

## IN BRIEF: POLITICAL

---

In his first term Manan oversaw many controversial decisions at the Supreme Court, including the 2004 overturning of Akbar Tanjung's corruption conviction and the 2005 reduction of Tommy Soeharto's sentence from 10 to 15 years for murdering a judge. Manan also came under fire after accusations surfaced that he was involved in an attempt by Soeharto's half-brother Probosutedjo to bribe the Supreme Court into overturning his corruption conviction. The Supreme Court's disciplinary committee, under his charge, has also been under-performing, exonerating most of the judges that have been investigated for bribery allegations. However, he has been credited for his role in the creation of a far-reaching blueprint to reform the Supreme Court.

Whatever way Manan's performance is assessed to date, judicial watchdogs are dismayed by what they regard as the un-transparent process through which he was re-elected. He is the first Chief Justice to be directly elected by Supreme Court Judges under a 2004 law that was created to avoid the political overtones of his previous selection by the DPR.

In the long term, if the Judicial Commission retains its mandate to test Supreme Court judge candidates before they are submitted to the DPR then the direct election of the Chief Justice by those judges could begin to make more sense. In the meantime, however, one of the most important positions in judicial reform has just been decided by a tiny group of people who are themselves tainted by corruption.

### **Compensation to the poor for fuel price hikes**

The Jakarta-based research institute, SMERU, has released an independent report monitoring the government's compensation programme to the poor for the rises in fuel prices. The massive programme, granting Rp 100,000 per month to over 15 million families living below the poverty line, has so far cost the government in excess of Rp 5 trillion. It began in October last year and is expected to run until September 2006.

The report, which interviewed 93 recipient families and 30 non-recipient families in five towns around Indonesia, gives a cautiously positive evaluation of the programme, with some important qualifications.

The process for poor families to receive payment includes the use of a census undertaken by the Central Bureau of Statistics, the issuance of an identity card, and then the withdrawal of the funds from the nearest post office.

Most of the problems identified by the research centred on the granting of the identity cards by the census takers. For example, there were instances of the census takers registering their own families or friends for the grants even though they were not eligible, or asking families for payment of transport expenses.

Other leakages were detected from post office staff taking a cut of the payments, claiming that the recipients had to pay extra for administration charges. A trade also seems to have developed in the identity cards. Since recipients have to wait three months in between each Rp 300,000 payment, some who

**IN BRIEF: POLITICAL**

---

needed the money straight away, felt compelled to sell their cards to the highest bidder who would then use it when the next payment date was due.

There were also incidents of protesting and even riots in some areas by those families who felt that they should have met the criteria for receiving the payments, but hadn't received a card. The results of the report show that those who did receive payment were generally satisfied with the service.

Despite the many individual stories of mis-targeting and corruption, it seems as though this highly complex and wide-ranging undertaking has not suffered from the systematic state abuses which were apparent in previous government compensation efforts. For example, it stands favourable comparison with the social safety net programme in 1999 which was designed to distribute small grants to poor Indonesians to assuage the Asian Economic Crisis. At the time, accusations were rife that Golkar diverted US\$800 million from the fund for their election campaign. □