

Legislative inquiry into Bank Century scandal: Are they serious?

The hurly-burly among the 200-plus House of Representatives members seeking an inquiry into the Rp 6.7 trillion (US\$700,000) Bank Century bailout is putting their sincerity in defending the public interest in great doubt.

Now lawmakers from major political parties are divided on whether they should wait for the final report of the House-commissioned investigative audit by the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) to start the inquiry.

The BPK has said it may take until the end of the year to complete the job — some media outlets are reporting it will finish it this week — but some lawmakers eager to start the inquiry hope they can begin as soon as this weekend, although there has been no update from the BPK on a fixed date.

The BPK had submitted its interim report last month. Legislators in favor of the motion say the report indicates irregularities and criminal acts in the bailout that may implicate then Bank Indonesia governor Boediono, now the Vice President, and Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati.

They allege the government may have committed a crime when the fund earmarked to save the bank dramatically shot up from Rp 1.3 trillion, as approved by the House, to Rp 6.7 trillion.

Suspicious abounded that part of the fund may have been siphoned off for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's re-election campaign, an allegation that is given credence by his Democratic Party's defensive stance on the issue.

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A stronger sign of the petitioners' questionable commitment became more evident last week when senior legislators made it clear the inquiry would not end in the possible impeachment of Yudhoyono.

"It's only to accommodate the people's demand for government accountability of where the public funds have been spent," said Gayus Lumbuun, a senior legislator from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the opposition spearheading the petition.

Pessimism has also been voiced by Bambang Soesatyo, a Golkar legislator and one of those who initiated the call for an inquiry.

"We're ready to confront the tyranny of the majority and we have to be prepared to be disappointed," he said.

Suppose Lumbuun and Soesatyo's frame of mind is shared by other petitioners; it's only reasonable to believe the politicians' true agenda is for stronger bargaining power over the President and his ruling Democratic Party.

An enormous barrier lying ahead is the slew of laws that give the real decision-making power in House politics to the parties rather than to individual legislators.

This explains well why many of the inquiry motion supporters come

from parties allied with Yudhoyono's Democratic Party, such as the second-largest party, Golkar, and a host of Islamic-based parties — the United Development Party, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the National Mandate Party (PAN).

It is well known that none of the parties, perceived as among the most corrupt institutions, have demonstrated their commitment to the bitter war on corruption.

Worse, House legislators were the target of public outrage when they recently attempted to curtail the powers of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). And in the ensuing battle pitting the "gecko" (KPK) against the "crocodile" (police and the Attorney General's Office), no parties have lent their sup-

port to the antigraft body.

So why are some legislators so enthusiastic about tracing the Rp 6.7 trillion in taxpayer money the government spent bailing out Bank Century? Because of the gargantuan sum of money involved? Or is it because they have had a change of heart?

In the past, countless attempts to question the government on issues of public interest ended with the motion evaporating into thin air, leaving the people guessing what the politicians might have received in return.

In the meantime, the public can only hope the BPK has been doing its job without political pressure and will come out with an independent report.

Just sit back and watch the circus in the House over the coming days.