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Barack Obama is expected to arrive with his family later this month. (AFP Photo)

Obama Visit Likely Fueled Terror Raids: Analysts

US President Barack Obama's planned visit to Indonesia this month has lent new impetus to raids that have left one top militant dead and his band of Islamist extremists on the ropes, analysts say.

"The most important and powerful leader in the world is coming to Indonesia, so the authorities have to tame any possible attack by jihadists," Noor Huda Ismail, an Indonesian analyst of extremism, told AFP.

Obama along with First Lady Michelle and daughters Malia and Sasha are expected to visit Indonesia from March 20 to 22 before heading on to Australia, although the US Embassy in Jakarta said on Wednesday that the dates were still unconfirmed.

In Canberra Wednesday, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono confirmed the death in a police raid of Dulmatin, one of the masterminds of the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists.

Dulmatin, who had a 10-million-dollar US bounty on his head, was shot dead along with two other people on Tuesday near Jakarta.

Their deaths were the latest in a crackdown launched on February 22 when police raided an extremist training camp in a remote part of Aceh province.

Since the Aceh operation, police say they have arrested 22 terror suspects, including firearms suppliers and financiers. Analysts say the arrests may have yielded valuable intelligence on Dulmatin's terror group Jemaah Islamiyah.

Jl, whose mission is to enforce a Muslim caliphate across Southeast Asia, was inspired by Al-Qaeda and is blamed for multiple incidents across Indonesia including the 2002 carnage in Bali and attacks on Jakarta hotels last year.

Ismail said the recent crackdown had left Jl "completely crippled". But he warned that the terror threat remained, especially with the "emergence of many splinter groups who support the idea of the use of violence".

Malaysian extremist Noordin Mohammad Top, the leader of a bloodthirsty splinter faction of the Jl, was killed by Indonesian security forces in September.

Indonesian authorities said the Obama visit was likely to go ahead as planned, which one analyst called a "vote of confidence" by the United States in Muslim-majority Indonesia's ability to maintain security.

"The US is well aware of the security situation everywhere. If they don't feel safe, they won't let the president go," John Harrison, a security analyst at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, said.

The recent operations show "how serious Indonesia is", he said, and are "a recognition of the capabilities that they have to react responsibly when there's information".

Singapore-based terrorism analyst Rohan Gunaratna said the death of Dulmatin was "a significant victory for the fight against terrorism in Asia".

Jl 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 attacks on the resort island in 2005 that killed 20.

But analysts believe the capacity of Jl and splinter groups to wage terror has been seriously curbed since the July 17 bombings on two luxury hotels in Jakarta. Noordin's death came as part of the subsequent investigation.

Indonesia's anti-terror clampdown may have broader implications beyond Asia.

Aceh governor Irwandi Yusuf said Tuesday that several of the arrested suspects had been recruited in January 2009 to help battle Israel's military incursion into the Gaza Strip.

"Intelligence has uncovered their intentions to set up a base for a Southeast Asian terror network," he told a news conference.

AFP, JG