

Report: Visit to Cebongan Prison in Sleman, Yogyakarta

KontraS
March 23, 2013

I. Introduction

The aim of the visit was to investigate the jailhouse shooting that resulted in 4 dead detainees, 8 injured officers, and the destruction of state property

The visit took place after the execution of 4 transferred detainees from Yogyakarta Regional Police by a group of armed men on March 23, 2013. The four detainees were implicated in the murder case of Special Forces (Kopassus) member First Sergeant Santoso, stationed with the Kandang Menjangan Kartosuro unit in the city of Solo. The murder allegedly committed by the four shooting victims took place on March 19, 2013 at Hugo's Café in the nearby city of Yogyakarta.

Prison condition on the visit: The prison's chief warden, Mr. Sukamto was inside the prison with many other officers. The prison was also guarded by members of the Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) Unit. In attendance were also journalists from various media outlets and some residents who had gathered near the entrance of the prison. The report below is arranged by interview and observation of the location.

II. Facts of the Tragedy

The attack occurred on Saturday, March 23, 2013 at 12:30 am, yet the story begins on Friday, March 22 when the prison accepted 11 (eleven) detainees from the Yogyakarta Regional Police. Afterwards, officials decided that only 4 (four) of the 11 (eleven) detainees were the alleged perpetrators of the murder case in Hugo's café.

On March 22, the prison called the regional police to inquire about the reason behind the transfer of the four detainees. Their stated reason for making the call was that they had a troubling feeling that this could be a repetition of the OKU tragedy (Note: The OKU tragedy occurred in South Sumatra on March 7, 2013. It was a violent conflict between members of the Indonesian army (TNI) and the OKU police. The army allegedly burned down a police headquarters station and violently assaulted several police officers.) A head unit in the regional police responded to the prison's call and stated that the regional police would provide backup security for the prison.

It was Chief Warden Sukamoto's understanding at the time that the security backup was already in place as of that time on Friday. He surmised that: "The regional police may already have sent up intelligence units."

In reality, on Saturday, March 23, at 00.30 a.m., the prison was only guarded by eight people. Two of them were stationed at the on-duty desk.

At 12.30 a.m. one person came to the gate that separated the on-duty desk and the yard outside the prison. He displayed a letter from the regional police and stated that he wanted to coordinate the transport of four detainees who had been transferred to the prison that morning.

The two desk officers called the head of security. The head of security came to inquire about the situation and the gate was opened. After the gate was opened, a group of gunmen forced their way into the prison. They wore street clothes – some of them wore jeans. Witnesses estimate that the group contained about 17 individuals armed with assault rifles; masks covered their faces. The masked individuals pointed guns, took hostages, and threatened to bomb the prison.

Some of the Prison officers said that they did not know where new transfer detainees were being held. The officers were forced to confess by means of torture. Chief Warden Sukanto said that prison officers' blood was splattered in order to get the officers to talk. One officer finally confessed that he knew the cell of the new detainees. He stated that they were located in cell number 5A. The assailants forcibly removed the prison keys from the place where they were located and gave it to the officer who was made to take the assailants to the detainees' cell.

35 people were being detained within cell 5A. They were all asked who were the perpetrators of the Hugo's Café Murder. There was panic and uproar inside the cell until four of the detainees were segregated from the rest of the group. The four were executed inside the cell by gunshot, in front of the other 31 occupants of cell 5A. Only one assailant shot all four victims.

After the shooting, the shooter demanded that the prison officer show him the video surveillance (Closed Circuit Television, or CCTV) control room. The officer stated that he did not know the location of the control room; he said that only the Chief Warden knew of its location. The assailant demanded that the officer take him to the Chief Warden's office. The officer took the assailant/shooter to the office on the second floor to an office with a sign stating "Prison Chief Warden" on the door. The door to the office was forcibly destroyed and the CCTV recordings were taken.

Witness reports give us a better picture of the event. The entire attack lasted only 15 minutes. One of the assailants is believed to have served as timekeeper. Witnesses said that there was one person who repeatedly looked at his watch. Other witnesses stated that the assailants jumped over the prison fence because that night the fence was locked. The residents said that they heard the sound of shots during the night and saw 3 (three) trucks near the prison. It is assumed that the assailants numbered between a dozen and 17 people. This number is based on eyewitness reports. The neighborhood surrounding the prison is somewhat desolate. To the right of the prison there is only a large house with an empty gap of dirt or soil between the prison and that house. On the left side there is an empty space, like a garden. In front of the prison there are two unfinished houses. There are no street lamps on the road to brighten the night.

The attack harmed Cebongan Prison personnel and prison facilities. 8 officers were injured as a result of the attacks. They were taken hostage, tortured, and forcibly made to take the assailants to the detainees' cell and the Chief Warden's Office that contained the video surveillance recordings. Two officers suffered serious injuries and 4 detainees were shot. State property was also damaged during the attack.

III. Conclusions

First, the prison was attacked with the apparent goal of murdering the 4 detainees alleged to have murdered Special Forces (Kopassus) First Sergeant Santoso. This looks like a revenge killing.

Second, a series of violent acts were committed against prison officers.

Third, the attack was well planned. For example, the assailants had already prepared a “letter” from the Regional Police, the tasks of the assault were divided between 17 separated assailants, and the attackers were monitoring the time as the assault was carried out.

Fourth, the assailants had information about the prison’s location and utilized weapons that cannot be owned by ordinary civilians.

Fifth, the police made a strange policy decision when they sent the accused to the prison only 3 days after First Sgt. Santoso’s death and without providing security backup to the prison. It was evident when the attack happened that there were no police officers on location. Upon information and belief, it is not common for the police to transfer accused criminals so quickly. Usually the transfer of accused criminals is conducted by the prosecutor’s office because they do not have enough room.

IV. Recommendations

First, there should be a legal inquiry into the cruel and systematic murder and torture, particularly focused on:

1. The revenge motive
2. The use of combat weapons, esp. firearms and vehicles.
3. The mobilization of the armed forces

Second, there should be an investigation into the Yogyakarta Regional Police, particularly related to the following facts:

1. The detainees were transferred within 3 (three) days to prison
2. The absence of security backup to the prison after the detainees were transferred
3. Did the Yogyakarta Regional Police have knowledge about the execution plan of the 4 detainees?

Third, the Ministry of Law and Justice must ensure the health and security of Cebongan Prison officers as a result of this tragedy.