

Indonesia: Clashes Follow Student Death After Fuel Protest Arrest

Thursday 26 June 2008, by [ASAP](#) (Date first published: 24 June 2008).

JAKARTA, June 24: Thousands of Indonesian protesters angered by a student demonstrator's death after his arrest burned cars and hurled stones at police guarding the Parliament after police attacked them with water cannon.

Participants in the demonstration in Jakarta also demanded that the government revoke a 30 percent fuel price increase imposed last month.

The dead student had been protesting the price hike. The protesters carried a fake coffin and pictures of Maftuh Fauzi, a 27-year-old student at the National University who had been among 100 fuel price protesters arrested May 24. He died in hospital last Friday, but there were conflicting reports about the cause of his death.

The Indonesian Doctors' Association was seeking clarification from Pertamina Hospital, which said Fauzi died of HIV/AIDS. Students say he was beaten by police and died of his injuries.

A National Human Rights Commission investigation concluded Tuesday that the police raid on Fauzi's university campus violated the students' rights and called for an independent autopsy for Fauzi, said commissioner Nur Kholis.

The protest started at Parliament. According to the student group LMND, hundreds of members mobilised by the Peoples Demand Front (FRM) began the action in the morning. They burnt rubber tyres outside of main entrance gates of House of Representative building and demanded government to immediately cancel fuel price rise and investigate the death of the student Maftuh Fauzi. At 2pm, thousands more from the Cross Generation Activist (Tali Geni) group joined the protest.

Police repeatedly used water canon against the protesters. Activists from FRM and Tali Geni rattled the gate of parliament. A side gate was brought down by the protesters. As the protesters tried to come into the House of Representative building, a violent clash between police and action took place. Many action participants were hit on their head, arm, and shoulders.

"We just want to enter the House building to persuade lawmakers to vote to question the government over its fuel price policy. We hope by using their right to inquiry, they can annul the government's fuel price hike policy," one of the leaders of the student protesters, Lalu Hilman Afriandi, told the Jakarta Post. A total traffic jam occurred along the Gatot Subroto Road during the clashes. An activist from IAIN Jambi, Arpi, was hit by a police patrol car. Police chased and arrested several student protesters.

Police later attacked students in two locations. One group had headed to Slipi-Grogol, West Jakarta, while another went to Jalan Sudirman, central Jakarta. Students at Sudirman tried to blockade main road in front of Atmajaya University. Jakarta Post reported that students and activists also protested at the Jalan Rasuna Said office of copper and gold mining company Freeport, demanding the government nationalize the company. The protesters halted the operation of TransJakarta buses serving the Kuningan-Ragunan route.

Later, a car was also set alight outside the Catholic Atmajaya University on one of the city's busiest commuter routes, snarling traffic for miles.

Indonesia's government raised gasoline pump prices by nearly 30 percent on May 23 because of the surging cost of oil and gas on the global market. The move triggered generally peaceful protests throughout the vast Indonesian archipelago, a nation of 235 million people. While the protests were taking place outside parliament, 233 of 360 parliamentarians inside the building voted for an inquiry into the government's fuel price policy.

Please send messages of solidarity to:

LMND c/-PAPERNAS

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P.S.

* Sources: International Herald Tribune, Jakarta Post, LMND.

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