

Indian, Indonesian NSAs to address special meeting focusing on countering extremism

Rezaul H Laskar | November 28, 2022

The day-long dialogue on the role of ulema, or Muslim scholars, in fostering interfaith peace and social harmony in India and Indonesia is being hosted by the India Islamic Cultural Centre



National Security Adviser Ajit Doval. (Vipin Kumar/HT File Photo)

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his Indonesian counterpart Mohammed Mahfud Mahmodin will address a special meeting of ulema, or Muslim scholars, of the two sides convened to focus on countering radicalisation and extremism.

The meeting is among the events that the Indonesian leader, popularly known as Mahfud MD, will attend during an official visit to New Delhi. Besides holding wide-ranging talks on security cooperation with Doval, Mahfud MD is expected to meet the external affairs minister and the prime minister.

Mahfud MD, who holds the official position of coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs, is heading a 25-member delegation that includes some of the most senior Muslim scholars of Indonesia and representatives of other faiths such as Catholicism and Hinduism.

The day-long dialogue on the role of ulema in fostering interfaith peace and social harmony in India and Indonesia is being hosted by the India Islamic Cultural Centre in line with a proposal made by Mahfud MD when Doval visited Jakarta in March for the second bilateral security dialogue, people familiar with the matter said.

Countering radicalisation is a shared concern for India and Indonesia and when the ulema meet on Tuesday, the focus will be on creating common grounds and narratives that can benefit both countries. Both sides also have an interest in presenting the “softer and peaceful” face of Islam, the people said.

Doval will deliver the opening address at the meeting and Mahfud MD will give the keynote address. They will also speak at the concluding session. The ulema will participate in three closed sessions on the themes ‘Islam: Continuity and change’, ‘Harmonising interfaith society’ and ‘Countering radicalisation and extremism in India and Indonesia’.

Besides the dialogue between the Muslim scholars, the Indonesian ulema will meet Indian leaders of other faiths. The dialogue intends to bring together scholars who can take forward cooperation to promote tolerance and peaceful co-existence and counter violent extremism, the people said.

Both India and Indonesia have multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies and face similar challenges. The dialogue is also understood to be part of the Indian side’s efforts to address criticism from abroad about the status of minority communities. India has largely rejected such criticism, such as a new report by the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) that said policies adopted by the government had resulted in an environment that is “increasingly hostile toward religious minority communities”.

During their bilateral meeting, Doval and Mahfud MD are expected to focus on deepening cooperation in maritime security and other security matters. The two sides have a range of

shared security interests and concerns and there is also a desire to enhance cooperation in key areas such as infrastructure, the people said.

The two countries agreed on establishing a security dialogue when Indonesian President Joko Widodo visited India in December 2016. The first such dialogue was held in New Delhi in January 2018, and both sides had agreed on operational cooperation in security and counter-terrorism. The second security dialogue in March this year focused on global and security issues, including counter-terrorism, extremism, and cooperation in maritime security, defence, space and cyber-security.

Indonesia formally handed over the G20 presidency to India during the Bali summit of the world's 20 largest economies. Both countries, along with Brazil are part of the G20 Troika, which includes the outgoing, current and incoming presidencies. Indonesia also has a key role in helping organise the events to be held during India's G20 presidency from December 1.

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