

After the Bali Democracy Forum and the World Culture Forum, both held last month in Bali, one might wonder how international relations connect to national politics and vice versa. Are international relations a reflection and extension of what is taking place domestically; or is national politics sharpened by Indonesia's participation in international affairs? Were the Bali Democracy Forum and World Culture Forum aimed at making Indonesia more visible in international politics and the global market; or should global development and international affairs be made part of national politics?

The ultimate goal should be made clear in the first place. Do we want to make Indonesia part of global development, or could our dealings with global forces be transposed into substantial input for national development?

The leading role of Indonesia in international politics is not a historical novelty. During the week of April 18 to 24, 1955, Indonesia, under the leadership of then president Sukarno, succeeded in hosting the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, which was attended by 29 nation-states from Asia and Africa. The conference, whose legacy and impact are still discernible, was carried out on the basis of two related concepts.

On the one hand, the Indonesian government wanted to extend its free and active foreign policy to other new emerging nation-states that had just released themselves from the bondage of colonial imperialism. On the other hand, Indonesia assumed a leading role in persuading other African and Asian nations that a progressive foreign policy of a free state should be much more than just choosing to join the Western bloc of NATO or the socialist bloc of the Warsaw Pact. The Cold War was not an international destiny, thus African-Asian countries had a third way to survive and develop, without having to necessarily declare themselves as belonging to one bloc or another.

In hindsight, the conference reflected brave, strategic and targeted politics that smartly combined the self-assertiveness of emerging nations as well as an intelligent maneuver to avoid the then imminent Cold War. Among many spectacular achievements of president Sukarno was his genius idea to build an original architecture of free and active foreign policy in a time of international crisis, which is worth remembering with respect and gratitude.

The present international maneuvers of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono raise the same questions. What is the aim of the Bali Democracy Forum? What is the ultimate goal of the World Culture Forum? In the Bali Democracy Forum, Indonesia was supposed to play the role of speaker, a mediator between industrialized and developing countries — between the consolidated democracies and young and transitional democracies. With the World Culture Forum, Indonesia offered a third possible forum for international communications and lobbying besides the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the World Social Forum in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

However, this role of mediator and facilitator assumed by Indonesia can only materialize if one prerequisite is met: All of its public policies should turn out to be democratically conscious and culturally sensitive. International communities should be convinced that the initiatives taken by

the present government are more than an image-building program at the international level, and go beyond the interests of a hidden campaign for whatever purpose.

No government is willing to be blamed for its failure to push for economic growth, though there is always a need to push for growth and to give sufficient opportunity to the people to strengthen their economic capacities.

Thus, national development must not only be indicated by aggregate figures in statistics but also by incremental betterment of people's standard of living and the promotion of their economic potentials and capabilities in dealing with the real sectors.

Culture is another important issue; it can contribute to sustainable development as planned in the Bali Democracy Forum. However, sustainable development only becomes meaningful if it helps sustain continued realization of human dignity in development projects. Economic growth, largely contributed by the financial market, with no link to the life of people in real sectors, does not help substantiate the realization, let alone promotion, of human dignity. One test of the quality of any development project is to examine whether what is done economically or politically also becomes cultural intervention.

Needless to say, people are right in wondering which national interests are at stake in providing all these international services. If some proposals mentioned above can be followed up with concrete policies and programs, Indonesia can be an example for how domestic policies can find an international extension, and how international affairs are transposed into sound national development.

If this was done, the two international forums would not merely be global events with a faint echo in domestic affairs but would create national pride deserving of national support.

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