

IN BRIEF: POLITICAL

With one eight-hour ROV mission costing around US\$1 million, salvage experts have estimated that the search could cost up to US\$20 million in total, an amount the airline was initially unwilling to pay despite being held responsible for the recovery operation by the government.

Since then inaction over the crash has seen the influential US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) downgrade the country's accident oversight rating and former minister of transportation Hatta Radjasa's replacement in a cabinet reshuffle.

A member of the original ad hoc team investigating the crash and editor of Indonesia's air industry magazine *Angkasa*, Dudi Sudibyo, believes new minister Jusman Syafi'i Djamil is making the crash a priority to restore the nation's damaged reputation.

"I believe there is a serious desire by the new minister to do something about investigating the cause of the Adam Air crash, and I have a strong feeling that we will soon hear about developments regarding the search for the black box," Sudibyo said.

However, he is less sure about who will fund the salvage operation. "First of all, to my knowledge the government has no budget for this, that is why it will take time, also Adam Air has no budget for this," Sudibyo said.

Suherman was unwilling to talk about the cost of the recovery except to say that "Adam Air will leave these things to the government. Actually what I can say is that we are trying our best to fund the operation, but we still don't know what the cost might end up being in the end. The company has never experienced this kind of operation before, and the difficulty factor in this kind of investigation is high."

The CEO assured travelers that the airline was taking "serious steps" to receive a category one rating on safety from the Indonesian government. The company has also hired an international consultant team to ensure the airline would reach International Air Traffic Authority safety standards "within 18 months", Suherman said.

Promises promises

As the dust settles on Jakarta's political scene after the recent reshuffle, the newest members of President Yudhoyono's cabinet are beginning to find their feet. Along with taking possession of their government-issued black Volvo cars, the latest additions have been busy giving interviews about their intentions for the next two and a-half years they are in office.

Some of the ministers seem set on shaking up their departments as a first step. Both Andi Mattalata, the new minister of justice and human rights and Sofyan Djalil, the minister for state-owned enterprises, have indicated that changes are afoot for some of the senior civil servants working in their ministerial departments. Others, such as Mohammad Nuh, the minister of

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information and communications and Lukman Edy, the minister for the development of disadvantaged regions, have announced their intention to continue with the departmental structure and policies of their predecessors.

Of all the new ministers, Sofyan Djalil began his new job with the most fighting talk. At his inauguration, he told the heads of state-owned enterprises who had gathered to hear him speak, that “as minister for state-owned enterprises, I am just the coordinator. If there are any blunders, the ones who will go to jail will be you, not us [at the department].” He also stated at the same event that state-owned enterprises would no longer be used as money-making machines for political parties under his watch.

Besides such rhetoric, the main point of interest for Djalil’s stewardship of SOEs is his attitude towards privatisation. Before his official inauguration, some observers had doubted Djalil’s commitment to selling off public interests because of recent regulations he issued as minister for communications, which had a distinctly nationalist flavour. One particularly controversial ruling prohibited Indonesian advertising firms from hiring foreign talent.

Djalil attempted to sooth any market anxieties by baldly stating that “personally I am not against privatisation.” He also went on to say that he would expedite the sale of three major SOEs, which have already been approved by the national House of Representatives: Bank BNI, the toll road company Jasa Marga and Wijaya Karya, a construction and manufacturing firm. Otherwise, Djalil’s big idea for SOEs is to subject them to the same financial reporting and accounting practices as public companies.

Meanwhile, priorities for the Ministry of Justice, according to Andi Mattalata, will include an overhaul of immigration procedures, following the many public complaints about the service, and a review of prisons, which he says are grossly overcrowded. He also promised a thorough internal investigation of those within the department who may have assisted the previous minister of justice to channel funds from a UK bank to convicted murderer Tommy Soeharto.

Other statements of intent came from the new minister of transport, who will prioritise the renewal of the national railway network, “since it transports over 90 million passengers a year.” As for the much-maligned airline industry, minister Jusman Djamil promised that those companies which did not manage to pull themselves out of the worst “category-three” safety status – non-compliance with most international standards – would soon be “liquidated.”

In his new role as state secretary, the man who previously held the job of transport minister, Hatta Radjasa, claimed he would concentrate on opening up the State Secretariat’s budget to auditors, while the new Minister of Communications and Information, Muhammad Nur, will focus on developing a computer network linking government departments.

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But the post with the widest potential ramifications is that of the new attorney general, now filled by Hendarman Supandji. Until now, much of Supandji's professional life has been about pursuing corruption cases, and some activists are concerned that his focus on graft could see outstanding human rights cases ignored. Perhaps to placate such fears, Supandji spent his first few days in office meeting the families of students shot during a peaceful demonstration for democracy in 1998 and making statements about his plan to follow up the Munir murder.

However, Indonesia being what it is, corruption must also feature heavily in Supandji's schedule. According to his statements to the press, recovering funds from the 1998 Indonesian Bank Liquidity Fund (BLBI) fiasco is one priority. The BLBI scandal enabled a handful of well-connected businessmen to make off with billions of dollars in state money aimed at supporting the banking sector during the 1998 economic crisis. According to Supandji, other priorities include speeding up the cases against several Soeharto foundations and testing the new extradition treaty with Singapore to bring corruption suspects back onto Indonesian soil.

Accountability is a concept which is far from embedded in Indonesian politics, and only time will tell whether the performance of these politicians will match up to their initial grand statements. But just by going on record they have left a mark against which their performances can be judged at the end of their terms in 2009.

All in a flap

On May 25, Indonesia signed a document promising to send bird flu samples to the World Health Organization (WHO) after five months of refusing to share the viruses with the international agency. The drawn-out dispute has put the spotlight on developing countries' access to life-saving drugs. It has also led to accusations that the government is playing politics with a life-and-death issue.

At the centre of the dispute is the WHO's influenza surveillance program. In existence for more than 50 years, it operates on a principle of free sharing, with countries sending flu viruses from around the world to the WHO's partner laboratories. Those strains deemed to be important new variations are passed on without charge to vaccine manufacturers.

However, Indonesian Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari has questioned the fairness of such a system, which sees drug companies make commercial vaccines that are often too expensive for people in poor countries to buy. To draw attention to the problem, Indonesia stopped sending bird flu samples to the agency in December, with health authorities in China following suit shortly afterwards. In February, Jakarta signed a preliminary deal with a unit of US company Baxter International to develop a bird flu vaccine. The deal gives the company exclusive rights to Indonesia's viruses in return for guaranteed supplies of the vaccine at a discounted price.

Around the same time, the health minister began advocating for a new virus