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Yakuza's Place in Indonesia A Concern, Author Says

Tunggul Wirajuda finds Japanese gangsters have deep roots

By **Tunggul Wirajuda** on 11:40 am July 19, 2013.
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As Indonesia's economic development advances, there are plenty of outsiders who want a piece of the cake.

Japan is no exception, with powerhouse brands Toyota, Honda and Sony grabbing a share of the Indonesian market over the past four decades. Following in these companies' wake is the yakuza, Japan's mysterious criminal underworld, of which much has been spoken but little is known.

To change that, Indonesian journalist Richard Susilo has written a book, "Yakuza Indonesia" (Gramedia Publishing).

Richard, a Tokyo-based correspondent for Indonesian media outlets Kompas newspaper and RCTI TV and a reporter for the Indonesian news service on Japan's NHK radio station, said he based the book on more than 20 years of research on the yakuza.

"The yakuza has been in Indonesia since Japanese companies started investing here intensively in the 1970s. Back then, they provided protection for Japanese businesses that were being extorted by local criminal syndicates," he explained at the book launch at a Gramedia bookstore in Jakarta.

"They even had people in then-President Suharto's inner circle. That shows just how deeply placed they are."

Citing his meeting with yakuza insider Manabu Miyazaki and a number of anonymous sources, among them yakuza members and their families, Richard pointed out the yakuza has stepped up its operations in Indonesia over the past few years, particularly since the Japanese government enacted anti-yakuza laws restricting their operations at home. But as in previous years, the extent of their activities is difficult to assess due to their discretion.

"The yakuza would do a thorough survey of Indonesia, its legal loopholes and whom to approach, such as politicians or the police. Members even made inroads [in another Southeast Asian country] ... by becoming legislators. But most of all, their aim is to get as much money from investments in Indonesia and other countries," the 52-year-old said.

"Therefore, they need the authorities to keep them from fighting turf wars with local organized crime syndicates, as this will potentially blow their cover.

"It's not impossible that they might be involved in some political scandals in Indonesia today, but the challenge is getting the proof we need against them.

"This is very hard because they come under the facade of legitimate businessmen and don't leave any loose ends."

He attributed the yakuza's discretion to its structure, in which gangs are run by their own leaders,



Foreign correspondent Richard Susilo has spent 20 years researching the activities of the yakuza. (JG Photo/Tunggul Wirajuda)



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leaving superiors or "godfathers" immune from any wrongdoing.

Richard said the yakuza mostly moved in legitimate businesses in Indonesia. "Most of their businesses have located in Kalimantan. They move into other areas like logging, mining and energy, particularly in coal, electricity and minerals" he explained. However, they still engage in the more traditional side of their



"I estimated the yakuza has laundered over Rp 2 trillion [\$197 million] in recent years. Most of the transactions of those funds are done in cooperation with tycoons in the stock and financial markets" he explained.

"It would be difficult to find anyone who will cooperate with the authorities. 'But if they are not stopped, [the yakuza] can potentially wreak great damage on the Indonesian economy, as much of the millions of dollars they release in the Indonesian market comes from drugs, prostitution, gun running and other illegal trades."

Richard has urged people to help law enforcement in efforts.

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