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Muslims make up 90% of the 200 million Indonesians

Radical Muslim groups have been attacking bars, discos, brothels and gambling centres in Indonesia.

The attacks have escalated since the Muslim holy month of Ramadan two weeks ago.

Gangs armed with swords and wooden poles have smashed audio equipment, furniture and bottles of alcohol worth tens of thousands of dollars, the Associated Press news agency reported.

Dozens of people have been injured during these raids.

Violence warning

Posters warning that such action will be taken against nightspots have been put up around Jakarta by the Islamic Defenders Front.

One warns, "Burn the nightspots that refuse to close for Ramadan," while another vows to destroy whoever "soils the holiness" of Ramadan.

Muslims are required to fast from dawn to dusk during Ramadan.

The group, which claims 70,000 members in Jakarta and branches in 19 provinces across Indonesia, believes its attacks on nightspots can be justified by the Koran, the Muslim holy book.

"We let the owners of the discos know in advance. We write them letters," Siroj Alwi, who heads the Islamic Defenders Front's anti-vice squad, told Associated Press.

“
If they refuse to shut, we close the places by force

Siroj Alwi

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"But if they refuse to shut, we close the places by force," the part-time preacher added.

Rise of religious unrest

There has been an upsurge of religious and communal unrest in Indonesia - which holds the largest Muslim population in the world - since the fall of former President Suharto in May 1998.



There is strong anti-Israeli feeling in Muslim Indonesia

The Moluccas islands have seen some of the worst religious strife, with 5,000 people killed and more than half a million driven from their homes.

In October, US citizens were told to leave some cities following anger over the perceived pro-Israeli bias of US policy in the Middle East.

The national constitution provides for a secular government but there have been increasing calls for Islam to play a greater political role, which has been opposed by President Abdurrahman Wahid.



There have been calls for Islam to play a greater role in politics

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