

# Large demonstrations demanded Suharto's fall

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Despite calls by opposition leaders to stay at home, hundreds of thousands of students, workers and professional people defied a massive military mobilisation to join demonstrations in major Indonesian cities on Wednesday, demanding Suharto's immediate resignation.

By mid-afternoon, more than 10,000 students had gathered in the grounds of the national assembly building, some arriving in buses from various parts of Java. The area was ringed by troops, but the military allowed students to enter the complex.

This decision by the military high command, essentially a move to accommodate and contain a scaled-down student protest, was made at the most senior levels, involving Admiral Sugiarto, a leader of the military's 75-member parliamentary contingent, and armed forces chief General Wiranto.

Protest leaders announced that students would remain at the building until Suharto agreed to quit. During the day they were visited by senior lawyers and other bourgeois opposition figures, including Amien Rais, the leader of the Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah. Rais was cheered despite earlier calling on students to abandon protest plans. He urged students to continue their peaceful protest and not take to the streets.

In Yogyakarta, central Java, a crowd variously estimated at between 50,000 and half a million people, including students and workers, marched through the city, accompanied by the Sultan of Yogyakarta, a former hereditary leader. All the city's police were mobilised but their presence was barely noticeable.

Tens of thousands of students gathered at campuses in the eastern Javan city of Surabaya, the country's second largest centre. A planned march was cancelled after troops attacked a student protest on Tuesday, injuring at least 60. The streets leading to the business

district were closed by troops and tanks patrolled main roads.

Some 10,000 people converged on the provincial assembly in the north Sumatran industrial city of Medan, in spite of the presence of hundreds of tanks. Large demonstrations were reported in Bogor, Solo and Ujung Pandang, on the island of Sulawesi.

In the western Javan city of Bandung about 100,000 people, including students, factory workers, labourers, office workers and housewives, rallied in front of the local assembly building, which was decorated with effigies of Suharto being hanged. Their six demands centred on urging the national assembly leaders to ask Suharto to resign and calling on the armed forces to be "on the side of the people".

These demands seemed to typify the illusions held by most students and other protest participants that elements within the Suharto regime, including the military chiefs, would bow to popular pressure for political freedom. The cheers for Rais at the national assembly also displayed a dangerous political naivete.

Above all, Rais and other bourgeois opposition figures fear an explosive movement from below that could challenge not only Suharto but the entire structure of Indonesian capitalism.

When students at the national assembly chanted demands for Suharto to be put on trial, Rais initially said "no, no" but then sought to appease his audience. "If you say Suharto must stand down and be put on trial, what can I say? I have to support you." In his speech, Rais praised Suharto for "developing the nation," before criticising nepotism and corruption.

Earlier, Rais suddenly abandoned his support for planned mass protests and broadcast an appeal urging students and his supporters not to leave their homes, in order to avoid a confrontation with the military.

Interviewed on Australian radio, one of his deputies gave a revealing insight into the primary concern behind Rais' manoeuvres. He warned of a repeat of last week's looting and rioting, emphasising that Rais' organisation had been in constant meetings with Suharto's cabinet ministers to seek a settlement.

He said the country would face a social revolution within a week unless Suharto agreed to step down. "People's hunger will drive them into the streets and they will do anything, quite naturally, when they cannot eat," he said.



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