

Which approach will Indonesia use to address the problem in Myanmar?

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On January 1, 2023, Indonesia formally assumed the role of ASEAN Chair after Cambodia successfully completed its year as the Chair in 2022. There are various concerns and expectations for Indonesia's leadership to serve as ASEAN Chair this year, such as the Myanmar conflict, the South China Sea Issue, the ASEAN position on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and so on.

An ASEAN Chair always has a lot of issues to deal with while in office, and different people have varied ideas on what each ASEAN Chair's chairmanship authority entails. Prior to its role as chair, Cambodia received harsh criticism from the former foreign minister of Malaysia on how to deal with the Myanmar issue. Before the last election, Malaysia sent the innocent people from Myanmar back to the country where they do not want to return. However, Cambodia received a great deal of congratulations and appreciation for many of the outcomes of its ASEAN Chair in 2022 because Cambodia has made many clear decisions on issues that have arisen in the world.

Indonesia is extremely fortunate because it receives numerous compliments and expectations before assuming the role of ASEAN Chair. Since it would be premature to evaluate the book before wide have finished reading it, we are unable to anticipate the outcome of Indonesia's leadership this year. At the conclusion of each chairmanship, not at the start, each ASEAN Chair should be assessed.

Let's concentrate on the Myanmar crisis, which Indonesia will have to address on behalf of the ASEAN Chair this year.

It should be remembered that the Myanmar crisis occurred when Brunei was the ASEAN Chair, and that it remained a contentious issue for ASEAN during Cambodia's leadership. Because Cambodia was more involved in verbal negotiations with members of the Myanmar regime and several stakeholders, both Brunei and Cambodia used different leadership styles to resolve the problem in Myanmar. Cambodia had likewise made every effort to get the Junta



Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen and Indonesian President Joko Widodo take part during the ASEAN summit closing ceremony in Phnom Penh, Cambodia November 13, 2022. Xinhua

Regime's approval before meeting with the NUG of Myanmar's leaders and representatives.

Let's reiterate: Hun Sen, the prime minister of Cambodia, received a lot of criticism when he first visited Myanmar on January 7, 2022, to meet with the junta's officials. At the time, there were a lot of declarations and criticism directed at Hun Sen.

The finest lesson to be learned for Indonesia to head ASEAN is from the previous leadership of Brunei and Cambodia. What would be the best method for Indonesia to lead ASEAN in resolving the Myanmar problem is the question that has to be asked right now. Will Indonesia reject the junta government before formally recognizing the NUG as its ASEAN representative?

All foreign embassies have remained in Myanmar since the start of the crisis there in February 2021 and are quietly collaborating with the junta administration. There is still a permanent Indonesian embassy in Myanmar. The trade exchange between Myanmar and its neighbors, particularly Thailand,

China, and India, has significantly expanded over the past year. The bordering nations of Myanmar consistently cooperate with the rulers of the nation and are only interested in the winner who leads the country.

If Indonesia formally recognizes the NUG government and offers the NUG a seat in ASEAN to represent Myanmar there, that would be the bad scenario for ASEAN since the junta is in charge of the nation and has openly done business with some ASEAN members as well as other major world powers like China, India, and Russia.

The NUG government deserves respect because it was legitimately chosen by the majority of Myanmar's population, but it is not currently in charge and lacks the resources to challenge the junta, which is currently able to maintain its rule thanks to its collaboration with other nations in trade and the acquisition of military hardware.

If Indonesia's president meets with the junta regime's leaders, Indonesia will be accused of copying Cambodia. If Indonesia only hosts meetings with other ASEAN

countries and its dialogue partners while ignoring the junta rule, it will gain nothing and be unable to resolve the Myanmar situation.

Will Indonesia request that its ambassador, who is now serving in Myanmar, return home? Will Indonesia declare war in retaliation against the government in Myanmar? Could Indonesia prevent Myanmar's neighbours from doing business with the junta regime?

Overall, if the relevant parties in Myanmar realize that only internal agreement among themselves may be the best approach to resolve the problem, it is possible for it to be resolved amicably. The Myanmar situation cannot be resolved if Indonesia disregards all parties within Myanmar, nor can it be resolved if ASEAN only engages in conversation among its participants at the summit while ignoring any relevant parties. However, best wishes to Indonesia to lead ASEAN Chair this year. ■

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