Indonesians protesting election law changes clash with police

AFP- parliament in Jakarta to protest proposed changes to election rules (BAY ISMOYO)
Indonesian protesters clashed with police in the capital on Thursday after the outgoing president’s allies moved to revise election rules, which critics said would allow him to install a political dynasty.

Parliament was preparing on Thursday to reverse a constitutional court order over candidate age requirements for upcoming regional polls, superseding a ruling that had made President Joko Widodo’s youngest son, 29-year-old Kaesang Pangarep, ineligible.

With thousands of protesters clamouring outside parliament, lawmakers said they delayed Thursday’s session before parliament’s deputy speaker later said the proposed changes would be dropped for this election period, in an apparent U-turn.

“It was officially decided that the revision of the Regional Election Law could not proceed. This means that the revision today was cancelled,” Sufmi Dasco Ahmad, deputy speaker of the House of Representatives, told reporters after the clashes.

The protesters lit tyres on fire and set off firecrackers while chanting slogans against Widodo, who is more popularly known as Jokowi.

A handful of the demonstrators knocked down a fence around parliament and tried to enter the complex, but police dispersed them with water cannon and tear gas, an AFP journalist saw.

“I came here because my country is on the verge of destruction. These lawmakers have scammed the people,” 64-year-old protester Muhammad Saleh Zakaria told AFP.

The uproar comes months after Widodo’s eldest son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, 36, was elected as Indonesia’s youngest vice president, stoking nepotism accusations.

Protests were also reported in Yogyakarta, Makassar, Bandung and Semarang.

Jokowi’s office tried to calm the unrest.

“The government hopes that there will be no disinformation or slander that could trigger chaos and violence,” palace spokesman Hasan Nasbi told reporters.

Jokowi’s youngest son, Kaesang, has been tipped for an influential post in November’s regional contest. The president’s allies have been trying to find a way around the current minimum age of 30 for candidates by making it applicable by the time of inauguration. Kaesang turns 30 in December.

Experts said Indonesians were becoming disillusioned with Jokowi and his attempts to retain political influence.

“The people are angry at the ongoing manipulation of our democratic system,” said Ika Idris, a Jakarta-based political expert at Monash University’s data and democracy research hub.

“It happened repeatedly and fast, there is a clear desire to… extend power.”

Jokowi is also accused of helping to install his replacement, defence chief Prabowo Subianto, who will take office in October.

AFP