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INDONESIA: Antigovernment Rioting

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Disturbances broke out after the arrests early this week of four speakers delivering antigovernment and anti-Chinese sermons at local mosques. Troops fired on demonstrators after they looted and burned several Chinese shops and marched on a police station to demand release of the prisoners. Government security forces have killed at least 25 civilians and wounded as many as 100.

Comment: The disturbances reflect both fundamentalist Muslim opposition to the Soeharto government's anti-Islamic policies and traditional Indonesian hostility to the ethnic Chinese community. Military forces remain on alert because further demonstrations are likely during the Muslim Sabbath and during funeral services for those killed. Authorities undoubtedly fear that riots may spread to other cities as they did in 1980 during extensive anti-Chinese riots in Central and East Java.

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