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Indonesian Foreign Minister arrives in Burma on fact-finding visit

Friday, 28 October 2011 20:33 **Nyi Thit**



(Mizzima) – Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa arrived in Burma on Friday to scout out Burma to decide whether it should be granted the Asean chair for 2014.



Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa of Indonesia speaks at the United Nations in this file photo. Photo: UN

During his visit, which ends Saturday, he will go to Naypyitaw, the capital of Burma, and meet with Burmese government officials.

He will meet with his Burmese counterpart Wunna Maung Lwin and Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and Labour Minister Aung Kyi, according to diplomatic sources.

Observers said he might also meet with NGOs and social organizations and other groups.

The visit to Burma was arranged during the 18th Asean Summit in May. Originally, he was scheduled to start his visit on October 26, but it was delayed two days.

Presently, Indonesia holds the rotating Asean chair and his findings could heavily influence the decision on whether Burma should be granted the chair in 2014 or not, observers say.

Asean has been put under pressure not to grant the Asean chair to Burma because there are still political prisoners and human rights violations in the country.

Burma's turn to chair Asean came up in 2006, but it passed over the opportunity after widespread criticism over its human rights record. Originally, its turn would have been up in 2016, but Laos agreed to swap places with Burma for the 2014 Asean chairmanship. Burma has been constructing new facilities in Naypyitaw, partly as a bid to attract the Asean delegates.

In August, Burmese Foreign Affairs Minister Wunna Maung Lwin said that the decision whether Burma would be granted the chair would be made at the 19th Asean Summit to be held from November 14 and 19 in Bali, Indonesia.

In May, the Thailand-based Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) said Burma should not receive the Asean chair.

Aung Myo Min, the HREIB director, told [Mizzima](#): "Far from it. There are still many political prisoners in Burma. The government is reluctant to hold a political dialogue. We want to urge Asean to put the Burmese government under pressure and to support a commission of inquiry into the allegations of crimes against humanity by the Burmese junta."

In September, the Global Justice Center called on Asean heads of state not to recognize Burma and block the country from taking the chair in 2014.

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In a letter, Janet Benshoof, president of the New York-based center, urged Asean states to uphold the law of nations and treat Burma’s new Constitution, which removes from the president and all branches of “civilian” government any sovereign power over the military, as “null and void.”

Benshoof said, “Asean states are under a legal imperative not to recognize Myanmar/Burma’s Constitution or elections as they violate the UN and Asean Charters and to take immediate action to stop the military’s ongoing war crimes including genocide and military rape of ethnic women used as a weapon of war.”

AP quoted Foreign Minister Natalegawa in September, saying, "I shall be keen to listen and to hear the voice of civil society, not least the voice of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi... whether this can have a multiplier effect, a pull effect in speeding up the pace of change.”

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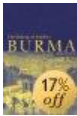
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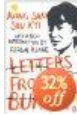


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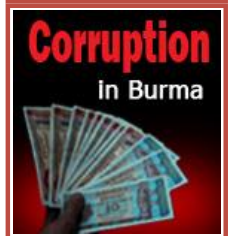
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