

Indonesia: 4 military personnel jailed for acid attack on rights activist

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16 June 2026

On June 10, an Indonesian military court sentenced four personnel from the armed forces' Strategic Intelligence Agency (BAIS) to prison terms for their roles in attacking a prominent human rights activist with acid in March.

The attack took place on March 12 in Jakarta against Andrie Yunus, a deputy coordinator for the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS). Andrie, who was known for his criticisms of the military's growing role in civilian life, was riding a motorbike shortly before midnight. He had been recording an interview for a podcast with the Indonesian Legal Aid Institute on the issue of remilitarization in Indonesia since the end of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998.

Two men on another motorbike coming from the opposite direction pulled up next to him and doused him with acid. As a result of his injuries, Andrie lost his sight in one eye and received acid burns on more than 20 percent of his body. The attack took place in full view of more than a dozen CCTV cameras, clearly meant to be seen in order to intimidate other government critics.

The four BAIS members on trial faced charges of premeditated assault, obtaining battery acid and rust cleaning spray to carry out the attack. The men, all in their 40s, are identified as Edi Sudarko, Budi Hariyanto Widhi Cahyono, Nandala Dwi Prasetya, and Sami Lakka. While the charges carried a maximum sentence of 12 years in prison, the defendants essentially received a slap on the wrist, receiving sentences ranging from 1.5 to 3 years behind bars.

The four soldiers were undoubtedly not acting on their own, but involved authorization at higher levels of the military. The BAIS is the intelligence body of the Indonesian military (TNI) and like other intelligence

and special forces organizations, played a key role in suppressing opposition to the Suharto regime, which was in power from 1966 to 1998.

Andrie was one of a number of activists who protested a closed-door meeting by members of the House of Representatives discussing revisions to the TNI law in March 2025. Those changes expanded the number of civilian positions that active-duty military personnel are legally allowed to hold, including in the Attorney General's office and the Supreme Court.

These changes are part of a broader expansion of the military in Indonesia. President Prabowo Subianto is reviving the Suharto-era political policy of "dual-function" or *dwifungsi* in which the military plays major roles in the government and public sectors. In this way, the military was able to enmesh itself into civilian life in order to suppress resistance to Suharto's government.

Following the end of Suharto's regime in 1998, the Indonesian bourgeoisie claimed it was carrying out a period of *reformasi*, supposedly ending the "dual-function" system among other democratic reforms. In reality, the military continued to exert a great deal of control and influence while figures like Prabowo, who were intimately connected to the Suharto regime, were brought back into positions of power. Under Prabowo, the repressive measures of the Suharto era are returning in order to suppress working-class discontent amid a global crisis of capitalism.

Before turning to politics, Prabowo spent his career in the Indonesian special forces known as Kopassus, which he led from 1995 to 1998. Prabowo has been implicated in numerous atrocities in East Timor, West Papua, and Aceh Province, as well as orchestrating the kidnapping and murder of activists as Suharto's regime was coming to an end. He was married to Suharto's

daughter and was positioning himself as his father-in-law's successor before Suharto resigned.

The trial of Andrie's attackers simply made them the scapegoats while covering up any involvement of the military top brass. Andrie had requested that the trial take place in a civilian court, rather than a military court. He refused to appear in person during the trial, citing his health and fears for his safety.

Mokhamad Zainal Abidin, one of the judges in the trial, downplayed the seriousness of the attack, stating, that the four men "only intended to teach (Andrie) a lesson" for criticizing and "demeaning" the military. In other words, Andrie had brought the attack on himself implying the same could happen to anyone who criticizes the armed forces.

The head of Amnesty International Indonesia, Usman Hamid, called the court case last Wednesday a blatant whitewash. "Today's verdict downplays the severity and impact of the life-threatening attack on Andrie. It fails to duly consider the involvement of other actors or the chain of command despite independent investigations recently (alleging) that at least 14 individuals had been involved," he said.

In fact, the attack follows a pattern of government and military intimidation that has intensified against activists and journalists since Prabowo took office in October 2024. KontraS, the organization Andrie works for, has reported intimidation in the past, particularly during protests against the revised TNI law in March 2025. That month, KontraS members received numerous harassing phone calls, including from at least one number linked to military intelligence. The organization also reported an attempted break-in at their office in Jakarta.

Significant protests have taken place during Prabowo's term, including those that erupted last August over an allowance that greatly increased legislatures' pay amid rising inflation costs and layoffs. In response, the Prabowo government deployed the police and military and carried out hundreds of arrests.

Only a few weeks after that, in September 2025, the military took out a full-page advertisement in *Kompas*, Indonesia's largest circulation newspaper, extolling the expansion of the armed forces into people's lives. It claimed that the military had been turned into "people's defense based on prosperity and cross-sector collaboration."

As part of these efforts, the Prabowo government is undertaking the largest expansion of the military this century. Since late 2024, approximately 30 "territorial development brigades" and 155 "territorial development battalions" have been established. The government intends to create another 150 battalions this year with the goal of establishing one for each of Indonesia's 514 regencies and cities.

While supposedly to assist in disaster relief, community projects, and to combat crime, these battalions are being deployed to monitor and suppress social unrest while conditioning the public to the presence of security forces in their daily lives.



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