Building the Veranda of Medina:
The Bā’alawī & Islamic Resurgence in Indonesia

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Wednesday, 14 May 2008, 3 pm, AS1-04-01

Abstract

Numerous studies have been devoted to the recent Islamic resurgence in Indonesia. Missing from most of these studies, however, are discussions on the recent appreciation of sufism in Indonesia. This talk attempts to analyze this new appreciation of sufism by observing the roles of the Bā’alawī in the Islamic resurgence. Acknowledged as the descendants of Prophet Muhammad, this group of Hadrami “diaspora” was able to tap into the general trend of Islamic resurgence, thereby increasing public appreciation of their position. The talk then surveys their involvement in the political development following the resignation of Soeharto and the reemergence of political Islam. It then observes new Islamic trends, especially among the youth, in contemporary Indonesia and look at how several Bā’alawī scholars adapt themselves to this changing context. Examining the Bā’alawī therefore enable us to observe the reconfiguration of religious authority in the most recent history of Indonesia.

This talk is based on the last chapter of Ismail Alatas' MA thesis and it is part of a bigger discussion on rethinking the notion of Bā’alawī as a diaspora in post-colonial Indonesia.

About the Speaker

Ismail F. Alatas is an MA candidate in History at the National University of Singapore, where he is writing a thesis entitled: 'Securing their Place: the Bā’alawī, Prophetic Piety and Islamic Resurgence in Indonesia'. He holds Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History from the University of Melbourne and will undertake his doctorate at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.