

Bambang defiant in face Islamist extremists
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President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono sent a message of defiance today to Islamist extremists, saying Indonesia would not be defeated by terrorism after police uncovered a plot to assassinate him.

In an address to the nation ahead of Independence Day on Monday, the ex-general called on all Indonesians to remain vigilant against extremists blamed for a series of attacks including last month's hotel blasts in Jakarta.

Police hunting Islamist fanatic Noordin Mohammed Top, who allegedly ordered the July 17 suicide attacks on the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels, said this week they had killed three men involved in the assassination plot.

"In this planned terrorist attack there is a new phenomenon which is to aim terrorist action directly at our country, including a plan to assassinate the head of state," Yudhoyono said.

"I want to stress that our country cannot be defeated in the fight against terrorism." Two suicide bombers believed to be part of Noordin's network killed seven people, mostly foreigners, at the Marriott and Ritz-Carlton in downtown Jakarta, the first attack of its kind in Indonesia since 2005.

Police investigating the blasts have killed three men who were allegedly planning to detonate a truck bomb at Yudhoyono's principal residence near Bogor, south of Jakarta, around Independence Day.

Hundreds of kilogrammes of explosive chemicals were found during a raid last Saturday at a house near Bogor where two alleged Noordin followers were rigging a small truck as a bomb, police said.

They were killed when they tried to hurl pipe-bombs at arresting officers.

A third man who was a key player in the hotel attacks and was being groomed to detonate the suicide truck bomb at Yudhoyono's house was killed later Saturday in a police raid on a farmhouse in Central Java, police said.

Followers told to switch tactics

Media reports that Noordin, 41, a Malaysian who leads an offshoot of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) regional terror network, was killed in the raid on the farmhouse proved false.

Noordin is the most wanted terror suspect in the country and is blamed for at least four suicide attacks targeting Westerners in Indonesia since 2003 which have killed around 50 people.

Police have said he ordered his followers to switch tactics and target the president during a meeting in April, as revenge for the execution of three Islamists convicted over the 2002 Bali bombings which killed 202 people.

Yudhoyono said "poverty and injustice" were the root causes of terrorism but the killing of innocent civilians could never be justified by religion.

"Terrorist acts in public places are inhuman and the victims are innocent, whether they are foreigners or Indonesians," he said.

"I urge the Indonesian police and other security apparatus to increase their vigilance to prevent and eradicate terrorism at its roots, whoever they are and whatever their motivation."

He also called on ordinary Indonesians - the vast majority of whom are moderate Muslims - to "stay united" against religious fanaticism.

"Let's protect our young people from the deviant and extreme way of thinking, which can lead to terrorist acts," he said.

Islamists mostly linked to JI, and sometimes funded by Al-Qaeda, have killed hundreds of people in terror attacks in Indonesia over the past decade as they seek to undermine the secular government and create a pure Islamic caliphate.

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