

Indonesian parliament takes a step toward removing President Abdurrahman Wahid

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The lower house of the Indonesian parliament, the DPR, voted on Monday to initiate investigations into President Abdurrahman Wahid's involvement in two alleged cases of corruption and into whether he lied when asked to explain the sacking of two government ministers in April. The decision is the first step in a process that could lead to his removal from office.

Ali Yahya, a spokesman for Golkar, the ruling party under the former Suharto dictatorship, told the *Jakarta Post*: "The House will likely call for a special session of the MPR [the parliamentary upper house] to impeach the president if he is found to have been deceitful over the sacking of the two ministers and involved in the two scandals."

The move against Wahid is further evidence of the growing alliance between the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) of Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Golkar. The two parties control 273 of the 500 DPR seats. The vote for investigations was supported by most of the Islamic-based parties that worked to install Wahid as president 10 months ago, including the Reform faction parties led by MPR chairman Amien Rais.

Wahid and the major parties have come into increasing conflict over economic policy and the failure of his 10-month presidency to stem the growth of separatist tendencies in various regions of Indonesia. As tensions have risen, so has agitation over the two scandals. One, dubbed "Bulogate," centres on Wahid's masseur, who convinced an official at the government agency Bulog that the president wanted \$US4 million for charity work in Aceh province. The second scandal concerns \$2 million given privately to Wahid by the Sultan of Brunei, also ostensibly for charity work in Aceh.

The threat of impeachment over the scandals was used in the lead-up to last month's MPR session to force Wahid to make major concessions to the PDI-P and Golkar. Wahid announced at the MPR that he would effectively confine himself to a largely ceremonial role, delegate the day-to-day running of the government to Megawati and appoint a new cabinet.

The investigations are a direct response to the new cabinet announced by Wahid last week. Rather than appointing figures acceptable to the PDI-P and Golkar, Wahid has attempted to retain a large measure of control over the government by placing people loyal to him into the main ministerial positions.

Unlike Wahid's first 35-member "cabinet of national unity" formed last October, the new 26-member cabinet does not accommodate the major parties. It is dominated by Wahid's associates, members of his National Awakening Party (PKB),

members of smaller Islamic parties and non-political specialists.

Only two cabinet members have connections to the PDI-P and only one to Golkar. Golkar's Marsuki Darusman retained the post of Attorney General but has been excluded from the cabinet.

Megawati has been left to preside over a cabinet that was immediately christened "all the President's men" in the Indonesian media and has only been given the power to sign legislation agreed to by Wahid.

While those behind her discussed their response to the cabinet, Megawati refused to attend the press conference when it was announced. Her closest economics advisor, Laksamana Sukardi, who Wahid sacked in April and the PDI-P wanted back in the cabinet, declared that "[Megawati's] views were not considered".

Bambang Sudibyo, an associate of Amien Rais who was sacked as Finance Minister in the reshuffle, branded it "a crony cabinet". Rais stated that Wahid had "wasted his last chance," and added: "I cannot hope too much from the new cabinet due in part to its failure to accommodate major political parties like Golkar, the PDI-P and others."

The chairman of the Golkar faction in the DPR, Syamsul Mu'arif, told the *Jakarta Post* that Wahid was "positioning Golkar as an opposition party".

The political parties have focused most of their condemnation on Wahid's new economic ministers.

The new Finance Minister, Prijadi Praptosuhardjo, was refused positions as the head of a state-owned bank on the grounds he was "not fit and proper". A banker surrounded by corruption allegations, Prijadi's main qualification for one of the most important cabinet posts appears to be that he is a personal friend of Wahid.

The key position of Coordinating Minister for the Economy went to Rizal Ramli, an economist and an advisor to Wahid. While he worked briefly in the Finance Ministry during the Suharto period, he is known as an opponent of Golkar. Ramli has generally spoken for and appealed to business layers that were to some extent hindered by the nepotistic relations that dominated under the Suharto dictatorship. He has denounced "crony capitalism" and called for measures to open up avenues for small to medium Indonesian businesses.

He achieved a certain reputation in Indonesia during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis as a critic of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Suharto and Habibie governments. His primary criticism of the IMF, however, was that it prematurely pushed

through the restructuring of Indonesia's banking system, producing a shortage of credit and blocking the ability of Indonesian investors to take advantage of the bankruptcy of Suharto-sponsored companies.

Ramli has pledged to collaborate closely with the IMF in completing the restructuring of the country's financial system and accelerating the privatisation of state-owned companies. The Indonesia government's Bank Restructuring Agency (IBRA) controls some \$70 billion in bankrupt companies and assets. Major state-owned assets, such as the telecom and airline corporations, are yet to be auctioned off.

He has also given voice to concerns in ruling circles over the country's explosive social tensions. With 30 million unemployed and 80 million living beneath the poverty line, Ramli has already called for the renegotiation of aspects of the IMF agreements in areas of social policy.

IMF spokesman John Dodsworth made clear the institution would work with the new economics team and praised Ramli as a "very capable and practical person". A new Junior Ministry for the Restructuring of the National Economy was given to Cacuk Sudarjanto, a technocrat and head of the IBRA, who has been working closely with the IMF.

The main security ministry, Coordinating Minister for Political, Social and Security Affairs, went to retired general Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. While there has been no overt criticism of Yudhoyono from political figures, the PDI-P and Golkar have reason to be suspicious of him.

Yudhoyono recently joined Wahid's Islamic-based PKB and has become one of the president's key advisors. Unlike many military figures, he has made little attempt to ingratiate himself with the PDI-P since Suharto's fall. He is sometimes described as a "reformer" because of an interview in 1998 in which he supported ending the political role of the military. Wahid has used Yudhoyono as his negotiator in attempting to pressure Suharto into handing over some of the assets his family built up during the 32-year dictatorship.

In 1996, Yudhoyono, as commander of the Jakarta military garrison, allegedly directed the violent assault to end the occupation by Megawati's supporters of the offices of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), one of the three legal parties under the old regime. His appointment was condemned by the Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association chairman Hendari, who stated: "It is now doubtful if he will ever undergo legal investigation".

The other major change in the security ministries attracted broader condemnation. The new Defence Minister Muhammad Mahfud is a constitutional lawyer with no military background, expertise or ties and as such will be little more than a civilian figurehead for Yudhoyono. According to Mahfud, Wahid made clear he should "learn" from the coordinating minister. He replaces Juwono Sudarsono, a civilian military specialist who had extensive links to Suharto and the army hierarchy. Sudarsono suffered a heart attack earlier in the year and was removed from the cabinet on health grounds.

During May 1998, one of the central demands of the anti-Suharto movement was that the political role and influence of the

military be ended. Figures like Wahid, Megawati and Rais postured as reformers and voiced agreement with the democratic aspirations of Indonesian students and workers. In his latest cabinet, Wahid has significantly strengthened the role of the military without attracting any criticism in the press or parliament.

Yudhoyono stated this week that economic policies that affect "social stability" would be jointly handled by his department, reinforcing the ability of the military to have a direct say in political and economic affairs. A new Junior Ministry for the Acceleration of Development in Indonesia's Eastern Regions, has also been placed under the direction of the security ministry. Furthermore the implementation of autonomy arrangements in provinces such as Aceh and Irian Jaya will be supervised by ex-general Surjadi Sudirdja, the Minister of Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy.

Given that the size of the cabinet has shrunk, the military have proportionately retained their representation. Besides Yudhoyono and Sudirdja, the two other retired generals who were in the former cabinet kept their posts and key portfolios, with Luhut Panjaitan in Industry and Trade and Agum Gumelar holding Transportation and Telecommunications. The representative of the Navy, retired admiral Freddy Numeri, did not retain a position. The Chief of the Armed Forces, Admiral Widodo, will no longer attend cabinet meetings.

Despite its criticisms of the cabinet, the PDI-P acted quickly to dispel rumours that Megawati would resign and withdraw from the government. If Wahid is constitutionally removed over the corruption allegations, his title and executive powers pass to the vice-president for the remaining four years of his term in office. Megawati swore in the cabinet last Saturday and, as the parliament set in motion investigations, began meeting with the new ministers in her new capacity as the overseer of the day-to-day operations of government.

Impeachment proceedings, however, would take months to initiate and some among Wahid's critics are apparently not prepared to wait. On Monday, the weekly *Gatra* magazine added fuel to the anti-Wahid campaign by publishing a lurid claim by 38-year old Aryanti Sipebu that the married Wahid had an affair with her in the mid-1990s, while he was the head of the mass Islamic organisation, Nadhatul Ulema.



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