

20 JANUARY 1998 -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Indonesia: fears for a renewed crackdown

This week's bomb explosion in Jakarta could herald a renewed crackdown on government opponents in Indonesia, as the government grapples with an economic crisis and forthcoming presidential elections, Amnesty International said today.

"The culprits responsible for the bomb ought to be brought to justice. However the Indonesian authorities should not exacerbate existing tensions by rounding up peaceful government critics," Amnesty International said.

During recent weeks the security forces have made clear their intention to eliminate any opposition to President Suharto being elected to a seventh term. General Feisal Tanjung, the commander of the armed forces, recently told journalists that anti-government groups would be "cut down".

The first signs of a renewed crackdown, began with the arrests of Mochamad Faik, Nurussulhi Nawai and three other members of the unofficial opposition party, the Indonesian United Democratic Party (PUDI) when the party's office in Malang, East Java, was raided by security forces.

PUDI's leader, the well-known government critic, Sri Bintang Pamungkas, is currently on trial in Jakarta under the draconian Anti-subversion Law for setting up the party. In Indonesia, subversion carries the death penalty or up to life imprisonment.

"It looks as if we are about to witness a repeat performance of last year's parliamentary elections, when the authorities gave the security forces *carte blanche* to detain critics," Amnesty International said.

The government has also reacted to criticism of its handling of the current economic crisis with threats and intimidation. Currency speculation and food hoarding have been publicly equated with 'subversion'. Riots which broke out in Jember, East Java have been blamed on the banned Communist Party of Indonesia. The media has been taken to task for its negative reporting and two respected economists have been summoned by the military intelligence services for their outspoken criticism of the government.

"This heavy handed approach will only exacerbate tensions in the long run," Amnesty International said. "As Indonesia accepts the need for economic discipline and reform, it should also take steps to relieve political pressures and bring the human rights situation into line with international norms and standards."

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