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# Hundreds dead from Indonesian unrest

**In this story:**


- Suharto again says he'll leave if people demand it
- Violence reported in other cities
- Nationals of other countries flee
- Related stories and sites


## 1,000 rioters arrested; Suharto may juggle Cabinet

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JAKARTA, Indonesia (CNN) -- The magnitude of Indonesia's political crisis was brought home late Saturday by a military official who announced that the official death toll from nearly a week of riotous protests had hit 500.

Calm was restored to the debris-strewn streets of Jakarta, where 10,000 troops were keeping order. More than 1,000 rioters and looters had been arrested.

Armed Forces spokesman Gen. Wahab Mokodongan issued a statement saying the death toll from the unrest and riots that started Tuesday "topped 499." Most of those were looters trapped in a series of horrifying shopping mall fires.

Jakarta Gov. Sutiyono said more than 3,000 buildings had been attacked and nearly 1,500 vehicles wrecked during the violence and looting. Most of the deaths occurred Friday when four shopping centers were set on fire.

As the debris smoldered, friends and relatives of missing people endured the gruesome task of .

## Suharto again says he'll leave if people demand it

Meanwhile, as nationals of other countries continued to flee Indonesia on Saturday, the man at the center of the storm, President Suharto, hinted that he may reshuffle his Cabinet

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-- a move not likely to mollify critics who have been calling for dramatic political reform.

Suharto, 76, who has ruled Indonesia for 32 years, met Saturday with university presidents and was quoted as saying for the third time in a week that he's willing to leave the presidency if the people demand it.

"Any time, if the people want me to step down, I am ready to resign, as long it is conducted constitutionally," Budi Santoso, the head of the University of Indonesia, quoted Suharto as saying during the meeting.

However, skeptical critics say the constitutional method of replacing the president could take months or more, because of Suharto's control of the Indonesian political system.

"He's said the same thing for more than 30 years," said Arbi Sanit, a political scientist at the University of Indonesia. "In many ways, Suharto acts like a king who wants to die holding on."

## Violence reported in other cities

Legions of university students have taken to the streets in dozens of protests over the last three months. But this week, the mood of the demonstrations darkened when thousands of urban poor -- hard hit by an economic crisis gripping Indonesia -- began to riot.



**A heavy military presence kept Jakarta quiet, providing a window for a continuing exodus from the capital**

In the wake of the violence, Suharto rolled back some of the government-ordered price increases that had so inflamed them.

Even as the social unrest appeared to ease in the capital, there were reports that demonstrations and rioting had spread to other cities in the vast country of 200 million people.

In Bandung, 10,000 people gathered to denounce Suharto and demand democracy. Troops stood by, watching the crowd.

The Jakarta Post reported that "a demonstration of thousands of people degenerated into an orgy of large-scale rioting, burning and looting" in Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, on Friday.

Thousands of university students marched through the Surabaya city center, at one point occupying the state-run radio station and broadcasting their demands for political reform.

As has been the case throughout the week, some people, believed to be non-students, attacked and looted a shopping area. They also burned down the office of the only showroom of the Timor car, the troubled automobile project run by one of Suharto's sons.

The Jakarta Post also reported unrest in the major cities of Bandar Lampung and Palembang on Friday.

Witnesses said there was widespread destruction in the central Javanese city of Solo, after mobs swept through town Friday. Stores in the university town of Yogyakarta were closed Saturday; owners feared a return of violence there.

## Nationals of other countries flee



**U.N. officials, diplomats, international business executives and anxious Indonesians desperately seek a way out of the country**

On Saturday, dozens of people lined up outside one major bank that remained open in hopes of withdrawing their savings. Angry mobs have targeted banks on their looting sprees.

Nationals of other countries were leaving the country in droves. The United States, Canada, Japan, Australia and Malaysia all sent in special flights to evacuate those who wanted to leave. Some multinational companies chartered their own flights to evacuate their employees.

Jakarta's main international airport was packed with people awaiting commercial flights out of the country.

The military, known by the Indonesian acronym ABRI, tried to stop the exodus with assurances Saturday that it had the situation under control.

"For the international community, ABRI guarantees your security and hopes that you will continue to be calm," said Brig. Gen. Wahab Mokodongan in a written statement.

But some nationals of other countries said they feared the angry mobs would soon turn on them.

"We all live in big glitzy houses, and the mobs were getting closer every day," said a British evacuee bound for

Singapore. "They have burned half of the city already, and sooner or later, they are going to go for the places the rich live in."

Correspondent Mike Chinoy and Reuters contributed to this report.

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- Suharto orders action against looters - May 14, 1998
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## Related sites:

*Note: Pages will open in a new browser window*

- Indonesia Internet Information Center - starting point for information about Indonesia
- DKI Jakarta - official Web site of the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia
- Indonesia Times Online - English language daily.
- Indonesia - AsianNet

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