

Southeast Asia  
**NOORHAIDI HASAN**

**A young student wearing ripped jeans, with long hair and an earring, was called on by a group of people wearing long flowing robes while he was having dinner at a food stall in a street of Yogyakarta. The group of people harassed him and forced him to leave his food. They accused him of being the troublemaker of the crisis and disaster facing Indonesia today. This situation occurred at the beginning of August 2000, when the first national congress of mujahidin was to be held on the re-establishment of the *shari'a* in Indonesia.**

Approximately two thousand people representing various 'radical' groups that are particularly in the public eye at moment, attended the congress. Amongst the participants were Laskar Santri (Santri Paramilitary Troops), Laskar Mujahidin (Mujahidin Paramilitary Troops), Kompi Badr (Badr Company), Brigade Taliban (Taliban Brigade), and Pasukan Komando Mujahidin (Mujahidin Command Force). A number of influential Muslim figures gave talks at the congress, such as Deliar Noer, Mansyur Suryanegara, Syahirul Alim, and Alawi Muhammad. They discussed one central theme: the application of the Islamic *shari'a* as highly necessary in order to solve various problems and disasters occurring in Indonesia today.

Recently, almost every week in Jakarta, the Front Pembela Islam (The Front of the Defender of Islam) conducts *razzia*. They go to cafés, discotheques, casinos, and other venues which they accuse of being dens of iniquity and break up the on-going activities without being hampered by security agents. A few months ago, a major force called Laskar Jihad (Jihad Paramilitary Troops) even openly trained its members to engage in combat and stated its readiness to go to the battle field in the Moluccas. Several times, similar groups wearing white long-flowing robes and turbans took to the streets in protest against President Abdurrahman Wahid's policies, such as his proposal to withdraw the MPR (People's Consultative Council) decree on the banning of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party). They also recently protested against the position taken by KOMNASHAM (National Commission for Human Rights) in dealing with certain crucial issues.

#### Islamic radicalism

The phenomenon of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia has emerged since the multi-dimensional crisis facing the country in 1997, which resulted in the collapse of Soeharto's regime. This movement marked a new phase of the relationship between Islam and the state, after the severe long-term repression of political Islam by the state. Since then, the existence of radical groups on the political scene has become increasingly remarkable and even 'attractive'. But what is the background of the emergence of such groups and is there any link between them and the changing socio-political and economic situations within the historical course of the nation?

The efflorescence of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia cannot be disassociated from the fast current of modernization and development projects run by the state during the last 30 years. In the past, the state has not provided sufficient space for all segments of society to express themselves and their interests in terms of modernization and development. The expression of political Islam, for instance, was often marginalized and repressed by the authoritarianism of the state.

However, this apparently could not be maintained, as there were moments when the state had to face the so-called legitimization crisis, which has increasingly expanded

# Islamic Radicalism and the Crisis of the Nation-State

since the end of the 1980s. In order to restrain the spread of this crisis, the state should seek out new means such as, for example, promoting a strategy of conservative Islamization, particularly focused on the accentuation of the Islamic symbols in the public discourse, or accommodating the religious socio-political powers. A number of organizations and institutions using Islamic symbols have come to the fore. The Islamic Court Bill was introduced, followed by the presidential decree on the Compilation of Islamic Law. Islamic *shari'a* banks and insurance companies were created everywhere, and thousands of mosques were built under the sponsorship of the state. In a very short time, the state drastically moved away from its former secular position and Muslim figures began to run the political scene.

Behind the conservative Islamization project run by the state at that time, there were many groups which, after losing hope, affiliated themselves to the project, or at least felt that they were going in that direction. Indeed, many groups saw this as a promising opportunity. Muslims who had been forced to remain in the periphery and who were given limited space in national politics found a new way to enter the political, social and economic arenas of the state. Those Muslim groups that had lost hope were bureaucrats, politicians, merchants, businessmen and even military, to name but a few. They believed that in this way they would be able to change the fate of their society, their nation, and their state – not to mention their own.

Within these groups, there were also sub-groups which had been active in their resistance to the state before the mid-1980s and had struggled to give voice to the establishment of an Islamic state. At certain times they resorted to violence, as demonstrated by a group of young people led by Abdul Qadir Djaelani, calling themselves the Pola Perjuangan Revolusioner Islam (The Pattern of Revolutionary Islamic Struggle), who rushed the People's Consultative Council's assembly in March 1978. Two years before, the actions of the Komando Jihad (Jihad Command), led by H. Ismail Pranoto, erupted but were suppressed only in 1981. In that same year, a group of people who were loyal to Imran M. Zein carried out a set of attacks on police stations and other governmental services. The attacks culminated in the hijacking of a Garuda Indonesia aeroplane on 28 March 1981. Yet another attack took place in 1984 in Tanjung Priok, North Jakarta, when hundreds of people, commanded by Amir Biki, demanding the liberation of their four colleagues were fired at by military troops. This tragedy cost dozens of lives. They did not stand a chance in the face of the state repression. The peak of their impotency occurred when the state forced all socio-political organizations to accept the Pancasila. As a result, many, hiding their real faces, became active in the underground.

#### Radical neo-fundamentalism

When the crisis erupted, all that they had worked to achieve was suddenly put to an end. A number of sub-segments within the wave of conservative Islamization began to

experience deep frustration due to this dramatic turn of events. Their aspirations of slowly taking control over the economy were shattered and their hopes of running the political scene were destroyed. Despite the last general election having demonstrated attempts to accommodate all socio-political powers, not all groups were satisfied. This was mostly due to a general feeling of not having acquired sufficient representation. They felt they were being marginalized again in the current of reformation, which led Abdurrahman Wahid to the presidency.

Taking the aforementioned historical processes into account, we can regard the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia as a site of resistance to the hegemony of the state by marginalized segments of society within the context of major political, social and economic change. The aim of this radicalism is to make these marginalized voices heard in the public sphere. Since hegemony functions through discourse, Islamic radicalism often attempts to produce a counter-discourse by criticizing secular-national expression and offering alternatives to it.

Olivier Roy, a French political scientist, has encountered a similar phenomenon in many Muslim countries today, which he calls 'radical neo-fundamentalism'. He defines it as a movement attempting to re-Islamize society at the grassroots level, through the re-establishment of the Islamic *shari'a*, without being formed within an Islamic state. This phenomenon arose from the failure of Islamism, a modern political Islamic movement which claims to re-create a true Muslim society, not merely by the application of the Islamic *shari'a*, but also by creating a new Islamic order through the revolutionary and militant political actions, if necessary. The proponents of the movement do not see Islam as a mere religion. Rather, they see it as a political ideology that should be integrated into all aspects of society. However, Roy adds that even though Islamism has failed since the 1980s, particularly in terms of its original target of creating an Islamic state, its resistance and criticism to the authoritarianism of the state have succeeded in forcing the latter to introduce a conservative Islamization policy. Ironically, such policies did not succeed in eliminating Islamism; on the contrary, they have broadened its constituency and supporters.

Roy indicates that radical neo-fundamentalism combines political and militant jihad to protest against the secular West, with a very conservative definition of Islam. He also purports that it is a supra-national movement, working beyond the borders of the nation-state. There is a sort of international network in which the actors of the movement are trained and given financial support. Furthermore, the movement attempts to demonstrate the failure of the nation-state, seen as caught between national solidarity and globalization.

In the recent bombings in several major cities in Indonesia these days, many suspect the Indonesian Islamic radical groups. President Wahid even commanded the chief of

police to arrest an influential figure of the Front of the Defenders of Islam, Sayyid Ali Baaqil. No one knows what the future holds for Indonesia, but one thing is clear: the violence, to quote Roy, 'is more a sign of weakness than the harbinger of a new wave of Islamic militancy'. Because political Islam remains in the periphery, it may never succeed in changing the strategic landscape of the Muslim world. ♦