

OUT OF RADICALISM'S CLUTCHES

IN A noisy house in Curug, East Jakarta, Fauzi Isman sits crossed-legged on a simple wooden bench. He is wearing a plain white T-shirt and blue sarong.

'It is good to be a free man,' he says.

Isman, 36, comes from a military family and graduated from the Jakarta State Academy of Statistics in 1988. He said he had wanted to overthrow the Indonesian government and replace it with an Islamic state. He was arrested in 1989 for subversion and freed 10 years later.

However, he is still under police probation because of his old ties with a group called Pengajian Santa (Santa Study Group), an offshoot of Darul Islam (DI). DI was itself a movement that began in 1948 during a regional rebellion in West Java under the charismatic leadership of S. M. Kartosuwirjo, who was disappointed with the then-newly independent Indonesia for its rejection of Islam as its sole foundation.

Then-president Sukarno had opted instead for Pancasila, an ideology based on the philosophy of the Indonesian people.

Independently, other rebellions under the name of DI emerged in South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi and Aceh. Over more than half a century, the movement produced several offshoots, such as Jemaah Islamiah (JI), which often resort to violence in their aim to establish an Islamic caliphate in the region.

The bombing in front of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta last September showed how JI collaborated with members of other DI splinter groups. Heri Golun, the alleged suicide bomber, is said to have been a DI member. (But earlier reports said he was an aimless youth until he was enlisted by two hardline clerics.)

Isman says that the underground movements develop their capabilities in secrecy. 'If they feel they have sufficient logistics and dedicated members, they will resurface and become more capable than ever.'

Recalling his involvement in DI, Isman says that one day in April 1988, a friend, Nurhidayat, asked him to join an Islamic training group. He agreed, and the next day he joined nine others for three days of training in the Pasar Santa mosque in South Jakarta. (Hence, the group's name.)

On the first day of the course, the instructor taught the group the meaning of illah, the concept of God and its implications; and muskilatul ummah, the current problems of the Muslim community.

During this session, the instructor claimed that although Muslims made up the majority in Indonesia, this did not mean that they were free to fully practise their religion. Why? Because the country was not run under syariah law, or Islamic jurisprudence. 'Our law is made by man, not by God,' the instructor had said.

On the second day, Isman was taught akhlaq, or Islamic ethics. The group was also taught syiroh, which is commonly understood as the history of Islam. In this case, however, syiroh was mainly the history of DI founder Kartosuwirjo.

On the last day, the instructor introduced the trainees to the concept of firoq, a clear segregation from the secular Indonesian government.

Members of DI, Isman says, reject the idea of the state based on Pancasila, the Indonesian state ideology, and seek to replace it with Islamic state or caliphate.

The trainees were also taught the movement's concepts of jihad and martyrdom. During this stage, the concept of fa'i - robbing infidels or enemies of Islam to secure funds for defending the faith - was introduced.

But fa'i also attracted many thugs to the movement. This tactical alliance between purists and thugs, between ideologues and criminals, proved important for raising funds, making logistical plans and recruiting additional manpower for waging jihad.

In 1989, Isman travelled to Talangsari, a village in South Sumatra, for more training. He joined a few hundred like-minded militants living in a radical training camp established by a man named Warsidi.

