

Features: Potpourri

Bayan Mosque, witness to the spread of Islam

BAYANVILLE, West Nusa Tenggara (JP): Masjid Bayan Beleg as the locals call is situated in Bayan—a stronghold of Islam Wetu Telu of North Lombok, 80 kilometers from Mataram. The mosque is about 20-meter walking from the main road of Bayan. It is surrounded by beautiful green landscape and is located by a hill.

By Wahyuni Kamah

At a first glance, the Muslims would not think it is a mosque. The first peculiar thing about this mosque is there is no water nearby the mosque (for obligatory washing before the prayer) and the mosque looks like an old, wooden, simple house.

It is only about 8m by 8m and all of its building material is bamboo and wood. Its roof is pyramidal and has two layers. The plaited-coconut blade roof is sharply sloped and hangs only one meter from the ground. On the very top of the roof, a protruding bud, which symbolizes the oneness of God, erects.

The mosque was renovated in 1982. Before that, it was much worse than what you see now," Pak Pala, the mosque caretaker, said.

"You may not enter," he exclaimed as I was about to go into the mosque. "One has to wear traditional Bayan outfit to be allowed to enter the mosque," Pak Pala, 30, a Bayan native, explained.

This outfit, *sapu putek*, characteristic of Wetu Telu, is white head cloth that is worn by Wetu Telu (religious scholar).

I could only crane my head through the only 1.20 meter-high plaited bamboo entrance door. It was dim inside the dirt-floored mosque. Four wooden pillars support the roof in the center. There is a *bedug* drum hanging on the roof. There was no lamp and the scent of old woods hovers in the air.

There is no speaker's platform, which is usually found in ordinary mosques. Wooden carved fish and coconut are seen hang on the ceiling inside the mosque. There is also wooden carved dragon seated on two supporting woods. The dragon, Pak Pala said, symbolizes the power of a kingdom.

Unlike other mosques, the Bayan mosque that was built in 1534 has different use from ordinary mosque. Only on occasions like Idul Fitri (celebration the end of Ramadan fasting month), Maulid Nabi (Prophet's Muhammad birthday) and Ramadan (Moslem's fasting month), the mosque is open, Pak Pala said. Since 1993, the mosque has been a cultural preservation protected by the law.

The Islam of Sasak, natives of Lombok, is classified into two categories: *Wetu Telu* (traditional Sasak) and *Waktu Lima* (strongly Islamic Sasak). The practices of *Wetu Telu* are not only inspired by local culture but also by Hinduism, Buddhism and animism.

According to the legends, Bayan and Sembalan, two of the oldest villages in Lombok, were founded by a prince of Majapahit, the greatest Buddhist Empire in Indonesia Archipelago in the 12th century. A manuscript founded in Pemenang village of Tanjung regency, North Lombok, wrote that Gajah Mada, prime minister of Majapahit, visited Bayan in 1331.

Islam was propagated in Lombok between 16th and 17th century after Majapahit had been destroyed and Java kingdoms fell under the power of Islam kings.

Sunan Prapen, son of Susuhunan Ratu of Giri from Java was assigned by his father to propagate Islam in Lombok and Sumbawa in a military expedition in the first half of 16th century as described in a palm leaf manuscript of Babad Lombok. Sunan Prapen was very attentive in propagating Islam taking into account that the local people already adhered to other religions. In another leaf manuscript, it is told the first to convert to the new religion is the King of Bayan.

In the book *Lombok Pulau Perawan* (Lombok, the Virgin Island) written by Solichin Salam, Sunan Prapen taught the Islamic laws particularly to the *kiai* and *pengulu* (village chiefs) first. These Islam propagators that had not completely finished teaching Islam then left Bayan. Their followers were very loyal and did not want to deviate from what the teachers taught them.

After the propagators had

left, the people's belief was in transformation period from Hinduism to Islam (syncretism). And it has continued until now.

The second wave of Islam propagation was brought by people from Makassar, Bugis and Buton (in South Sulawesi). These propagators strictly implemented Islam. Islam Waktu Lima may be related to the second wave of this Islamization.

According to Wetu Telu believers, death does not imply a definite parting, the souls of the dead may have left for another world and they can return to this world whenever necessary. They also believe that human beings cannot be separated from three (*telu*) processes (*wetu*), namely giving birth, laying eggs and growing. These processes are symbolized by creatures consecutively: fish, bird, and coconut. These carved wooden creatures are hanged on the ceiling inside the mosque.

However, the birds are gone now. The Wetu Telu believers removed and hid them in a secret place when Waktu Lima Sasaks wanted to mob the Bayan mosque in the late 1960s. The Waktu Lima Muslims thought the birds were creatures and should not be kept in the mosque.

Wetu Telu believers also use their own old calendar system that does not match with Islamic calendar. Therefore, Idul Fitri, the celebration after one-month fasting on Ramadan (Islamic calendar) is celebrated three days later by them. The Maulid Nabi is celebrated on 12 Rabiul Awal (Islamic calendar) by many Moslems but the Wetu Telu Sasaks celebrate it on 15 Rabiul Awal, three days afterwards.

"There is *peresean* show in

the yard of the mosque on Maulid celebration," Pak Pala said. *Peresean* is like a fighting between two fighters using rattan stick and shield and is mediated by a referral. "In such an occasion, it is like a party here," he added.

In Wetu Telu, the obligatory sessions, such as fasting on Ramadan and five-session daily prayers are only committed by *kiai* and *pengulu*. However, these *kiai* and *pengulu* only

perform three-session daily prayers. The ordinary Wetu Telu Sasaks do not fast on Ramadan. The *kiai*s fast only on the first, the middle and the last day of Ramadan.

Therefore, Waktu Lima Muslims view Wetu Telu as Muslims that commit only three pillars of Islam (credo, prayers and fasting), instead of five; performing three sessions of daily prayers and fasting only three days in the

whole Ramadan.

The discussion about existence of Wetu Telu continues. According to Faturrahman Zakaria, a witness of Wetu Telu history and a member of West Nusatenggara House of Representative as well, Wetu Telu Sasak is a group of traditional people that still adhere to their ritual belief.

It is not a sort of religion. The existence of Wetu Telu, he added, is not only in North

Lombok but also in Central and East Lombok. Pak Pala said the majority of Bayan people that follow Wetu Telu are farmers.

On the yard near the mosque, some stones are buried on the ground. Pak Pala said they are the graves of first Islam believers in Bayan.

There is a house by the entrance that displays photos of the mosque before it was renovated.



The front view of Bayan Beleg Mosque in northern Lombok. Since 1993, the mosque has been a cultural monument protected by the law.

Microsoft works on Xbox as PlayStation 2 debuts

By Scott Hillis

REDMOND, Washington (Reuters): Microsoft Corp. has a message for all those video game fanatics ready to snatch up Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2 this week: You ain't seen nothin' yet.

The Japanese electronics giant will grab headlines this Thursday when the much-anticipated video game console splashes down in the United States, but Microsoft is determined that Sony won't hog the limelight for long.

This time next year the Redmond, Wash.-based company will be taking the wraps off its Xbox—a device it claims will be the most powerful video game console on the planet.

"In terms of the launch activity and commitment we're making, this will be the largest launch Microsoft has ever done, by orders of magnitude," Robbie Bach, who is leading

the Xbox effort, told Reuters in an interview.

Bach, whose business card reads "CXO"—for Chief Xbox Officer—says that by using the same kind of chips and parts found in regular computers, industry newcomer Microsoft will have an edge over its older, more experienced rivals.

"You have to have graphics that people are just going to go, 'Oh my God, and we do get that reaction on our demos, now we have to get that in our actual product,'" Bach said. "I think we have put in Xbox technology to do it right."

Certainly the hard numbers seem to bear those claims out.

The Xbox will boast a modified Pentium III processor

built by top chip-maker Intel Corp. With a top speed of 733 megahertz, it is modest compared to the fastest PCs but far out-guns Sony's 300 megahertz processor.

Polygon performance, a key measure of how fast a chip can paint graphics, is 150 million polygons-per-second for the Xbox, vs. 66 million-per-second for the PlayStation 2.

The machine also will feature separate graphics and audio chips, come with an 8-gigabyte hard disk, a DVD drive and a built-in port for high-speed online gaming.

It will not act like a PC, however. There will be no boot-up times, messy file systems or software installation.

"From a consumer perspective this looks like a very simple, straight-forward proposition, like it should. You pop in a game and it plays. Our job is to hide

all the complexity from everybody," Bach said.

Microsoft claims the real benefits of Xbox technology do not lie in megahertz, gigabytes or polygons but in the ease with which game creators can bring their ideas to life.

"The main problem with making games is not making the games but fighting the hardware," said Seamus Blackley, who dreamed up the notion that the world's biggest software company should try its hand with gaming hardware.

Microsoft is trying to win the hearts of developers, who have complained that PlayStation 2 is tricky to write games for. But analysts said developers will soon learn to tap the full potential of the Sony hardware.

"It is a fact that PlayStation 2 is a bit of a bear to program for, at least initially," Jeremy Schwartz, an analyst with For-

rester Research, said. "It was rocky to develop for PlayStation 1, but now it's pretty amazing what they can wring out of that box."

Since new consoles sink or swim based on how many games are available, Microsoft has already lined up more than 150 outside companies and teams to create Xbox games.

It promises there will be about 30 games at launch, rising to 50 by the holidays and to 100 after several months.

Several top video game companies, such as Activision Inc., have declared their support, with one huge exception: Electronic Arts Inc., the world's top game maker. The company has remained silent on whether it will make Xbox games, a sign analysts say indicates loyalty to Sony.

"They (Microsoft) haven't secured the key developer,"

Schwartz said. "To me, that's kind of significant."

Microsoft is taking notes on how not to launch a product after Sony had to halve initial U.S. shipments to 500,000.

That angered retailers who had counted on stocked shelves for the holidays, and could possibly send customers running to rivals such as Sega Enterprises, which launched its Dreamcast last year.

"We got to see what the competition did. We have a lot of experience of what they did well and what they did not do so well. So it gives us a great vantage point," John O'Rourke, director of games marketing for the Xbox team, said.

So the company is treading a fine line between telling everybody that Xbox will be second to none, and not raising hopes too high to make sure it won't disappoint.