Parliament wants them investigated over Bank Century bailout

BY SALIM OSMAN & WAHYUDI SOERATMAJDA
INDONESIA-CORRESPONDENTS

JAKARTA: Indonesia's Parliament voted late last night to conduct a criminal investigation of two of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's top reformers over the Bank Century bailout.

Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati and Vice-President Boediono have come under scrutiny over their decision to rescue the bank in 2008, highlighting a bitter political dispute over reform.

The vote came after midnight and followed more than eight hours of unsuccessful lobbying by Dr Yudhoyono's Democratic Party to reach a compromise with the opposition camp over the issue.

In the end, Parliament cast 322 votes in favour of a recommendation to launch a criminal probe of the two Cabinet ministers, to just 212 votes against it.

The Finance Minister and Vice-President were expected to keep their jobs, analysts said, but the move dealt a heavy blow to Dr Yudhoyono and his ruling party.

It reflected the Democratic Party's inability to control its coalition partners, even though they held 75 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives.

Analyst Burhanuddin Mubti of the Indonesian Survey Institute said: "There is a likelihood that there will be a shake-up in his ruling coalition as well as in the Cabinet."

He said that he expected Dr Yudhoyono to defend his two officials "at all costs" even though the President would let the legal process take its course.

"But it's still a long shot that Dr Boediono would be impeached because of the legal process involved and the numbers game," he said. "The Democratic Party has enough numbers to hinder the impeachment process."

The House debate was over the final report by a parliamentary inquiry into the bank scandal.

It paved Parliament two options.

The first would have approved the bailout as justified to avoid a financial crisis. It criticised the way the central bank and other authorities handled the bailout of Bank Century, but did not place the blame on the Finance Minister or the Vice-President for any wrongdoing and did not recommend action be taken against them.

That option was supported by the Democratic Party and its ally the National Awakening Party.

But it was the second option — calling for a criminal probe on Dr Boediono and Dr Sri Mulyani — that won when put to a vote.

It led to an embarrassing development for the President, two of his party's coalition partners, Golkar and Prosperous Justice Party, joined three opposition parties to vote in favour of the recommendation for a criminal probe.

The Democratic Party tried its best to stall the voting.

Well aware that the numbers were stacked against it, it tried to offer the House a third option that said the bailout had legal problems but stopped short of calling for a criminal probe of Dr Boediono and Dr Sri Mulyani.

But the House voted against the introduction of a third option.

"It's unconstitutional to present another option which was not recommended by the inquiry committee at a plenary session," said Mr Tutiwati Yahya of Golkar.

Another legislator, Mr Andi Rahmat, said: "The gap is so wide between the two recommendations. It is almost impossible to find a common ground."

So it was back to square one — with legislators back to voting on the two options presented in the morning.

In the final vote, 322 voted in favour of an impeachment of the two ministers, 212 against and one abstained.

By Sejun Thomas

A TOUGH but gracious opponent who is generous and truly committed to clients.

Lawyers who are familiar with Senior Counsel Sundareesh Menon, who takes over as Singapore's Attorney-General in October, yesterday described him as a man with many qualities that make him the perfect choice for the job.

Senior Counsel Thio Shen Yi, head of litigation at TSMP Law Corporation, said: "While he has formidable legal skills, it is the passion and commitment he brings to fighting for his clients that is truly inspiring.

"As a professional, he is a tough but gracious opponent, and I also know that he is generous with people he feels are deserving of help. These are all excellent qualities that he will bring when he starts his term as the new A-G."

Added noted criminal lawyer Subhas Anandan: "He is known internationally as a good arbitrator, and you cannot get a reputation like that unless you are a very fair person."

Mr Menon, 47, is currently the managing partner of Rajah & Tann, one of the Big Four law firms here. He assumed the position in August last year.

He will continue in that capacity until he leaves in September.

In a statement last night, a spokesman for the firm said: "The firm warmly congratulates Mr Menon on the appointment and wishes to express a debt of gratitude to him for his leadership, vision and immense contributions.

"He graduated with first-class honours from the National University of Singapore and later obtained a master's degree from Harvard Law School in the United States."

"He has been practising in the field of commercial arbitration and litigation for more than 20 years and is on the rise as one of the world's foremost arbitrators."

"Chambers Global, the leading international guide to lawyers, named him among the top 40 international arbitration lawyers in the world in 2006."

"He is currently the deputy chairman of the Singapore International Arbitration Centre and is a member of the Senate of the Singapore Academy of Law."

He is also a member of the advisory board of the Faculty of Law in the Singapore Management University.

Mr Menon has also served a one-year term as judicial commissioner in the High Court, a stint he has described as the "highlight of my two decades in law."

During his term, he heard several high-profile cases, including the National Kidney Foundation's civil suit against its former directors.

The foundation's new board had sued the four ex-directors, including former chief T.T. Durai and former chairman Richard Yong, for $12 million in damages, accusing them of breaching their duties to the charity.

The case ended when the ex-directors threw in the towel.