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ASIAWEEK INVESTIGATION

TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK INDONESIA

New evidence indicates that the riots that convulsed Jakarta during May were masterminded

BY SUSAN BERFIELD AND DEWI LOVEARD

In the twilight hours of May 12, four student protesters were shot dead at Jakarta's prestigious Trisakti University. Within 24 hours, the killings by security forces had sparked savage riots and an anti-Chinese pogrom that turned Jakarta into a war zone, forced out President Suharto and altered the destiny of a nation.

From the moment the first rock was thrown and car set alight, Indonesians suspected the riots were more than a spontaneous uprising against an overstaying president. The nation has a history of violence instigated by shadowy figures who are rarely identified. This time, however, suspects have been charged in connection with the Trisakti shootings. Two police officers are on trial in Jakarta for misconduct - but many Indonesians believe the suspects are scapegoats and that the court martial is part of a larger military cover-up.

A month-long Asiaweek investigation, that included interviews with military officers, lawyers, human-rights activists, victims and witnesses, suggests that the Trisakti shootings, the riots that followed and the rapes of Chinese women were indeed planned. Among the evidence uncovered in the investigation: four police officers and their uniforms disappeared days before the shootings; the bullet retrieved from a Trisakti victim is not police issue; two men, now in hiding, have admitted they were recruited to provoke riots; and military sources have revealed for the first time that they intercepted radio traffic between Jakarta army headquarters and groups of provocateurs on May 14.

If the riots were orchestrated, there had to be a mastermind. His identity may never be fully substantiated, but one man has been consistently linked to the violence: Suharto's son-in-law, Lt.-Gen. Prabowo Subianto, at the time commander of the elite Army Strategic Reserves (Kostrad). Prabowo, a volatile and much-resented officer, is almost too obvious a suspect. Fadli Zon, a Muslim activist close to Prabowo, says the lieutenant general is a victim of "character assassination." Days after the riots, Prabowo himself denied involvement. In June his intermediaries told Asiaweek he might consent to an interview. It hasn't happened yet.

Prabowo is ambitious and he certainly had the means to instigate riots. He had at his call thousands of reckless young men, many of them members of paramilitary organizations known to foment trouble. Hoodlums, gangsters, paramilitaries, youth groups - call them what you will. Some, like Pemuda Pancasila, are well established and led by retired officers. Military sources suspect other organizations involved in the riots are no more than local rackets headed by thugs recruited from the provinces and set loose in the capital.

"Prabowo was obsessed with his belief that the only way to govern Indonesia was by military stratagems," says a senior military officer, "and that he could take power in exactly the same way as his own father-in-law wrested power from Sukarno." The officer claims Prabowo wanted to create such chaos that his rival, armed forces chief Gen. Wiranto, would be unable to restore order. Suharto, in Egypt at the time, would have had to declare martial law. As chief of

Kostrad, a key combat-ready unit, Prabowo would have been the only one able to take charge. That's one theory. Others say he wanted to impress Suharto by sowing chaos - and then proving he could control it.

In the end, Prabowo lost his patron and his command. His country lost far more - 1,188 people dead, as many as 468 women raped, and 40 malls, 2,470 shophouses and 1,119 cars looted or destroyed. Ten days that shook Indonesia:

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