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ASIA

Indonesian Suggests Forming Militias

JAKARTA, Indonesia -- Indonesia's president yesterday suggested that she supports setting up militias to help maintain order as the army fights to contain two rebellions and the police struggle against rising lawlessness.

Human rights activists warned that the comments could allow the reemergence of army-backed militias such as those that rampaged through East Timor in 1999, killing hundreds of people after the territory voted for independence in a U.N.-sponsored referendum.

The army is believed to have already formed a militia in Aceh, a province where a 27-year rebellion is again raging after a truce collapsed last month.

President Megawati Sukarnoputri raised the issue of militias in a televised speech to officers celebrating National Police Day.

"The lack of numbers of security officials makes it impossible for our police and military to guarantee our citizens' security," she said. "That is why we need to seriously consider the people's request to defend themselves, especially in regions that are suffering a security disturbance."

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