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Study claims Islamic party is spreading radical, extremist ideology in Indonesia

By Channel NewsAsia's Indonesia Bureau Chief Sujadi Siswo | Posted: 04 April 2009 0037 hrs

JAKARTA : Just days before Indonesians go to the polls, a study has been released charging that an Islamic party is spreading radical and extremist ideology - undermining the country's moderate Islamic tradition.

The research will soon be published in a book titled "The Illusion of an Islamic State: the Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia."

The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) is expected to garner greater support in this election and become the leading Islamic party in Indonesia.

But that could spell trouble for Indonesia's moderate Muslims, according to research by LibForALL, a non-governmental organisation co-founded by former president Abdurrahman Wahid and an American.

The two-year study claims that members of extremist elements have infiltrated Indonesian Institutions and moderate Muslim organisations in the country to spread their ideology. They are also said to have received funding from Middle Eastern countries.

PKS and Hizbut-tahrir - a religious organisation - are said to have the ultimate goal of turning Indonesia into an Islamic state.

Ahmad Suaedy, executive director, The Wahid Institute, said: "We do not engineer these findings. They are from the research. And in the process, there were responses from mass organisations such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. The book documents their official response to this phenomenon."

The PKS has brushed aside the allegations.

Zulkieflimansyah, deputy chairman (political affairs), Prosperous Justice Party, said: "We are very disappointed that educated people, Western-educated people like our friends at the Wahid Institute used this kind of issue to attract public attention. And I think the public in Indonesia knows who PKS is and who the Wahid Institute is. I think it won't impact us at all."

The Wahid Institute - belonging to former president Abdurrahman Wahid - is one of three Indonesian organisations involved in the publication of the research.

The research said it is concerned about the presence of Islamic elements in President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's coalition government. And observers expect PKS to play a bigger role should Mr Yudhoyono return to power.

Ahmad Suaedy said: "Our experience with the Yudhoyono presidency shows that he is weak in facing demands from this movement - for example inter-religious violence and blasphemy charges against minority Muslim groups."

PKS is also said to be behind the controversial anti-pornography law which was rejected by segments of Indonesia's plural society.

Zulkieflimansyah said: "Radicalism will not have any place in Indonesia. The nature of Indonesian people is very moderate. And there is no choice for political Islam like PKS, political party like PKS, except capturing the middle ground."

And that has been seen at PKS campaign rallies, with rock bands and the "no headscarf" rule for women - once a taboo with the Islamic Party.

The organisation behind the research claims that the publication of the study is not meant to coincide with Indonesia's general elections, but the findings will certainly have some bearing on the country's politics.

But voters in general - who are more concerned about basic economic issues - are unlikely to be swayed by the research. - CNA/ms