

# Pencak Silat: The art of self-defense

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**P**encak Silat is a set of martial arts first appearing in Indonesia in approximately the sixth century A.D. and quickly spreading to Malaysia and Singapore. Both of the words “pencak” and “silat” mean self-defense, but they are used in different regions of Indonesia. The two words were combined in 1948 to describe the hundreds of regional self-defense styles.

Throughout the archipelago’s history, this martial art has been used in Indonesia to defend the islands or help expand its territory via trained warriors. Although it went underground during the period of Dutch colonization, Pencak Silat played a large role in Indonesia’s 19th century war of independence.



The performance of Pencak silat Yemeni students is good and witnesses a continues improvement. However, shortage of support is one of the biggest obstacles in front of these students.

Pencak Silat is based on combining physical and psychological processes, with the physical side focusing on animal-like movements essential to defending oneself, such as kicking, grappling and hitting. Unlike many other types of martial arts, Pencak Silat trains its fighters to use weapons alongside the various elements of hand-to-hand combat.

The psychological aspect derives from Indonesian ideologies about mental control and critical thinking. Some forms of this martial art focus completely on spirituality and mysticism, rather than battle combat or self-defense.

With its two sides, physical and mental, play functions under four principal values: moral, technical, art and sport. These dimensions are passed down over time from master to student through oral recounting and demonstration.

Some Pencak Silat styles, which are more artistic rather than brutal, involve dance-like motions and intricate hand and footwork. Other styles include movements dating back to medieval times, while other movements developed only half a century ago.

Following a protocol it signed with Indonesia, Yemen was the first Arab country to import Pencak Silat in 2003, the same year Yemen’s Pencak Silat Federation was formed.

Eddie Napalaraya, director of the International Pencak Silat Federation, visited Yemen in July 2004, during which he appointed Mohammed Al-Faqih, who is advisor to the Youth and Sports Ministry, as president of the Pencak Silat Arab Federation, which is located in Sana’a.

The federation immediately began its activities in 2003 by sending coaches to Indonesia to receive proper training and establishing Pencak Silat branches in 10 Yemeni governorates, including Sana’a, Ibb, Dhamar, Sayoun, Hodeidah, Aden, Taiz, Mukalla and Abyan.

According to Al-Faqih, there are more than 300 Pencak Silat students in Yemen, with Taiz topping the 10 governorates for the number of students due to support from the private sector, particularly Hayel Sa’eed Anam Group.

In 2004, Yemen participated in the international Pencak Silat championship in Singapore, placing fifth among the 12 participating nations.

As a sport and an art, Pencak Silat was exported to Europe in the 1960s when Indonesians of Dutch

descent emigrated, eventually making its way across the ocean to the United States during the ensuing decade.

The sport arrived in the Arab nations in 2003. Besides Yemen, Pencak Silat also is taught in Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, but through individuals. "Yemen is the only Arab nation with a Pencak Silat branch," noted Fakhri Al-Deen Jamal, the Indonesian coaches' translator, adding, "While there are no Pencak Silat federations in other Arab countries, the game has spread through individuals who both learn and then teach it to others."

Pencak Silat in Yemen suffers a financial shortage from the Youth and Sports Ministry. "The federation receives YR 3 million per year, which is too little, as we need at least YR 20 million annually for proper training and to increase the number of participants," Al-Faqih explained.

He further revealed that Yemen's Pencak Silat branches haven't received their budgets or uniforms since the beginning of 2008, maintaining that their Yemeni coaches receive only YR 10,000 per month.

"With only two Indonesian coaches in Yemen, we still need one, so we were surprised when the ministry issued a resolution canceling an Indonesian coach under the pretext of budget shortages because such a decision is made only by the federation, not the ministry," Al-Faqih pointed out.