

Extremists 'infiltrating Indonesia'

JAKARTA, April 4 — Islamic extremists are infiltrating all levels of society in Indonesia, threatening its traditions of religious pluralism and tolerance, warned a new report backed by moderate Muslim leaders. It said these extremists were influenced by Wahhabism, the more fundamentalist brand of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia and the ideology of the militant Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt.

They were members of the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the radical Muslim group, Hizbut Tahrir, in Indonesia, said the report.

With funding from Saudi Arabia, they had taken over some mosques belonging to moderate Muslim groups Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, as well as infiltrated government departments and even the government-appointed Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), it said.

MUI, the top Islamic authority in Indonesia, was described as the "bunker of fundamentalist and subversive movements", issuing counterproductive fatwas that ban secularism, pluralism and liberalism, along with branding certain groups as deviant.

The report accused the PKS of trying to grab political power by infiltrating mainstream Islamic organisations and to win converts by building village mosques funded with Saudi money.

"Opportunistic politicians who work with extremist political parties and groups have joined the radicals in driving our nation towards a deep chasm," wrote former President Abdurrahman Wahid, the editor of the report released on Thursday.

"They are jeopardising the future of our multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation."

Abdurrahman set up the LibForAll Foundation with American businessman C. Holland Taylor. The foundation conducted two years of research for the report, "The Illusion Of An Islamic State: The Expansion Of Transnational Islamist Movements To Indonesia". It was jointly published by the Wahid Institute, the Maarif Institute and the Bhinneka Tunngal Ika, or "Unity in Diversity", movement.

The report called on Indonesia's elite and public at large to defend their nation's tradition of religious pluralism and tolerance, and to prevent radicals from establishing a so-called "Islamic state".

The PKS, which is likely to form a coalition with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party after next week's elections, has denied having a hidden agenda to promote an Islamic state and "infiltrating" mosques.

"Our members are Muslims who go to the mosques and many are naturally active in the mosques. How can you say we infiltrate these places of worship?" said PKS legislator Zulkieflimansyah, adding that his party does not receive funding from Saudi Arabia.

Hizbut Tahrir spokesman Ismail Yusanto also objected to the use of the word "infiltration", saying it was provocative and implied "evil intention". — Straits Times