

Contemporary Islamic Renewal in Indonesia

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During the early years of Soeharto's presidency, tension and conflict between Muslim groups and the government was widely evident. This discord was a result of government policies which the Muslims felt would uproot the influence of Islam from Indonesian politics. Towards the end of the 1980s, however, Islam began to show some convincing signs of revival. The turning point of Islamic reinvigoration was the acceptance of *Pancasila* by Muslim mass organizations as the foundation of their socio-political activities, thus ending the mutual suspicion between Muslims and the government. A more recent indication of Islamic resurgence is the increasing number of Indonesian *haj* pilgrims to Mecca and the formation of an important Islamic organization, the All-Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association, which serves as a sounding board for the Muslims to influence public policy. To conclude, the revival of Islam came at a time when Indonesia was enjoying economic growth. The crucial question, therefore, is how to maintain the momentum for economic growth so as to avoid possible negative effects of an economic regression on the revival of Islamic life. Moreover, Muslim activists working for a genuine revival of Islam should also deal with the problem of how to eliminate, or at least reduce, un-Islamic practices such as corruption and poor discipline among Indonesian Muslims.

Introduction

"Silent spring in Indonesia" reads the cover caption of *Impact International* dated December 1995 on its issue on the development of Islam in contemporary years. The London-based Islamic magazine, which is usually critical of Indonesia, begins its report on the topic with the following:

After almost three decades of tension and conflict between Muslims and the New Order regime of President Soeharto, Indonesia appears to be going through a quiet revolution Javanese style! Opinions differ whether the changes that have come are good enough or even whether they represent a genuine desire to change, but there is little controversy that the political climate of Indonesia has perceptibly changed.

Then *Impact International* went on to give some favorable opinions of prominent Indonesian Muslim leaders, many of whom used to be outspoken critics of the Indonesian government. Some of these leaders include Professor Anwar Harjono, head of the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyyah Indonesia (DDII or Indonesian Islamic Preaching Council), and A.M.

Fatwa who was paroled early this year. Fatwa was imprisoned for several years for his involvement in "preaching subversion and plotting a campaign of mental terror against government officials."

There is little doubt that Harjono and Fatwa represent the completion of rapprochement between Muslim groups and the Indonesian government. Unlike in the past where there is conflict and tension, the relationship between the government and many Muslim groups is now much better.

Conflict and Tension

Any discussion of contemporary Islamic renewal in Indonesia should include discussion of some political developments in Indonesia during President Soeharto's New Order government. Soeharto came to power in the aftermath of the abortive coup d'etat of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) on September 30, 1965. Despite their pre-eminent role in mass actions against the communists, Muslims later felt that they were abandoned and even marginalized. As a result, tension and conflict between Muslims and the government developed. Several factors contributed to this conflict.

In the political field, Muslim groups felt that some policies of the New Order government were apparently intended to uproot the influence of Islam from Indonesian politics. They believed that the government, by taking the following actions, deliberately attempted to "depoliticize" Islam.

First, the New Order government showed its marked disapproval of the attempts of the Muslims during the period 1966-1968 to rehabilitate the Masjumi, a leading Islamic party that was outlawed by the Soekarno regime. The government also disapproved any attempt to establish a new Islamic political party. In 1971, the tension intensified when the government co-opted and imposed its leadership on older Islamic political parties by way of their fusion into the United Development Party (PPP). The fusion proved only to be the beginning of the long and bitter struggles among various factions within the PPP for it was unable to function as smoothly as expected. On top of this, in 1985, the government enacted a law that required all social and political organizations to adopt the state ideology *Pancasila* as the sole foundation of their socio-political activities. This meant that Islamic organizations had to erase the

word "Islam" from their statutes. All these policies unavoidably created a strong impression among Muslims that the government intended to remove the influence of Islam from Indonesian political life.

The tension further exacerbated when the government launched political purge and surveillance on Muslims who used to be proponents of the Dar al-Islam and Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) movements. This was followed by a series of military suppression of "Islamic extremists" who were claimed by the military to be members of "Komando Jihad" (Jihad Command) that allegedly plotted to overthrow the government. A number of similar incidents took place from 1982 to 1985 in Bandung, Tanjung Priok, Glodok (Jakarta), Tasikmalaya, Borobudur, Aceh and Lampung.

In a more religious realm, the introduction of the National Marriage Bill (1972-1973) by the government created furor and anger among Muslims. For them, the Bill mostly contradicted the Shari'ah (Islamic law) and was regarded by Muslims as a stark attempt to remove the influence of Shari'ah from the Indonesian legal system. The Muslims only accepted the Bill in 1974 when substantive revisions were made as a result of their protest actions and demonstrations against the measure (Azra 1992).

Later in 1978, another controversy surfaced when the government officially recognized the Javanese *aliran kebatinan* or *aliran kepercayaan* as a legitimate cultural spiritual tradition and a distinct religious grouping. Despite the fact that the government did not recognize the *aliran kepercayaan* as a religion, many Muslims, who see it as a deviation from Islam, felt that the government recognition significantly reduced the realm of influence of Islam.

Moreover, many Muslims believed that all these policies were only portions of a much larger plot to destroy Islam in Indonesia. Vatikiotis, for instance, pointed out that there is evidence that some radical Islamic movements (such as the DI/TII) may have been instigated by the state to become active again in the 1970s and 1980s in order to gain political support. For example, it is believed that Ali Murtopo (one of the brains of the New Order) asked the former leaders of the Dar al-Islam revolt in West Java to reactivate the movement which was crushed by the army in the 1960s. The reason behind this was Murtopo's desire to discredit the Islamic political forces. Moreover, in the succeeding years, hundreds of

Muslims were arrested and accused of belonging to an extremist group known as Komando Jihad (Vatikiotis 1994: 128-9). It is through such machinations that Islam and Muslims were being discredited.

Against this background, it is hard to imagine, especially in the first half of the 1980s, that there would be an Islamic revival in Indonesia. Beyond anyone's expectations, however, Islam in Indonesia began to show some convincing signs of revival by the end of the 1980s. This Islamic revival can be attributed to changes that took place in both the international and domestic scenes. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will only discuss those pertaining to the latter.

Turning Point for Reinvigoration

The reinvigoration of Islam in Indonesia has been the subject of discussion among both Indonesian and foreign scholars. For example, Schwarz devoted a long chapter on this in one of his books. According to him, after the long conflict between the Muslims and the government, the revival of Islam was underway in Indonesia by the late 1980s (Schwarz 1994: 162-193).

The turning point of Islamic reinvigoration, it seems, was the acceptance of *Pancasila* by Muslim mass organizations as the sole ideological foundation of their socio-political activities. This ended the relatively long mutual suspicion, tension and conflict between the Muslim *ummah* in general and the government. As a result, the subsequent development of Islamic went on smoothly. Muslim activities geared toward the development and improvement of the various aspects of Islamic life were no longer seen by the government as a threat to state ideology and political stability.

Before providing a detailed discussion on the several signs of Islamic reinvigoration in Indonesia, I will cite a list issued by the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) detailing actions of the government manifesting its changed attitude toward Islam. The following list, published in the June 1992 issue of the official magazine of the MUI, *Mimbar Ulama*, enumerates 19 items considered as significant contributions of government toward the improvement of Islamic life and the Muslim community in general.

- 1 Law No. 2, 1989 on National Education which stipulates that religious education is compulsory at all levels of education, and guarantees the existence of Islamic educational institutions;
- 2 Law No. 7, 1989, on the Islamic Religious Court;
- 3 Presidential Instruction No. 1, 1991, on the compilation of Islamic jurisprudence;
- 4 Construction and improvement of some 400 mosques by the *Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila* chaired by President Soeharto;
- 5 Dispatching of 1,000 Muslim preachers to remote regions of transmigration, financed by a foundation headed by President Soeharto;
- 6 Construction and provision of a number of transit complexes to Indonesian *haj* pilgrims;
- 7 Construction of four *haj* hospitals in memory of the Indonesian victims of the 1990 tragedy in Mina, Arab Saudi;
- 8 Intensive training program for the *madrasah 'aliyah*;
- 9 Upgrading of the IAIN staff through postgraduate programs including overseas studies;
- 10 Arabic instruction program through the national television TVRI;
- 11 President Instruction No. 2, 1991 on the regulation of *halal* food for Muslim;
- 12 Promotion of *waqf* land certification;
- 13 Conferences and meetings of Ministers of Religious Affairs of Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia on common Islamic calendar, etc.;
- 14 Full support for the *Istiqlal* festival;
- 15 Promotion of *Qur'an* reading and writing movement;
- 16 Formation of the ICMI;
- 17 Establishment of Bank Mu'amalat (Islamic Bank);
- 18 Establishment of and aid to mosque libraries throughout the country; and
- 19 Assistance to the construction and improvement of the *pesantren* (Nakamura 1993: 27-28).

This list clearly shows that Islam has taken a new course by the late 1980s. Muslim leaders since this period have been cultivating a positive relationship with the ruling elite which has acted favorably toward Islam and the Muslim society. By cultivating this kind of relationship, it is hoped that this will contribute to national development as well as provide Islam with a sense of legitimacy and respectability. It is also expected that with this, development and improvement of Islamic life can be carried out in

a more systematic way. Attendant with the revival of Islam is a change in its image. As Nakamura points out, "Islam has become (and is becoming) something beautiful, respectable, modern, relevant, fashionable, and even entertaining... Islam was rediscovered as something to be proud of" (Nakamura 1993: 25).

The new course of Islam can be said to be more cultural than political in nature. It is apparent that tension and conflict in the past originated mostly from government's suspicion of political Islam. Despite government's hostility to Muslim politics, it has provided ample room for the growth of a more cultural and spiritual expression of Islam. The cultural reinvigoration, however, is not entirely without political implications. Since the start of the present decade, many scholars have been stressing the return of "political Islam" to Indonesian politics.

There are many factors that contributed to the reinvigoration and renewal of Islam. One of these is the status the government accorded to religion. Contrary to the assertion of many Western observers that Indonesia is a "secular" state, the Indonesian government has always emphasized that religion plays an important role in the national life and the country's development. It is stated in various government pronouncement on national development that the ultimate aim of Indonesian development is the creation of a just, prosperous, and religious society, a society which enjoys not only material progress, but spiritual well-being as well. Hence, in Indonesian life and national development, religion is assigned a prominent role. Since majority of Indonesians are Muslims, it is expected that Islam would benefit most from such policy.

In the field of education, religious instruction is compulsory from elementary to the tertiary level. Again, since majority of Indonesian students are Muslims, religious instructions are mainly on Islam. Muslims are also privileged as far as their education is concerned, for there are distinctive Islamic educational institutions from elementary to the tertiary level. This is provided for in the recently enacted National Education Law of 1989. This law is considered by Muslims not only as a recognition of the importance of Islamic education, but also as a cornerstone for the reinvigoration of Islam in Indonesia through the educational system.

In addition to public schools (*sekolah negeri*), which are administered by the Department of Education and Culture, there is a significant

number of Islamic schools (*madrasah*) managed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Throughout Indonesia, there are now over 21,000 Islamic religious elementary schools (more popularly called *madrasah ibtida'iyah*); around 4,500 Islamic religious junior high schools (*madrasah tsanawiyah*); and over 1,300 Islamic religious senior high schools (*madrasah 'aliyah*). The total enrolment in all these *madrasahs* is more than eight million. At the level of higher education, in addition to the 42 state public universities, there are now 14 state Islamic universities throughout Indonesia. All of the universities under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs usually teach subjects on Ushuluddin (Theology), Shari'ah (Islamic Law), Tarbiyah (Islamic Education), Adab (Islamic History and Arabic Literature), and Dakwah (Islamic Propagation) (cf. Sjadzali, 1986: 189-94).

Islamic education managed by private sectors are likewise showing signs of improvement. The *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding traditional educational institutions), which in the past were mainly located in rural areas of Java, are now gaining popularity and spreading throughout the country. Many of the new *pesantrens* are established in urban areas like Jakarta. The content of the *pesantren* education has also improved with the inclusion of subjects on modern science and technology. Moreover, a lot of *pesantren* complexes at present have modern, big and impressive structures. Thus, *pesantrens* are no longer associated with rural culture and backwardness. They are becoming a symbol of pride among Muslims.

The government has also improved the position of Islamic legal institutions. The Shari'ah Court (*peradilan agama*), which has a long history in Indonesia, is now co-equal with the public court, administrative court, and military court. This is enacted in the Islamic Court Law of No. 7, 1989. Furthermore, the Supreme Court and Department of Religious Affairs recently completed a joint project on the codification of the Islamic jurisprudence, with the objective of publishing law books and manual for the Shari'ah judges.

The improved economic conditions of the Muslims have allowed them to build more mosques, *madrasah* and *pesantrens*. Thousands of new mosques were and are being built everywhere, mostly through the initiative and financial resources of the Muslims, while the rest with government's financial assistance. President Soeharto is the chairman of the *Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila* which has built hundreds of new mosques in various places in Indonesia. Most of these were built

using modern technology and architecture. Despite their significant increase, the mosques still cannot accommodate all the enthusiastic Muslim worshippers, especially during the Friday congregational prayers. Because of this, many government offices and hotels started holding Friday congregational prayers in their places.

According to some estimates, young people comprise up to 85 percent of the worshippers in many mosques. It is not surprising, therefore, that "Remaja Masjid" (Mosque Youth) associations are becoming popular throughout the country. A wide range of social and religious activities, such as martial arts and other sports, music, and academic and religious discussions, are carried out by these associations. Most members of these youth associations are senior high school and university students, but there are also members who are younger or older than them. The associations held their first national convention in March 1980 where they reformulated their programs to emphasize the importance of the 15th century *Hijrah* as the Revival Century of Islam.

Islamic resurgence in Indonesia is also evident in university campuses. During the fasting month of Ramadan, many campuses are full with major religious activities, as if these were converted into Islamic centers. Programs such as the "Ramadan on Campus" — as students call it — have become increasingly popular among university students. The program of the Ramadan on Campus includes socio-cultural and religious activities which are unconventional for many Muslims, such as poetry reading, dramas, and even musical shows, in addition to the traditional *tarawih* (Ramadan nightly prayers), *tadarrus* (Qur'anic studies), and religious lectures and discussions.

Most Indonesian university campuses now have their own mosques. The most prominent among them is the Salman Mosque in the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB, or Bandung Institute of Technology), one of the most prestigious centers of higher learning in Indonesia. The Salman Mosque in many ways has become a prototype of university mosques in Indonesia. It plays a leading role in transforming mosques from merely a place of worship into multipurpose centers for Muslim religious, social and cultural activities. Salman-inspired religious activities became a prominent feature of campus life at every major university during the 1970s and early 1980s (Hefner 1993: 13).

Another important sign of Islamic reinvigoration in Indonesia is the continued increase in the number of Indonesian *hajj* pilgrims to Mecca.

In the last several years, more and more Indonesian Muslims made their pilgrimage. Since 1993, the total number of Indonesian pilgrims are the largest among all Muslim countries, with the exception of Saudi Arabia. In the 1996 *haj* season, almost 200,000 Indonesian pilgrims made their pilgrimage to the Holy Land. After President Soeharto and his family made their pilgrimage in 1991, more and more high government officials traveled to the Holy Land since then; and each year the leader of the Indonesian *haj* contingent (*amir al-haj*) is a minister of the cabinet. The Indonesian *amir al-haj* for the 1996 *haj* season was General Faisal Tanjung, the Army Commander.

Another significant development took place in December 1990 when a new important Islamic organization, the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia (ICMI or All-Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association), was formed. It is chaired by the Minister of Research and Technology, Professor B.J. Habibie. The formation of the ICMI undoubtedly has the blessing of President Soeharto. Without Soeharto's consent, the formation of the ICMI would not have been smooth. Another proof of his support for the group is the presence of long-serving cabinet ministers, independent intellectuals, and even critical non-government Muslim leaders in the leadership of ICMI.

The ICMI was formed to serve as a sounding board for Muslims to influence public policy, rather than as a mass-based political vehicle. To help in the conscientization of the Muslim population as well as the dissemination of their views, ICMI launched its own newspaper, *Republika*, and its own think-tank, the Center for Information and Development Studies (CIDES). The ICMI is also instrumental in the founding of the Bank Mu'amalat (Islamic Bank), *Takaful* Islamic Insurance and the Bank Perkreditan Rakyat (BPR or People's Credit Banks) which are now operating in various parts of the country.

The ICMI, it is believed, not only plays an important role in the establishment of various new institutions, but also in the appointment of several ICMI top leaders to high government offices such as ministries in the Indonesian cabinet or governorships at the provincial level. Considering this, it would be a mistake to view ICMI as a purely religious organization. Because of the political interests of the organization, the rise of ICMI is regarded by some analysts as the "return" of political Islam in Indonesian politics (cf. Anwar 1995; Hefner 1993; Nakamura 1993).

The rise of ICMI is seen by many observers as a consequence of the growing power and consolidation of Indonesian Muslim middle class. Both Hefner and Nakamura stressed that it is the New Order government that is mainly responsible for the presence of the Muslim middle class as will be shown later. Nakamura regard this new class as *santri* middle class (cf. Nakamura 1993: 8-9). The term "santri" refers to orthodox Muslim as opposed to *abangan* or nominal Muslim.

One of main factors that contributed to the rise of *santri* middle class is the expansion of higher education, which, in turn, created what some referred to as "Muslim intellectual boom." A portion of this new Muslim intellectuals obtained their higher education abroad. They occupy important social, political, and economic positions in society. As Vatikiotis stressed, rapid urbanization and access to education have swollen the number of Muslims who now belong to the country's upwardly mobile, indigenous middle class. They brought Islamic religious beliefs into bureaucratic and business circles which are close to the ruling elite (Vatikiotis 1994: 131). The *santri* middle class contributes not only to the finance of various Islamic activities, but also to the development of a new image of Muslims as well-to-do. They, for instance, hold Islamic activities in prestigious hotels, establish discussion groups (like the Yayasan Paramadina), go to pilgrimage with accommodations in five-star hotels in Mecca and Medina, and send their children to prestigious Islamic schools (such as the Azhar schools in Jakarta).

Significant changes also took place in the field of *dakwah* or Islamic preaching. In the past, the government was very suspicious of *dakwah* for many Muslim preachers made use of *dakwah* activities as occasions to criticize the government. Viewing the *dakwah* activities as too political, the government imposed some restrictions on the conduct of these activities. For instance, *dakwah* in the form of *pengajian umum* (public religious meetings) required police permit, or this could lead to the arrest of those who organized it.

At present, however, permits are no longer necessary for *dakwah* activities. Preachers are now free to conduct their work anywhere in the country. This development is welcomed by the Muslims for it manifests that the *dakwah* has gained new legitimacy and respectability. This legitimacy is further reinforced by the presence of government officials in *pengajian umum* or the use of government buildings for this purpose (Vatikiotis 1994: 131; Feillard 1993: 34-35).

Because of the current status of *pengajian umum*, its audience has widened considerably. Its audience now is not only limited to common

people, but also extends to civil servants who were reluctant to attend such religious meetings before. The *pengajian umum* eventually proliferated throughout the country. Among its prominent preachers at present are K.H. Zainuddin MZ (an IAIN graduate), K.H. Qasim Nurseha (a religious teacher of President Soeharto's family) and Tuty Alawiyah (chief of the As-Syafi'iyah Pesantren in Jakarta). Zainuddin MZ draws thousands of people to large stadiums and is dubbed by many as "Kiyai Sejuta Ummat" or preacher of one million *ummah*.

The *dakwah* activities are now also covered in television. Each of the six television channels has a program on Islamic forum. During the last Ramadan, these six television channels were full of Islamic programs ranging from simple lectures and discussions to poetry reading and musical shows with Islamic themes. It appears that such programs command a wide audience.

Conclusion

A major factor that contributed to Islamic reinvigoration is economic development. The New Order government began on the edge of economic downfall. Export revenues were either stagnant or sliding down; investment had trickled almost to a stop; factories were operating at a fraction of their capacity and with outdated equipment; inflation had topped 1,000 percent a year; and the government had a massive budget deficit. In less than three decades, Indonesia's economy, by any indication, has performed well since Soeharto came into power. From 1965 to 1988, macro-economic growth plus a successful family planning program combined to raise Indonesia's per capita gross national product by 4.3 percent a year. Indonesia performed better than most of its neighbors in Southeast Asia and most oil-exporting economies. With this, Schwarz and other analysts begin to call Indonesia as "the emerging tiger" (Schwarz 1994: 52-59, cf. Bresnan 1993). Better economic performance has resulted in poverty alleviation which is considered as one of the most important achievements of the New Order. In 1970, almost 60 percent of Indonesians were living below the poverty line. By 1990, however, the figure dropped to 15 percent. According to the 1990 World Bank Report, Indonesia had the highest annual reduction in the incidence of poverty among all countries studied (World Bank 1991: 45).

There is no doubt that the annual reduction in poverty incidence takes place mostly among Muslims who constitute the largest population in Indonesia. The improvement of the economic status of the Muslims can be considered to have positively contributed to their increased

attachment to Islam. A crucial question, therefore, is how to maintain the momentum for economic growth so as to avoid the possible negative effects of an economic regression on the revival of Islamic life.

Another important issue that should be dealt with by Indonesian Muslim leaders and activists toward the real Islamic revival in Indonesia is how to eliminate or at least reduce the gap between Muslim religious enthusiasm and their actual practices. Although there are signs of Islamic resurgence, un-Islamic practices such as corruption, abuse of power, weak social ethics and poor discipline, are still rampant among Indonesian Muslims. If Indonesian Muslims are serious about the revival of Islam in Indonesia, they should exert effort to eliminate the gap between their religious enthusiasm and their actual practices. Otherwise, the real revival of Islam is only an illusion. ●

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