

Indonesia: Golkar Party elite want former dictator Suharto to be declared national hero

Friday 22 March 2024, by [CNN Indonesia](#) (Date first published: 29 February 2024).

Jakarta — Golkar Party Deputy Chairperson Melchias Markus Mekeng says he supports Indonesia's second president Suharto being made a national hero.

Mekeng made the statement after President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo awarded Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto with the honorary rank of four-star general on Wednesday February 28.

"Personally I agree that Pak [Mr] Suharto be given the rank of national hero", said Mekeng when contacted on Thursday February 29.

According to Mekeng, Suharto did a lot of good work and was dedicated when he served as president.

In fact, Suharto's service to the country began long before Indonesia's independence in 1945.

"Because of his work and dedicating while serving as president and even before independence", he said.

However, up until now, said Mekeng, they have not had a specific discussion on this discourse. He also responded to a number of negative opinions about Suharto during his time as president.

He said that no figure is perfect and everyone has their own perceptions and views.

"Certainly, yes, in this world there is [no one] who is perfect, everyone has views according to their own perceptions", said Mekeng.

Suharto was initially appointed as acting president through a People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Special Session on March 7, 1967. Based on the results of a Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (MPRS) General Session on March 27, 1968, he was appointed president.

After being appointed, Suharto continued to serve as the Number 1 person in Indonesia for more than three decades. During his term of office, he did not forget to produce various kinds anti-PKI propaganda, one of which was producing a film titled "Penkhianatan G30S/PKI" (The Betrayal of the September 30 Movement/Indonesian Communist Party), which has doubtful historical references.

Having remained in power for 32 years, Suharto was finally brought down. But not by the military or the PKI as was propagandised to citizens, but rather an economic crisis that undermined the trust of the public, the banks and fellow New Order officials.

On May 21, 1998, he officially stepped down, leaving a legacy of authoritarianism and fear of the PKI.

Suharto, who was born on June 8, 1921, died on January 27, 2008 at the age of 86 years.

Notes: The Golkar Party (or Party of Functional Groups) was formed by the military in 1964 and became Suharto's political vehicle during the 32 year New Order dictatorship. Following Suharto's overthrow in 1998, it reinvented itself and embraced electoral democracy as a secular-nationalist party. Thanks to the organisational base developed during the Suharto years and the financial backing of Suharto's former business cronies, it has remained one of the largest parties in the national parliament. In the 2024 elections it backed Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto's successful election bid.

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