



REUTERS

## Radical Islam targets Indonesia institutions-report

By Olivia Rondonuwu | April 2, 2009

JAKARTA, April 2 (Reuters) - Indonesia's tradition of practising a moderate form of Islam is being undermined by extremists whose agenda includes the creation of an Islamic state or international caliphate, a report said on Thursday.

The report, backed by some moderate Muslim groups, said members of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) group were "infiltrating" moderate Muslim groups and institutions such as schools to press their agenda.

PKS, an Islamist party that could be a potential ally or coalition partner for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in this year's elections, has denied any secret agenda to implement Islamic law.

Hizbut Tahrir says it supports sharia law and the creation of a caliphate through peaceful means.

"Opportunistic politicians who work with extremist political parties and groups have joined the radicals in driving our nation towards a deep chasm," said Indonesia's former president, Abdurrahman Wahid, whose Wahid Institute promotes moderate Islamic thought, democratic reform and religious pluralism.

"They are jeopardising the future of our multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation," Wahid, the editor of the report, added in a summarising statement.

The report also includes contributions from former leaders of the country's two largest mainstream Muslim organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which between them claim to have more than 70 million supporters.

Predominantly Muslim Indonesia is officially secular although a vocal group of Muslim hardliners have pressed a more radical agenda in a country with significant minorities of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and other religions.

The study noted that the tactic of extremists was to gain influence in mosques or other institutions by, for example, offering financial help or even free cleaning services.

Sometimes professionals such as lecturers, doctors or teachers would also help to infiltrate institutions and ultimately gain control over them, it said. The report said a team of more than 30

researchers from Islamic universities and institutes covering 17 provinces was involved in the study.

## ISLAMIC LAW

PKS, which has campaigned on strong anti-corruption credentials, is targeting 20 percent of the vote in the April 9 parliamentary elections so that it can field a candidate for the more important presidential election on July 8, although most opinion polls have put it below 10 percent.

"There's no infiltration, no hidden agenda, we are open as a party," PKS spokesman Ahmad Maburi said. "What is clear is PKS is now even more moderate."

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia spokesman Ismail Yusanto said that some of the group's members belonged to other Muslim groups or organisations but in a private capacity or after being invited.

"Using the term 'infiltration' is very provocative. It has a meaning of evil intention even though it is not in fact like that," he added. He also denied that the group received funding from Saudi Arabia.

The staunchly Muslim Indonesian province of Aceh is the only area officially allowed to practise Islamic law, but some other parts of the country have introduced sharia bylaws requiring women to wear headscarves or schoolchildren to recite the Koran.

Yudhoyono currently relies on support from a coalition of Muslim and other parties which, some analysts say, has influenced his government's policies.

Last year, the government issued a decree to restrict a minority Muslim sect, and pushed a controversial anti-pornography law through parliament, provoking an outcry from many Indonesians who saw it as a threat to artistic, religious and cultural freedom.

"The Illusion of an Islamic State: the Expansion of Transnational Islamist Movements to Indonesia" is jointly published by the Wahid Institute, the Maarif Institute and the Bhinneka Tunggal Ika ("Unity in Diversity") movement.

(Reporting by Olivia Rondonuwu; Editing by Ed Davies and Sugita Katyal)