

# Muslim Protesters Demand Government Jail Christian Politician

An Indonesian court will decide next week whether to push forward with a controversial blasphemy trial of Jakarta's Christian governor, who is accused of insulting the Koran, a judge told a hearing on Tuesday.

Several hundred Muslim protesters stood outside the Jakarta court, calling for the jailing of Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an ethnic Chinese politician, known by his nickname Ahok.

A rival group of his supporters unveiled a banner with a map of Indonesia calling for unity and saying "Ahok is a blessing".

A prosecution lawyer said the charges against the governor were legal and the trial should continue, dismissing a claim by the defense that naming Purnama a suspect had violated his human rights and breached procedures.

"The defendant under the prosecutors' charges has violated articles 156 and 156a ... but there was no violation of procedures," said Ali Murkatono, referring to the codes of the blasphemy law, which can carry a jail term of up to five years.

In an emotional court appearance a week ago, a tearful Purnama denied he had intended to insult the Koran, when he was campaigning ahead of elections for Jakarta governor in February.

At the time, he criticized rival politicians for citing the Koran to argue that Muslims should not vote for non-Muslims.

The trial has raised concern over the treatment of minorities in the predominantly Muslim country, which also has sizable Christian, Hindu and Buddhist communities and dozens of groups that adhere to traditional beliefs.

Judge Dwiarto Budi Santiarso said on Tuesday another hearing would be held on Dec. 27 to decide whether to proceed with Purnama's trial.

This is a normal procedure in Indonesia and is supposed to ensure that the prosecution has met the requirements for an indictment under the criminal code.

Purnama was named a suspect after hundreds of thousands of people, led by Muslim hardliners, attended rallies in the past six weeks calling for his arrest.

President Joko Widodo, seen as a Purnama ally, has blamed "political actors" for fueling the protests, but declined to elaborate. Widodo has faced widespread criticism for not doing enough to protect religious minorities. As governor, Purnama has won credit for shaking up the city's bureaucracy and taking steps to ease Jakarta's notorious traffic. But his abrasive language and insistence on clearing city slums has alienated many voters.

After suffering a dip in support in opinion polls, Purnama has rebounded to become the frontrunner again in the election race to lead Jakarta, according to a poll by Indonesian Survey Institute. {eo}

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