

Crackdown on Indonesian students

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The disappearance of a further 10 student activists in the central Javan city of Yogyakarta is the latest sign of a growing campaign of repression aimed at intimidating students and suppressing protests against the Suharto regime.

Lawyers from the Legal Aid Institute stated that the 10 students are still missing after Indonesian security forces attacked a demonstration in the city. The police and military have denied any knowledge of their whereabouts.

At least 31 students were injured in the violent clash, one of scores of anti-Suharto protests that have erupted in recent weeks across Indonesia. A number of students told lawyers they had been arrested and tortured. Other students and political activists had previously been reported missing by human rights groups. Many more are still being held in military or police detention after earlier protests.

One of General Suharto's senior advisers, Admiral Sudomo, has urged the military and riot police to go further, saying he would issue shoot-to-kill instructions. "That is what we call shock treatment. If you want to control a mob, there is no other way than to have this shock treatment," he said this week. Sudomo, a close Suharto associate for nearly 40 years, chairs the Supreme Advisory Council. He formerly headed the widely hated Command for the Restoration of Security and Order (Kopkamtib).

Until now, the police and military have taken little action against student protesters, as long as their demonstrations remained confined to the university campuses. But last week police and soldiers entered the campus at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta and attacked students with tear gas and sticks to break up demonstrations. The institution's rector Ichlasul Amal blamed the violence on the security forces and called on them to remain outside the university grounds during future protests.

Last weekend, the Minister for Education and Culture, Wiranto Arismunandar, called on administrators at state-run universities to enforce a long-standing ban on political activity on campuses, and promised to support sanctions against protesters. As former rector of the Bandung Institute for Technology, Arismunandar expelled 12 students and suspended another 61 for taking part in demonstrations.

Behind the Suharto regime's crackdown on students lies its concern that the protests will draw in sections of the working class who have been hit hard by retrenchments and the impact of soaring prices for basic commodities.

Its fears are shared by international big business, reflected in a recent report in the US magazine, *BusinessWeek*. "The army is keeping demonstrating students from marching off Jakarta campuses, thereby preventing disenfranchised workers from joining them and rioting," it reported.

Officials in the country's state-run unions have already warned that the government's decision to reject a rise in the minimum wage, despite 70 percent inflation, could trigger a wave of strikes. "Who will be responsible if workers stop working and take to the streets to demand a rise in minimum wages tomorrow or next week?" Suradi Idris, head of a textile and leather workers union, declared at the beginning of April.

In a bid to ward off a social explosion, Suharto has accepted US\$5 billion in emergency food aid from the World Bank and other sources, and has called on private corporations to limit the number of layoffs.

Some companies have kept on workers, but slashed wages instead. Astra International, a partner of the giant Japanese auto manufacturer Toyota, has retrenched 4,000 contract workers, but has maintained its 119,000 full-time workers, even though car sales have dropped 90 percent. Citra Bimantara, controlled by Suharto's

son Bambang Trihatmodjo, has cut pay by 30 percent for some of its 14,000 employees.

At the same time, Suharto has ordered security forces to prevent rural migrants from entering the cities unless they can prove they have a job. The military and police are stopping buses and trains bound for Jakarta and removing passengers without working papers. These measures indicate a developing social time bomb as millions of poverty stricken workers, unemployed and peasants face rapidly worsening conditions. The official jobless rate has already doubled this year.

The feelings of many Indonesia workers were summed up in comments made by Supryanto, a 21-year-old sacked clothing worker, to *BusinessWeek*. Unable to return to his home village by lack of money, he is forced to dig ditches and sleep with others under an elevated highway. "Everybody's angry at everyone else because we have no money," Supryanto said, "If all the people attack the president [Suharto], we'll do it too."



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