

Indonesia: Internet throttling, hacking slammed as attempt to cover up police violence in Wadas

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Jakarta — A number of professional organisations have slammed an alleged throttling of the internet at Wadas Village in Bener sub-district, Purworejo regency, Central Java, which has made it difficult to access information on the situation in the area.

The Yogyakarta, Semarang and Purwokerto Independent Journalist Alliances (AJI) and the Yogyakarta Legal Aid Institute for the Press (LBH Pers) believe that the throttling of the internet, which occurred between Tuesday February 8 and the afternoon of Wednesday February 9, was an attempt by the government to cover up police violence at Wadas.

“Through this alleged throttling of internet access, there was an effort so that the publication of information on the violent actions of police against [Wadas Village] residents opposing the measurement of their land could be blocked, so that it would not be known by the public”, read a joint statement by the organisations.

The groups said that the internet throttling was also done to smooth the way for the land measurement activities for the construction of an andesite mine in the vicinity of the Wadas Village.

In addition to this, the groups also condemned the hacking of the LBH Yogyakarta Instagram account on Tuesday. The account disappeared after they uploading a video showing the repressive actions of police and this shows that that there was an attempt to cut information access.

“We believe that the hacking of the LBH Yogyakarta social media account was to cut off access to information transparency for the public related to the latest development on the situation at Wadas Village which is protected by law”, they said.

Furthermore, the alliance also spoke about police sweeps of Wadas Village residents’ mobile phones. According to the groups, this is against the law and violates citizens’ freedom of expression.

“This of course cannot be justified because there are no legal grounds. Moreover the police’s actions allegedly violated the right to freedom of expression and opinion which is regulated under Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution”, they explained.

Earlier on the morning of Tuesday February 8, police units surrounded and entered the Wadas Village. They swept through the village removing banners with messages opposing andesite rock mining for the Bener Dam.

The police also arrested scores of residents who allegedly resisted police. At least 64 people were arrested ranging from the elderly to underage children. The police claimed they had come to the village to assist a team from the National Land Agency (BPN) to measure the land for the Bener Dam

project.

The Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) revealed that the internet went down when the police visited Wadas on Tuesday morning.

“The current situation, is that the internet in Wadas is also down, so it makes it difficult to spread news through social media. In addition to this, thousands of police have gathered in the field behind the Bener sectoral police station, fully armed with shields and dogs”, said the YLBHI in a tweet on Tuesday.

YLBHI debunks security chief Mahfud’s denial of police violence at Wadas Village

Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) Chairperson Muhammad Isnur has accused Coordinating Minister for Security, Politics and Legal Affairs Mahfud MD of lying over an incident at Wadas Village in Purworejo regency, Central Java.

Isnur also said that Mahfud’s explanation that there was no violence against Wadas Village residents yesterday is not in accordance with the facts on the ground.

“Pak [Mr] Mahfud’s narrative is clearly not based on and is different from the facts on the ground which we have seen, the Jogja LBH [Yogyakarta Legal Aid Foundation] witnessed [the incident] for themselves”, said Isnur when contacted by CNN Indonesia on Wednesday February 9.

“If Pak Mahfud has seen the video which is spreading easily on social media and also heard [Wadas] residents’ stories, then clearly what Pak Mahfud conveyed was a lie”, he added.

Isnur said that based on the video of the incident at Wadas Village, many have already seen the police violently arresting village residents. Aside from this, there are other videos which show the police violence.

“There were many incidence of violence in the videos. There were many youths including LBH lawyers who were also assaulted, arrested by police”, he said.

According to Isnur, Mahfud must personally go to Wadas to look into the facts on the ground. He wants Mahfud to listen directly to the testimonies of residents so he can obtain information which is in accordance with the facts on the ground.

“Pak Mahfud must not listen to only one side of the story, not listen to what he wants to hear, but go there to the community, go to Wadas”, he said.

Earlier, Mahfud refuted information and news reports about the tense situation at Wadas Village when police escorted a team from the National Land Agency to measure the land for an andesite rock mine for the planned construction of the Bener Dam.

“All of the information and reports depicting things as if there was a tense atmosphere at Wadas Village yesterday, absolutely did not happen as depicted, especially on social media”, said Mahfud during a press conference on Wednesday.

Mahfud also denied that there was any violence against residents. According to Mahfud, the incident which occurred at the village was a result of friction between residents who support andesite rock mining at Wadas and residents who oppose the plan.

On Tuesday February 8, fully armed police were deployed to escort a team measuring land for the Bener Dam project in Purworejo.

The police did not just escort the team by also arrested residents who were alleged to have been provocative. At least 67 people were arrested, including among them children and the elderly.

Although police have release scores of the arrested residents, one was declared Covid-19 positive and is now undergoing isolation at a hospital. The police however are still at the Wadas Village providing security for the land measuring team.

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