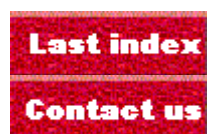


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Murder and rape propel Indonesia toward chaos

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Indonesian social workers and human rights activists claim to have evidence of an organized campaign of assaults, gang rapes and killings of mostly ethnic Chinese women and girls during three days of rioting in Jakarta in May.

According to a Jesuit priest involved with gathering testimony, the systematic and violent intimidation continues against the Chinese community and individuals investigating the violence.

On May 21, President Suharto, the country's dictatorial leader for 32 years, already under pressure because of an economic crisis he could not control, resigned, but not before riots, looting and unprecedented student protests had shaken Indonesian society to its foundations.

From May 14 through May 16, official reports say, 1,200 people were killed (hundreds burned to death trapped in buildings), 40 shopping malls and other buildings were razed and 1,200 vehicles were destroyed.

In addition, local groups have confirmed reports that during those three days as many as 200 women and girls -- most ethnic Chinese -- were raped by gangs of men. At least 20 of these were murdered or died of wounds suffered during the assaults. Reports are being compiled and released by the Volunteer Team for Humanity, an umbrella group for

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nongovernmental organizations, student activists, academics and professionals.

"I am afraid the European countries and the [United States] will see this as an ethnic conflict or socioeconomic. It is not," said Jesuit Fr. Sandyawan Sumadri of the Volunteer Team.

Ariel Heryanto, a political anthropologist and writer with the Jakarta-based journal *Jurnal Perempuan*, called the mid-May violence in Jakarta and several other cities "racialized state terrorism rather than racially motivated mass riots."

"As elsewhere, racism in Indonesia flares up in household conversations, jokes, gossip and private quarrels. Such pervasive sentiment partly explains the ease with which terrorism evolved last May," Heryanto said. "However, [racism] did not cause the mass burning, raping and looting."

"We have less than unequivocal evidence to indicate who exactly must bear the greatest responsibility for the violence," Heryanto said, but nongovernmental organizations' investigations and witnesses' testimony implicate state-sponsored terrorism -- in the guise of racism -- as responsible for the violence.

Heryanto said that most media accounts -- especially foreign media -- portrayed the May violence as ethnic and/or economic conflicts. Such portrayals, he said, are "unwittingly helping the state terrorism by protecting the perpetrators."

Sandyawan explained that the May violence "is how the elite politicians and the powers want to [maintain] their position." He said they used the chaos to advance their own schemes.

The Volunteer Team found in reports of the violence from far-flung districts of Jakarta suspiciously similar details and patterns that indicate the violence was well-planned and systematically executed by well-organized groups.

Witnesses said trucks or buses would bring men into the area. The men, said the witnesses, were unfamiliar to the area and "well-built" or "fit" and with "crew cuts" or "military-style haircuts." Many witnesses said the men were dressed in college or high

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school uniforms but were obviously too old or too big to be students.

Eight to 16 men would disembark from trucks or buses and ask people in the streets where the Chinese lived. They would then encourage bystanders to break into and loot homes and businesses owned by ethnic Chinese. These were the men who usually torched buildings, the witnesses said. These men also formed the gangs that raped the women.

The violence against women and girls is especially gruesome. Testimony from victims and witnesses makes clear that the violence was meant to be seen, which, according to Heryanto, is a characteristic of state terrorism. The women and girls were raped in front of people, often in public places, such as banks, public buses and shophouses.

Examples include: wives raped in front of husbands and children, daughters raped in front of parents, granddaughters in front of grandparents and sisters in front of siblings. Girls as young as 9 years old were raped by as many as seven men.

The genitals of some women and girls were mutilated with knives or razors or blunt objects like bottles. The assaults were frequently preceded by acts of humiliation, such as forcing the women to parade, run, dance and swim naked.

Some of the rape victims were left to die in homes and businesses set ablaze by looters. Some victims died days after the assaults. Others committed suicide after being assaulted.

The Volunteer Team aided a man who confessed to being recruited to help incite riots during May. Fr. Sandyawan said the man told him that he and others spent two weeks at an army camp being briefed on what to do when released in Jakarta.

Heryanto said, "The violence was just too perfect to leave any doubts about the narrow range of potential suspects." In less than 50 hours, 27 areas in the capital were engulfed in "spectacularly and severely violent actions," he noted. No local civilian group in the affected areas has the experience or capacity to wreck such havoc, said Heryanto.

On June 11, President B.J. Habibie, who succeeded Suharto on May 21, ordered the army

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to investigate reports of "organized crimes" during the May riots. Two national police officers were charged with failing to control their troops during demonstrations at Trisakti University, where four student protesters were shot and killed. The officers face up to 28 months in jail. Another 15 national police troopers face courts-martial for dereliction of duty during the rioting.

But, in published reports, army investigators said they could find no evidence of rapes and that not a single victim had come forward.

The official Indonesian human rights commission, known as Komnas-HAM, asked the government to launch an independent investigation into the allegations. On July 13 Habibie named an investigation commission that included the armed forces chief, Gen. Wiranto, the attorney general, and the home, foreign, justice and women's affairs ministers. Nongovernmental organizations representatives have also been invited to sit on the commission.

Leaders of the Volunteer Team met with this commission July 23. Sandyawan said the commission is largely for international public relations and could be "a way to co-opt us. To stop us." After meeting the commission, Sandyawan said the commission could be one of the useful tools to learning the truth of what happened. If it doesn't work, people have other tools to find the truth, he said.

The commission is to issue a report within three months, but Heryanto doesn't hold out much hope for the proceedings. "I suspect state officials, especially the military, are at least partially responsible for the violence," he said. "They are liable to an independent, impartial and thorough investigation rather than joining the investigating team.

"However, if the military is totally excluded, no investigating team made up totally of Indonesians will have the power to go very far and achieve anything effective.

"So the little hope comes from the possible friction among military officers. Some antagonism is already apparent. The question is: How serious can such antagonism be before one camp is willing and able to prosecute the other without destroying itself?" Heryanto said.

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Meanwhile, Fr. Sandyawan said, "The terror goes on." Rapes and intimidation continue. "Reports are also coming in from central Java and South Sumatera (the island adjoining Java to the west) with the same pattern and even worse," he said. "People have been in hiding, but, as the Volunteer Team grows in credibility, they are coming forward."

He said that he met with riot victims until midnight on July 20. By midday on July 21, another 120 families had come to the office. "It's like this every day, all day," he said. For every 100 victims who report to the office, two or three are rape cases.

Furthermore, he continued, "The Volunteer Team has been drawn into the terror." Not only did team members witness the atrocities but now receive daily death threats and intimidation.

Heryanto believes the response to the May violence signals a change in Indonesia's political history. "The May violence may not be the worst of its kind in the territory," he said. "But in my observation, none of the past incidents in the country provoked the kind of moral and political outrage from the public as we are witnessing now."

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