

**Cleaning Up Indonesia's Legislature**  
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**By Our Correspondent**

*First step: put the girls in jilbabs*

It is fair to say that Indonesia's House of Representatives, the national legislature, has an image problem.

Already 33 members of a single committee of the 530-person legislature have been sent to prison for accepting bribes in a single scandal. That involved votes sold in 2004 for a total of US\$2.3 million to reelect as Indonesia's deputy central bank governor Miranda Goeltom, who is now under investigation by authorities.

There could well be more to come. A total of 51 members of the commission who voted for Goeltom's appointment have been named as suspects. That doesn't even count the legions of lawmakers caught up in Indonesia's biggest scandal, over the construction of an athletes' village for the Southeast Asian Games which were held in Palembang and Jakarta last November. That scandal appears set to wreck the Democratic Party headed by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Among others ensnared are Anas Urbamingrum, the head of the party; former youth and sports minister Andi Mallarangeng, former party treasurer Muhammad Nazaruddin and a long list of other lawmakers.

Since it started operating in late 2003, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has investigated, prosecuted and achieved a 100-percent conviction rate in 86 cases of bribery and graft related to government procurements and budgets.

The legislature normally manages to pass perhaps a half-dozen bills a year at best. It was listed in the 2011 Transparency International index as Indonesia's most corrupt institution in a country ranked well down the world's list. One of its major 2011 goals was to cut back on the power of the KPK to do investigations. Clearly, the house of representatives, as the body is also known, needs an image makeover. Its answer, besides trying to get rid of the KPK?

Make sure its female staff members dress modestly.

The Household Affairs Committee announced Monday that it had written a new regulation designed to allay the worries of religiously conservative male house members who have complained that they have been embarrassed by the clothing worn by some staff members, never mind that one of the members of one of the most conservative political parties was caught a few months ago, watching pornography on an electronic device while sitting in a legislative session and was forced to resign from office.

Deputy House Speaker Pramono Anung told reporters the new regulation "has become necessary to prevent unwanted incidents. Polite dress is also good for House members." The lawmaker is a member of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. "We're improving the image of the House, little by little. My staff are mostly male, and those who are female wear jilbab," or head scarves. But some lawmakers are not convinced of the need for the new regulation.

“There are plenty of other steps that could improve the image of the House. For example, the Speaker could stop wasting his breath on counter-productive topics,” said Bambang Soesatyo of the House commission that handles legal affairs. Bambang went on to suggest that “sexiness” was in the eye of the beholder.

“The limits of ‘sexy’ are relative to people’s respective values,” Bambang said.

“Deciding what constitutes sexy clothing isn’t as simple as measuring a miniskirt. It could include a tight blouse, a couple of undone buttons, a flirtatious manner and so on.”

The new rule would be impossible to implement, he said, citing for example the possible ban on short skirts.

“Maybe wearing a long skirt but putting cleavage on show would be just as flirtatious. Those things could all be said to be tempting,” he said.

Masruchah, the deputy chairwoman of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) said the ban was inappropriate and perhaps unconstitutional.

“If the issue is people’s mode of dress, that’s a private matter and one that can’t be controlled by the state,” Masruchah said. “So I think that if this is made into a rule, it will be inconsistent with the constitution.”

“The House of Representatives doesn’t need to be worrying about miniskirts. As far as I can see, [staffers’ dress] has been completely normal,” said Golkar lawmaker Nurul Arifin. “No one is over the top. Please, gentlemen, don’t have such lecherous minds.”

However, former models-turned-politicians Venna Melinda and Noura Dian Hartarony said they support the regulation. There has been no word from Democratic Party lawmaker Angelina Sondakh, a 33-year-old former Miss Indonesia and glamorous party figure who was implicated by Nazaruddin in the athletes village scandal, saying he had heard her tell an internal party fact-finding team in May that she had accepted Rp9 billion from Mallarangeng and his ministry’s secretary, Wafid Muharram, for the athletes’ village project.

“If we respect the institution [the House], we must respect the regulation. I will really approve such regulation,” Vena Melinda said on Tuesday morning. “I actually don’t understand whom they’re trying to address to; they could be guests, staffers or personal assistants. But the rule is made to be obeyed,” added the former Ms. Indonesia and soap opera actress.

The House's Household Affairs Committee has yet to decide what types of clothing will fall under the ban, but Refrizal, deputy chairman of the committee, said that miniskirts should not be allowed in the parliamentary building complex. Several lawmakers and a women's rights commission have spoken out against the move, calling the regulation unconstitutional.

But lawmakers Vena and Noura, a former model, are fine with the ban, explaining that the rule could help form “the character of the nation.”

“Children these days are never taught of how they should dress in accordance to the places.

Such regulations need to be encouraged. Let's become a cultured nation," Noura said, adding she had seen a number of staffers wearing miniskirts and showing cleavage at work.

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