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Halaman : 1

P20 meeting deadlock bodes poorly for November summit

Yvette Tanamal and Yerica Lai
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Despite vows to uphold "collective work" in resolving some of the world's biggest crises, lawmakers from the Group of 20 biggest economies have failed to reach any substantive agreements at the Parliamentary 20 Speakers' Summit.

Last week's event produced no joint statement to be brought before the G20 Summit, signaling possible troubles for Indonesia ahead of the Bali conference in November.

As an official engagement group under the G20 framework, in which nongovernment stakeholders offer solutions to their state counterparts, the P20 assembly sought common ground on the green economy, food security, energy crisis, democracy and social inclusivity.

But the two-day forum of lawmakers from G20 member states and invited countries was unable to escape the cloud of conflict that has colored most G20 talks this year.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February has recently escalated following Moscow's annexation of some territories. The conflict has split the global consensus on other important issues to be tackled collectively, including at the G20, with some choosing to take hostage of the talks and risking the lives and livelihoods of billions.

At the opening of Thursday's P20 assembly, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo reiterated the need for a willingness to sit together and bridge dialogues, saying that "conflict and division will only harm all parties".

However, the United States' lead delegate for the P20, Gregory Meeks, said that "there was no agreement" made at the crunch session of the assembly and noted that the war took the biggest portion of talks at the meeting.

Washington, whom Meeks represents as chair of the US House of Representatives' foreign affairs committee, did not budge on its stance to use every opportunity to condemn Russian aggression.

"The language of what was being proposed initially was not strong enough [to address] the antidemocratic, illegal invasion of Russia. The United States would not have signed on to it," Meeks asserted in an interview with *The Jakarta Post* on Friday.

Russia, the US and Indonesia are all G20 member states. Jakarta has invited a representative of Ukraine, People's Consultative Assembly Speaker Olena Kondratiuk, as a courtesy and to acknowledge the urgency of the war.

But efforts to reach a consensus on other global issues outside of the war became a nonstarter. Indonesian House of Representatives Speaker Puan Maharani, as host of the P20 talks, even spoke of a world "increasingly divided".

In the end, Puan announced that a chairman's statement, which offers a non-binding overview of discussions, would be presented at the November summit.

"We conveyed everything, of course, in different ways and with different views. In all sessions we agreed that no country would attack each other — no country would blame each other," Puan said at the closing press conference.

While the absence of a joint statement may indicate a deadlock in global discussions, Meeks also said that some parts of the conversation at the P20 were nonetheless "very invigorating", as lawmakers explored the concepts of democracy, religious pluralism, innovation and growth in a world "more interconnected than ever".

"The coming together of parliaments [is an attempt] to resolve some of the issues that affect all of us. [...] We need to be working collectively together," he said.


Antara/ Galih Pradipta
Puan Maharani


Courtesy of the US Embassy
Gregory Meeks

Battle of wills

Though the commitment to maintain cooperation has been reaffirmed by many representatives before, experts and diplomats alike have expressed concerns that international collaboration was becoming increasingly elusive.

Critics have also noted that policies taken by the Group of Seven wealthiest industrialized nations after the war erupted, such as harsh trade sanctions and diplomatic exclusion, would not only hurt the European economy as a whole, but also put developing nations at risk. A refusal to compromise would also affect problem-solving, they noted.

"How the P20 unfolded is a clear indication that the G20 Summit will be similarly riddled with contemporary political issues," said Dafri Agussalim, an international relations expert from Gadjah Mada University (UGM).

Dafri said it was possible the Bali summit could "produce nothing" and instead become a "stage for fierce debate".

"Indonesia isn't just an event organizer. We have to be effective agenda-setters. If we fail to do so, then every country will feel the brunt of it," he told the *Post*.

Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi acknowledged the direness of the situation last month and said that Indonesia as G20 president would need to get crafty to keep its global priorities intact.

The country has already dealt with fallout from the war, with threats of a boycott from mainly Western nations pushing for Moscow's exclusion from G20 talks. Jakarta refused, acting on its "free and active" foreign policy.

Another meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors, which ended with a walkout in April, would be convened again this week.