 years in prison in April 2008.

Along with Noordin, several top JI militants are still at large, including Zulkarnaen, reportedly the Al-Qaeda pointman in Southeast Asia, and bomb experts Dulmatin and Umar Patek.



Indonesia bombings show SE Asia complacent on terror: analysts

Alvin Darlanika Soedarjo

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Twin bombs that tore through luxury hotels in Indonesia's capital Friday have exposed the complacency of Southeast Asian nations in fighting regional militant networks, analysts say.

At least nine people were killed and more than 40 were wounded, including foreigners, by bombs that exploded in the JW Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotels in Jakarta's upscale Mega Kuningan district.

The attacks are the first of their kind in Indonesia since 2005 and brought back painful memories of a bombing by the radical Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) network that killed 12 people at the JW Marriott in 2003.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said the bombings were an "act of terrorism", but authorities have so far not pointed the finger at any group.

However University of Indonesia political scientist Bantarto Bandoro said the choice as targets of hotels popular among Westerners suggested the attack could be the work of JI or related militant groups.

"The governments of Southeast Asia have failed and have not been effective in controlling these terrorists because they have been over-confident in their abilities," Bandoro said.

"These terrorists won't stop even though some of their people get caught. Their networks are very wide," he said, adding that regional governments will have to step up security coordination in the wake of the attacks.

Regional governments have made strides in recent years in curtailing JI, which has been responsible for attacks in the Philippines and Indonesia including 2002 and 2005 bombings on Bali that killed more than 200 people.

JI militants also have been convicted of plotting spectacular attacks on high-profile targets including Singapore's Changi airport.

Despite the capture and killing of key regional JI leaders over the years -- including the recapture of fugitive alleged Singaporean cell leader Mas Selamat bin Kastari in Malaysia in April -- some key leaders remain on the run.

The chief of a violent JI splinter group and the alleged mastermind of the 2002 Bali bombings, Malaysian-born Noordin Mohammad Top, could be one figure behind Friday's attacks, International Crisis Group analyst Sidney Jones said.

"If it was a suicide bombing, then it's certainly a possibility that this was done by Noordin's

network," Jones said.

"Noordin is no longer acting in the name of JI. He's a splinter of JI," she said.

"It means that efforts to eradicate (Noordin's network) need to be stepped up. The seriously dangerous fugitives are still at large."

Unconfirmed local reports have said police chasing Noordin stumbled across bomb-making material in an Islamic boarding school in Cilacap district, Central Java, earlier this week.

Singapore-based analyst **Rohan Gunaratna** said Islamist militants had used flagging attention by regional authorities as an opportunity to regroup for fresh violence.

The attacks show that regional "governments will have to closely work together to dismantle the JI infrastructure," Gunaratna, of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, said.

"Also they need to work on dismantling the propaganda, recruitment and fund-raising activities of JI. These activities have not been dismantled," he added.

"The bombings demonstrate that Indonesia should get its act together. If Indonesia took the threat seriously, this would not have happened."