

Top terror boss `still on the run'

ADAM GARTRELL

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TERRORIST leader Noordin Mohammed Top may have cheated death or capture once more but he is likely to be caught by Indonesian police soon, a leading expert says.

Rohan Gunaratna, head of the Singapore-based International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, is certain the man killed in a counter-terrorism raid on a house in Central Java at the weekend was not Noordin.

“It is not the body of Noordin M. Top,” Gunaratna said, citing sources close to the investigation.

“People who have seen Noordin M. Top have identified that body as not belonging to him.”

His comments came as fingerprint analysis reportedly confirmed that the body was not that of the Malaysian-born extremist. Officially, police say they are still waiting on DNA tests to confirm whether the body belongs to Noordin, whom they have been hunting for the past six years.

“It's not him. We know from his facial structure as well as his fingerprints,” an unnamed counter-terror police officer said yesterday.

“We're continuing to track his whereabouts.”

Noordin, who leads a hard-line splinter group of terror outfit Jemaah Islamiyah, is the suspected mastermind of last month's attacks on the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta that killed nine people, including three Australians and two bombers.

Authorities believe he was also responsible for a 2003 attack on the Marriott, a 2004 attack on Australia's embassy in Jakarta and the 2005 Bali bombings.

Police have come close to catching him several times but he has always eluded capture.

However, Gunaratna believes police will catch him soon.

“Noordin M. Top has been the key target of the Indonesian police and intelligence services since 2003 but not enough effort went into neutralising this target,” he said.

“I believe the attacks against the Ritz-Carlton and JW Marriott hotels last month will be the catalyst for Indonesia to find him.”