Violent attacks trying to force Indonesia into Islamic State

by Rajiv Chandrasekaran
The Washington Post
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More than 85 percent of Indonesia's 216 million people are Muslim, but it is not officially an Islamic country. To promote national unity, independence leaders insisted in the late 1940s that the country's constitution officially recognize four faiths - Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Although Jakarta has a mosque every few blocks and Friday prayers bring many businesses to a halt, its wide boulevards feature neon billboards touting locally brewed Bintang beer. The city has bars open all night, where scantily clad teenage girls gyrate on the dance floor. There are gambling dens and bordellos.

The fact that such establishments exist and that alcohol is so openly promoted galls Habib Muhammad Rizieq bin Hussein Syihab, a 35-year-old high school teacher who leads the Front for the Protection of Islam. He wants the bars shuttered and the prostitutes jailed. He also wants Islamic law to be imposed on everyone, no matter what their religion.

"We see the lack of morality spreading like an illness," Rizieq said. "It's like malaria. It's not enough to treat those who are ill. We must kill the mosquitoes."

Rizieq claims that his movement has 15 million followers who are ready to do battle against what they believe are evil Western influences in Indonesia's emerging democracy. Political analysts say he probably only has a few thousand machete-wielding men at his command. But the analysts note that his group - like other fundamentalist-minded organizations - has grown markedly in the past two years.

Hard-line religious leaders also are trying to rally support around disaffection with President Abdurrahman Wahid. A pluralist and moderate who once headed the world's largest Muslim social organization, Wahid has angered fundamentalists with his commitment to keep religion out of politics and his flat rejections of calls to impose Islamic law.

Wahid has said he is trying to strike a balance between the interests of Muslims and minority religious groups. His supporters contend that a majority of Indonesian Muslims do not favor the imposition of Islamic law or other social restrictions.

But Rizieq insists his group will continue its violent attacks until Wahid relents. "It seems that the government is deaf to the interests of Muslims," he said. "So this is our only option."

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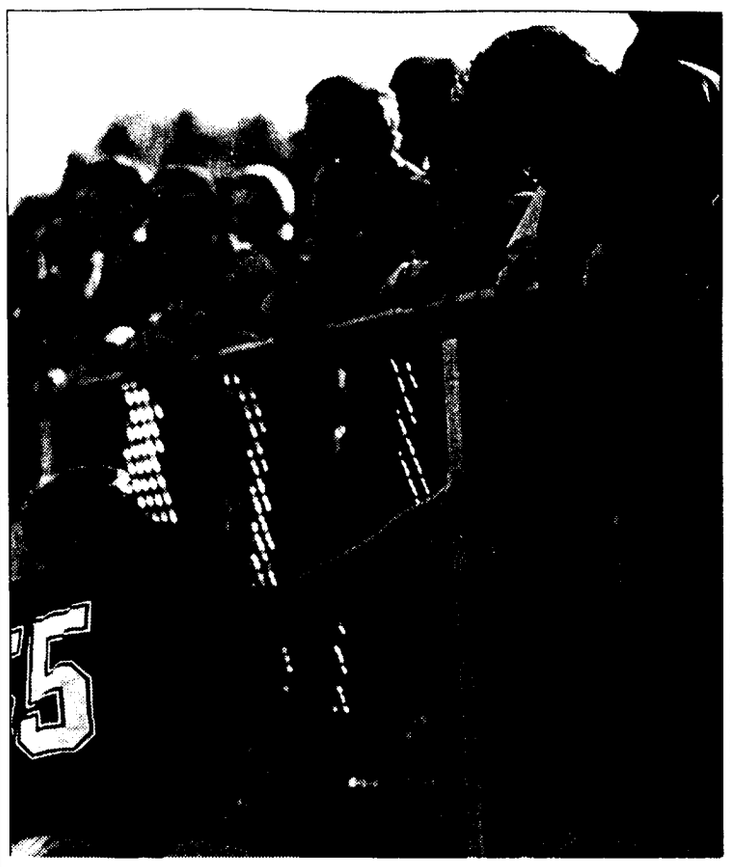
>
> -*Habib Muhammad Rizieq bin Hussein Syihab*, a 35-year-old high school teacher who leads the Front for the Protection of Islam.

Encouragement from Dad



WASHINGTON POST PHOTOS BY JOHN MCDONNELL

Al Gore III gets a handshake from his biggest fan, his dad the vice president, who hasn't missed a game this season despite the demands of his presidential campaign.

Iraq Bombings

THE HARTFORD COURANT PHOTO BY BRAD CLIFT

Um-Grayda lost nine family members when two laser-guided bombs punched a hole in the reinforced steel roof of the Amariyah Shelter in Baghdad, Iraq, on Feb. 13, 1991. Having changed her name to Arabic for "Mother of Grayda" in tribute to her 15-year-old daughter who died in the blast, she now leads tours of the shelter where hundreds of civilians were incinerated. The U.S. military believed the shelter was an Iraqi command center. "It is a crime that all these people died here in one minute," Um-Gradya says. "It is a bigger crime that the sanctions have killed many children for 10 years."

Aleutians' vast ecosystem is collapsing

by Marla Cone
Los Angeles Times
November 3, 2000

ADAK ISLAND, Alaska - There are few places on Earth that have changed so much, so fast as the narrow arc of islands where the Pacific Ocean greets the Bering Sea.

The Aleutian Islands are in the middle of nowhere. No tourists, no cruise ships, no chartered fishing trips, no quaint country inns. On a quiet day, when the turbulent seas and legendary winds are still, you can hear a killer whale breathe.

But look and listen more closely. Something is missing.

Where are the sea lions, fat and happy, napping on the rocks and barking at their pups? And the furry sea otters crunching on urchins? What became of the ample king crabs and shrimp, and the schools of silvery smelt? And where are the lush, undersea forests of kelp that provided food and refuge for fish?

As sudden and savage as an Arctic storm, some mysterious phenomenon has transformed this spectacular 1,300-mile archipelago in just a handful of years.

A vast sub-Arctic ecosystem is collapsing. No one knows why.

The sudden changes in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea have inspired an eclectic team of men and women to try to solve an extraordinary environmental whodunit. Virtually alone in a forbidding wilderness closer to Siberia than to Anchorage, they have been divebombed by eagles, bitten by otters, buffeted by 70-mph winds, rattled by earthquakes and lost in storms. And each year they return for more, drawn back by the Aleutian paradox. If this rugged, remote ecosystem is collapsing, can any place on Earth be safe?

Jim Estes, a marine ecologist at the U.S. Geological Survey in Santa Cruz, Calif., has traveled to the Aleutians for the last 30 summers, studying what once was the world's largest and healthiest population of sea otters. Three summers ago Estes realized that the otters had virtually disappeared while he watched.

There were no bodies to dissect, few clues to decipher. The otters aren't starving. They aren't sick. They have simply vanished.

Throughout the Gulf of Alaska and probably the Bering Sea, too, the balance of prey and predator has been upended, a transformation so extreme it's called a "regime shift." Waters once brimming with seals, otters and king crab are now dominated by sharks, pollock and urchins. Virtually no creature remains untouched.

"You just can't grasp how different things were 10 years ago," Estes said during a recent expedition. "No one has ever seen a decline of this magnitude in such a short period of time over such a large geographic area."

Piece by piece, over the last three years, scientists have started to solve the puzzle. Clues point toward something - almost imperceptible - that happened in the ocean in 1977. But the answers are more disturbing than satisfying, more elusive than conclusive. It seems the ocean's chain of life is actually a fragile silken web. If you remove a strand, the whole thing unravels. And it may never be whole again.

LOS ANGELES TIMES PHOTO BY MARLA CONE.

Netted specimens such as the octupus are returned to the sea after examination.

Tim Tinker is swathed in a bulky orange survival suit, hanging from the bow of a 25-foot boat as it hugs the rugged shore of Adak Island.

A brutal storm has just ended, leaving August skies crisp and clear. Adak's mountains, set against a blue satin sky and fog as white as cotton balls, are draped with a luxuriant fleece blanket of moss. The green shines so brightly it seems as if it could glow in the dark. Overhead, a bald eagle soars, and black and white puffins skim across the surface of the sea, their orange webbed feet splashing the 40-degree water.

From his perch on the bow, Tinker lifts his binoculars, training them on rocky reefs. For the ninth straight year, he is counting the Aleutians' sea otters for an annual survey. He scans a reef and holds up a single finger clad in ragged wool gloves.

Iris Faraklas, a research assistant, dutifully makes a notation: One otter. An hour into the survey, Tinker _ a marine mammal biologist at Santa Cruz - and his colleague Brian Hatfield have counted only five otters and two harbor seals.

"Back in the old days, in the early '90s, we probably would have seen 500 otters by now," Estes said. "Now we go miles and miles without seeing even one."

This day, they will survey 200 miles of coast, finding only 171 adult otters and 29 pups.

If sea otters dream, they are surely dreaming about a place like Adak Island, in the middle of the Aleutian chain. There's plenty of food. Plenty of sanctuary. But only one otter per mile.

In the 1980s, as many as 100,000 otters inhabited the islands. Today, only about 6,000 remain, according to aerial surveys. Between 1992 and 2000, the population dropped by 70 percent, a rate of decline that researchers say is unprecedented for any mammal population in the world.

"What's really horrifying is that the Aleutians have always been considered the stronghold of otter populations," said Rosa Meehan, who heads the marine mammal office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage.

"At one time, 80 percent of the world's population of sea otters were out there," Meehan said.

Now, the wildlife agency has declared otters a candidate for endangered-species protection, although only in western Alaska.

In 1995, when they began to notice the signs of a population decline, Tinker and Estes, who specialize in otter behavior and population biology, at first looked for signs of disease, famine or reproductive troubles. They found none.

For a couple of years, as the decline steepened, they were baffled. If thousands of otters had died, where were the bodies?

Then it dawned on Tinker: Perhaps the animals were being eaten.

By killer whales.

But orcas had lived in harmony with otters for thousands of years on the Aleutians. Why, all of a sudden, were they preying on them so heavily?

To find the answer, biologists simply had to follow the food chain.

Orcas customarily feed on sea lions and seals, which are packed with high-calorie blubber. But the population of Steller sea lions, the world's biggest sea lions, took a sharp dive in the late 1980s. Harbor seals also declined at a similar rate.

By 1992, otters were the only plentiful marine mammals left in Aleutian waters. The orcas, in their hunt for calories, apparently had been forced to switch prey.

The effects cascaded rapidly down the food chain.

With far fewer otters around to eat them, sea urchin populations exploded - increasing eightfold within a few years. As many as 100 of the spiny green creatures now cover each square foot of ocean floor around the Aleutians.

The urchins, in turn, ate the kelp. In 1993, kelp forests were 20 feet deep and so thick they clogged the engines of Brenda Konar's dive boat.

"Now the only kelp you find is the stuff right by the shoreline, and it's maybe only three feet deep," said Konar, a biologist with the School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences in Fairbanks.

When the leafy undersea forests vanished, so did many of the rockfish, snails, starfish and other creatures that use the kelp for food, shelter and breeding grounds. Some local seabirds, mainly puffins and kittiwakes, also are hurting from lack of fish.

LOS ANGELES TIMES PHOTO BY MARLA CONE

The rocky outcroppings along the Adak shoreline offer a good habitat for seals and sea lions, but the mammals' numbers have dwindled drastically.

The Aleutians offer proof that one small ecological change can move like a tsunami throughout the entire ocean realm.

Yet the snarl in the food web had to begin somewhere. Where, scientists wondered. And, even more important, who - or what - did it?

The Aleutians are a dynamic place, ever-changing. Fog shrouds the islands one instant and retreats the next. Hurricane-force squalls _ descend with little warning. The environment of the Aleutians, however, isn't supposed to be as capricious as its weather. Ecosystems normally evolve slowly.

"I have not come across any other example of such a total flip-flop," of an ocean environment, said Bruce Wright, a division chief at the National Marine Fisheries Service in Alaska.

Ecological shifts as sudden and sweeping as the ones in the Aleutians usually can come only from human interference, said David Lindberg, an evolutionary biologist at the University of California, Berkeley. If the shift were natural, animals and plants of the Aleutians would have evolved with some defensive strategies, he said.

"We're incredible, as a species, at speeding up changes," Lindberg said.

Scientists are exploring many factors - global warming, overfishing, pollution - that might have played a role in the Aleutians' misfortunes.

Looking back, they theorize that the key event may have come in 1977, when a sudden warming - just two degrees Celsius - in the average temperature of the Gulf of Alaska was recorded.

The Arctic has been especially vulnerable to climate change, which many scientists believe is caused in part by worldwide burning of fossil fuels and production of greenhouse gases.

While they cannot know for sure, researchers believe the chain of events was most likely this:

Warmer water caused plankton - short-lived and ultra-sensitive to temperature changes - to disappear. Tiny copepod and krill probably followed quickly.

The shrimp and crab, along with smelt fishes such as capelin and herring, would have vanished afterward, deprived of their food, to be replaced by an explosion of cod and pollock.

Once-thriving shrimp and crab fisheries collapsed in the late 1970s while the new species attracted large fishing trawlers that descended on Alaska, harvesting millions of tons of pollock and cod a year for American and Japanese consumers.

So far, the rest of Alaska has escaped the regime shift, presumably because waters elsewhere around the state have different ocean circulation patterns and have not warmed.

There is never one factor at play. ...

"Sometimes you poke along and poke along and all of a sudden, the pieces fall into place."