

Indonesia: Queuing for oil in an oil-rich country

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Thofilus Itta, 42 years old was found lifeless in his room in Surabaya, east Java on March 7, 2008. It was strongly believed that the father of two sons was exhausted after in line for three hours to obtain 5 liter petrol. Recently there have been 200 meter queues for petrol in Balikpapan, in East Kalimantan province - a place known as the "city of oil". In Cimahi, West Java, every day 500 people in line up for petroleum from early morning to afternoon. The same situation can be found in various cities of Indonesia.

Queues for petrol, massive electricity black-outs, industry fuel shortages are current ironic phenomenon in this oil rich country

According to a report issued on January 2008 by Energy Information Administration, Indonesia's oil production is 1.1 million barrel a day. Indonesia was also known as a first-rank natural gas producer in Asia Pacific. Unfortunately more than 90% of energy industries are controlled by foreign corporations. Indonesia only owns 20 out of 137 companies of oil and gas.

ExxonMobil, the World biggest oil corporation gain \$40.6 billion profit in year 2007 equal to Gross domestic Product of 120 country.

Responding to this situation, affiliate organisations of the National Liberation Party of Unity (PAPERNAS) have been organising series of public meetings and mass actions to demand the nationalization of the oil and mining industries. PAPERNAS will continue this round of actions up to May 2008.

On March 3, 2007 at Bandar Lampung, Lampung, around 600 people - mostly farmers and urban poor - attended a Papernas public gathering to demand the nationalization of mining and oil industries for people's welfare. In Lampung, 3.2 million out of its 8 million population are living below the poverty line.

On March 10, 2008, the following mass actions to demand the nationalisation of oil and mining industries was held in three cities; Ternate, Maluku province; South Sulawesi province and Pekanbaru, Riau Province.

In the East Indonesian island-town of Ternate, hundreds of students united as the Coalition for Women's Concerns clashed with police in front of the North Mollucas' Regional Assembly (DPRD) during a protest

to demand the nationalisation of mining companies operating in the area. Five students were wounded, two of whom were badly injured and had to be taken to the hospital.

The clash started when police prevented some students from meeting with members of North Moluccas' Regional Assembly. The coalition, initiated by the National Students' League for Democracy (LMND), also demanded that the government reduce prices of basic goods. Due to this incident at the end of the protest they also demanded that the Police Chief resign.

Meanwhile, in the city of Makassar - located at the southern tip of Indonesia's K-shaped island, Sulawesi - dozens of students from LMND carried out a protest in front of PT Inco's office to demand nationalisation of oil, gas, and mining companies in Indonesia. More than 60 per cent of PT Inco's shares are owned by the world's second biggest nickel-producer, Canada-based Vale Inco; about 20 percent, owned by several Japanese companies; and the rest, sold in the Stock Exchange. PT Inco's operational plant in Sorowako, South Sulawesi, is notorious for creating land and water pollution, ecosystem damage, carrying out forced eviction, and therefore causing impoverishment and health problems among the local communities.

Students asked permission from security personnel to enter the company's office but were refused. In their statement, they demanded that the government should have the courage to nationalise the company or at least to renegotiate the contract of work to bring more benefit to the people of South Sulawesi, to fund development, particularly education. Three decades since the start of its commercial production, PT Inco has not only given little royalties to the Indonesian government, but the company has also broken promises to provide free health care, education, electricity, clean water services and priority in employment.

In Pekanbaru, Riau Province, 800 people from PAPERNAS and Riau Peasant union (STR) gathered at Chevron's old artesian well and then convoyed to Chevron offices. The protestors demanded the nationalization of oil industries to provide electricity facilities in Riau and also free education and health.

Chevron has been operating in this part of Indonesia for many years, extracting 500 million barrel per year. Yet the local Bengkalis and Kampar Regions have had no access to electricity since shortages of oil supply and facility in electricity power plant.

On 12 March 2008 in Jakarta 80 workers from The National Front of Indonesian Workers' Struggle (FNPBI) conducted a theatrical action in front of the ExxonMobil office in Sudirman, Jakarta. They queued up with empty bottles and jerry cans demanding the nationalization of oil and mining industries.

Dominggus Oktavianus, Chairperson of FNPBI said in his speech to the protest action:

"The situation has become an emergency, people are lining up for petroleum, we have the phenomenon of blackouts in many cities, industries are crying out for diesel fuel, all while the giant corporations have full control of abundant energy resources in their hands.

"They gain abundant wealth while the people who own the land desperately line-up for oil, starving, trapped in illness and ignorance.

"Therefore the workers in Indonesia must unite with other oppressed people to take over foreign oil and mining corporations for the people's welfare."

FNPBI urged the government to issue a decree to nationalise the mining industries, to meet country's need of energy for household, transportation and industries. FNPBI also urged the government to create a national industrialisation program.

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Pictures:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/peter.g.boyle/OilQueuesInAnOilRichCountry/photo#s5177381365648171762>