

President cleans house in latest Cabinet changes



By Eugene V Flynn

On May 7, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono 'cleaned house' in carrying out his second limited Cabinet reshuffle since he took office in October 2004.

Among those removed from office were Justice Minister Hamid Awaluddin and State Secretary Yusril Ihza Mahendra, himself a former Justice Minister. The Attorney-General (a non-Cabinet position), Abdul Rahman Saleh, was also replaced. The sacked officials had been implicated in a recent controversial case involving allegations that they helped Mr Suharto's youngest son, Hutomo 'Tommy' Mandala Putra, reclaim control of US\$10 million of allegedly tainted funds while he was serving time for ordering the murder of a Supreme Court justice.

Although no evidence of corruption has been forthcoming, observers were outraged at what appeared to be at least a blatant abuse of power that raised serious questions about the integrity of the President's Cabinet. President Yudhoyono was voted into office in 2002 as the first directly elected president in Indonesian history, largely on a platform of anti-corruption reform.

Other changes in the Cabinet included newly appointed Ministers for Transportation, Regional Development, State Enterprises and Communications & Information. Notably, the economic team of the administration was left in tact. The most controversial Cabinet member to retain his post was the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare, Aburizal Bakrie, whose company Lapindo is blamed for an ongoing mudflow disaster in East Java that has displaced over 13,000 residents.

Perhaps the best signal that the President has not given up on his campaign against corruption is his selection of the new Attorney General, Hendarman Supandji. Mr Supandji was serving as a Attorney General for Special Crimes when he was appointed by the President to head the Coordinating Team to Eradicate Corruption Crimes. Established by presidential decree in May 2005

the team consisted of 45 people with a mandate of two years. Its members were made up of prosecutors, police officers, and auditors from the Financial Development Controller (BPKP). Supandji's initial caseload included 21 major corruption cases involving 16 state-owned enterprises, four government departments, and corruption within the State Palace.

Mr Supandji successfully obtained convictions against the CEO of state-owned Bank Mandiri, a former Minister of Religious Affairs, and the former Director of the state-owned insurance company PT Jamsostek and is given credit for the ongoing corruption investigation involving a former head of the State Logistics Bureau (Bulog) and members of his family. Reports indicate that during Supandji's term as team leader, nearly 4 trillion rupiah (US\$ 444 million) in stolen or misappropriated state funds were recovered. He has publicly stated that one of his priorities as Attorney General will be

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to reopen the cases of Bank Indonesia Liquidity Support debtors now hiding abroad who siphoned off hundreds of millions of dollars in the aftermath of the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis.

While Mr Supandji had his share of detractors as the head of the Coordinating Team to Eradicate Corruption Crimes, his track record is far superior to most of his peers and stands in sharp contrast to most if not all of his predecessors.

Despite the President's relatively weak political position making him susceptible to pressures from his coalition partners, the most recent Cabinet changes send a loud and clear signal that he will continue to root out corruption to the best of his ability. That alone is a refreshing and welcomed message to receive from a head of the Indonesian government.

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