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Indonesia Preparing Crackdown on Rebels

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) -- Indonesia on Tuesday said it was preparing a military offensive against rebels in Aceh province, in the latest sign that a five-month peace pact was faltering.

More violence broke out Tuesday. Soldiers gunned down three rebels in clashes and assailants shot and killed an Aceh lawmaker.

Security Minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said that President Megawati Sukarnoputri was frustrated with the increased clashes in recent weeks between the military and the Free Aceh Movement.

"The president has ordered the preparations for an integrated operation ... (including) a security operation," Yudhoyono told reporters after a Cabinet meeting.

He declined to say when the operation would start or what it would entail.

His comments came a day after Jakarta rejected a proposal by the rebels to meet after the government's deadline of May 12 to save the fragile peace agreement.

Yudhoyono said the government was still willing to hold talks with the rebels as long as they drop their bid for the independence of the oil- and gas-rich province.

Fighting between the two sides dates back to 1976 and left nearly 12,000 dead in the province on the northern tip of Sumatra, about 1,200 miles northwest of Jakarta.

The Dec. 9 agreement has reduced violence in the province but the last two months has seen a rise in shootings, kidnappings and ambushes.

On Tuesday, soldiers killed three rebels in two separate clashes in the North and West of the province, Maj. Eddi Fernandi said.

Troops also found the bodies of two civilians who died of gunshot wounds, Fernandi said, adding that rebels may have killed them to steal their motorbikes.

Meanwhile, two assailants gunned down legislator Amiruddin Adam, 43, who was driving a car in the outskirts of East Aceh capital Langsa, said legislators and residents who refused to be named. Police could not confirm the killing.

Talks to save the deal have repeatedly been delayed over procedural issues such as dates and venues.

The Henri Dunant Center, the Geneva-based conflict resolution group that brokered the deal, has been seeking a new date for talks.

The military has accused rebels of using the peace pact to campaign for independence and recruit fighters. Rebels have countered that the military has intimidated supporters of the peace agreement.

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