

Indonesia: 40 arrested after frustrated anti-mine protesters torch government offices

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Jakarta — A protest action in front of the Pohuwato regent's office in Gorontalo province, on Thursday September 21, has ended in chaos, with protesters torching the regent's office and having earlier vandalised the offices of the Pohuwato Regional House of Representatives (DPRD).

The riot began with an earlier demonstration demanding compensation for land at the offices of the mining company PT Puncak Emas Tani Sejahtera — a subsidiary of PT Merdeka Copper Gold which oversees the Pani Gold Project mine. Unfortunately, there were no company representatives willing to meet with the demonstrators so they vandalised the office.

They then demonstrated at the local DPRD in the hope that lawmakers would be willing to listen to them and provide a solution to their compensation demands. But none of the Pohuwato DPRD leaders were there so the protesters' emotions flared up and the demonstration ended in anarchy with protesters vandalising the regional legislative office.

Unwilling to give up, the demonstrators decided to go to the Pohuwato regent's office to convey their aspirations. They also hoped to be able to meet with the regent.

Again the protesters failed to meet with the regent. Emotions flared and they vandalised and torched the regent's office. In the aftermath of the series of destructive protests, police arrested 40 people, who are currently being questioned intensively to discover their roles in the incidents.

"There were 40 people who were arrested. But it hasn't been determined yet what or how it happened. They're still being questioned. There's no result yet on determining suspects or what their role was, it's like that, yeah", Gorontalo regional police spokesperson Senior Commissioner Desmont Harjendro told reporters on Friday September 22.

"They were arrested because at the time of the incident, the protest action, they appeared to be inciting it, like that, throwing things, yeah, that's who we arrested", he added.

Harjendro also revealed that the anarchic demonstration resulted in 11 police officers suffering injuries.

"(The breakdown is) eight (personnel injured) slightly, three (injured) seriously", he said.

In order to secure the demonstration, 200 North Sulawesi (Sulut) regional police (Polda) paramilitary Mobile Brigade (Brimob) officers were deployed to assist the Gorontalo police.

Gorontalo deputy police chief Brigadier Pudji Prasetyanto Hadi said that the addition of the Brimob troops were to assist the Gorontalo regional police in securing the protest action.

“Yesterday the demonstration held by the Pohuwato community ended in chaos between the police and the community. Therefore Polda Sulut Brimob personnel at the BKO [military operational unit] were [called in] to assist securing the course of the protest action”, said Hadi.

“With this assistance we were able to secure the course of the protest until it could proceed securely and under control”, he continued.

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Translated by James Balowski.

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