

Protests in Indonesia warning to Malaysia, says UMS lecturer

TBP 09.09.2025 P.02

KOTA KINABALU: The wave of massive protests that erupted in Indonesia since August has sent a clear signal of the people's dissatisfaction with their government, and at the same time serves as a warning for Malaysia not to take domestic issues lightly, said Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) lecturer, Associate Professor Dr Syahrudin Awang Ahmad.

Dr Syahrudin said the situation in Indonesia should not be taken lightly by Malaysia as similar issues also exist here.

"Corruption, social injustice and income disparity are universal issues. Malaysia has witnessed major gatherings such as Bersih and Blackout 505. These protests in Indonesia should serve as an early lesson for our government," he said.

He added that with similar demographics, particularly a young population highly active on social media, Malaysia risks facing a "contagion effect" — where protesting movements from neighbouring countries can influence and mobilise local citizens.

Dr Syahrudin said the Malaysian government must immediately strengthen governance, transparency and communication channels with the people to prevent discontent from escalating into street protests.

"A thorough introspection is



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Awang Ahmad

crucial. We need to strengthen institutions of justice, review the Peaceful Assembly Act, and ensure that investigations into high-profile cases are carried out transparently.

"The people must be assured that their voices are heard," said Dr Syahrudin, who is also Deputy Dean (Research, Innovation and Commercialisation) of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UMS.

He further stressed that public stability does not depend solely on laws, but also on the collective psychology of the people.

"When the people feel their voices are ignored, it can spark mass anger.

"If small sparks are not addressed, they can explode into a mass uprising. Malaysia must learn from what is happening in Indonesia — before it is too late," he said.

The protests in Indonesia began after the death of a

food delivery worker, Afnan Kurniawan, who was struck by a police Brimob tactical vehicle. The incident quickly went viral on social media and spread across Indonesia, becoming a symbol of injustice and abuse of power by the authorities.

According to official data from Indonesia's Ministry of Health, more than 350 people were injured and at least 12 killed, including a freelance journalist, Syawal Rahmat, who died from head injuries.

In just the first two weeks, more than 2,500 demonstrators were arrested by authorities.

The demonstrations, which erupted in major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Jambi and Makassar, not only demanded justice for Afnan but also exposed deeper issues including rampant corruption, widening income gaps, and the government's failure to deliver promised reforms.

The phenomenon was amplified by social media, with more than 7.5 million hashtags such as #ReformasiTotal and #JusticeForAfnan trending within the first 48 hours.

Student groups from leading universities such as Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Gadjah Mada and Bandung Institute of Technology played a vital role in mobilising the masses, organising talks, distributing flyers, and spearheading digital campaigns.