

Extremists sit deep in Indonesia: Wahid



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Islamic extremists have infiltrated deep into Indonesia's government, businesses, schools and religious bodies, and are using cunning new tactics to seize control of mosques and preach radicalism, a former president says.

Abdurrahman Wahid, who served as president of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001, says hardliners are succeeding in transforming Indonesia's traditionally moderate brand of Islam into one that is "aggressive, furious, intolerant and full of hate".

Writing in a new book, *The Illusion of an Islamic State*, Wahid says the extremists are systematically infiltrating Indonesian institutions in order to remake Indonesian society "in their own harsh and rigid likeness".

Wahid, also known as Gus Dur, says the hardliners are strongly influenced by transnational Islamic movements from the Middle East, such as Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood, and many are financed by massive amounts of Wahhabi petro-dollars.

The 68-year-old says the hardliners have penetrated to the heart of Indonesia's government, and warns of opportunistic politicians who work with extremist political parties and groups.

"They have joined the extremists in driving our nation towards a deep chasm, which threatens destruction and national disintegration," Wahid says.

The book is based on more than two years of research by the LibForAll Foundation, a non-government organisation (NGO) set up to promote religious tolerance and discredit extremism.

As Wahid points out in the introduction, researchers for the book uncovered evidence of several cunning schemes extremists use to seize control of mosques.

Under one scheme, a group of youths will offer a mosque a free cleaning service.

Actually "extremist agents", the cleaners will aim to impress a mosque's management with their piety, and eventually gain a spot on the mosque's board.

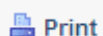
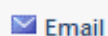
Once on the board, they consolidate their power, stack it with other radicals, and eventually come to control who can serve as imam, deliver sermons or give religious education.

The groups are also involved in strenuous efforts to seize control of Indonesia's mainstream Islamic organisations, particularly Muhammadiyah and the Nahdatul Ulama, in order to use them as vehicles to spread extremism, Wahid says.

The Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars has largely fallen into the grip of radicals and is now dictating to - and in many ways controlling - the country's government, he says.

About 90 per cent of Indonesia's 240 million people are Muslims.

Wahid, Indonesia's fourth president, was kicked out of office and impeached in 2001 amid accusations of incompetence and corruption.



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