

31/05/2001

Aye to impeach Gus Dur (HL)

Abdul Razak Ahmad in Jakarta

INDONESIA'S Parliament yesterday evening passed a motion requesting the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) to convene a special session to impeach President Abdurrahman Wahid, as massive protests erupted in the capital and several provinces in Java.

With the decision, the MPR is now empowered to conduct the session anytime within the next two months.

The 500-seat Parliament or House of Representatives (DPR) and the President are considered equals under Indonesia's laws and cannot cancel each other out.

Only the MPR, the highest legislative body in Indonesia, can remove the President at the DPR's suggestion.

The DPR's members voted largely in support of the motion, with 365 of the 500 members expressing their support to proceed with impeachment proceedings.

They comprise seven of the 10 factions in the DPR which met yesterday.

Two factions opposed the move while the security forces abstained from declaring their stand. Abdurrahman's PKB party staged a walkout, refusing to take part in the voting.

The DPR proceedings and subsequent protests that broke out nationwide overshadowed the inauguration of the G-15 Summit which also took place yesterday.

Abdurrahman, who was present at the G-15 ceremonies yesterday, kept mum about the developments.

Yahya Staquf, his spokesman, when approached, said that despite the developments, Abdurrahman, also known as Gus Dur, had no intention of stepping down.

He refused to say whether the President would issue a decree imposing a state of national civil emergency as a response to the DPR's efforts to impeach him.

Among the five world leaders present in Jakarta to attend the summit are Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe.

Despite tight security, thousands of marching Abdurrahman supporters were seen passing the Hilton Hotel in Jakarta, where the opening ceremonies of the summit were being held, on their way to the DPR complex.

The 27,000-strong security force presence in Jakarta armed with live ammunition erected a circular security cordon around the DPR building, and warned protesters that they would shoot troublemakers who entered the DPR compound.

Security forces also gave protesters a 6pm (7pm Malaysian time) deadline to disperse peacefully from the vicinity of the DPR.

The deadline was met and Abdurrahman supporters were seen leaving the area after the deadline, and proceeded to march to the presidential palace.

Protests also flared up in Abdurrahman's stronghold of East Java, with one protester shot dead by security forces in fierce clashes which took place in the town of Pasuruan, police said.

The army beefed up its presence in the East Java province and sent in airborne troop reinforcements, but to little avail.

As of 7pm, protests had broken out in Surabaya. Main roads leading into another east Java town, Malang, was blocked by protesters in the worst of

the protests.

The DPR meeting began at 9am. Many representatives of the factions pushing for impeachment attacked the President for threatening the DPR in his recent statements.

Specifically, they criticised Abdurrahman for claiming that six of the country's provinces would declare their independence from the republic if impeachment proceedings went ahead, and that there would be "national disintegration" and mass unrest.

They said such statements were "irresponsible" and "unbecoming" of the President of a republic to make as his responsibility was to maintain the integrity and unity of the country.

The push to impeach the embattled President was led by the 153-seat faction of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI-P), the party of Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Also in favour of the move to begin the impeachment proceedings was the Golkar faction, the second largest faction in the DPR with 120 seats.

The only faction that protested the motion was Abdurrahman's National Awakening (PKB) faction.

The 38-member army and police (TNI/Polri) faction abstained from voting.

The session began with a presidential spokesman delivering a reply to the House on the second memorandum of censure against the President over his alleged involvement in two financial scandals, dubbed "Buloggate" and "Bruneigate".

In his reply, Abdurrahman said the allegations against him were not clear, and that he had replied to them earlier.

Abdurrahman's reply was followed by a letter, read out by an official from the Attorney-General's Office (AGO), which said that investigations into the two cases by the AGO had "so far found no evidence" which could prove the President's involvement.

Later approached by reporters, Attorney-General Marzuki Darusman said the cases involving Abdurrahman were not closed and were still being investigated.

"We have merely diverted our investigations on the President," he said.