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Cambodian crisis grouping's chance to prove its mettle

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THE Cambodian crisis is an opportunity for Asean to act and prove to the rest of the world that it can solve problems in its own backyard without the intervention of Western powers.

A Cambodian observer attending the Asean Congress who requested anonymity, said that Asean cannot afford to take a non-interference stance concerning the situation there.

"Non-intervention must be clearly defined. Asean cannot just stand and watch the events in Cambodia when people are being killed and a democratically-elected government is toppled by one man.

"Asean cannot accept Hun Sen as the leader of Cambodia when he is responsible for (the loss of) hundreds of innocent peoples' lives," he said.

He said if Asean continued with its present form of non-intervention, the policy was shameful in humanitarian terms.

The observer said even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had criticised Europe for being unable to solve the Balkan crisis.

"Now the same thing is happening in Asean's backyard," he said, adding that immediate political and diplomatic intervention was a must to stop the situation from further deteriorating.

"There will be civil war in Cambodia and it will send the country back into isolation. Asean cannot let this happen in the spirit of brotherhood," he added.

Asked if ousted Cambodian First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, would attend the Asean Ministerial Meeting beginning tomorrow, he said Ranariddh would not, as respect to Asean's non-intervention policy.

However, he added, Ranariddh had held talks with Dr Mahathir in Europe recently during the early days of the coup.

Meanwhile, chairman of the supervisory board, Indonesian Centre for Strategic and International Studies Jusuf Wanandi said Hun Sen does not understand changes taking place globally.

"That is why he can tell Asean off and threaten to pull Cambodia out of the regional grouping. He thinks he can lead Cambodia to isolation just as in the 1970s. What he does not realise now is times have changed and further isolation will mean the end of Cambodia," he said.

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