

Six killed in Indonesia rioting

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A new wave of demonstrations and riots have erupted in several major cities across Indonesia in the last few days. They have been sparked by the slashing of government subsidies on food, fuel, electricity as part of the IMF bailout package agreement.

On Monday, May 4 three days of rioting started in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra. Medan is a trading center of the rubber and palm-oil industries. Thousands of students and residents were angered by the price increases of fuel, transport and electricity. The price of gasoline has gone up by 70 percent. Kerosene, which is used mainly for cooking, rose by 25 percent. The price of electricity is set to rise by up to 20 percent.

A local newspaper in Medan stated that six people died in the incident. Some 80 people were reported injured by the gun fire from the troops and police. Four hundred people have been arrested since Tuesday. Similar riots by the residents also broke out in other nearby towns of Tanjung Merawa, Siantar and Binjai.

The ethnic Chinese minority, who make up about 30 percent of Medan's population of 2 million people, has again become the chief target in the turmoil. The rioters were throwing stones, looting and burning Chinese-owned stores. Ethnic Chinese comprise only five percent of the country's total population of 200 million, but they are concentrated in major cities like Medan, Djakarta and Surabaya.

The Suharto dictatorship and various local and national Muslim leaders have encouraged anti-Chinese racism in order to use the ethnic Chinese as scapegoats for the economic crisis. The anti-Chinese rioting, which has forced many ethnic Chinese to flee their homes, also provides a pretext for intensified repression by the military regime.

Three truck loads of riot police and soldiers armed with automatic weapons and tear gas were deployed to Medan and the surrounding area to put down the riots. General Wiranto instructed the security forces in North

Sumatra to take severe action to bring the situation under control. He blamed earlier student demonstrations, which were directed against the Suharto government, for triggering the riots.

On May 5, in Jakarta, thousands of students demonstrated against the price increases. At a private university in Jakarta, Mercua Buana, rubber bullets and tear gas were used by the riot police to repress the student demonstrations.

On May 6, in Bandung, around 5,000 students from University of Padjajaran, Winata Mukti, and Institute Koperasi Indonesia demonstrated in the streets. The demonstration ended when the security forces started to chase the students. Nine students were injured during the clash.

On May 6, in Bogor, at a rattan processing company, 1,000 workers were on strike to demand higher wages, which are currently only 75 cents a day.

Despite hypocritical words by the Clinton Administration and the IMF about their concern for human rights in Indonesia, the demands imposed by the IMF, at the direction of the United States, will mean an escalating attack on the living standards for the majority of people of Indonesia. This in turn will drive the military dictatorship to take even more cruel actions to suppress demonstrations and otherwise attack the democratic rights of the Indonesian masses.



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