

TOP STORIES

Fri. Apr 03, 2009



Extremists sit deep in Indonesia: Wahid

Islamic extremists have infiltrated deep into Indonesia's government, business...

[Analysis](#) | [Read More...](#)

Extremists sit deep in Indonesia: Wahid

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, former President Abdurrahman Wahid says.

Wahid, who served as president of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001, says hard-liners are succeeding in transforming the country'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 extremists are systematically infiltrating Indonesian institutions in order to remake Indonesian society "in their own harsh and rigid likeness".

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

The 68-year-old blind cleric says the hardliners have penetrated to the heart of the 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, an 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.

In 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 the country's mainstream Islamic organizations, particularly Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, in order to use them as vehicles to spread extremism, Wahid says.

The Indonesian Ulemas Council has largely fallen into the grip of radicals and is now dictating to — and in many ways controlling — the government, he says.

Wahid was kicked out of office and impeached in 2001 amid accusations of incompetence and corruption. He and his loyal supporters were ousted from the National Awakening Party after an internal dispute with his nephew, who later became the party's chairman. (Australian Associated Press/Concord)

Analysis

Despite his political troubles, Wahid remains respected worldwide as a leading figure in Indonesia's tolerant Muslim community. He sits on the boards of many international organizations dedicated to religious tolerance and understanding and, in Indonesia, was a wily fighter for democracy and human rights through the tough years of the Suharto regime. His comments on the creeping inroads of hard-line Islam into mainstream society and the effect it is having are worrying. It has been clear for some time that hard-liners are gaining ground, but Wahid's analysis, based on his wide network within Indonesian Islam, makes it clear the situation is already far worse than had been feared.