

# Military kills five protesters as Indonesian parliament enacts sweeping security law

Peter Symonds  
25 September 1999

Thousands of protesters clashed with police and heavily armed troops in cities across Indonesia on Thursday and Friday, as the outgoing House of Representatives (DPR) pushed through a new law giving extensive powers to the military when a state of emergency is declared nationally or in a province. In a bid to defuse the demonstrations against the Prevention of Trouble Bill, the government yesterday evening postponed the bill's implementation.

Riot police and soldiers, backed by armed thugs from a pro-government Islamic organisation, shot dead at least five people and injured more than 100 others on the streets of Jakarta. Yesterday, students were joined by thousands of urban poor from Jakarta's slums in running battles with security forces along Jalan Sudirman, a major thoroughfare. Scores of people were detained.

According to journalists and hospital staff, the troops not only used tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters but also live rounds. Three people died of gunshot wounds inflicted on Thursday. The fatalities included Fadly, 21, an employee of the Survey Research Indonesia, shot in the back; Zaenal bin Zudin, 22 shot in the back of the head and another unidentified man. Reuters reported that one victim appeared to have been shot with ammunition normally available only to army snipers.

Two more people were killed yesterday evening as protesters gathered near the Danamon Plaza. Ten military trucks carrying troops from joint military-police riot troops drove past firing wildly at the crowd. A nine-year-old boy and a teenager were killed on the spot and two other people were wounded in the attack. A police officer is also reported dead.

The Atma Jaya University near the National Parliament building in central Jakarta was the scene of bitter fighting yesterday. Security forces had attempted to drive students back onto the campus after confrontations during the previous night. During the standoff, troops and riot police demanded journalists leave the area, then used batons and fired into the air to drive them away.

On Thursday, more than 10,000 students, members of non-

governmental and professional organisations, and opposition party activists clashed with police near the National Parliament building. The crowd gathered despite attempts by the security forces to prevent demonstrators from assembling. Police broke up a group gathered at Pejompongon.

The *Kompas* newspaper reported: "A group of Student Action Front for Reforms and Democracy led the march from the direction of Semanggi carrying a coffin attached with a banner that read 'Our Condolence for the Death of Human Rights' and another poster than read 'Habibie-Wiranto Crimes Against Humanity'.

"They were followed by supporters of the independent All-Indonesia Labor Union, Pancasila Student Movement and Pancasila Students for Reforms, Muhammadiyah students and activists of the Association of Independent Journalists and other non-governmental organisations."

Protests were held at a number of other locations in the capital and continued into the evening. Hundreds of students were involved in a running battle with police near the Dr Murtopo private university in South Jakarta. At dusk on Thursday, about 1,000 protesters remained gathered outside the main Catholic university.

Demonstrations also erupted across the country on Thursday and Friday. In the country's second largest city, Surabaya in East Java, 4,000 protesters broke through three large gates on Thursday and stormed the regional parliament. In the industrial city of Medan in North Sumatra, hundreds of students gathered outside the provincial council building on Thursday and demonstrations continued yesterday. Protests were held in Yogyakarta and Semarang in Central Java, Bandung in West Java, in Aceh, Bali and Ujung Pandang, the capital of South Sulawesi.

Facing growing opposition, the government announced on Friday evening that it would delay the ratification of the security law by President B.J. Habibie. Military spokesman Major General Sudrajat claimed that "several segments of society still do not understand the essence of the new bill," which is designed to replace the previous 1959 State of

Emergency Law.

Defence Minister and Armed Forces (TNI) chief General Wiranto said he intended to further “socialise” the bill so there would be no suspicions. More ominously, he attacked unspecified “groups with hidden agendas” for orchestrating the anti-government protests. He refused to name the “irresponsible people,” whom he claimed used “students and hoodlums to create chaos”. However, a police spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Zainuri Lubis singled out four former high-ranking government officials as being involved in the conspiracy. Forced temporarily onto the back foot by the extent of the opposition, the military is attempting to find a scapegoat.

Wiranto and the military were eager to ram through the new security legislation before the present parliament was disbanded yesterday. The DPR, which voted in favour of the Bill on Thursday, was stacked with military and civilian nominees appointed under the former president Suharto, as well as representatives of the three parties previously permitted to contest elections. None of the opposition parties—the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), the National Mandate Party (PAN) or the National Awakening Party (PKB)—were represented in the old DPR, and will only take their seats in the new parliament on October 1.

The decision to press ahead with the Bill, in the dying days of the old DPR reflects concerns in ruling circles over the fragile state of the political situation in the wake of the Australian-led military intervention in East Timor; calls for independence in Aceh and Irian Jaya (West Papua); the Bali Bank scandal that has implicated President B.J. Habibie's closest advisers; and the country's deteriorating economic position.

Under both the so-called Guided Democracy of former president Sukarno and General Suharto's military dictatorship, the army was able to use state of emergency legislation to provide broad powers to arrest, detain, intimidate, torture and kill its opponents. Only this week Habibie lifted the state of emergency that the military had used in East Timor to suppress opposition to its rule.

Over the next month, the convening of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) is likely to become a focus of protests over the political intrigues involved in the choice of the next president and vice-president, and demanding basic democratic rights and better living standards.

Since Suharto's resignation in May 1998, Habibie, his ministers, the military chiefs, the state bureaucracy and the media, with the backing of opposition leaders like Megawati Sukarnoputri, have insisted that fundamental democratic reforms have taken place. However, the passage of the Bill shows that behind the democratic façade, capitalist rule

remains reliant on the brute force of the military.

If a state of emergency is declared, the army takes over the presidential authority either nationally or in a province, in order to suppress threats to “state security”. The generals can order raids and investigations, take over mail, telecommunications and electronic facilities, control air, sea and land transport, ban demonstrations, set curfews, stop people from entering or leaving the country, and isolate troublesome individuals and areas.

During the DPR discussions, minor modifications were made to the bill so that the parliament, or the provincial legislature in the case of a province, would have to endorse the declaration of a state of emergency. After such a declaration, however, the military would have the same sweeping powers.

The law no longer specifically refers to the right to censor the media. But as Legal Aid Institute chairman Bambang Widjojanto noted, the media's independence will be severely curtailed because the military has the power to take control of the mail and telecommunications. “The bill's article will allow security authorities to control the press,” he said.

Opposition parties including the PDI-P, PKB, PAN, the Democratic People's Party (PRD) and the Justice and Unity Party (PKP) have warned that the legislation would be rejected once the new parliament is convened next month. PAN Secretary-General Faisal Basri said yesterday “the revocation of the bill would become our priority agenda in the next House”.

However, PDI-P leader Megawati Sukarnoputri, a leading contender for the presidency, has not openly opposed the security legislation. A political commentator Wimar Witoelar told the *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday that “reformists” were disappointed that Megawati had not come out clearly against the tough new security provisions. Since the national elections, the opposition leader has openly courted an alliance with sections of the military including Wiranto.

Other figures have called for an ongoing campaign of civil disobedience against the bill. Cornelius Lay, an academic at Gadjah Mada University, said the public had the right to disobey the bill. “People can exercise civil disobedience in response to the law because opposition to the bill by various elements in the society has been left unheeded by the government and even the House.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**