

Brazil's Senate removes President Dilma Rousseff from office for breaking fiscal laws

01/09/2016 22:17 by admin

Brasilia: In an impeachment process on Wednesday, Brazil's Senate voted to remove leftist President Dilma Rousseff from office for breaking budget laws.

Suspended Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff waves goodbye after her impeachment

The decision is the culmination of a yearlong fight that has paralysed Latin America's most powerful economy and exposed deep rifts among its people on everything from race relations to social spending.

Rousseff was on trial for breaking fiscal responsibility laws in her management of the federal budget, a charge she denies.Â

The Senate voted 61-20 to remove Rousseff from the office. A separate vote will be held on whether she will be barred from public office for eight years.

Vice President Michel Temer, once Dilma Rousseff's ally, has become her nemesis and will serve the rest of her term through 2018.

While Rousseff waited the Senate's final decision, her supporters gathered outside Alvorada Palace, banging drums and chanting slogans. They warned that her removal could lead to "civil unrest".

While Rousseff's ouster was widely expected, the decision was a key chapter in a colossal political struggle that is far from over.

Rousseff was Brazil's first female president, with a storied career that includes a stint as a Marxist guerrilla jailed and tortured in the 1970s during the country's dictatorship. She was accused of breaking fiscal laws in her management of the federal budget.

Opposition lawmakers, who made clear early on the only solution was getting her out of office, argued that the maneuvers masked yawning deficits from high spending and ultimately exacerbated the recession in a nation that had long enjoyed darling status among emerging economies.

Nonsense, Rousseff countered time and again, proclaiming her innocence up to the end. Previous presidents used similar accounting techniques, she noted, saying the push to remove her was a bloodless coup d'État by elites fuming over the populist policies of her Workers' Party the last 13 years.

The opposition needed 54 of the 81 senators to vote in favor for her to be removed. They got many more, winning in a landslide of sorts, 61-20.

"Today is the day that 61 men, many of them charged and corrupt, threw 54 million Brazilian votes in the garbage," Rousseff tweeted minutes after the decision.

Rousseff won re-election in 2014, garnering more than 54 million votes.

In the background of the entire fight was a wide-ranging investigation into billions of dollars in kickbacks at state oil company Petrobras. The two-year probe has led to the jailing of dozens of top businessmen and politicians from across

the political spectrum, and threatens many of the same lawmakers who voted to remove Rousseff.

Rousseff argued that many opponents just wanted her out of the way so they could save their own skins by tampering with the investigation, which Rousseff had refused to do.

Many lawmakers and Brazilians nationwide, meanwhile, blamed Rousseff for the graft even though she has never been personally implicated. They argued that she had to know, as many of the alleged bribes happened while her party was in power.

Rousseff's removal creates many questions that are not easily answered. Michel Temer, her vice president who became her nemesis, will serve out the remainder of her term through 2018. But Brazilians have already gotten a taste of Temer's leadership, and they are clearly unimpressed.

In May, Temer took over as interim president after the Senate impeached and suspended Rousseff. The 75-year-old career politician named a Cabinet of all-white men, a decision roundly criticized in a nation that is more than 50 percent nonwhite. Three of his ministers were forced to resign within weeks of taking their jobs because of corruption allegations, which also follow Temer and threaten his hold on power.

When Temer announced the opening of the Olympics on Aug. 5, he was so vociferously booed that he remained out of sight for the remainder of the games.

Rousseff's allies have vowed to appeal to the country's highest court. While previous petitions to the court have failed to stop the impeachment process, at the very least legal wrangling will keep the issue front and center.

The decision also leaves many question marks over the economy, expected to decline for a second straight year. Temer has promised to pull the country of 200 million people from its recession by tackling reforms that have long been taboo, such as slimming public pensions.

But he has not been able to accomplish much the last 3 months as interim president, and it remains to be seen whether Congress will be willing to work with him.

- (With AP inputs)