
UNIT 16 THE PHILIPPINES

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 The Land and the People
- 16.3 History
 - 16.3.1 Spanish Rule : 1565-1898
 - 16.3.2 The Philippines under US Occupation
 - 16.3.3 The Philippines at Independence : 9th July 1946
 - 16.3.4 Laurel-Langley Agreement
 - 16.3.5 The US Bases in the Philippines
- 16.4 Evolution of Philippine Foreign Policy : 1946-72
- 16.5 The Philippine Constitution (1934)
- 16.6 The Marcos Regime in the Philippines (1972-86)
 - 16.6.1 Economic Crisis
 - 16.6.2 Student Movement
 - 16.6.3 Rama Resolution
- 16.7 The Communists
 - 16.7.1 The Huk Movement
 - 16.7.2 Ramon Magsaysay and Suppression of Huk Rebellion
 - 16.7.3 The Formation of the Communist Party
 - 16.7.4 The Battle of Mandiola Bridge
 - 16.7.5 The Communist Movement and Foreign Policy
- 16.8 The Muslims
 - 16.8.1 Marcos and the Muslims
 - 16.8.2 Advent of Islam in the Philippines
 - 16.8.3 Post-Independence Relations
 - 16.8.4 Moro National Liberation Front
 - 16.8.5 Improving relations with Muslim Countries
- 16.9 The Americans Bases
 - 16.9.1 Background
 - 16.9.2 Changing Pattern of Relationship
 - 16.9.3 Negotiations over the Bases
 - 16.9.4 Question of Marcos' Credibility
- 16.10 End of the Marcos Saga
- 16.11 Presidency of Mrs. Corazon Aquino : 1986-92
 - 16.11.1 Marcos' Legacy and Attendant Problems
 - 16.11.2 New Constitution
- 16.12 Philippines Today
 - 16.12.1 Immediate Tasks
 - 16.12.2 Future of US-Philippine Relations
- 16.13 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.14 Some Useful Books
- 16.15 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

16.0 OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of this unit is to acquaint you with the people, art and culture, government and politics of Philippines. After going through this unit, you should be able to :

- Talk about the early history of Philippines, the land and the people
- Discuss its foreign policy and
- Talk about various political developments in the country since its independence.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since President Marcos proclaimed martial law in the Philippines on 22 September 1972, many significant developments have taken place in the land. Marcos' ouster in February 1986 and the subsequent coming to power of Corazon Aquino led to the restoration of constitutional democracy in the country and the start of a new era in Philippine politics. There was a thorough reappraisal of US-Philippine relations. Indeed, Philippine foreign policy provides an excellent example of the 'align' policy that grew out of American defence and trade relations. Though it took shape during the forties and fifties when the Cold War was at its height, it acquired a certain degree of flexibility in course of time. The latest trends in Philippine foreign policy reflect the "emerging realities" of Asia. The country is responding to new power alignments by trying to end its exclusive dependence on a single power and by cultivating relations with those with whom it had no relations earlier.

16.2 THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The Philippines is an archipelago of 7,100 islands, islets and atolls located southeast of the Asian mainland. It straddles the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean and serves as a gateway to the interactional straits linking Northeast and Southeast Asia to the Indian Ocean and the Middle East.

Although the Filipinos are by and large, Malay in ethnic composition, their culture is an amalgam of Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian influences. The occidental influence is also there in good measure. Following almost 330 years of Spanish rule, the Philippines is the only country in Asia to have a predominantly Christian (Roman Catholic) population. In their customs and manners (the Filipinos) are influenced by the Americans, who ruled the Philippines for almost 50 years after defeating Spain. However, the Filipinos do retain their Asian identity. Its population was estimated to be 6,05,00,000 in 1990. Religious break-up is : Roman Catholics—85%, Roman Protestants—9% and Muslims—5%.

16.3 HISTORY

16.3.1 Spanish Rule : 1565 to 1898

Recent historical researches indicate that the Philippines had attained substantial cultural progress even during the pre-colonial period. However, there seems to have been no unifying factor—cultural, religious or political. It is the Spanish colonialists who cemented together different regional patterns of culture and developed the composite culture that characterizes the Philippines today. Spanish rule itself was feudal in character and exploitative and corrupt in practice. It is remembered today only for the inefficient administration that it introduced and the financial ruin that it wrought. Spanish colonialism totally disillusioned the Philippines and alienated it from Spain.

16.3.2 The Philippines under US Occupation

When the Americans took charge of the Philippines, they encountered a society which had already been greatly influenced by the West. They gave the Philippines an efficient administration and introduced a system of free national education. The American occupation, thus, mitigated the harshness

of Spanish colonialism and gradually paved the way for self-rule by the Filipinos. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Filipinos should entertain no great bitterness towards their former colonial masters, unlike many other independent Asian African peoples.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude that the American regime in the Philippines was inspired solely by philanthropic motives, for it also produced a social system dominated by a narrow but influential middle class based largely on commercial capitalism and feudal landlordism. This had a profound effect upon the evolution of the state. The Huk movement, for instance, was an attempt by the country's peasantry to rise in revolt against this combination of commercial capitalism and feudal landlordism.

16.3.3 The Philippines at Independence : 4th July 1946

Like most countries of the Third World, the Philippines inherited a colonial economic legacy at independence. The economy was mainly agrarian and dependent on the United States. Since sugar, abaca and coconut were the main exports to the USA, emphasis was laid on cash crops. Certain crops actually needed for domestic consumption were neglected. Tenant farming was the most conspicuous feature of the agrarian economy.

The entry of duty-free American goods into the Philippines discouraged the local manufacturing industry. This simply followed from the inability of local goods to compete with the goods imported duty-free from the United States.

The Americans also did not build the Philippines military with the result that it easily fell to the Japanese during the Second World War. Even after independence it had to depend on the United States in matters of defence.

To the Philippine decision-makers there appeared to be only two alternatives after independence—either to give in to communism (the Philippine Government at that time was confronted with a Communist-led insurgency) or to align with the United States. It is, therefore, understandable as to why the Filipino leaders should rule out any third alternative—non-alignment, for example. They opted for a close relationship with the United States entering into various treaties. Though, in retrospect, they might regard terms of some of these treaties as onerous, at the time the treaties were signed, the concessions granted by the United States seemed to outweigh the disadvantages greatly. Besides, it would have been difficult and even disastrous for the Philippines to break off with the United States abruptly as its economy was tied to that of the United States.

16.3.4 Laurel-Langley Agreement

The U.S.-Philippine economic relations were governed by the Trade Act of 1946 and later by Laurel-Langley Agreement of 6 September 1955 which replaced the earlier act. In July 1974, the Laurel-Langley Agreement expired; alongwith this basic document of the post-Independence relationship between the United States, all the special arrangements, too, lapsed—arrangements such as tariff preferences for certain Filipino products in the US market and “Party rights” for the Americans in the exploitation of Philippine natural resources.

16.3.5 The US Bases in the Philippines

Under the agreement of 14 March 1947, the Philippines granted bases to the US for a period of 99 years. The bases became an increasingly important source of income and employment for the Philippines. However, as time passed, it sought to reopen several issues relating to the agreement. The three

US bases were the Clark Air Base, the Sangley Air Base, and the Subic Naval Base. In September 1971, the Sangley Point Naval Base was turned over to the Philippines which had requested its return. Large sections of Filipino youth were becoming critical of the exploitative aspects of the US-Philippine relationship. The continued existence of the US military bases was considered to be a serious erosion of Philippine sovereignty. The Bases Treaty expired in 1991, and the United States withdrew its troops from the Philippines by December end 1992.

16.4 EVOLUTION OF PHILIPPINE FOREIGN POLICY : 1946-1972

Philippine foreign policy during the long period, extending from 1946-72, operated within the larger framework of US foreign policy. There was a confluence of the interests and attitudes of the Philippine ruling elite and the US Government. Proximity to China and existence of a communist rebellion within the country convinced the Government in power of a communist threat. The outbreak of wars in Korea and Vietnam further underlined the gravity of the situation.

Besides, the political elite (a majority of its members at least) felt indebted to the US for liberating the country from Japanese rule and for extending generous assistance in reconstructing its war-ravaged economy.

It may be noted that Philippine participation in Asian affairs during those years was inspired as much by the sentiment of a common identity as by the hope of creating a bulwark against the communists. However, subsequent complexities and changing patterns of the international situation contributed to the "shift" in Philippine foreign policy, especially after 1961. The emergence of a commercially strong Japan after the Second World War made it the second most important trading partner of the Philippines. Besides, the end of the Cold War and the US failure in Vietnam made an impression upon the Philippine leaders. They saw how the Americans were going all out to promote better relations with Communist China. Even while being leader of a world power, President Nixon had felt constrained to travel all the way to Beijing to woo the Chinese. They, therefore, went ahead and established diplomatic relations with China and other communist nations.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.
 ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Discuss the main features of the Philippine foreign policy in the 1946-72 period.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

16.5 THE PHILIPPINE CONSTITUTION (1934)

The Philippine Constitution, drafted in 1934, established a democratic system of government for the country. It remained in force till September 1972 when

President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law. Under the old constitution, the main underlying principle was separation of powers.

Thus the three branches of the government, the legislative, executive and judicial were under the law equal, coordinate and independent of each other. Legislative powers were exercised by the Congress; all those executive in nature by the President, and the Supreme Court was the highest judicial authority.

The Congress of the Philippines consisted of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

The upper house, the Senate, comprised 24 elected members, while the lower house, the House of Representatives, had 124 members. Seats in the lower house were allocated to provinces based on population. Unlike the upper house, where only eight seats were contested every two years, elections to the lower house were held every 4 years.

The Philippines had (and still has) a presidential type of government. With a popularly elected president, holding office for 4 years with right to one re-election only.

The Constitution stated : "The judicial power shall be vested in one. Supreme Court and in such inferior courts as may be established by law."

Since 1946 till 1972, the two political parties holding power alternatively in the Philippines were the Nationalist Party and the Liberal Party. Presently, there is no single all-powerful party.

The foregoing survey helps in understanding Philippine politics which has been shaped by two equally powerful influences. On the one hand, the Filipinos are aware of the legacy of colonialism—the special relationship with the United States, Westernisation (to a large extent greater than their neighbours) etc. On the other hand, they are conscious of their Asian identity and feel a strong desire to reaffirm it.

16.6 THE MARCOS REGIME IN THE PHILIPPINES (1972-1986)

Ferdinand Marcos had been President for two terms, when he declared Martial Law in the Philippines on 23 September 1972. His second term was to expire in December 1973 and under the provision of the old Constitution he could not stand for the third term.

16.6.1 Economic Crisis

Towards the end of Marcos' second term, the country was in a critical stage. The gap between the rich and the poor had increased. In the Philippines, where 75 per cent of the entire population is dependent on agriculture, old feudal modes of production continued side by side with "capitalist farming", mainly meant to produce a few cash crops needed by the United States and other capitalist countries. Thus, the economy remained mainly agrarian, and more or less, dependent on the United States market for sustenance.

Whatever limited land reforms were introduced, failed to relieve the misery of those who lived in feudal bondage. The failure was mainly due to the disinclination of the government officers to bring any change in the feudal set-up, obstruction to the implementation of these reforms by the land lords, and last but not least, the sheer enormity of the problem.

Industrialization and domestic trade succeeded in enriching only a few. The population continued to increase at an alarming rate, and the GNP could hardly keep pace with it. The expenditure of the government was more than its income, only resulting in the diminishing of financial reserves. Foreign capital, the mainstay of the Philippine economy, also "shied away". Hence, as the economic situation in the Philippines worsened, social unrest followed.

Unmindful of the mass poverty, however, the First Family, continued to live in an extravagant style. No wonder, Marcos and his wife Imelda were held directly responsible for all that went wrong in the country. Actually, he had been in power too long, and had failed to do anything substantial for the common man.

16.6.2 Student Movement

All sections of the society were restless. The enlightened Filipinos were clamouring for a change in the system, which had become corrupt over the years. The most active critics of Marcos were the students, who played an important role in activizing the people by holding demonstrations and protest rallies and by going to remote barrios (villages). The most militant of the youth organizations was the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) which strongly challenged feudalism, fascism and imperialism. Marcos, in turn, alleged the KM to be the front organization of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Thus, in the months leading up to the proclamation of Martial Law, there had been an increase in the demonstrations against the government. Marcos further precipitated matters by holding elections in 1978 for a Constitutional Convention (Con. Con.) to draft a new constitution. The sceptics wondered how a systemic change in the form of government was going to cure the basic societal ills. Soon the suspicion grew that the President was having a new constitution drafted only in order to prolong his stay in office, either through the adoption of an amendment permitting him a third term, or through a shift to a parliamentary system under which Mrs. Marcos could be the President and he the Prime Minister.

16.6.3 Rama Resolution

A resolution, called the Rama Resolution, was introduced in the Constitutional Convention which sought to bar Marcos from becoming the Head of State under any form of government. This resolution was rejected by the majority in the convention convincing the critics that it was under the influence of Marcos.

Most vociferous among the critics of Marcos was ex-Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. (popularly known as Ninoy), the General Secretary of the now-defunct opposition Liberal Party.

As a prelude to the Martial Law, Marcos suspended the writ of Habeas Corpus on 21 August 1971. The President justified his action by stating that it had become imperative to suspend the writ as the country was threatened by a Communist revolution. According to him, the grave danger to the country had been confirmed by the bombing in Plaza Miranda. Even earlier, he had been harping on the Communist threat to the Philippines—which looked to many as an excuse to stay in power—and had repeated several times that he would not hesitate to proclaim Martial Law if the situation demanded it.

The last straw for Marcos was the rejection of his party at the Senatorial elections of November 1971, his candidates losing to the Liberals. True to the general speculations, President Marcos declared Martial Law on 23 September 1972 and detained many prominent leaders including Aquino.

Despite the Martial Law, the old problems continued for Marcos. The three basic problems facing him were related to the Communists, the Muslims and the American bases.

16.7 THE COMMUNISTS

16.7.1 The Huk Movement

The Communists in the Philippines have been known for a long time as Huks, the short form of Hukbalahap which came formally into existence on 29 March 1942, as the People's Anti-Japanese Army. The programme of the Huks in the beginning was limited to resistance against the Japanese and their Filipino collaborators and to bring about agrarian reforms. The leadership of the Huks during the War was not entirely Communist; it was thought in some circles that after independence, the Huks would work within the constitutional framework. Negotiations on this issue continued between the Huks and the government, but there was no concrete meeting point. Meanwhile, the Huk leadership was taken over by the Communists. It was later alleged that they had sought to overthrow the government of the newly-established Republic.

The real threat to the government from the Huks, however, came in 1950, when Elpidio Quirino was the President. During his term, many corrupt people occupied important governmental offices in the Graft, corruption and lawlessness were rampant at all levels. The army was equally inefficient. With the growing unrest in the country, the Huks became even more powerful.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949 made the threat from the Huks to the ruling class only graver.

16.7.2 Ramon Magsaysay and Suppression of Huk Rebellion

The Huks could be suppressed only after Ramon Magsaysay was appointed Defence Secretary in 1950. His method of counter-insurgency was highly successful. He also encountered the Huk problem by going to the countryside and listening to the people's grievances. On becoming President, he did his best to redress the grievances and succeeded in giving a clean image to his Government, which went a long way in weaning the people away from the Huks.

For all practical purposes, the Huk rebellion was over: most of the Huk leaders had either been killed or captured. The morale of the Huks was completely broken when the last of the Politburo member, Jesus Lava, was captured by the Government. On 20 June 1957, with the enactment of Republic Act No. 1700, known as the Anti-Subversion Act, the Communist Party of the Philippines was legally banned.

From 1962 to 1965, the Huks, still suffering from the government retribution, laid low. From 1966 onwards, however, there was, according to the government reports, a "Huk resurgence". Some hold that the Huk violence increased in 1966 as a direct consequence of government's harshness towards them. The other version is that the Huk movement had, in fact, remained under control and that it was the armed forces themselves who regularly came up with reports of renewed Huk activity every year, about the time when the military budget was due for consideration in the Congress.

16.7.3 The Formation of the Communist Party

However, by 1968, a new group of young Communists emerged under the leadership of Jose Ma Sison (a former University teacher), or Amado Guerrero, as he is popularly known. In 1964, he founded the Kabataang Makabayan and became mainly responsible for making the Filipino youth conscious of the problems of the country. Since then, the youth have never lagged behind in expressing their views. The movement was, of course, mainly confined to the extreme Left.

The Communist Party was re-established by Sison on 26 December 1968 on the theoretical base of Mao Zedong's thoughts. An armed wing was also organized on the pattern of the Chinese Red Army, known as the New People's Army (NPA). The NPA was under the command of Col. Dante, who was held in great awe and reverence by Filipino youth. The bible of the Leftists was the book by Sison published under the pseudonym, Amado Guerrero, in 1971. This book, a Maoist interpretation of Philippine history, is especially critical of the Marcos regime. Sison condemned him as a "rabid puppet of US imperialism", who had outdone Macapagal in sending out Filipino mercenary troops to participate in the US war of aggression against Vietnam and Indo-China in general".

He also held Marcos directly responsible for the political and economic crises in the country, and reacted sharply to Marcos' oft-repeated decision to declare Martial Law. He wrote :

"Confronted with the increasingly fierce opposition of the revolutionary masses, the Marcos puppet régime has harped on formally declaring martial law, notwithstanding the fact that it has want only practised Fascist terror in both city and countryside, especially so in the latter, where uninformed troops and their goon assistants vent their ire on the peasant masses."

Though the book had a great impact on the attitude of the youth towards the Marcos regime, anti-Marcos feeling had been present even before its publication.

16.7.4 The Battle of Mandiola Bridge

On 30 January 1970, demonstrators numbering about 10,000 students and labourers, stormed the President's Palace. It was a day-long riot in which 4 students were killed and hundreds injured as a result of the police and army retaliation. This incident has popularly come to be known as the "Battle of Mandiola Bridge". Until Marcos declared Martial Law, students continued to stage various protest demonstrations against him. The student movement, for which Sison had been responsible, was a new phenomenon for the Philippines. However, the movement came to a halt with the declaration of the Martial Law. Most of the student leaders were arrested, and force was quickly and largely used wherever there was any opposition to the government.

Marcos was able to similarly cripple the Communist movement. Most of the leaders, like Jose Ma Sison, Commander Dante, and Sison's second-in-command in the party, Victor Corpus, were captured. The Communist movement has remained mainly confined to Luzon, though it is reported by the government that it has made inroads into the south of the Philippines as well.

16.7.5 The Communist Movement and Foreign Policy

It will be out in order to discuss here, briefly, as to how the Communist

movement had affected Philippines foreign policy; especially in relation to Communist nations.

When Quirino took over as President in 1949, it had been surmised that there would be some change in the Philippines foreign policy towards the Communist countries. He had expressed his desire to recognize the People's Republic of China. However, this failed to materialize. As already stated, the Huks working in close association with the Communist Party of the Philippines had created havoc during 1950, and the subversive tactics indulged in by China in support of the Huks were looked upon by the Philippines as a threat to its security. This threat was heightened by the Chinese Republic's proximity to Philippines. Besides, the Philippine Government doubted the loyalty of the overseas Chinese in the Philippines who have often been accused of supporting the local Communists. With the coming of Magsaysay as the President, there was no question of any kind of relations with the People's China. After him, Garcia and Macapagal too refused to recognize the People's China. During their terms it was actually alleged that the Communist subversion in the Philippines had been financed by the People's Republic of China.

With Marcos in power since 1965, some amount of flexibility was evident towards the Communist countries. Though he remained strongly anti-Communist, he kept his country's options open regarding the People's China and the Soviet Union. With the approval of the Foreign Office, Filipinos were even allowed to travel to the People's China, the Soviet Union and other Communist countries. This was earlier unthinkable. Indeed, President Macapagal had even refused to allow the Soviet and the Yugoslavian basketball teams to participate in the IV World Basketball Championship held in Manila in December 1962.

Even though it was alleged that the mainland Chinese agents had been working closely with Huks, there was a growing realization in the Philippines that they had been more "Popish than the Pope". As one Filipino writer explained: "Whatever America did vis-a-vis China, we followed blindly; America shut herself off from (People's) China and China reacted similarly out of pique. And how did we react? Because America would not allow US newsmen to visit China, we also banned our newsmen."

By the time Marcos began his third term, he had established relations with People's China, the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries. Complexities and changing patterns in the international situation contributed to this decision. Besides, the end of the Cold War and the US failure in Vietnam made quite an impression upon the Philippine leaders. They saw how the Americans had gone all out to promote better relations with the Communist world, and how, with the emergence of the People's China as a world Power, President Nixon felt it necessary enough to travel to Beijing to befriend the Chinese.

Marcos had a triumphant trip to People's China where he received an audience by Mao, which he played up to advantage showing that China was all out to have friendly relations with him. With the arrival of a senior Chinese leader, there was a growing speculation that China had "quietly agreed to stop assisting the NPA and to shelve the Spratly issue at least for the time being."

Notwithstanding all this, it does appear that the Communist movement will continue to have a hold on certain sections as long as the grievances of the people remain. No show of force or success on the foreign policy front is going to change this.

Check Your Progress 2

The Philippines

- Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Trace the rise of the communist movement in the Philippines.



- 2) Discuss the impact of the Communist movement on the Philippine foreign policy.

16.8 THE MUSLIMS

The Muslims were a very serious problem for the Marcos regime. Though a legacy of the past, the problem became intensive after the Martial Law was declared. Marcos had ordered the people of the Philippines to surrender their arms, and the Muslims retaliated by attacking government troops.

16.8.1 Marcos and the Muslims

Initially, Marcos was not planning a hard line policy vis-a-vis the Muslim rebels, as is apparent from the Presidential Decree No. 95, which enunciated a policy of selective amnesty to the rebels. Also, Marcos had announced projects to be taken up by the government for the development of Mindanao, and had made various other economic concessions to the Muslims.

At the same time, Marcos also had a meeting with the "old" Muslim leaders in Manila who came out in praise of the Martial Law. This, indeed, was ironical, for the situation in the south was entirely different from what Marcos was trying to project in Manila. The rebel leadership was in the hands of young Muslims, like Nur Misurai, who had been closely associated with Sison when they were both in the University of the Philippines.

Therefore, the much publicized dialogue of Marcos with the so-called Muslim leaders was condemned by the rebels. According to them, they were in revolt not only against the "Fascist, discriminatory" Government, but also against their own old Muslim leaders who, they felt, had sold them for personal gain.

Once there was an open rebellion by the Muslims against the Martial Law regime, the armed forces of the Philippines launched an all-out drive against them. Keeping the magnitude of the war in the South in view, it would be in order to trace briefly the problem as it began almost 400 years ago. After all, as Leon Ma Gurrero states: "The friction between Muslim and Christian Filipinos....can be more accurately described as an encounter between two communities with different traditions and rival economic interest, and suffering from different historical hangovers."

16.8.2 Advent of Islam in the Philippines

Islam came to the Philippines via Sulu in about 1380 and spread to the other islands as well. In 1542, the Spaniards conquered Visayas and Luzon, but were unable to conquer Mindanao which remained under the Muslims. The rest of the Filipinos were converted to the Catholic religion by the Spanish Friars who had accompanied the soldiers to the Philippines.

Thus, while the polarization between the North and the South began with the advent of the Spanish rule, further alienation between the Christians and the Muslims took place under the American rule. The Americans established a separate government for the Muslims in Mindanao, and it is their policy of "divide and rule" which many eminent Filipinos hold responsible for the unfortunate repercussions to this day.

16.8.3 Post-Independence Relations

Once the Philippines became independent, the Christian-dominated government introduced many policies that in retrospect were shortsighted in its effort to assimilate the Muslims. The Resettlement Plan of the government was one such policy decision which has been responsible for aggravating the problem. Under this Plan, the Christian Filipinos from the densely populated islands of Luzon and the Visayas were encouraged to migrate to the sparsely populated south, with the result that the Muslims were reduced to a minority in many of the provinces where they were earlier in a majority. This influx has resulted not only in endless land disputes between the two communities, but also in the economic exploitation of the Muslims by the Christian businessmen.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the Muslims had been feeling neglected, and harbouring many fears related to their status in the country. This restlessness ultimately led to a desire among the Muslims to secede from the Philippines, and in 1968, the Mindanao Independence Movement demanding secession was formally launched. Since then, there have been bitter clashes between the Christians and the Muslims. Fighting also broke out between the Muslim rebels and the government troops. During the period leading up to the imposition of the Martial Law, reports of massacre of Muslims by the army were common in the Philippine Press.

16.8.4 Moro National Liberation Front

By 1972, the Muslims had organised themselves into the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), organized on the pattern of the Palestinian National Liberation Front. The threat to secede now became real, as the MNLF movement was better organized under the leadership of Nur Misuari and had gained the sympathy of the Muslim countries.

The problem acquired a new dimension with the MNLF getting money and arms from Libya. In the Islamic Conference, Libya openly advocated stern measures against the Philippines. Libya and Egypt sent a joint mission to the Philippines on 1 July 1972, to report on the condition of the Muslims there. The mission gave an adverse report stating that Marcos should stop the genocide of Muslims in his country. Marcos was fast finding the Muslim problem an embarrassment in his dealings with the Islamic countries. Any determination of relations, especially with the Arabs, would have led to the oil supply being stopped. Two thirds of the Philippines oil comes from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Abu Dhabi. In addition, Marcos had to respect the sentiments of its two Muslim neighbours and fellow members of ASEAN, namely, Malaysia and Indonesia. Relations between Malaysia and the Philippines became somewhat strained after 1972. It was alleged that the then

Chief Minister of Sabah, Tun Mustapha, was supporting the Muslim rebels, and that many Muslim rebels were having their training in Malaysia. Malaysian interference was seen by some as a means of pressurizing the Philippines to drop its claim to Sabah, and Marcos was probably of the same mind when he announced on 4 August 1977, at Kuala Lumpur, that his country had decided to drop its claim to Sabah.

16.8.5 Improving Relations with Muslim Countries

Improving relations with Malaysia and Indonesia helped Marcos somewhat in his dealings with the Muslims. It was owing to the efforts of Malaysia and Indonesia alone in the Islamic Conference that moderate resolutions were adopted on the Filipino Muslims; otherwise they would have condemned the Philippines Government. Both these countries continue to put pressure on the Philippines to settle the Muslim problem for the sake of stability in the region. They, however, made it clear that it should be done within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines.

Meanwhile, Marcos made an all-out effort to woo Libya, where Nur Misuari was staying after the imposition of the Martial Law. Marcos' wife Imelda was sent to hold talks with Libyan leader Col. Gaddafi. She succeeded in convincing Gaddafi that the Marcos regime was not practising genocide and had every intention to arrive at a peaceful settlement with the Muslims. As a result of this meeting, Gaddafi arranged for talks between the MNLF and the Philippine Government. On 24 December 1976, the two sides concluded a cease-fire agreement, which soon ran into difficulties on the question of its correct interpretation.

Talks were, however, again arranged in Tripoli in February 1977. No agreement could be reached as the MNLF wanted the Southern Philippines to become a separate state to which the Philippine Government did not agree. The latter took the stand that the southern provinces would become one autonomous region, if the majority of the voters in the region ratified it in a referendum.

Marcos went ahead and held a plebiscite in the south on 17 April 1977. As expected, the results were favourable to the Government. The Christian majority voted against the establishment of an autonomous region. The plebiscite was boycotted by the MNLF, and the Islamic Conference too showed its disfavour by not sending observers. The plebiscite did not help in solving the problem for Marcos and many have wondered as to why he went ahead with it in the first place.

Since then, the cease-fire has been violated and armed conflict continued unabated in the Philippines. It is reported that in the conflict in the south, 50,000 civilians had been killed since 1972.

For Marcos, the insurgency had become an additional excuse to retain the Martial Law.

Check Your Progress 3

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.
 ii) Check your answer with that given at the end.

- 1) Discuss Marcos' policy towards the Muslims.

.....

.....

.....

16.9 THE AMERICAN BASES

16.9.1 Background

American military bases have been a significant input in Philippine Foreign Policy. Though the problem of American bases in the Philippines has not been as serious as the two problems already mentioned, it has become a major irritant in the Philippine-US relations.

Till recently, the major determining factor in the Philippines foreign policy was the "special relations" with the United States. American global policy was reflected in the attitude of the Philippines. It was an ally of the United States, a member of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation, (SEATO), was extremely hostile to the Communist aims, and had allowed several important American military bases to be set up on its soil.

The 'special relationship' of the Philippines with the United States hampered the development of close relations with its neighbouring countries. Its various treaties with the United States did not also help in enhancing its image in Asia. The dispatch of non-combatant troops to South Vietnam under American pressure was considered contradictory to its often-repeated desire to be close to the countries of the region. For the same reason, Philippine foreign policy towards People's China and also been unrealistic.

From 1946 to 1969, Philippine foreign policy operated within the limits imposed upon it by the requirements of US foreign policy. It would, however, be unwise to conclude that it was controlled or directed by the United States, as it cannot be denied that there was a genuine congruence of interests and shared attitudes between the Philippine ruling elite and the US Government.

16.9.2 Changing Pattern of Relationship

What the Philippines is now trying to do is to change these close links with the United States. Even under Marcos, attempts were being made to project an Asian image by participating actively in Asian affairs. The Philippine confidence in the United States was greatly shaken by the Communist victories in Indo-China, and it was widely felt that the US bases in the Philippines were a security risk. The Philippines had realized that for both security and economic purposes, its destiny lay with Asia, and ultimately, it would have to get rid of its close association with the United States for the sake of stability in the region. After all, the Philippines had endorsed the ASEAN declaration which laid down: ".....all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national development."

Even before Martial Law was declared, large sections of the Filipino youth were becoming critical of the exploitative aspects of the US-Philippine relationship. The continued existence of the US military bases was considered to be a serious erosion of Philippine independence. Several other irritants also accumulated resulting in a sense of estrangement.

The anti-American sentiment reached its peak during 1978, when the United States refused to support the Philippines in its claim to Sabah. The United

States Government had stated on 19 September 1968 that it had no doubt about the legality of the arrangements under which Sabah had become part of Malaysia in 1963. It generated surprise and anger in the Philippines, and a section of the population demanded abrogation of the defence treaties with the United States. It was felt that the Mutual Defence Treaty was ineffective as the United States would not come to the help of the Philippines in case of open confrontation with Malaysia. This anti-American feeling coincided with the growth of a more substantial Asian nationalism in the country.

The Philippines had offered and granted bases to the United States, for a period of 99 years, under the Military Base Agreement of 14 March 1947. The then ruling elite of the Philippines considered this a necessary price to pay for the much-needed financial assistance and military security. It needed US assistance to restore its war-damaged economy. Later, the bases became an important source of income and employment for the Philippines.

16.9.3 Negotiations over the Bases

Negotiations over the Bases Agreement have been going on through the terms of most Filipino Presidents. It appeared that at times the negotiations were used to extract more aid from the United States. According to Leon Ma Guerrero (an eminent Filipino diplomat), the Filipinos are aware that "American aid, whether military or non-military, whether by way of grants or by way of loans, has been less to the Philippines than in other Asian countries, which were either outright enemies of the U.S.A., like Japan, or uncommitted and indifferent to American policy objectives."

The interesting part is the hard line attitude adopted by the Marcos regime in these negotiations, when at the same time it had been stating that the military bases must stay. Marcos had been irked by the criticism of his regime by the US sources. He had been blamed by many Americans for violating human rights, the upholding of which was the main emphasis of the Carter Administration. Besides, many of his opponents had been given asylum in the United States. In fact, he had been openly alleging US interference in the internal affairs of his country.

16.9.4 Question of Marcos' Credibility

However, his credibility is lost when one remembers that he was the man who sent non-combatant Filipino troops to South Vietnam under American pressure, in spite of the fact that within the country public opinion was against the sending of troops. Under Marcos, agreement had been reached on placing the Clark Air Base and the Cubic Naval Base under Filipino Commanders. No agreement had been reached on the two basic issues, i.e., the amount of rental to be paid by the US Government and the question of criminal jurisdiction. The last issue was the most delicate, as it involved the US Military personnel who enjoyed extra-territorial rights. Many crimes were committed against Filipinos by the US military personnel on these bases, but the Philippine Government could not exercise any criminal jurisdiction over them.

As seen, the earlier problems following Marcos through his third term. The restlessness among the masses was growing and in spite of restrictions, one often heard of demonstrations against Marcos in which even the priests and nuns had participated.

He, of course, tried to give credibility to his government by holding a referendum in December 1977, in which the voters were asked to indicate if they wanted Marcos to continue as both president and prime minister after the convening of the Interim National Assembly. Predictably, he got the

approval, and as a next step, organized elections for the National Assembly on 7 April 1978. The Interim National Assembly comprised 200 members. 35 of its members had been appointed by Marcos, while the remaining had been elected by public ballot. All important powers remained with the President and the Assembly was not able to enact any new laws without his permission. Also, it was not able to lift the Martial Law.

16.10 END OF MARCOS SAGA

As the economic situation in the Philippines became bad, social unrest followed. With the assassination of Benigno S. Aquino, in August 1983, the whole nation galvanized behind Aquino's widow Corazon (Cory), to be led by her to freedom. Even the Catholic Church under Cardinal Sin joined the people in their protest against the tyrannical and oppressive rule of Marcos.

When elections were held (ostensibly under US pressure) on 7 February 1986, Marcos, like all dictators thought he would be able to manipulate the results with the blessings of the United States. However, nobody could help him in the face of mass uprising which brought Cory Aquino to power. The American support from Marcos came in the shape of a helicopter which flew him and his family to Hawaii. He left behind a shattered economy and evidence in the Presidential Palace of his and wife Imelda's corrupt, extravagant and opulent ways. Marcos left "a nation stripped and impoverished beyond anything known in Philippine history with the possible exception of the close of World War II." The success of "People Power Revolt" in the Philippines, has certainly become an example for all those who are fighting for democratic rights.

16.11 PRESIDENCY OF MRS CORAZON AQUINO : 1986-1992

President Aquino proved to be honest, earnest and dedicated in her efforts to bring stability to her country. She granted amnesty to political prisoners, scrapped decrees and restored freedom. However, she was kept on her toes throughout by her political opponents, thus making her task of nation building extremely difficult. The assignment before her was not easy, she was expected to dismantle the edifice of corruption left behind by twenty years of Marcos rule. In addition, she had to salvage the badly plundered and damaged Philippine economy. She has made all efforts to put an end to the war in Southern Philippines. Like other problems, this, too, is a legacy inherited by her from Marcos.

16.11.1 Marcos' Legacy and Attendant Problems

But the most serious aspect of Marcos legacy concerns the future role of the armed forces. Until 1972, the military played a low key role, but after the declaration of the Martial Law by Marcos in September 1972, the armed forces became openly involved in Philippine politics. Even now there are many in the military who continue to swear by the memory of Marcos. Between February 1986 and December 1987, six coup attempts were made against Mrs. Aquino's government by the pro-Marcos military factions.

Another Marcos legacy is the much strengthened Communist Movement in the Philippines. During Marcos regime, land reforms were introduced and a great show was made of wiping out the oligarchs. The land reforms were never implemented and a set of new oligarchs were created who were more

congenial to him. Thus, the movement continued to have a hold on certain sections of people whose grievances increased under the inefficient Marcos government.

16.11.2 New Constitution

In February 1987 a new Constitution was adopted after it was overwhelmingly approved by the people in a plebiscite. The Filipinos had been clamouring for a change, especially after having suffered for so long under Marcos. At the same time they have been strongly averse to their democratic traditions being destroyed. Marcos' dictatorship was a mere aberration in the way of that strong tradition. The new constitution is basically the same as the 1934 constitution with some safeguards; human rights are guaranteed and the President's powers are restricted. For example, the President tenure is limited to a single term of six years. Executive powers are severely constrained especially emergency powers, including the declaration of Martial law to prevent a repeat of authoritarian rule. Executive appointments require confirmation by the Commission on Appointments for heads of executive department, ambassadors, and chiefs of mission, as well as military promotions from the rank of army colonel and up the bicameral legislature comprises 24-member Senate elected nationwide and 250-member House of Representatives largely elected through single member constituencies. To secure the representation of minority groups, some seats are filled with a party-list system. Senators are elected for 6 years and House members for 3 years.

In May 1992 presidential poll, Fidel Ramos, a former defence secretary, was elected President to succeed Corazon Adnino in a largely peaceful multiparty election.

Check Your Progress 4

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.
 ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Discuss the role played by the American military bases in determining US-Philippine relations.

.....

16.12 PHILIPPINES TODAY

To sum up, there is a growing awareness in the Philippines of the contradiction between its desire for an Asian identity and its alignment with the United States. The contradiction is, of course, inherent in its historical background, but efforts are now being made to resolve this contradiction and give the country a totally Asian complexion.

16.12.1 Immediate Tasks

The immediate task of the Government of the Philippines is to improve the standard of living of its poverty-stricken masses; most Asian countries are engaged in the same task. They have therefore, a common stake in ensuring that the region remains free of tension and strife. The Philippines fully

recognizes this fact. It is also aware of the fact that there is immense scope for regional co-operation. The Philippines proposes to make its contribution to regional co-operation through organizations noted for their anti-Communist orientation. ASEAN, which has Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei and Singapore as its members, is an organization devoted to the ideal of turning the Southeast Asian region into a "zone of peace, freedom and neutrality." To that end, it has even undertaken political responsibilities that have grown over the years. It functions on the basis of frequent consultations among its members. These consultations help not only in solving specific problems, but also in building up a sense of shared purpose and solidarity.

16.12.2 Future of US-Philippine Relations

It is not, however, likely that a radical change in US-Philippine relations will come about in the near future. In spite of the expiry of the Bases Agreement, important members of the Philippines ruling-elite have personal interest in a number of areas of the economy, and they are, thus, susceptible to pressures from the United States. Thus, the efforts being made to promote and maintain cordial relations with the United States are actuated as much by the enlightened self-interest of the Philippine elite, as by "gratitude" or "shared ideals"

Check Your Progress 5

- Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly discuss trends in Philippine government and politics.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

16.13 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the Philippines. You were introduced to its history, the land itself and the people. You also studied in detail about the various political developments in the land leading up to the turbulent 80s and the 90s. It is hoped that after going through the unit you will be in a better position to discuss the various facets of the Filipino's lives, their government and politics.

16.14 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Abueva, Jose Veloso and Guzman, Raul P. de, eds., 1969, *Foundations and Dynamics of Filipino, Government and Politics* (Manila).

Agoncillo, Teodoro A., 1965, *The Fateful Years : Japan's Adventure in the Philippines* (Quezon city, 2 Volumes).

Agoncillo, Teodoro A., and Guerrero, Milagros C., 1970, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon city, end. 3).

Baig, M.R.A., 1967, *In Different Saddles* (Bombay).

Guerrero, Leon Ma., 1972. *Prisoners of History* (New Delhi).

Kaul, Man Mohini, 1978. *The Philippines and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi, Radiant Publishers).

M. Wright, 1988. *Revolution in the Philippines?* Harlow : Longman.

J. Denis Derbyshire and Ian Derbyshire, 1990. *Chambers Political Systems of the World*, New Delhi : Allied Publishers.

Carolina G. Herndez, "Philippines" in Joel Krieger, ed. 1993. *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, New York, Oxford.

Mario D. Zamora, 1994. *Perspective on Cultural Change and Development Focus on the Philippines*, New Delhi, Reliance Publishing House.

16.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See section 16.4 for your answer

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See section 16.7 for your answer
- 2) See section 16.7.5 for your answer

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See section 16.8 for your answer

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See section 16.9 for your answer

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) See section 16.12 for your answer

UNIT 17 GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Indonesia's Search for a Viable Political System: Experiments with the Parliamentary Democracy (1950-57)
 - 17.2.1 Parliamentary System in Indonesia
 - 17.2.2 Elections
- 17.3 Soekarno's Concept of Guided Democracy
- 17.4 The Period of Guided Democracy: Emergence of Soekarno, Army and the PKI Triarchy
- 17.5 The Army in Power : The Emergence of New Order
 - 17.5.1 Forces of Renewal and Army Rule in Indonesia
- 17.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.7 Key Words
- 17.8 Some Useful Books
- 17.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

17.0 OBJECTIVES

In Indonesia politics in the post-independent period has been marked by intra-party divisions, factionalism, strife and mutual jealousies of the leaders, parliamentary democracy and attendant successes and failures. After going through this unit, you would be in position to:

- describe Indonesia's political system and experiments with political democracy
- assess the role of leadership and democratic processes
- evaluate the role played by army in Indonesian politics.

17.1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a republic in Southeast Asia comprising the islands of the Malay archipelago and the Western part of New Guinea (West Irian). It has an area of 1,904,000 sq. km. and in 1971 the country had a population of 1,24,000,000. 66 per cent of the total population live in Java. The largest islands are Kalimantan, Sumatra, West Irian, Java and Madura. There are about 360 ethnic groups or sub-nationalities in Indonesia. Among these groups the Javanese (over 45 per cent), the Sundanese (about 14 per cent) and the Madurese (about 7 per cent) are the bigger groups. There is also a big population (more than 2 per cent) of Chinese origin. According to an estimate 87 per cent of the total population are Muslims, 4 per cent Christians, the remainder are Buddhists, Hindus and animists. The official language is Bhasha Indonesia which belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian group of languages.

The present political system in Indonesia is called the "New Order" as opposed to the "Old Order" of Soekarno (Sukarno). The basic fact of Indonesian politics is the search for a viable political system with an identity that can help the leaders shape and modernise their society. The history of Indonesian politics since independence can be divided into three main periods: the period of parliamentary democracy (1950-57), the period of Guided democracy (1957-65), and the present period under General Suharto who is now retired from the army and prefers to call himself a civilian President and which is called by the present rulers as Pancasila democracy. The earlier two periods met with failure, and Suharto after more than twenty-five years in the *Istana Negara* (Presidential palace) has no doubt, brought political stability and economic prosperity to the country. However, now seems to have lost much of his legitimacy for his governmental power which was not only consolidated by a systematic annihilation of the communists and emasculation of other

political groups but also became increasingly authoritarian in character. The government is riddled with corruption and the charge that Suharto's own family uses its position in questionable deals, is constantly harped on by a large section of the political public.

17.2 INDONESIA'S SEARCH FOR A VIABLE POLITICAL SYSTEM : EXPERIMENTS WITH THE PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY (1950-57)

After the attainment of independence, the spirit of nationalism which had hitherto united all freedom fighters, apparently ebbed away. The post-independence period was marked by intra-party divisions, political factionalism, strife and mutual jealousies of the leaders.

During the period 1950-56, Indonesia had experienced six cabinets and the longest period of any one cabinet was two years. None of these cabinets had a true representative character since there were no elections till 1955 and the first elected government took office only in March 1956. Both Soekarno and the army, the two major extra-parliamentary forces, had played an important role in the selection of the cabinets—the former by virtue of his power to elect the *formateurs*, and the latter as a pressure group and by virtue of its influence over some major political parties. This was made possible by the fact that most parties, ideologically and organizationally, were very weak and were unable to formulate any specific goal which they could translate into action necessary for the nation-building process. Division within the parties, numerous political parties fighting with one another for power, personalities have more influence as compared to ideologies and programmes, were some of the important factors that led to the decline of the party system and with it of parliamentary democracy in Indonesia.

17.2.1 Parliamentary System in Indonesia

A further contributory factor for the failure of parliamentary democracy was the coalitional character of all the cabinets in Indonesia. In the absence of unity and consensus among the political parties, the coalitions did not succeed as had been evident from the downfall of the one cabinet after another. Since none of the political parties had an absolute majority in parliament, parties often utilized the extra-parliamentary forces—the President and the army—who in turn utilized the parties for furthering their own interests. The presence of a charismatic Soekarno with a popular mass base and at the same time ironically having no decisive constitutional powers, and a politicised army with a significant role in the fateful years of national revolution against the Dutch made it all the more difficult for Indonesia to practise parliamentary democracy with success. In fact, parliamentary democracy functioned (though embryonically) in Indonesia so long as it did not face serious challenges from the army and Soekarno. The major reason for this was the clash of interests between Soekarno and the army in the initial years which gave some room to various parties for manoeuvring things in their favour. But by 1956, there was convergence of interests and understanding between the President and the army centred on their joint attempt toward weakening the parties. When the real test of viability of parliamentary democracy and the party system came, the parties could not demonstrate their unity and strength and yielded to the extra-parliamentary forces. Almost all the cabinets during the period of parliamentary system in Indonesia had their downfall because of the opposition or active dislike of either the President or the army. In no case a cabinet had to resign or go out of office due to parliamentary censure. This in a way demonstrated parliament's lack of power vis-a-vis decision-making. At no time did the political process run through the normal parliamentary channels; rather it ran through extra-parliamentary ones.

17.2.2 Elections

It was hoped that the elections would bring stability and the necessary political crystallization, but this was not to be. Far from bringing stability and satisfying the rising expectations of the people, the elections made the party squabbles all the more bitter, and also intensified the ideological, ethnic, and other differences—Pancasila vs Islamic state, Java vs Sumatra, Santri vs Abangan, Communism vs anti-Communism. The elections also did not basically change the system of forming the government, i.e., on the basis of compromises, some of which were quite far-reaching. This made it practically impossible

for the post-election cabinet to carry out a vigorous and well-defined policy. The elections were a failure in a way. The pre-election governments were corrupt, inefficient, and lacked the skill needed for political management. It was again hoped that the elections would bring a true representative government which could correct the shortcomings of the earlier regimes. The elections, however, could not have the way for an efficient and stable government capable of tackling the enormous problems that Indonesia had inherited from its colonial rulers and carry on the process of nation building. The people soon became disillusioned with the elected government that took office after the country's first elections, and this finally resulted in the decline of civilian authority. The legitimacy of parliamentary government began to be seriously questioned.

The elections also revealed the regional character of the parties, and by 1956 when regional differences came to be more pronounced, the parties also began to identify themselves with their respective regional interests. This led to serious splits within the governments. As a result, by the end of 1956 some of the regional commanders, dissatisfied with the way the central government in Jakarta was dealing with their problems and demands, staged a series of coups. As confrontation began to develop between the central government and the outer regions, the political parties also started to polarize. The PNI and the PKI (the nationalist and the communist parties respectively) being Java-based parties sided with the central government in Jakarta, whereas the Masjumi having its base largely in the outer islands, began to identify itself with the regional causes. The Nahdatul Ulema (NU), the other important political party and essentially a Java-based party of religious scholars, initially maintained certain neutrality but later on fell in line with other political parties in order to support the central authority. It was around this time that Soekarno advocated the burial of political parties which, according to him, looked only after their own interests and not those of the nation, and were responsible for creating instability within the country. It was a kind of shock-therapy, as Soekarno himself was to admit later. The parties, obviously, reacted to it sharply. Masjumi was particularly strident in its criticism of Soekarno's proposal for the burial of political parties.

Soekarno actually did not want, at the first instance, to abolish the parties. What he wanted was to bring home the realization that the existence of the party system as such did not essentially help the process of political development; on the contrary, it at times retarded it. He also wished to reduce the influence of the parties by breaking the backbone of the party leaders. However, he was not yet sure how to do it. He was only testing some of his ideas and sending feelers in order to gauge the reactions of the citizens. This was, however, enough to set off a series of reactions, and the first of these was the resignation of Mohammad Hatta from the Vice-Presidency, followed by withdrawal of Masjumi from the cabinet. Hatta's resignation intensified the already existing differences between the central government and the regions, because with Hatta who came from the outer region no longer in the government, the central government lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the outer island people. Hatta's resignation was ill-timed, and was based on miscalculations. It widened the gulf between Soekarno and Hatta—the symbolic *Dwitunggal* (Duumvirate), between the central government and the regions.

The situation was further aggravated by the withdrawal of the Masjumi members from the cabinet. This dealt a death blow to the first popularly elected government of Ali Sastromidjojo. Both the party system and parliamentary democracy were facing a great crisis. The anti-party forces were offered an excellent opportunity to brand the parties as divisive forces. By withdrawing from the cabinet, the Masjumi made the PNI and the NU helpless and forced them to side with the communists who seized the opportunity to consolidate their own position at the expense of other parties. It also further widened the gulf between the central government and the outer regions and accelerated the confrontation between the two.

The end of 1956 and the beginning of 1957 witnessed the rise of two kinds of reactions in Indonesian politics. One came from Soekarno who expressed his strong disapproval of the western parliamentary system of government as was functioning in Indonesia, and advocated an Indonesian type of democracy which must be guided and led. The other came from the regionalists who wanted the restoration of Soekarno-Hatta duumvirate, by which they implied the return of Hatta to the Prime Ministership in addition to more

regional autonomy, greater power for the regional army commanders, and finally an overall anti-communist orientation to the new government in Jakarta. Both these reactions were an outcome of the failure of the parliamentary system of government beset with multi-faceted challenges.

It is against this background of a rapidly changing society and government that Soekarno's concept of guided democracy should be judged. At the time of this crisis, Soekarno, the foremost leader for three decades, offered his *Konsepsi* (concept). He seemed to have broader, more comprehensive and ideologically satisfying solutions than most of the political parties or the regionalists had, and this really was an immense asset at a time when the bottom seemed to have been knocked out of the whole constitutional structure and fundamental solutions reigned supreme. When the rivalries among the political parties, ethnic groups, regionalists as well as religionists were bringing the country close to chaos and disintegration, Soekarno stepped into the political arena to offer his solution to the country's maladies, and decided to guide his country to democracy.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : Use the space below for your answer. Also compare your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Critically examine the political instability in Indonesia.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What are the main factors contributing to the failure of parliamentary democracy in Indonesia.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) Bring out the importance of elected politics and its impact on the democratic process in Indonesia.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.3 SOEKARNO'S CONCEPT OF GUIDED DEMOCRACY

Speaking in February 1957, Soekarno gave a new concrete form to his ideas of guided democracy, and called for the establishment of a new high advisory body, the *National Council*, which would represent various "functional groups"—workers, peasants, veterans, national businessmen, the armed forces, and so on—and would sit under his chairmanship, and a "Mutual Help" cabinet of all parties, including the Communists. Support for the President came principally from the PNI and the Communists. When the first elected government resigned in March 1957, President Soekarno's proposals were

accepted, but in modified form. Soekarno himself formed an extra-parliamentary "business cabinet" headed by the non-party engineer, Djuanda. The Communist party was not represented in this new cabinet—nor for that matter was the Masjumi, the party most strongly opposed to guided democracy—but the Communists gained seats on the forty-five-man National Council establishment soon after the cabinet took office. Another result of the crisis was that strength and the position of the central army leadership under Chief of Staff Major General A.H. Nasution. This was particularly because martial law was declared for the whole nation on March 14, providing a legal basis for army intervention in civilian affairs.

The new Prime Minister, Djuanda, made a number of efforts to heal the breach between Djakarta and the regional regimes, but basic political disagreements persisted. As the end of 1957 approached, each side grew increasingly suspicious of the intentions of the other. The regionalists feared that Jakarta was planning military action against them and the central government suspected the regionalists of making common cause with Western powers to overthrow it. The hopes of negotiated settlement faded quickly by November end, when an attempt was made by a group of Muslim youths to assassinate President Soekarno. This action created a crisis situation, particularly as it coincided with Indonesia's defeat in the UN General Assembly—on a motion which urged that Indonesia and the Netherlands should negotiate with one another on the Indonesian claim to West Irian—and President Soekarno threatening the Dutch with radical action in the event of the motion being lost. Within a few days of the UN vote, radical action commenced, with groups of workers in Dutch-owned establishments declaring them as "taken over" in the name of the Indonesian Republic. Dutch shipping companies and hotels, plantations and factories, banks, trading firms, and shops—all these were seized by groups of their Indonesian workers, in a set of quickly snow-balling actions which clearly had support from some sections of the government. On December 13, 1957, Major General Nasution issued a Martial Law decree which authorized army commanders to take over control of the enterprises from the workers. The huge Dutch business establishment had all but formally become Indonesian government property; formal nationalization followed a year later. The great majority of the approximately 46,000 Dutch citizens who were left in the country at that time had departed three months later.

It was not long after these take over actions that the regional contest came to a head. Leaders from a number of defiant regional councils met in Central Sumatra in January and were joined by several top leaders of the Masjumi and the Socialist Party and men like former Prime Minister Natsir, who had been personally harassed in Jakarta in December and had fled from it. On February 10, this group issued an ultimatum: unless the Djuanda cabinet resigned in five days and was replaced by a cabinet under Hatta and/or the Sultan of Jogjakarta, a person respected by all Indonesians, the leaders assembled in Central Sumatra would establish rival government. On February 15, the ultimatum was actually carried out: the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) was proclaimed in Padang (Central Sumatra), with the Masjumi leader and former central bank governor, Sjafruddin Prawiranegara, as Prime Minister. It was immediately clear that the counter government enjoyed support from the army-led council regimes of Central Sumatra and North Sulawesi, but military commanders elsewhere outside Java took a "wait and see" position. The US government showed a degree of initial sympathy for the rebels, both overtly in a statement by Secretary of State Dulles and covertly through supplies of modern arms; but it too remained substantially uncommitted, refusing to recognize the PRRI in any formal way, and the American oil companies with wells in rebel territory continued to pay revenue to the central government. To the surprise of most observers, the counter-government's soldiers offered little or no resistance. By April the rebel cause had lost its chance of attracting new support either from the uncommitted military commanders of other regions or from the United States and its allies. The PRRI continued as a guerrilla movement of large proportions in both Sumatra and Sulawesi. But the major challenge had been decisively defeated.

17.4 THE PERIOD OF GUIDED DEMOCRACY : EMERGENCE OF SOEKARNO, ARMY AND THE PKI TRIARCHY

Perhaps the biggest political change of the period was a rapid increase in the power of the army (or its loyal sections). The army had been able to place many of its officers in

executive and supervisory positions in the enterprises taken over from the Dutch. With the outbreak of civil war, Major General Nasution and his territorial commanders had begun to make extensive use of their martial law powers to exercise control over civilian administration and political affairs. And by its quick victory over the PRRI, the army had gained tremendously in prestige. All in all, it seemed most unlikely in the second half of 1958 that civilians would be able to re-establish the degree of control they had over the military before 1956. On the contrary, there was much discussion in 1958 of a possible move towards military dictatorship.

But not only the army had grown in power as a result of the crisis of the period, the President, Soekarno, had also gained in clout. He was widely credited with a role of key importance in the politically popular decision to initiate the takeovers of Dutch property. His strongest enemies, the leaders of the Masjumi and the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI), had been either defeated (where they had become part of the PRRI), or discredited by association, and their political influence had been drastically reduced. By the second half of 1958, Soekarno's broadly phrased appeals for guided democracy and a "democracy which accords with our national identity"—appeals to which the army leaders assented without openly stated qualifications—were being hailed in almost every public place as the way to political regeneration.

Conversely, the parties which had been powerful in the previous eight years were now largely demoralized and without influence. All of these parties had lost prestige as a result of the President's denunciations of "liberal democracy", "50 per cent plus one democracy", and "the disease of parties, parties, and still more parties". So positive had been the response to Soekarno's denunciations that very few party leaders had advanced principled arguments in support of the existing constitutional system. By the second half of 1958 even the beneficiaries of the system felt obliged to join in the chorus of denunciations—all except the Masjumi, which was discredited for its leader's links with the PRRI. Constitutional democracy was both ideologically defeated and abandoned even by the parties who upheld it. Of the four large parties which had emerged from the elections of 1955, only the Communist Party remained vigorous and respected. But it had its troubles too, because it had become a special target, along with the Masjumi and the PSI, for the army's activities restricting political freedom. The increasingly turbulent adversary politics of the previous eight years had been brought to an end, and a period of authoritarian calm had set in. Politics had lost its open character and become for the most part a hidden tussle between various forces within the government.

Early in 1959 President Soekarno and the cabinet decided to accept an army proposal aimed at giving a concrete shape to the concept of guided democracy. They declared that the promised political restructuring should be done within the framework of a return to the constitution of August 1945 (which had been abandoned formally in 1949 and in practice in November 1945). After a complicated and ultimately unsuccessful series of moves to persuade the elected Constituent Assembly to approve this proposal, President Soekarno finally re-enacted the revolutionary constitution by a presidential decree on July 5, 1958, and dissolved the Assembly. As the 1945 constitution incorporated principles of the *Pancasila* and made no reference to Islam, its re-enactment meant that an official end had been put to the long and acrimonious debate on the ideological foundations of the state. Also involved was a change from a parliamentary to a presidential system of government. Soekarno became President-Prime Minister, with the retiring Prime Minister Djuanda assuming the new post of First Minister. Army Chief of Staff Nasution became Minister of Security and Defence Affairs, while retaining his army post, and 10 other service officers, 7 of them army men, were given ministerial positions in a new cabinet of 37 members. The National Council was reconstituted in the same month to become the Supreme Advisory Council postulated by the 1945 constitution and a new high-status body, the National Planning Council, was established with instructions to draw up a blueprint for Indonesian socialism.

The next in this series of quick actions was a complete reorganization of regional governments making it more authoritarian and centralistic. The July 5 decree was officially said to mark the "Rediscovery of Our Revolution", the decisive abandonment of the false paths trodden since 1949, and the President's Independence Day speech interpreting the change was subsequently declared to be the Political Manifesto of the state. An appointed *Gotong Rojong* (Mutual Aid) parliament was established in June 1960, after President Soekarno had dissolved the existing elected assembly. A National Front

was established in August the same year with a view to bring about closer cooperation between all parties, groups, and individuals who supported the Political Manifesto. And in November-December 1960 the inaugural meeting of the highest state organ (under the 1945 constitution), the People's Consultative Assembly was held. This body then endorsed an Eight year over all Development Plan which had been drawn up by the National Planning Council.

Restriction on political freedom began to grow as a consequence of the introduction of guided democracy. The Masjumi and the PSI were banned in August 1960, and a number of their political leaders were arrested in January 1962. Press censorship also grew more severe, and vows of narrowly focussed loyalties were increasingly required of journalists, teachers, students, and civil servants. At the same time the government started devoting more attention to the development and inculcation of state ideology. The government's efforts to generate economic expansion had been generally ineffective leading to a virtual economic decline in all the sectors. Export production fell drastically, and production of foodstuffs for domestic consumption rose rather slowly. The country faced a high rate of inflation and the rising prices created mass discontent.

The Soekarno government, however, had success in other fields. One of these was the ending of the PRRI rebellion in 1961 and restoring the unity of the country. The Nasution-led army was willing to extend fairly generous terms to the rebels if they "returned to the fold of the Republic". (The term "surrender" was avoided.) Thus approximately 100,000 men abandoned the path of rebellion in 1961. Among them were the leaders and other members of two earlier rebel movements which had become allied with the PRRI, the Achinese Islamic movement of Daud Beureueh and the Islamic insurrection of Kahar Muzakar in South Sulawesi. With rebel activity outside Java virtually at an end, the army was free in late 1961 and early 1962 to concentrate its efforts on destruction of the thirteen-year-old Darul Islam rebellion of West Java. In June 1961 it succeeded in capturing the leader of this rebellion, S.M. Kartosuwirjo, and most of his followers surrendered immediately thereafter. By August 1962, civil security had been restored in virtually the whole country. The other major achievement of the government was the August 1962 agreement with the Netherlands on West Irian which was brought back under Indonesia completing the process of independence of the country.

Soekarno's guided democracy was based on a delicate balance of power between three emerging political forces during the period; namely, President Soekarno himself, the army and the PKI. The most important aspect of this alliance of the trio of guided democracy was that their union was a tactical one, and thus a temporary arrangement to further each other's interests vis-a-vis the other. It was, therefore, natural that their relationship would be characterized by both cooperation and conflict. Of the three, Soekarno was the most important and powerful. The army increased its prestige and power by crushing the rebellion as well as by taking over the management of Dutch properties. While Nasution and his central army leadership helped Soekarno considerably in the implementation of his concept of guided democracy, Soekarno was not particularly happy with the increasing presence of the army in the political process of the country. This was because a powerful army was always a threat to his own predominant position in the country's politics. So a countervailing force had to be created to balance the growing power of the army. As Soekarno did not have a political party of his own (while the PNI always identified itself with Soekarno, he did not associate himself very much with the party), he had to depend on the PKI to fulfil that role. Although he was never a communist, he had some admiration for the PKI for its superb organization and the discipline and dedication of its cadres. At the same time, he did not particularly relish the idea of the PKI emerging as too powerful and capturing political power. So Soekarno continued to balance the PKI against the army and vice-versa. Both the army and the PKI needed Soekarno to consolidate each other's position against the other, giving Soekarno the necessary leverage to preserve his dominance within the coalition. The failure of guided democracy within a few years of its implementation can be attributed to the lack of uniformity of purpose between these three contenders for power. During the period of parliamentary democracy, power did not reside in parliament; it was in the hands of party oligarchies as well as with the extra-parliamentary forces. Guided democracy tried to plug this loophole, but did not succeed due to the conflicting interests among the three—the President, the army and the PKI—on which the system was based. The army was looking for an opportunity to annihilate its main rival i.e. the PKI, and the opportunity came in late 1965 with the complete breakdown of understanding between the three and particularly, with the failing health of the leader of the system, i.e., Soekarno.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.
- 1) Briefly explain Soekarno's concept of Guided Democracy

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What are the main factors which contributed for the failure of Guided Democracy?
Discuss.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

17.5 THE ARMY IN POWER : THE EMERGENCE OF NEW ORDER

The dramatic developments following the 1965 coup ushered in a new period in Indonesian politics which witnessed one of the greatest tragedies of human history under the guardianship and stewardship of Suharto and his armed forces. The seizure of power by the army and the consolidation of its authoritarian rule had taken place with organized slaughter and mass killings to establish "stability and order" which the Western powers and academicians much cherished and propagated and which paved the way for the exploitation of the Third World countries. The late Bertrand Russell, the great humanist, expressed his deep anguish and pain at the massacre and wrote : "..... in four months, five times as many people died in Indonesia as in Vietnam in twelve years". But Russell was an exception; the tragedy of Indonesia caused great delight in the west. *Time* magazine described the slaughter as "the West's best news for years in Asia".

The immediate cause of the 1965 coup is still riddled with mystery and, as yet, there are no clear evidences or definitive history regarding those actually responsible for the events that shook the country. For the sake of presenting the emergent role of the army in proper perspective, it will suffice to narrate its central position in the politics of the country. On September 30, 1965, discontent amongst a group of PKI-sympathizing Javanese junior officers culminated in an attempted coup by Lt. Col. Untung. Six senior generals of the army, including Yani, the army chief, were murdered, although Nasution who by now had been promoted to the rank of Defence Minister and had also been marked for killing, escaped with injuries; otherwise things were badly bungled and it was successfully suppressed by Maj. Gen. Suharto, the surviving senior-most army officer after Nasution. The army leaders alleged that the PKI was the main plotter of the coup. Soekarno's authority was undermined by his inability to restore the pre-coup cooperation between the parties under the NASAKOM (Nationalism, Religion and Communism) concept, and by his refusal to put the blame for the Untung coup and the killings of six generals on the PKI. This was used by Suharto and his army; and in collaboration with the Islamic groups who suffered deprivation during the later years of guided democracy, they gradually started stripping Soekarno's powers. Side by side, the army began a massive campaign to destroy the PKI, arresting large number of its cadres and fanning the Islamic groups and local anti-communists to finish the communists for all time to come. The extermination of thousands of communist cadres and hundreds of thousands of communist party followers and sympathizers and in many cases innocent people, became the fundamental factor of the New Order.

Students, sometimes on their own and sometimes at the instigation of the army, played a very important role in bringing about the downfall of Soekarno. Pressure was brought to bear upon Soekarno to explain his own relations with the plotters. The situation reached a climax on March 11, 1966, when Sockarno was forced to transfer power to General Suharto, the hero of the counter-coup, "to take all necessary steps" to remedy the political instability in the country. This mandate, however, was used by Suharto to take over Soekarno's political prerogatives and through a series of stage-managed actions both inside the MPRS (The Provisional Supreme Legislative Assembly) and outside it, he was able to ease out Soekarno from power. On March 12, 1967 Suharto became the acting President and after a lapse of one year, on March 27, 1968 he was installed as the President of the country. By that time, all the major state institutions had been thoroughly overhauled to remove those who had any connections with either Soekarno or the PKI.

There are certain similarities between the regimes of Soekarno and Suharto. Both of them tried to create a political system which was designed, regulated, directed and imposed from above. Both curbed activities of the parties, denied the scope of any dissent to their system of government, curtailed press freedom and imprisoned their opponents. Soekarno banned the Masjumi and the Socialists, and Suharto the Communists. Their style of politics is also very similar—the same *Kraton* (Palace) politics—playing one group against the other. At the same time there are important differences between the two. Suharto's government is much more authoritarian, ruthless and oppressive than Soekarno's. The consolidation of the New Order was achieved mainly through systematic killing of the communists and supposed communists, and through silencing of other opposition groups by coercion. Large number of political prisoners, day-to-day arrests, interrogation, dismissal of people from jobs on the ground of alleged communist links, suppression and intimidation—all these demonstrate very clearly that the military regime under Suharto was determined to strengthen its grip on power through brute force and unbridled exercise of violence vis-a-vis the opposition.

Since the establishment of the New Order, the army has been the only dominant force with complete control over the state apparatus and the society as a whole. The non-communist political parties, which had existed in various degrees of disarray since the overthrow of parliamentary democracy in the late fifties, have been further emasculated by Suharto's government through steamroller tactics. Army leaders, over the years, forced most parties to dismiss their old executives and include only those who were amenable to the regime. This had happened more in the case of the PNI, because of its close links with Soekarno. Whereas in 1966 it was the leftist and the Soekarnoist elements who suffered the brunt of army wrath, in 1970s and 1980s all parties irrespective of their affiliations were emasculated. In the 1970s all political parties were forced to merge into two groups, namely, the PPP (Islamic Development Party) and the PDI (Democratic Party of Indonesia). At the same a new state-sponsored political party called GOLKAR was created to provide civilian image to the army rule. All state employees were required to be members of the party, thus ensuring its victory over the other two political groups in all the elections that were held so far in a cautiously-flirted system of democracy that the New Order government of Suharto invented to provide legitimacy for its rule.

The army's control over Indonesian society at large and over its bureaucratic machinery appeared to tighten after early 1970. This process has been rationalized with the argument that only well-trained specialists have the ability to mobilize the country's resources in order to achieve the goals set by the government's First Five Year Plan. Wider power for this group of civilian and military bureaucrats and technocrats were needed if Indonesia was to develop. In other words, Suharto government justified centralization of power in the hands of the chosen few in the name of modernization and development. This process was furthered by the second nation-wide elections (but first under the army rule) in July 1971. Initially, The Suharto government's decision to hold the elections was considered by the political parties as a victory for them, but their hopes died very soon as the military made it abundantly clear that they were not going to lose their hold on power. The military had already assured itself of the right to nominate one hundred members to what was to be a parliament of 460, and it decided to make its victory certain; firstly, by excluding those who were considered to be directly or indirectly involved in the abortive coup of September 30, 1965, former members of the PKI, the Masjumi, PSI as well as other banned organizations, from casting their votes or from being candidates, and secondly, by creating a new party called the GOLKAR, a conglomeration of professional associations,

interest groups, trade unions, youth, veterans and women's group. In these elections, in which local army commanders and civil servants often put massive pressure on the electorate, more than 75% of the seats were won by GOLKAR.

Suharto has strengthened his position within the armed forces through a number of reorganizations of the defence forces. Earlier, Indonesia was divided into seventeen territorial commands, and each territorial commander had complete control and authority over the movement of troops and other military activities. The system had made the commanders in the past enormously powerful and virtually war lords. Under the new system, operational authority of the military has been divided into six "regional defence" commands, and the new commanders are under the direct authority of the Minister of Defence (who always happens to be someone very close to Suharto) and would have authority over the administration of their forces and equipments. Suharto has also seen to it that he is able to have direct control over the socio-political duties of the armed forces involving their participation in functions of the government and in different agencies. Suharto has also stripped the army, navy and air force commanders of their cabinet portfolios as was the practice during the guided democracy period, and made them Chiefs of Staff Subordinate to the defence ministry. The reorganization of the armed forces has enabled Suharto to centralize the functions of different armed services, hitherto acting independent of each other, and establish firm control over them.

The Suharto government's enhanced control over society has also resulted from an extended shakedown, streamlining, and militarization of the government's own apparatus. What was previously a heterogenous, ramshackle, and often stubbornly localistic bureaucracy has progressively been remade into a far more cohesive instrument of control. The existence of a wide network of intelligence services and systems have further helped the government to cow the critics into silence. Fear has been a powerful stimulus to political passivity, as has been the post-massacre sense of revulsion against politics. The weakness of the political parties helped the army regime to consolidate its positions by placing military personnel in key positions in important organs of the government, both at the national and regional levels.

Apart from other political techniques to strengthen control over each and every aspect of Indonesian society, the Suharto government has sought legitimacy on the basis of its economic achievements. Political participation in decision-making is denied to the masses on the ground that political competition will lead to chaos and instability, and this in turn will hamper government's pursuance of twin goals, namely economic development and modernization. In practice, the freedom to design has meant arbitrary formulation of the objectives and methods of economic development by the professional staff closest to Suharto. By training and social affiliation, Suharto's planners were inclined to believe that the construction of a national design for development did not require either the involvement of the citizens or their agreement. Moreover, the designers believed that if the contending political forces were allowed to speak out, they might have raised "unnecessary" issues of distribution and division of advantage in society. The development is only one part of the totality of national progress. Democracy, nation-building and social justice are some of the other ingredients of social progress. By over-emphasizing the economic side of the development effort, there is a great danger that Indonesia will be heading towards some serious political or social trouble in the near future.

One cannot deny the fact that the Suharto regime has been able to achieve considerable economic progress. Suharto had inherited from the earlier regime and economy which was characterized by acute inflation, drastic deterioration of an infrastructure, i.e., poor conditions of roads, railways, and shipping facilities; and a heavy indebtedness to foreign countries. With the help of the country's economists and planners as well as technocrats who were held in high esteem in the West, the Suharto government negotiated rescheduling of debt payments, and long-term loans and investments of private capital from the West and Japan. As a result, the government was able within a couple of years to curb inflation, achieve major improvements in transportation and communications, increased production and a major rise in the export earnings, particularly from oil, other minerals and timber. Much of these however, have been accomplished mainly through the injection of large doses of aid and investment, the oil bonanza of the '70s, rather than through domestic mobilization of resources and elimination of corruption from public life. The result has been the emergence of a new class of rich, mostly from the army which has

opened a large number of business enterprises in collaboration with the local Chinese community, who provide the army with managerial expertise and business entrepreneurship in return for protection against any racial hostility towards them from the indigenous Indonesians. Even while the fruits of development had trickled down to the bottom sections of the society in Indonesia, it could not narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. On the other hand, the economic development strategy of the New Order under Suharto has brought about an ever growing gap between the rich and the poor, between the military and civilians, between urban and rural areas, and between landlords and government officials at the local level and the mass of the peasantry. This has caused resentment in large sections of the politically conscious both public in the urban rural masses.

17.5.1 Process of Renewal and Army Rule in Indonesia

Indonesia is presently passing through an interesting political phase with President Suharto's New Order government in its twenty-seventh year in office, and many of its original 1945 generation (the revolutionary nationalist groups who fought a bitter struggle against the Dutch for the independence of the country) with personal experience of Indonesia's freedom movement and guerrilla struggle from 1945 onwards now retired or dead. Questions of succession and the issue of an orderly political transition are rapidly gaining importance. This is reflected in President Suharto's own constant emphasis in the past few years on the regeneration of leadership under the tutelage of a few remaining figures of the 45 generation. How the country would be prepared for the change and the impending hand-over of power to the next generation, and how the generational change could be planned with maximal advantage to the present wielders of power, have been the themes of political activities in Indonesia over the last decade. While the generational change within the Indonesian military hierarchy has already been completed, the actual transfer of political power is going to be slow, and is still under the control of Suharto and his close associates of the 1945 generation.

President Suharto himself now appears increasingly unlikely to lay down his office, however, and indications are that he would stand for re-election when his current fifth term expires in 1993. The present leadership would not like to hand over power till it was certain that the status quo would continue under the new dispensation. In fact, the first stage in preparing the country for such a planned orderly change had begun from the mid-eighties with a number of personnel changes within the Indonesian military and reorganization of the armed forces, and continued through the late 80s and early 90s. The process was further intensified with the enactment of laws that tightened the controls of the government over contending political groups making it easier for its successors to take over, and to ensure that the basic direction of the government could be maintained. In the last few years, the New Order regime has presented Pancasila (the five principles initially enunciated by Soekarno as the basis of Indonesia's state ideology; the five principles are: Belief in God, Nationalism, Internationalism, Political and Economic Democracy) as a framework for holding the country together and protecting the political status quo from pressures exerted by militant Islam and communism. The regime has perceived political Islam as the major threat to its continued exercise of power, and has thus attempted to clip its political wings by taking initiatives to drive a wedge between Islamic political parties and institutions. By forcing all mass organizations, including parties, whether religious, professional or cultural—to accept the state creed of Pancasila as the sole ideology, the government has been able to maintain strict control over all organizations and institutions, from religious bodies to trade unions.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:**
- 1) Use the space below for your answer.
 - 2) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain briefly the role of army in Indonesian politics.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) What do you understand by New Order and its legitimacy in Indonesian politics? Discuss.
-
.....
.....
.....
.....

17.6 LET US SUM UP

Despite occasional challenges to his rule through more than 25 years, Suharto has been remarkably successful in maintaining political stability of cajoling the majority of the population into accepting his blueprint for Indonesian society. His government has taken measures to ensure that those recalcitrants who cannot be persuaded to accept the present government are at least made to fear it. This he has done by clamping down on the dissenting minority. Even though resentments and dissatisfactions still persist in some sections of the population. The government so far has been able to keep them within manageable proportions, and there is little likelihood of any major challenge to Suharto's government in the immediate future, particularly since the "Petition of 50" group (the only opposition group to openly challenge Suharto's leadership and his ability to rule in view of the corrupt nature of his government. The name was derived from a petition sent to Suharto in early 1980 in which a group of 50 dissident leaders, many of whom were former Suharto associates who had helped him come to power, but came to believe by the beginning of 1980s that Suharto had betrayed the ideals of New Order, and therefore lost his legitimacy to rule) has been weakened through persecution and marginalization, and the various Islamic organizations have reconciled themselves to the primacy of state ideology, Pancasila. The institutional structure has been geared to the maintenance of status quo. Behind the stability, however, there are uncertainties for the future. Although there are elements of political institutionalization under the New Order, yet the political system is sustained essentially by Suharto's own personal skill in manipulating forces and events. This personal element always brings uncertainty into the political system.

One can identify two major components within the opposition to Suharto regime—one populist, which comes out particularly loud and clear in Islamic groups and some progressive elements, and the other regularizing one, which comes out in the carefully chosen words of liberal professionals—men of high prestige. The Islamic opposition, in its form and content is sharply anti-imperialist, hostile to the multinationals and capitalist form of development in its present form, and particularly to the notion that Indonesia should aspire to do everything in the way it is done in the West. The liberal regularizers, on the other hand, are people who want Indonesian capitalism to run more smoothly and predictably and modernization to proceed further along the paths it took in the last 25 years but with less corruption, less waste, less monopoly, less nepotism and less military privilege. And they want more efficient performance by the government.

While the Islamic groups and some radical intellectuals, for different reasons and from different perspectives are fascinated and attracted by the appeals of populism, lots of middle class Indonesians who sympathize with the goals of regularization in a general way have been unwilling to support the anti-Suharto opposition because they are positively frightened by the populist as well as Islamic elements who talk about the need for action by the people. In this scenario it is unlikely that there will be any serious challenge to Suharto's government in the near future. If at all there is any change, it will be more in the direction of a change in the leadership of the army—Suharto being replaced by another military leader who could either be a little more sensitive to popular demands for reform within the political system, or he could be someone more authoritarian than Suharto himself. This will, however, depend on the way change will come. If it is a peaceful

transition it is more likely that there will be a greater trend towards reform coupled with greater participation of civilians in decision-making process. But if the change is a violent one, then either of the two may come about.

Indonesia



17.7 KEY WORDS

Revolution	: radical upheaval, a means for transition from a historically out dated socio-economic structure to a more progressive one.
Authoritarian	: favouring complete submission to authority.
Peasantry	: the oldest and most numerous social class chiefly engaged in farming.
Internationalism	: World outlook asserting the equality and equal rights of all peoples irrespective of nationality or race.

17.8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

- Crouch, Harold, 1976, *Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press).
- Dahm, Bernhard, 1968, *History of Indonesia in the Twentieth Century* (London).
- Feith, Herbet, 1968, *Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca).
- Ghoshal, B. 1980 *Role of Military in Indonesia* (Madras, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies).
- Ghoshal, Baladas, 1982, *Indonesian Politics, 1955-59: The Emergence of Guided Democracy* (Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi & Co.)
- Jenkins, David, 1984, *Suharto's Generals* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press).
- Leifer, Michael, 1983, *Indonesian Foreign Policy* (London, George Allen and Unwin).
- Mody, Nawaz, 1987, *Indonesia Under Suharto* (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers).

17.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) Nationalism which had united people to fight foreign cbed away.
ii) Freedom movement failed to give birth of a cohesive political party.
iii) Post-independence period was marked by intense cleavages in the political parties.
iv) Unusual delay in holding elections.
v) Numerous political parties.
vi) Parties fought only for power.

- 2) i) Coalitional character of the successive cabinets.
ii) Parties had no unity.
iii) Parties were more interested to utilize the extra-parliamentary forces rather than the people.
iv) Involvement of army in politics.
v) Top leader Soekarno's distrust on political party.

- 3) i) Election is a sine-qua-non for democracy.
ii) Election cleanse the parties and society.
iii) Election helps polarisation of political forces.
iv) Elections reveals how united the state is.
v) Election provides legitimacy of the government.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Guided democracy was in fact an alliance of functional groups like the workers, peasants, veterans, national businessmen, the armed forces and so on. The alliance was christened as the National Council. Sockarno was the chairman of the Council. There was a cabinet known as Mutual Help Cabinet consisting of all parties, including the communists. Guided Democracy restricted the political freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of press and many other fundamental rights of the people.
- 2)
 - i) Guided democracy strengthened the President, the Army and the Communists (PKI)
 - ii) There had been no uniformity of purpose between these institutions. All of them emerged as contenders for power.
- 3) Guided democracy was adopted to plug the loopholes of the parliamentary democracy, but failed to do so. On the contrary created many more loopholes.
- 4) Army emerged a mainstay in Indonesian politics.
- 5) PKI got the test of power.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1)
 - i) Establishment of authoritarian rule.
 - ii) Destruction of the possible forces—the left and radical forces.
 - iii) Army denied the political parties to play due role.
 - iv) Emergence of civilian political institutions was made difficult.
- 2)
 - i) Political stability
 - ii) Economic prosperity
 - iii) Widening the gulf between the poors and the rich.
 - iv) Measures to stop the voice of dissent.

UNIT 18 THAILAND

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Land and People of Thailand
- 18.3 How Thailand Escaped Colonial Rule
 - 18.3.1 The Institution of Monarchy
 - 18.3.2 Constitutional Monarchy
- 18.4 Military Leadership
- 18.5 Democratic Experiments
 - 18.5.1 Religion and Politics
- 18.6 Economic Policy
- 18.7 Thai Foreign Policy
- 18.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.9 Key Words
- 18.10 Some Useful Books
- 18.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

18.0 OBJECTIVES

Establishing a democratic political process has been a serious problem in Thailand, although masses have demonstrated their faith in a democratic set-up. After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- trace the history of Thai monarchy and that of various political developments
- discuss its military leadership
- comprehend the various democratic experiments
- understand Thailand's economic policy and
- evaluate its foreign policy.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Thailand lies in the centre of the Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos) Peninsula and the northern part of the Malay Peninsula. In the north and the northeast Thailand borders on Laos, in the east on Cambodia, in the West and northwest on Burma and in the South on Malaysia. The country was known till 1939 as Siam. Thailand occupies area of 514,000 sq. km. which is slightly higher than France. The country is geographically divided into four regions—Northern, Northeastern, Central Basin and Southern Peninsula. The economy of each region develops on the bases of the resources available in the concerning areas. According to the estimate of 1969 Thailand has a population of more than 34 millions. Thailand is a plural society consisting of nearly thirty sub-nationalities. Among them Thai (Siamese) and the Lao constitute about 85 per cent of the total population. Thai, a language originated from Sino-Tibetan group, is the national language. Buddhism which plays an important part in the life of the country, and is professed by nearly 90 per cent of the total population, has been the official religion since long.

Thailand had never experienced colonial rule and consequently did not follow the traditional pattern of civil military relations; i.e., military subordination to civilian authority. After the 1932 coup that ended the period of absolute monarchy, the military established its primacy in Thai politics. It extended its influence on vital institutions of government and rationalized participation on the basis of its tradition of leadership provided in times of crisis. The only civilian leader who had some popular support among the masses, Pridi Phanomyong and who as also an important leader of the coup of 1932, was branded a communist and not allowed by the military elites to establish his roots in Thai politics. Other civilian leaders did not have the required charisma and thus, the military entrenched itself in the country's politics. At the same time, the military leaders could not establish institutions and norms to facilitate transition of power in a peaceful manner. The net result has been a succession of military rulers in the past 60 years who

could assume power only through coups and counter-coups, making the Thai political system extremely volatile and unstable. There have been intermittent attempts at establishing a civilian government and nurturing democratic institutions, but they were thwarted by military coups or political manoeuvring on the ground that they were unable to protect the honour of the King, nation or religion, the three emotive issues in Thai politics. Recent events have, however, showed that while clockwork coups are a part of Thailand's old world they have no place in the modern age, where a growing middle class, especially in Bangkok, insists on making its own destiny. 'Mobile Phone Mob' or middle class demonstrators joined by a rainbow coalition from all walks of life insist that their politics be finally freed from an overdose of military involvement.

While the appointment of Chuan Leekpai as prime minister of Thailand following the recent national elections signifies a triumph for democratic forces, this victory can hardly be seen as ushering in a new political era. Although pro-democratic forces, comprising Chuan's *Democratic Party*, the *New Aspiration Party* (NAP), the *Palang Dharma Party* and Solidarity won the election, they did so with only a small margin of five seats. As a result one cannot expect anything except a fragile and shaky government despite their decision to bring in the pro-military *Social Action Party* to strengthen the coalition. Thailand is also bound to face political instability, mainly because of a lack of cohesion within the coalition. Bickering and clash of interests will become inevitable as the coalition partners seek to expand their base of support. Political corruption is another problem which may weaken the Chuan government, as short-term personal or group interests emerge. The new government's relationship with the military is also crucial. The 1991 coup against Chatichai Choonhaven's administration was triggered by a lack of mutual trust between the government and the military. Underlying the question of the military's reaction to its changed circumstances is the prevailing public mood of democratic awareness. The military's brutal suppression of the pro-democracy demonstrations in May'92 served to raise public political consciousness. Many Thais, particularly of the urban middle class, are now demanding a truly representative government that belongs to the people and not to small groups within the military elite. The economy's dramatic growth in recent years has strengthened the nonbureaucratic forces, including the business community, the media and other professional groups. These influential groups are now looking for an efficient, honest and elected government to move the country's economy forward. During 1978-1991 in forcing Vietnam to move out of Cambodia, Thailand provided strategic support to Cambodian rebels and that proved a crucial factor in Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia.

18.2 LAND AND PEOPLE OF THAILAND

Thailand, also known as Siam in the past, is strategically situated in the centre of Southeast Asian mainland and spread over 513,115 square kilometers. It was due to its strategic location that Japan occupied its first before advancing further in the rest of southeast Asia. Japan infact used Thailand (during 1942-1945) as a spring-board to invade Burma, Java, Malaya and Singapore. It was again due to its location that it was chosen as the headquarters of Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Thai air bases at Udon Thani, Nakhon Phanom, Ubon, Nakhon Ratchasina, Takhli and U-Tapao and the naval base at Sattahip were developed by the United States in order to contain communism in the region. Thailand once again played a strategic role during 1978-1991 in deterring Vietnam from staying in Cambodia. Thailand provided strategic support to Cambodian rebels and this proved a crucial factor in Vietnam's eventual withdrawal from Cambodia.

18.3 HOW THAILAND ESCAPED COLONIAL RULE

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia to have escaped colonial rule. The enlightened monarchy of Thailand was solely responsible for maintaining the independence of the country. The conduct of diplomacy and foreign relations, particularly under the leadership of King Mongkut (1851-68) and Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), was very realistic. Thai kings had a clear perception of the security environment of the region and had the capabilities to tackle France and Great Britain vis-a-vis colonial ambitions over Thailand. They had the necessary command over English language as well as the

sophistication needed to solve the emerging problems. They were polite and respectful while dealing with Western emissaries and tried to accommodate their demands in a suitable manner. The British emissary, Sir John Bowring was so happy with the behaviour and hospitality of the then King Mongkut that he wrote a famous memoir, "The Kingdom and People of Siam, with a Narrative of the Mission in 1855". He was a great advocate of Thai interests in Great Britain.

Thailand had evolved effective instruments to conduct its foreign policy. It had introduced foreign advisors for framing suitable policies vis-a-vis Western powers. Thus there was a British advisor to suggest policies concerning Great Britain, a French advisor to deal with France and a Dutch to deal with Netherlands and so on.

For a proper understanding of the society and politics of Western powers and for enlisting their cooperation, King Chulalongkorn astutely established a personal rapport with some monarchs in the West. He sent some of his sons for education under the care of prominent European monarchs of the time. This also helped him to build a team of indigenous experts for handling diplomacy with competence and sophistication. Indeed, King Chulalongkorn's attempts to get international recognition were remarkable.

As a result of proper conduct of Thai diplomacy, an understanding developed between Great Britain and France for maintaining a buffer state between British Burma and French Indochina. Historical records testify that in 1889, M. Waddington, the French Ambassador in London, called on the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, with the suggestion that it would be advantageous for both countries to declare Thailand a buffer state between their respective empires. The response of the British prime minister was positive and thereafter both the countries evolved a strategy to treat Thailand as a buffer area.

This is not to suggest that these colonial powers did not create any difficulties for the sovereignty of Thailand. In 1893 French gunboats came up to Menam Chao Phraya to press their claims over Laos. France looked for the natural border line for demarcating the boundary between Thailand and the Union of Indochina and it pressed its claims on the areas situated on the left bank of the Mekong River. Thai rulers, after some reservations, conceded the French demands and vacated the territories known as Laos today. Thereafter, France looked for the natural border line to demarcate Thai-Cambodian border also and chose Cardamom mountain ranges for the same. Thus, France subsequently pressurized Thailand to forsake its claims over Battambang, Siemrip and Sisophon. Thailand knew its strategic weaknesses in relation to France and therefore, instead of a confrontation chose to hand over disputed areas to the latter in 1907. These developments had their impact on the attitude of Great Britain also. It also wished to extend its colonial areas on the Malayan frontier. In 1909 Britain demanded the jurisdiction over Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu and Thailand agreed to do so. Thailand maintained its balance even in the face of great provocation from Western powers and thus managed to protect its sovereignty.

18.3.1 The Institution of Monarchy

When Thais defeated the Khmer government at Sukhothai under the leadership of King Indraditya in 1253 A.D., they laid the foundation of the Kingdom of Thailand. Indratiya's successor King Ramakabheng the great (1270-1317) was a great warrior and statesman. He fought to combine several principalities into his Kingdom. His jurisdiction spread from Mekong River in the north to Malayan peninsula in the south and from Burma in the west to Cambodia in the east. He established tributary relations with the Liang emperors in China and received their support for subduing the Khmer and Annamite rulers in the region. Thailand with its capital at Sukhothai, under the stewardship of Ramakabheng, became the most powerful state in the Southeast Asian region. His successors were also powerful and fought several wars against the Burmese, Khmer and Vietnamese rulers.

The security and geo-political environment of the Southeast Asian region became disturbed in the 19th century. There was an imperialist race amongst European countries and the various Southeast Asian states began to succumb to colonial rule. The Dutch had already consolidated their rule over Indonesia. The French empire had entrenched itself in Indochina. Great Britain was consolidating its hold over Burma and Malaya. The colonial powers were focussing their attention now on Thailand. In the situation Thai rulers displayed tremendous understanding and searched avenues to escape colonial yoke.

The Kings of Thailand provided worthwhile leadership in an endeavour to deter Western powers from indulging in gunboats diplomacy against it. King Mongkut introduced reforms in domestic policies and adopted a liberal outlook towards the Western world. He stopped paying tributes to China and began to attach importance to Great Britain from 1851 onwards. In 1855, he signed a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Great Britain and conceded some trade benefits. He also offered extraterritorial rights to British subjects residing in Thailand to enable them to pursue trade interests in Thailand. Such a policy suited the Britishers interested mainly in business and commerce. Thus, Britain sought friendly relations with Thailand and never challenged its sovereignty. Though Britain was in a position to create problems for Thailand because one, it was controlling Malaya, Burma and the Indian sub-continent and second, it had geo-political compulsions to check French expansion in the region, yet it desisted from doing so.

The successor of King Mongkut was Chulalongkorn the great, who was popular with his subjects. He was more liberal and shrewd than his predecessor. He searched avenues for establishing personal rapport with monarchs in the European continent with a view to enhance Thailand's national interests. The successors of King Chulalongkorn however were not so capable and strong to handle the domestic situation. King Vajiralongkorn (1910-1925) and King Prajadhipok (1925-1935) were educated and trained in Great Britain and were impressed with the British model of government and polity. They were liberal in their outlook and this made a section of the Sakdina class (aristocracy), unhappy. There were some misunderstandings about the character of King Prajadhipok. Under the circumstances, a group of civil and military men led by Pridi Phanomyong and General Phibun Songgram hastily formed a group that supported a coup in the name of Peoples Party for overthrowing the system of absolute monarchy.

The promoters of the coup surrounded the capital on 24 June 1932 on all sides and presented an ultimatum to King Prajadhipok. The coup leaders demanded that the King either accept the position of a constitutional head, resign or face for bloodshed. The King was thus faced with a delicate situation. He abhorred bloodshed and thought that any delay on his part would result in unnecessary bloodshed. So he agreed to constitutional monarchy.

18.3.2 Constitutional Monarchy

Several constitutions have been framed since 1932 to suit the needs of the changing political order and subsequently abandoned for a new one. But there is a factor common to all the constitutions is that they regard monarchy as a revered institution. The King is the ceremonial head of the state and of the armed forces. The sovereignty, technically, rests with the people and the King exercises those powers only which are in conformity with the provisions of the constitution. The person of the king is sacred and cannot be violated, accused or sued in any way. He leads the nation on ceremonial occasions and is revered by the people of Thailand. He is the symbol of Thai nationalism and people are still loyal to him.

The present King Bhumibol Aduldej is very influential. He has helped the leaders of different political parties with sincere advice for resolving conflicts and crisis. Thus, in the wake of students' revolution in October 1973, he advised Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn to resign. This diffused the tension and paved the way for democratic experiments. The King once again displayed his great diplomatic skill in 1992 when he advised General Suchinda Kraprayoon to hand over power to his successor in view of the civil unrest against his leadership.

Check Your Progress I

- Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Briefly explain the diplomatic manoeuvres of ruling elite in maintenance of Thai independence.

- 2) Briefly discuss the political developments that led to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Thailand.
-

- 3) List the important features of the constitutional monarchy in Thailand.
-

18.5 MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Thailand has had a tradition of military leadership right since the end of absolute monarchy. The military established its primacy in Thai politics immediately after 1932 coup d'état. It extended its influence on vital institutions of government and pleaded justification for its presence. The civilian leader, Pridi Phanomyon, who had some popular support, was projected as a communist. Though Pridi became the Prime Minister of the country, he failed to lay the foundations of civilian rule. When he came out with his idealistic proposals to introduce radical changes in the socio-economic structure, it was disliked and opposed by the political elite. His proposal was to nationalize all agricultural lands for better distribution and production. While nationalizing, he did not propose to pay compensation immediately. The acquisition of lands were to be through the issue of bonds and not by cash. He also advocated evolving a public distribution system of rice and other essential commodities and elimination of the role of middlemen in business. His proposals won him more enemies than friends and he was portrayed as an enemy of the prevailing political system. His political career was really doomed when in 1946, King Anand Mahidol was assassinated in mysterious circumstances. Pridi was somehow implicated in the case. The situation became so bad for Pridi that he had to leave the country and stay in exile for years in France.

Thus, the most important civilian leader of 1932 coup was eliminated. Other civilian leaders did not have the required charisma and the military eventually entrenched itself in Thai politics.

There has been a succession of military rulers in Thailand in the past 60 years. General Phraya Pahol ruled Thailand from 1933 to 1938, Field Marshal Phibun Songgram from 1938 to 1944 and then from 1947 to 1957, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat from 1957 to 1963, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn from 1963 to 1973, Admiral Sangad Choloryu from 1976 to 1977, General Kriengsak Chomanan from 1977 to 1980, General Prem Tinsulanand from 1980 to 1988 and General Chatchai Choonthavan from 1988 to 1991. The last two military leaders came into power through democratic elections but the present prime minister, General Sunthorn Kongsompong came into power after a coup d'état in February, 1991.

Here it will be appropriate to mention the role of Phibun Songgram in earmarking the strategies aimed at establishing the fact that military leaders are indispensable for bringing

stability and progress to Thailand. Phibun Songgram dominated Thai politics from 1932 to 1957 and was able to lay solid foundations for the primacy of military in Thai political system. Besides Pridi, he was supporter of democracy for his country but when he became the Prime Minister, he supported only a semblance of it. There was a unicameral legislature and provisions for elected representatives throughout his tenure, but all the powers of the government were concentrated in the hands of the centre. Concerning foreign policy, he was flexible. Till the end of the Second World War, Phibun was a close ally of Japan, but when he came back to power in 1947, he supported the policy of alignment with the United States. The friendship with Japan was used to recover territories lost to France in 1907 and to Britain in 1909. This pleased his people immensely and he received their backing.

Phibun also campaigned for "Asia for the Asians" and actually declared war against Western colonial powers. He backed up independence movements in the region and provided bases to Indian National Army of Subhas Chandra Bose among others. But after 1947 his priorities changed. He perceived a threat from China and the emerging communist movement in Vietnam. Thus, he joined the crusade against communism and became an ally of the United States in this regard. At the domestic level, Phibun tried to introduce socio-economic reforms to reduce the hold of the overseas Chinese on the Thai economic system. He tried to evolve such ventures as textile, paper, sugar, tobacco and distillery industries under the state, which was being run by military men and this strengthened their economic power. He astutely encouraged the military to take interests in business and trade. He extended all the necessary facilities and built canals and roads and means of communications. This way he was able to secure popular support for the military leadership.

The successors of Phibun tried to strengthen their support base and were eventually able to establish their presence in the socio-economic structure. As a result the military has emerged as the major agent of social change and political engineering in contemporary Thailand. They are key leaders of major political parties and cannot be marginalized even in democratic experiments.

An assessment of Thai politics suggest that no government can be stable in Thailand without the backing and participation of military elites. A soldier in Thai armed forces thinks that it is his bounden duty not only to defend the country, but also to provide leadership. They are greatly respected by the common people. Talented people in Thailand are attracted to defence services because they are lucrative and prestigious. However, there has been some decline in the role of military in the country's polity ever since the rise of Chuan Leekpai to power.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Discuss the role of Phibun Songgrams leadership in the Thai political system.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

18.5 DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTS

There have been intermittent attempts at establishing civilian government and nurturing democratic institutions in Thailand ever since 1932. Popular civilian leaders like Pridi Panomyong (1930s), Seni Pramoj (1940s), Sanya Thammasak and Kukrit Pramoj (1970s) tried to eliminate military elements and establish civilian democracy but could not

succeed. They were either removed through military coup d'etat or on the alleged ground that they were unable to protect the honour of the King, the nation or religion, the three emotive issues. In October 1973 a student led revolution ousted the military dictatorship and established civilian rule. Dr. Sanya Thammasak, the new prime minister was immensely popular. Under his stewardship a new constitution was adopted and elections were held. But the coalition government, which emerged thereafter was not stable and thus the coup of October 1976 took place. The military once again emerged as the most powerful force. A new constitution was adopted in December 1978 but it became null and void in February 1991 after a coup d'etat. However, there have been some landmark developments in Thailand during 1991-92 which have weakened the hold of military in power politics of the country and brightened the prospects for democracy. In order to have a proper understanding of the prospects for democracy, a brief appraisal of the current developments will be in order.

There was a coup d'etat led by General Sunthorn and General Suchinda Kraprayoon on 23 February 1991 to oust the popularly elected government of General Chatichai Choonhavan. This ushered in an era of military dictatorship in Thailand. The military sought legitimacy for the coup by stating that the Chatichai government was corrupt and that they were willing to restore democracy and a clean government to Thailand. They installed a civilian leader, Anand Panyar Chun as interim prime minister and promised to hold elections as early as possible.

However, as is well known General Chatihai was ousted because of his strained relationship with the top leadership in the armed forces. Chatichai tried to induct the former army chief General Arthit Kamlang Ek in the defence ministry for neutralising the military's influence in politics. The military moved in on the eve of the swearing in of General Arthit and thus there was a bloodless coup. Now the military tried to neutralize the influence of Chatichai and his colleagues. It instituted Assets Verification Committee (AVC) to prove corruption charges against Chatichai and his former cabinet colleagues. The AVC started investigations in right earnest and some of the ministers in Chatichai cabinet were declared "unusually rich". But by the end of 1991 strange developments took place whereby Chatichai and his Thai Party was included into the pro-military coalition. When the elections were held on 22 March 1992, the pro-military coalition got a majority. In this election most of the so-called corrupt colleagues of Chatichai became victorious on a pro-military platform. General Suchinda Kraprayoon who emerged the unelected Prime Minister, selected 11 such ministers whom the AVC had declared corrupt. This development was disliked by the people. This also exposed the fact that corruption which was a basic charge against General Chatichai was concocted. Thus, the popular legitimacy that the military had gained from the 1991 coup was diluted. This created a feeling of revulsion against the government and caused civil unrest.

Another reason for the unrest was the selection of the unelected prime minister. *Samakhi Tham Party* which was the largest partner of the pro-military coalition was led by Narong Wongwan. He became controversial immediately after his name was proposed for the post of prime minister. The pro-democracy parties argued that he was corrupt. On 25 March 1992, the *New Aspiration Party, Palang Dharma, Ekkaparb* and *Democrats* addressed a joint press conference and called into question the credibility of Narong in the light of the US State Department allegation that he had been denied a visa to the US in mid-1991, because of his suspected ties with drug trafficking. The following day the US State Department spokeswoman Ms Margaret Tutwiler confirmed that it had in July 1991 denied a visa to Narong because of suspicions over his role in heroin trading. The impact of such a revelation was disastrous. The military thus withdrew their support in favour of Narong. The next powerful contender was Air Chief Marshal Samboon Rahong of *Chat Thai*. He too did not have a clean image and was accused of dubious duty free business deals. He was afraid about the public outcry and refused to be considered for the post. Under the circumstances, the candidature of General Suchinda who had not fought the elections on the plea that he was not willing to be the Prime Minister, was proposed. The pro-military coalition accepted his leadership and the King approved the appointment. Suchinda while accepting the post of prime minister said, "I pledge that I will be loyal to the King and provide protection to your majesty and the royal family with my life, and will carry out my responsibilities with honesty for the national and public interest without any regard for the special interests of individuals or certain groups."

But subsequent events were traumatic for Suchinda. He became the target of demonstrations as soon as he stepped into power. On 20 April 1992, thousands of protestors staged demonstrations opposite Parliament House and the Supreme Commander headquarters. The number of demonstrators started growing and the protest picked up momentum. When parliament was convened on 23 April, the opposition members of parliament wore black to mourn the demise of democracy. Outside a *Palang Dharma* Party leader sat on hunger strike, who was subsequently joined by 40 others. Chamlong Srimuang led the protestors with enthusiasm and spirits. By the end of April the situation began to deteriorate. In the beginning of May 1992, thousands of demonstrators sat down in central Bangkok surrounded by riot police. On 9 May, more than 150,000 people poured into the streets with a demand to force Suchinda to quit. They filled a park and spilled over into surrounding streets. Thus, the anti-Suchinda protest climaxed. The display of enthusiasm and spirits were similar to that witnessed in October 1973, when the Thanom Prapas clique was forced to quit making way for democratic experiments. The protestors demanded the resignation of the unelected premier and suitable amendments in the constitution so that there was no recurrence of the unelected prime minister in Thailand. They were unwilling to disperse unless their demands were accepted. Though efforts were made to assure the pro-democracy leaders about suitable amendments in the constitution, but it was not successful. The protestors continued to demonstrate and the military rulers lost their patience. They decided to tackle the demonstrators by force. The army crackdown started on 17 May and an emergency was declared the following day. About 50 people died as a result of the crackdown and hundreds were injured. The leader of the protest movements, Major General Chamlong Srimuang was handcuffed and arrested and thus the streets were cleared.

The backlash of the police action was devastating. Premier Suchinda and his supreme army commander, Issarapong Noonpakdi were held responsible for the bloodshed. This was not liked even by other leaders of the pro-military coalition. The opposition to Suchinda was being felt by his supporters. Thus, there was a rumour of another coup in the offing. At this juncture the King Bhumibol Aduldej intervened to solve the constitutional crisis. He advised General Suchinda to resign in view of the mounting pressure from the public and factions in the military. Thus Suchinda resigned on 24 May 1992. He was succeeded by the interim Prime Minister, Anand Panyarchun. This time Anand was entrusted the task of introducing necessary reforms in the constitution for making the system more democratic and ready for another election.

Anand's ascendance as a premier provided a healing touch to the people who suffered loss of lives and casualties in the May bloodshed. It neutralised the antipathy that Suchinda had masterminded. Anand's government tried to convince people that it would do justice to them and also try to punish culprits of the May bloodshed. The House of Representatives Committee was established to pin responsibility for the May bloodshed. Suchinda supported the constitutional amendments for more democracy. The parliament approved four important amendments to the constitution and on 10 June 1992 they were incorporated. They had great implications for the Thai political system. The amendments were as follows:

- a) The prime minister must be an elected member of parliament
- b) The power of the senate be limited to scrutinizing and passing laws
- c) Open debates be allowed in the second annual parliamentary session and
- d) The House Speaker be made president of the parliament.

After these amendments, general elections were held for the second time in Thailand on 13 September 1992. There were two important coalitions vying for power. The pro-democracy coalition was projected as "Angels" and the pro-military one as "devils" by the media. The pro-democracy parties became victorious and under the leadership of Chuan Leekpai a new government was established. The pro-military parties are demoralised at the moment while the new government has shown interest in strengthening democratic structures.

18.5.1 Religion and Politics

Religion is one of the most important and emotive issues in Thai society. The state religion of Thailand is Buddhism. The interactions between political elites and the Buddhist Sangha over the years have been influencing the political system of Thailand deeply. The

different social and ethnic groups view amongst each other to attract the support of the Sangha without which they cannot claim proper legitimacy. There is a wide spectrum of religio-political phenomenon, i.e., the interaction of Buddhism and modern political ideologies, the use of religion in the politics of democracy or dictatorship, the efforts of some ambitious politicians in promoting religious revival and the use of Buddhism in fighting against communism and separatism in Thailand. All these underscore the importance of religion in government and polity.

It is a historical reality that in order to promote the causes of Thai nationalism, King Ramakhamhang in the 13th century, King Mongkut in the 19th century and his successors in the 20th century, considered Buddhism an important vehicle of this goal. Rama VI had introduced Buddhist prayers in various public institutions, government schools, police forces and the army on the eve of the First World War. The prime minister, Field Marshal Phibun Songgram, provided special significance to religious aspects during the Second World War era with a view to promote the cause of nationalism.

The operation and role of the Buddhist Sangha, however, is different from its Islamic counterparts. It believes in discourses, persuasion and in arousing moral virtues. It has tried to reconcile differences amongst different social and ethnic groups and has paved the path for national integration and assimilation.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
 ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Critically examine the success and failure of democracy in Thailand.

.....

- 2) Briefly explain the importance of religion in Thai society and polity.

.....

18.6 ECONOMIC POLICY

Thailand has been pursuing a liberal economic policy and has been a champion of free enterprise in the region. Though Field Marshal Phibun Songgram had brought some industries under the public sector, not much should be read into it as these endeavours were purely expedient. His successors always gave priorities for the development of the private sector, but it was under the stewardship of prime minister Prem Tinsulanand (1980-1988) that the private sector was really given incentives and required facilities. This boosted the production of agricultural and industrial outputs and presently, the GNP per capita is \$1,418.

General Prem found innovative avenues to earn foreign exchange for the country and thus, modern technologies were acquired for promoting fishing, gems, textiles and tourist industries. These efforts were successful and indeed the rise of these sectors has been largely responsible for the phenomenal rise of Thailand's economy in the past few years, if the present rate of growth continues. Thailand will be at par with the NICs, i.e., Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

It is relevant to point out here that Thailand was an ally of the United States. From the signing of the economic assistance agreement to the end of Vietnam war in 1975, American influence on Thailand's economic management continued. A large number of American advisors were posted in Thailand. A great bulk of American loans, grants and direct investments flowed into Thailand to finance infrastructures with strategic implications. The US poured enormous economic and military assistance to Thailand for its role in containment of communism in the region. From 1963 to 1978, Baht (Thai currency) was tied to the US dollar.

However, the strategic importance of Thailand for the United States was reduced with the end of the Vietnam war in 1975. Thailand was facing a grim economic situation as well as unstable regimes from 1973 to 1978. When the political order got restored, the rulers tried to improve economic management. It was felt that the spread of communism could be contained only with acceleration of economic growth. They, thus, began to review the functioning of various instruments of economic policy. Thus, the apex body of economic planning, National Economic Development Board (NEDB) began inviting fresh ideas to accelerate development. NEDB founded initially in 1959 endeavoured to coordinate and stimulate development, took charge of economic reforms and formulated "five year plans" accordingly.

The NEDB came out with fresh ideas during the presentation of the Sixth Five Year Plan (1986-1991). Before 1986 the NEDB accorded priorities to rural development and communication schemes. It took measures for raising the productivity and income of the farmers. Thus, the emphasis was on construction of roads, dams, irrigation canals, health schemes etc. But during the sixth plan period, it gave urgent priorities to develop private sectors. The private sector was projected as the prime engine for pulling the growth locomotive. As a result, the role of public sectors was transformed from one of regulating and controlling to supporting and promoting private business. The NEDB evolved liberal policies to attract foreign enterprises and promised incentives to them to invest in Thailand. Subsequently foreign owned enterprises were exempted from restrictions on repatriating profits and capital, and on foreign ownership of land, import duties and taxes on equipment.

The Thai government gave guarantees against nationalisation or competition from state enterprises. As a result about 1,037 companies started operations during 1987-1990. The largest foreign investors were Japan (27.4 per cent), followed by Taiwan (11.2 per cent) and the United States (10.9 per cent). The promotional programmes are giving emphasis on industries for export priorities, i.e., biotechnology, computer software, solar cells and microwave insulators.

The qualitative changes in the policies of the government towards private sectors have activated the Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee (JPPCC) which had been established in 1981 for the sole purpose of conducting dialogue between government and business representatives. JPPCC is playing the role of a think tank to promote business interests and to effectively lobby for private business ever since 1986.

JPPCC is also credited with influencing the decision makers in giving due importance to export-oriented economic strategy. The business representatives in the national JPPCC point out obstacles in production and marketization of several goods. Tourism and gem exports, two well known items of earning foreign exchange in recent years, were promoted due to the tireless efforts of the JPPCC. In the past both the government and the public viewed tourism and gems as luxuries for a handful of rich people but now that image is changed. These sectors were heavily taxed in the past, but now they understand the export value of such items. The government reduced utility rates, cut down sales tax for hotels and gave facilities for the import of precious gems resulting in tariff, customs and tax concessions. This helped the gem merchants of Thailand to be the leading gem exporters in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, there was better management of hotels and transportation system. This attracted the foreign tourists to Thailand and currently, the average arrival of tourists are around 2.4 million every year. Tourism has thus become the largest source of foreign exchange.

The performance of other export-oriented industries notably textiles and garments, processed food, jewellery and light manufactures are remarkable. Since 1986, fish exports

increased in volume by 35 per cent. Again tinned and frozen sea food represented 8.3 per cent of export earnings. The textiles contributed 13.5 per cent of export earnings, thereby superseding rice as the largest item for the same. The manufacturing sectors as a whole increased its share of GDP from 6.8 per cent in 1960 to 23.0 per cent in 1986 and subsequently showed buoyant trends.

Thailand is the second largest rice exporter of the world after the United States. It produces about 20.6 million tonnes of rice every year. It also produces about 5 million tonnes of Maize, 19.3 million tonnes of cassava roots and 2.3 million tonnes of fish. It has timber, sugar, rubber, teak and other potentials.

It is producing cement on a commercial level (7.9 million tonnes), half of which is purchased by Malaysia. It is also producing automobile assembly, integrated circuits and such other items for exports.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note:**
- i) Use the space below for your answer.
 - ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit

- 1) Identify some of the specific features of Thailand's economic developments

.....

18.7 THAI FOREIGN POLICY

The makers of Thai foreign policy have generally been flexible in their approach to various issues always taking care to meet the everchanging demands of international diplomacy. From its birth in the 13th century to the end of the opium war in the 19th century, it cultivated friendship of the Han emperors of China. In return China helped Thai rulers to consolidate their powers and grab a vast area of Southeast Asia under their control. When Britain's power increased substantially in 19th century Southeast Asia, Thailand shifted over its emphasis and gave priority to cultivating relations with Britain. It provided trade facilities and extra-territorial rights to Britain and thereby, placed British subjects beyond the purview of Thai courts. In return Britain respected the sovereignty of Thailand deterring France from creating troubles for Thailand. During the Second World War Thailand sided with Japan and in return Japan helped Thailand to regain the territories lost during the colonial period. But after the War, the US emerged as the most influential country in the region and Thailand true to its tradition moved fast to forge closer relations with the Americans. Thailand agreed to co-operate with US in pursuing the policy of containment of communism and adopted an anti-China anti-Vietnam stand. Thailand joined the military pact of SEATO in 1954 and agreed to offer its bases as a springboard for anti-Communist operations. Thailand was infact the headquarter of SEATO and a major base for the American forces during the Vietnam war. In return, the US gave enormous economic and military aids. It helped in the construction of roads, dams and bridges. It also strengthened the security postures of Thailand vis-a-vis its neighbours.

With the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, the strategic environment of Southeast Asia changed. China was eager to strengthen its relations with ASEAN countries. Thailand took the initiative to forge closer relations with China. Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj paid a visit to China in 1975 to break the ice and the endeavour was fruitful. Thailand received oil from China on friendly terms. China paid a higher price for Thai rice in order to strengthen the latter's economy. Thus, Sino-Thai relations improved rapidly and were consolidated after Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia in December 1978. Thailand became a conduit for the supply of Chinese arms to Cambodian rebels. Thailand provided sanctuaries to Khmer Rouge which was backed by China. It also provided shelter to KPNLF and Funcinpec guerrilla forces. The Cambodian rebels raised their guerrilla forces in Thailand and were supplied arms and ammunitions from China, the US and other

sources via Thailand. China was very happy with Thailand for cooperating in the endeavour to isolate Vietnam.

Thailand, thus, was projected as a frontline state to deter Vietnamese expansion in the region. However, with the signing of the Cambodian Peace Accord in Paris in October 1991 and the dismantlement of the communist bloc, the situation has drastically changed.

Thai rulers are presently evolving a policy to convert Indochina from a battleground to a market place. Thailand is planning big investments in other Indochinese countries. It is eager to take their keen in the Mekong River Development Project and on the other hand, it is trying to revive rail links from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh city via Phnom Penh.

Thailand is a leading campaigner for regional cooperation in the region. It took active interest in the formation of ASEAN, which comprised Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. ASEAN cooperation embraces varied fields, i.e. industry and commerce, tourism, finance, food production and supply, fisheries, shipping, communications, air traffic services, meteorology, transportation, telecommunication, science and technologies etc. The ASEAN is also cooperating in strategic and political matters and has presently seven "dialogue partners", i.e., Japan, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and ECC.

Thailand has successfully mediated in resolving some of the intricate disputes in Southeast Asia. In 1966 Thailand was the venue for talks between the foreign ministers of Malaysia and Indonesia for termination of the "Crush Malaysia Plan". Thailand also arranged a meeting amongst Malaysia and the Philippines to end the conflict over Sabah. Again Thailand, through ASEAN, deterred Vietnamese penetration in Cambodia.

Thailand today is one of the few countries to maintain good relations with military regime in Burma. It does not encourage Burmese refugees to come towards Thailand. Thai businessmen have taken contracts to cut teak woods in the Shan and Karen areas and there is a close commercial relationship between the two regimes.

Finally, it can be said that the Thai foreign policy has proved successful in achieving its goals. To summarise the developments of the past four decades, it can be said that strategic considerations guided its policies in the past but now side by side business interests are getting priorities. Thai government enlists the cooperation of businessmen at all levels of decision making, particularly in the realm of foreign policy and thus its business interests are promoted.

Check Your Progress 5

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Identify the main characteristics of Thai foreign policy.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

18.8 LET US SUM UP

To summarize, it can be stated that the Thai political system has four important pillars, i.e., the nation, its religion, the King and the army. Any arrangement for a new political order cannot be successful without attaching due importance to them. For survival of a leader, it is essential that he establishes a balance amongst these pillars.

In the realm of external relations, dynamism and flexibility have been the hallmark. Thais say that "like a bamboo, we bend with the wind". This aptly explains their behaviour and attitudes while determining foreign policy and diplomacy.

18.9 KEY WORDS

Sakdima Class	: aristocracy
Colony	: country or territory deprived of independence and ruled by a foreign state
Communism	: the social and economic structure (social system) based on public ownership of means of production coming up to replace capitalism.
Democracy	: government by the people; a political system under which methods and forms of democracy and civil freedom and equities are secured and laws guaranteed and implemented
Baht	: Thai currency

18.10 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

- Elliott, David, 1978, *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule*, Zed Press, 1978.
- Girling, J.L.S., 1981, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1981.
- Jha, Ganganath, 1979, *Foreign Policy of Thailand*, New Delhi, Radiant Publishers, 1979.
- Morrell, D. and Samudavanija, C., 1981, *Political Conflict in Thailand*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981.
- Neher, C.D., 1979, *Modern Thai Politics: From Village to Nation*, Cambridge, Mass., Schenkman.
- Wyatt, D.K., 1984, *Thailand: A Short History*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1984.
- Xuto, Somsakdi, ed., 1987, *Government and Politics of Thailand*, Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1987.

18.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) Appointment of Western advisors for framing suitable policies vis-a-vis Western powers.
ii) Sincere urge for understanding the society and politics of West. King established personal rapport with western monarchs.
iii) Thailand became a buffer between the British in Burma and the French in Indochina.
iv) Thailand avoided confrontation with the Western powers by fulfilling their demands.
- 2) i) Successive monarchs of the 20th century with Western education and were imbued with liberal ideas.
ii) Civil-military coup of 1932.
- 3) i) Parliament is not supreme.
ii) Monarchy has always been revered.
iii) Monarch generally does not violate the constitution.
iv) Monarch is the symbol of Thai nationalism.
v) King plays successfully the role of friend, philosopher and guide to politicians.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) Laid the foundation for the primacy of military in Thai politics.
ii) Concentrated the powers in the centre.

- iii) Followed the policy of alignment with the powerful states—Japan, the USA, etc.
- iv) Anti-communist.
- v) Modernised Thai economy.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) i) Weakness in the political parties.
ii) Dominance of the military in the politics.
- 2) i) Religion-Buddhism served as vehicle for creating national feelings in the people.
ii) Political parties use religion to raise support base.
iii) Religion is used to fight communism.
iv) Religion helped integrate the different social and ethnic groups.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) i) Free enterprise
ii) Dominance of private sector
iii) Agrobased economy
iv) Emphasize on rural development
v) Higher allocation for infrastructural development
vi, Several incentives are given to foreign companies to invest in Thailand.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) i) Flexible in approach
ii) Reliance on Western Bloc in general and on the USA in particular
iii) Added emphasize on the regional cooperation
iv) Strategic considerations guided its policies in the past but now side by side business interests are getting priorities.

UNIT 19 BURMA

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Historical Background
 - 19.2.1 Establishment of British Rule
 - 19.2.2 Colonial Exploitation and Emergence of Nationalism
 - 19.2.3 Japanese Occupation and Burmese Independence
- 19.3 Parliamentary Period
 - 19.3.1 Political Instability of the Early Days
 - 19.3.2 Development Policies
 - 19.3.3 Ethnic Minorities and Burmanization
 - 19.3.4 Internal Dissensions within the AFPFL and the Coup
- 19.4 The Army Regime
 - 19.4.1 The New Political System
 - 19.4.2 Problems of Economic Development
 - 19.4.3 Prelude to Resistance
- 19.5 The Movement for Democracy
 - 19.5.1 End of BSPP Rule
 - 19.5.2 Weaknesses of the Pro-Democracy Movement
 - 19.5.3 Towards the Election of 1990 and After
- 19.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.7 Key Words
- 19.8 Some Useful Books
- 19.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

19.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with the aspects of Government and Politics in Burma. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- trace the historical background up to Burmese independence
- describe parliamentary system and its existence
- examine the role of army and bureaucracy in a developing state
- recognise the importance of democratic movement.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

Burma occupies the Western most part of Southeast Asia and attached to South Asia. The country borders on India, China, Bangladesh, Laos and Thailand. A total area of the state is 678,000 sq. km. and 1971 census estimated 28,200,000 as the total population. Burma is inhabited by a number of sub-nationalities and tribes. The Burmese are about 70 per cent of the total population. Among other groups Karens (8 per cent) the Shans (7 per cent), the Chins (2 per cent) and the Kachins (1.5 per cent) are most important. All these groups have their own language, literature and culture and also historically developed economic areas. The eastern, northern and western mountainous borders are inhabited by different tribe—who are backward in their socio-economic and cultural development. Burma has inherited large number of people of Indian origin. Burma is endowed with vast and rich economic resources by harnessing them the country may be both agriculturally and industrially prosperous.

Burma after independence followed the British model of parliamentary democracy. Even though the political process was dominated by the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League), the elections were fair and free. But the rule of the AFPFL was far from smooth

since it assumed power under Premier U.Nu. The party itself was threatened by internal rivalries and personal bickerings. The first major challenge to the civilian government came from the Communists who created a situation in the initial years of independence whereby the real control of the Rangoon government ceased beyond the limits of the capital city. By taking advantage of the confusion, the ethnic minorities further destabilized the political situation in the country. The government was so busy with pacifying the dissident groups that before 1950-52 it did not have time or energy to think about development problems. A syncretic ideology called the 'Burmese way to Socialism' was devised incorporating proposals like nationalization of monopolistic enterprises, foreign trade, land etc. and protection for the workers, peasants and the poor against capitalist exploitation. But nothing practically was done in this direction in the subsequent years. The economic performance of U.Nu government was unsatisfactory. The demand of the ethnic minorities for political autonomy had created a far more critical political as well as security problem at this juncture. This served a pretext for the army junta under General Ne Win to seize power in 1962 and to continue in office uninterrupted ever since.

The army rule brought neither political stability nor economic prosperity to Burma. The political system was highly authoritarian with the supreme control of all political institutions in the hands of General Ne Win and his Cohorts. All political activities other than through government channels were banned. Many civilian leaders were arrested and imprisoned. There was a blanket ban on private newspapers and news media. The policy of stick and carrot pursued by the army-sponsored Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) did succeed for twenty-six years in preventing any major popular resistance to the army rule, though there was simmering discontent among the political public in general and among the ethnic groups in particular for domination by the Burmans over the non-Burmans constituting Karens, Shans, Chins and Kachins. But this apparent stability received a jolt with the declining economic conditions in the country in the late 80s forcing General Ne Win to openly acknowledge the failures of his economic policies. This really infuriated the middle classes, while the lower classes were already distressed by the soaring food prices. The obvious results was great unrest which could no longer be controlled by mere force. The resultant mass protest developed into a democracy movement leading to the end of the BSPP rule. The military rule in Burma had never been accepted by the non-Burman ethnic minorities who had taken to prolonged insurgency to assert their autonomy, but now the regime lost its legitimacy among the majority Burman population as well. While the BSPP rule ended under pressure from the democracy movement, it was replaced by a much brutal government which calls itself *the state Law and Order Restoration Council* (SLORC) and which has not only let loose a reign of terror in the country but also refugees to handover power to the democratically elected group called the *National League for Democracy* (NLD) following the 1990 elections. None of the arrested leaders, including Syukyi have yet been released to facilitate a peaceful transition to democracy. Thus Burma or Myanmar still effectively remains under military rule.

19.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

19.2.1 Establishment of British Rule

The Burmans, or the majority ethnic group who inhabit the country which today is called Myanmar (Burma), belong to the Tibeto-Burman ethno-linguistic group of the great Sino-Tibetan family. They had entered the territory sometime in A.D. 9th century and had subjugated the indigenous people. The latter, who belonged to various ethnic groups, such as the Shans, Mons, Kachins, Karens, Chins and the Arakanese, were gradually pushed to the frontier regions. They were brought under the tutelage of an absolutist Burman Buddhist monarchy, which had its headquarter at Ava-Amarapura located in northern or upper Burma.

For a hundred years before the advent of the British, the Konbaung dynasty held sway over the whole of Burma. The organisation of its power resembled a system of 'concentric circles', which existed in many other Buddhist Kingdoms of Southeast Asia. It meant that royal power was most consolidated and absolutist near the centre. It assumed a more 'dispersed character' towards the periphery. This dispersal of royal authority was most palpable in the south or lower Burma, where we find the existence of locally powerful district governors or *myoungs* and the township headmen or *myothugyis*. This weakening of

central authority could also be found in the frontier regions, dominated by the various ethnic minorities.

After the 1750s, by proclaiming a royal monopoly over foreign trade, the Konbaung Kings had virtually insulated Burma from the Asian maritime trade networks. For sometime, Burma was saved from the western imperialist intrusions. But in the nineteenth century, the British, then firmly entrenched in India and interested in participating in China trade, began to cast covetous eyes on Burma. In 1852, they occupied Lower Burma. The rest, i.e., the Upper Burma was incorporated in 1886 and the whole country was made into a part of the British Indian Empire.

19.2.2 Colonial Exploitation and Emergence of Nationalism

After her annexation by the British, Burma was exposed to a dual exploitation. In addition to her western colonial masters, there had been the Indian businessmen, financiers and the educated middle classes who went there in search of jobs. Her economy remained agricultural throughout the period, as the majority of the population depended on this sector. But in this sphere also important changes were taking place. Removal of the ban on the export of rice led to rapid commercialization and the fertile lands in the Irrawaddy delta were opened to a profitable rice cultivation. Burma soon became the granary of the world. The Burmese rice had great demands in the European markets and it also fed the vast populations of the Indian subcontinent.

This emergence of a rice-bearing mono-culture had a profound impact on Burmese rural society. The British land revenue system and commercialisation transformed a community of peasant proprietors into a highly stratified society of large landowners, owner-cultivators, tenants and a growing class of share-croppers. Land alienation became a chronic problem, as the agriculturists, particularly to the Indian Chettiar money-lenders. The situation bred contempt for foreign rule and its agents. Right from the beginning there had been peasant resistance to colonial rule in Burma. This growing rural unrest was fully blown up in the famous Say San Revolt of 1930-32. Its main targets of attack were the Europeans and the Indian money-lenders. In this way it aimed at overthrowing the exploitative system instituted by colonial rule and its Indian and Chinese underlings.

The suppression of the Say San Revolt in 1932 did not quell unrest in Burma. But around this time the emergence of an indigenous educated middle class gave an entirely new direction to her struggle for independence. This nationalism developed in a context where the indigenous population belonged almost entirely to the oppressed class and their oppressors, the imperialists and the capitalists, were foreigners. For this reason, Burmese nationalism could set forth socialist goals. It did not involve the risk of alienating any major interest or any important section of the indigenous people. Such ideas of establishing a socialist economy, cleansed of foreign exploiters and freed from colonial control, were articulated through the movement of a group of younger educated people who called themselves *Thakins* or masters of their own country. Gradually this movement influenced other sections of society, such as the students, workers and peasants, thus creating a wider mass base for the nationalist movement. But the *Thakins* soon became divided in terms of their ideologies and programmes. Some were socialists, who formed a socialist party in 1939, called the People's Revolutionary Party. There had been another group who were full scale communists and formed in 1944 the Burma Communist Party. There was yet a third group of nationalists, who also had strong socialist leanings.

19.2.3 Japanese Occupation and Burmese Independence

It was around this time that the Second World War broke out and Burma in 1942 passed into the hands of the Japanese. Even before the war, some of the Burmese leaders had thought of raising an army with Japanese assistance, in order to fight British imperialism. Aung San for this purpose had gone to Tokyo, along with some of his close compatriots like Ne Win, and received military training. Like many other political leaders in Asia, he also believed that militaristic Japan would contribute to the liberation of the colonised Asiatic nations. With this hope, this newly formed Burma Independence Army supported the Japanese war efforts. It was replaced, after Japanese occupation of Burma, by the Burma Defence Army, which was more directly controlled by the Japanese. But Japan kept alive its image of a liberator. In pursuance of that Burma was accorded a formal independent status on August 1, 1943. Dr. Ba Maw became the prime minister and Aung

San the minister of defence and the commander-in-chief of the Burma National Army.

But soon there was disillusionment with the Japanese. Their occupation was followed by intensive economic exploitation of the country. What was unleashed in Burma was a 'conqueror's rule' under which the racial polarity between the Japanese and the local inhabitants 'was complete'. At this juncture the Burmese freedom fighters formed Anti Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) under the leadership of Aung Sun and his followers to fight against the Japanese occupation of Burma. Japan was finally defeated in 1945. Burma was reoccupied by the British. Now negotiation for self-government was started between the AFPFL and the British government. Meanwhile India achieved independence. Britain now decided to withdraw from Burma. A pact, known as Nu-Atlee pact was signed and Burma achieved independence at the beginning January 1948.

The study of nationalist movement is important for us, as it had certain significant legacies for future Burma. First of all, the nationalism of the Burmans, the majority community, had become a major dominating force in Burmese politics. The ideas of socialism had also acquired a natural legitimacy, as these were expected to affect only the foreign exploiting elements. Finally, a national army was born through this movement and it had performed an important political role by participating in the nation's war of liberation. All these factors were to influence Burma's politics during the next forty years of her independence.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Identify the major ethnic groups in Burma.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Briefly describe the factors responsible for the rise of nationalism in Burma.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

19.3 PARLIAMENTARY PERIOD

19.3.1 Political Instability of the Early Days

The political system in Burma since independence followed the British model of parliamentary democracy. The elections were free and fair, but were dominated although by the Anti Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). During this period, nationalism continued to have a tremendous appeal for the average Burmans. The ideals of socialism were also widely acceptable. So also were the concepts of Buddhism, which was made the state religion in 1960. But the rule of the AFPFL government was far from smooth ever since it assumed power under Premier U Nu.

To begin with, the first challenge that the new democratically elected ministry in independent Burma faced was from the communists. They were divided into two groups: the Red Flag (Trotskites) and the White Flag (Stalinists). The latter, under the intellectual guidance of its theoretician, M.N. Ghosal, had begun to criticize the AFPFL for being the

agents of British imperialism. They called for an armed uprising, which actually took place just four months after the new ministry had taken over power. The situation appeared to be really critical when a section of the Burma Army revolted and went over to the communists. At one point, the real control of the Rangoon Government ceased beyond the limits of the capital city. The government retaliated, but could not crush the revolt decisively. It only gradually began to lose its momentum after about a month of protracted warfare.

By taking advantage of the confusion, the ethnic minorities further destabilized the political situation in the country. The greatest of the danger came from the Karens, who wanted a separate Karen state. For this purpose, they raised a paramilitary force, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), which started a war against Rangoon in late 1948. By March next year, they had captured the city of Mandalay, ransacked Insein, made several unsuccessful attempts to capture Rangoon and inflicted a number of defeats on the Burmese army. It was not until 1950 that the KNDO forces could be driven back to the hills beyond Salween river. But even then there were wide tracts which remained under its effective control.

Meanwhile there had been trouble from other sources as well. The members of the People's Volunteer Organisation (PVD), the former armed wing of the AFPFL of the pre-independence days, took advantage of the situation for personal aggrandizement. The Union Police revolted in Arakan in mid-1949. The Mujahids were up in arms against the Rangoon Government in the north of Arakan while Red Flag Communists were active in the interior of Arakan. Back in Rangoon, the government servants went on a strike in February 1949, against a salary cut. The situation really looked dismal and it sapped the government's energy and financial resources.

19.3.2 Developmental Policies

Before 1950-52, which is considered to be the period of consolidation for the U Nu government, it did not really have time or energy to think about the developmental problems. In this sphere, socialism remained a guiding principle. But it was emphasized repeatedly, first by Aung San and then by Ba Swe, that it had to be adapted to the specific Burmese conditions and her historical legacies. In other words, a 'Burmese way to socialism' had to be devised. The new constitution spoke of a welfare concept of government and of adequate preventive measures against foreign economic penetration. It proposed, for example, the state ownership of land and accordingly a Land and a Nationalisation Act was passed in 1948, along with an Agricultural Labourer's Minimum Wages Bill. The 'Two Year Plan for Economic Development of Burma', drafted in the same year, also envisaged the establishment of a socialist economy. In June that year, U Nu announced his fifteen point socialist programme. It included many proposals such as nationalisation of monopolistic enterprises, foreign trade, land etc. and protection for the workers, peasants and the poor against capitalist exploitation. But nothing practically was done in this direction in the subsequent years. Later, U Nu gradually shifted from this 'extreme left' stand 'a moderate socialist position'.

This shift had become necessary in view of the less than satisfactory performance of the economy in the first few years of independence. The 'Eight Year Programme of Economic and Social Reform' popularly known as the 'Pidawtha' (welfare state) programme, launched in 1952, had retained a socialist orientation. But by 1955 its failure was manifest and this resulted in a decline in anti-capitalist slogans. There was now a greater preparedness to accept private capitalist enterprise. The shift was clearly evident in the next 'Four Year Plan for Economic Development' proposed by U Nu in June 1957. Though the goal of social welfare was retained, there was more emphasis on private investments, both indigenous and foreign. The ideal of socialism henceforth began to play a less important role in the realities of Burmese life. The result was not, however, an accelerated economic growth, but a perpetuation of the existing chaos, both economic and political.

19.3.3 Ethnic Minorities and Burmanization

The major cause of political chaos was the lack of legitimacy that the AFPFL government suffered from in areas outside the deltaic mainland. The dominant political culture that it represented was a blending of Burman nationalism, the tenets of Buddhism and certain

vague principles of socialism. And in the name of 'Burmanization', the government tried to impose it on the ethnic minorities, such as the Arakanese, Chins, Kachins, Karens, Kayahs, Mons and the Shans. The cultural domination of the majority Burmans came through the imposition of the Burmese as the official language of the nation and the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion. The constitution of 1948 also did not provide for a federal structure. The state power and the resources were concentrated in the hands of the central government. This resulted in a simmering sense of frustration and the articulation of regional identities among the ethnic minorities, such as the Arakanese, Chins, Kachins, Karens, Kayahs, Mons and the Shans.

19.3.4 Internal Dissensions within the AFPFL and the Coup

U Nu had often talked about further democratization of the polity by handing over power from the national to local officials and ultimately turning the government and the army into real people's organisations. But nothing of that sort happened. And then the unity of the AFPFL party itself was threatened by internal rivalries and personal bickerings. Subsequent to the Communists, the Socialists had also decided to quit the AFPFL. The internal dissensions within the party had reached such a point by 1956, that U Nu had to take a year off from premiership to set his house in order. After the formal split in the party in June 1958, a clean AFPFL government took over power, also under the premiership of U Nu. But the situation continued to be so unstable, that power had to be temporarily handed over in September 1958 to a caretaker government under General Ne Win. This gave the veteran officer of the Burma National Army of the pre-independence days a taste of real political power. But this time he had kept his words—he handed over power to the democratically elected government under U Nu in April 1960. The record of this new reformed Pyidaungsu government was however far from satisfactory. Moreover, the demand of the ethnic minorities for political autonomy had created a far more critical political as well as security problem at this General Ne Win, a socialist and a former close associate of Aung San, to seize power through a bloodless coup on 2 March 1962. The military government which thus came into power in Burma continued to have an uninterrupted rule for the next twenty six years.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the main reasons for the political instability in Burma?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Describe some of the important features of socialism in Burma.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

19.4 THE ARMY REGIME

19.4.1 The New Political System

General Ne Win with his political experience could realise that in order to be in power, he must politicise the army rule as quickly as possible. So in July 1962 he launched a new political party, known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). It promised to

reconstruct Burmese economy and society through the 'Burmese Way to socialism'. This could not be expected to be achieved through parliamentary democracy, it was declared. Because this system had been 'tried and tested' and had 'failed', because of the absence of a matured public opinion. Hence the task of reconstructing a socialist Burma was to be entrusted to an effective party organisation which was to enjoy an absolute monopoly of political power. This party was supposed to have its network spread over the whole country, involving the masses—the peasants and the workers in particular. Initially, however, it was to remain a closed 'cadre party', consisting of nucleus personnel. Its supreme authority was to be vested in a Revolutionary Council, which included only some high ranking military officers close to Ne Win. It was empowered to appoint certain high powered committees, such as the Central Organizing Committee, the Discipline Committee, the Socialist Economy Planning Committee etc. At the lower level, the Central Organizing Committee would appoint the primary 'party units' on the basis of 'constituencies' and 'branches of production' and if necessary townships and hill tracts. The party units would appoint 'party groups' in villages, wards, roads and streets, mills, factories etc. The Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, Ne Win, himself was to appoint a Council of Ministers, with the approval of the Revolutionary Council.

Thus on organisational framework was improvised in which an effective party network, reaching out to the common people in the interior, was linked with the administrative machinery. The supreme control of the entire structure was vested in the apex body of the Revolutionary Council, which was in effect a military council under the all powerful leader General Ne Win. Along with this, in 1964 all other political parties were banned and their leaders arrested. In 1966 there was a blanket ban on private newspapers and news media. The iron rule of Ne Win was thus consolidated.

But the last half of the 1960s was not very smooth for the army rulers. The economy had been malfunctioning and popular discontent was simmering in many parts of the country. This situation compelled the ruling clique to think about doing something to legitimise its rule through popular consent. Against this backdrop, the First Congress of the BSPP was held in 1971. Here it was decided that the 'cadre party' would be transformed into a 'mass party' by incorporating also the ordinary civilian population into it. The decision was followed by a vigorous membership drive, as a result of which by 1980-81 about one-third of the adult population of Burma had become 'full' or 'candidate' members of the BSPP, or were otherwise associated with it through the ancillary bodies like 'People's Councils'. Many of them were also placed at the lower rungs of the party leadership hierarchy and the lower level bureaucracy. This was expected to generate among the common people a sense of involvement in the new political system. On the other hand, the army dominance in the party was carefully retained. At the time of the Fifth Party Congress in 1985, about 94% of the armed forces and para-military units were members of the party. They constituted nearly 60% of the total party membership. The top leadership was also vested in the hands of senior army officers, the trusted men of General Ne Win. Finally, the new constitution promulgated in 1974 officially legitimized this single party rule. The party was projected as the people's party, but it was controlled effectively by an all powerful military elite.

19.4.2 Problems of Economic Development

The dictum of the 'Burmese Way to Socialism', as we have already seen, was by no means a new concept. The professed socialist ideology of the new regime, like that of its predecessors, provided for nationalization of the means of production, which were to be owned by the state or the cooperative societies or the 'collective unions'. But private enterprise was not to be totally stifled, particularly where the interests of the Burmans were involved. The Nationalization Act which came in 1963 therefore mainly affected the immigrant merchant capitalists, financiers and white-collar employees. This policy gradually led to a complete Burmanization of the economy and the services. This was followed by a Land Reforms Act in 1965. It abolished tenancy and redistributed some surplus land among the landless labourers. So far as the distribution of national income was concerned, it was envisaged that every individual would work according to his ability and would have a share of the material and cultural values that accrue 'in accordance with the quantity and quality of labour expended'. Though complete equality was accepted as an utopian goal, 'correct measures' were promised to narrow down the difference in income to a reasonable limit. Laudable welfare goals were thus set forth. But at the same time sufficient manoeuvring space was left to enable the military bureaucracy to legitimise

its attempts to monopolize wealth and power.

As far as economic growth was concerned, the new government placed its primary emphasis on the agricultural sector, which in 1960 had accounted for 33% of the GDP. To promote agricultural production a number of measures were taken, such as provision for agricultural credit, introduction of improved methods of cultivation, fertilization, use of quality seeds, land reclamation and irrigation. But despite all these, the annual growth rate in agriculture was just 4.1% between 1960 and 1970. Nor did the production of paddy, which really dominated Burmese agriculture, register any appreciable increase during the first decade of the military rule. In the industrial sector too, situation was far from satisfactory. The amount of public investment in industry had increased during this period from 3.6% in 1960-61 to 37% in 1970-71. But output did not keep pace with this growth in public investment, while fresh private investment remained minimal. Foreign investments were also scrupulously avoided, as the government strictly followed the policy of autarchy. As a result, between 1960 and 1970, the annual average growth rates were 3.1% for the industrial sector as a whole and 3.7% for the manufacturing sector. By the end of the 1960s Burma was about to be swept away by an impending economic crisis, with an abysmally low average growth rate of GDP—just about 2.6% between 1960 and 1970.

The First Party Congress of the BSPP in 1971 therefore took up seriously the question of economic development. It decided to launch a 'Twenty Year Development Programme' the aim of which would be to establish a socialist economy in the country by 1993-94, when there would be 'affluence for all'. The Twenty Year Plan was to be divided into five Four Year Plans. On the four Plans completed (the Fourth Plan came to an end in 1985-86), the Third Plan was the most successful, as the annual average GDP growth rate during this plan period was 6.7%. But on the whole the rate of economic growth has been rather slow: between 1965 and 1980 it was just 3.9% and between 1980 and 1986 only 4.9%. To achieve a further increase in growth rate, Burma needed a technological breakthrough, which necessitated foreign assistance. But from the beginning the new regime had avoided economic contact with the outer world, as through this gate usually comes in also foreign political intervention. On the other hand her foreign exchange reserve dwindled, as the production of rice, the major export commodity for Burma, did not increase according to expectations. Consequently, the country faced difficulty in importing the necessary industrial machinery, spare parts and agricultural inputs. The result was an economic deadlock out of which Burma could not come out on her own. The economy went further downhill, due either to the mismanagement or the rampant corruption of the bureaucracy.

But this slow economic growth was at the same time accompanied by a higher degree of distributive justice. Since 1963 the distribution of all essential commodities was controlled by the government and through a chain of 'People's Shop' food items and other necessary consumer goods were supplied to the people at quite reasonable prices. True, a thriving black market was always there. But in spite of that, there was no major short supply of coarse rice or minimum essential clothings. From 1978-79, the government initiated People's Health Plans to provide for the minimum health care facilities for the masses. As a result, infant mortality declined and average life expectancy increased appreciably, particularly in comparison with the other South Asian countries. This comparative situation would become evident if we look at the index of physical quality of life, calculated by averaging three indices, i.e., life expectancy at birth, infant mortality and literacy. The index for Burma in 1984 was 55. For India it was 44, for Pakistan 40 and for Bangladesh 36. Thus by curbing all democratic rights and by initiating welfare measures, the BSPP tried to sustain its rule. Such a system would continue as long as the public distribution system functioned well. But once cheap rice became scarce, the people could find no other reasons to tolerate this oppressive regime. And this was precisely what began to happen from 1987.

19.4.3 Prelude to Resistance

The policy of stick and carrot pursued by the BSPP did succeed for twenty-six years in preventing any major popular resistance to its rule. Resistance was certainly there and some of them not of very trivial nature. Leaving aside the resistance of the Burma Communist Party of the insurgency carried on by the ethnic minorities, there were in the city of Rangoon itself several movements for the restoration of democracy. There were student revolts in the Rangoon University campus in July 1962 and again in November

1963. In May-June 1974, there were workers' strikes, followed by student disturbances, and these recurred again the following year. Then in July 1976, there was an unsuccessful coup by some young army officers, who denounced the new socialist system. But such movements did not involve people of other than middle class background. The only exception was the 1974 riot in which the working class had taken an active part. The reason behind this absence of popular resistance was that there was still no major dearth of food and clothing for the common people. It was only in 1974 that there was an unusual food shortage which had made the Rangoon working class restive. But the distributing exportable rice through the People's Shops in the capital city at highly subsidized rates.

The economic situation once again became alarming in 1986-87 precipitating a crisis. The low growth rate which was the perennial problem for the Burmese economy proved to be the Achilles's heel for her government. As the national pie did into increase in size (the GDP in Burma in 1986 was just US Dollar 8,180 million), the individual's share in it also did not increase or even decreased with the rise in population. So distributive justice in this case really began to amount to a kind of sharing of poverty that was continually growing at an alarming rate. The economy was heading towards a crisis during the Fourth Plan period (1982-83 to 1985-86), when the overall growth rate of GDP had come down to 5.5%.

During the last two years of the plan period the actual growth rate had gone down even further and the Fifth Plan really began with a crisis situation. During the first year of this plan period, i.e., in 1986-87 the growth rate was just 1% and in the second year (1987-88) it was estimated to be around 2.2%. Along with this, the consumer price index rose to 167 in 1987 with 1980 as the base year. The average annual inflation rate was 26.7% in 1986 and about 28% in 1987. In a situation like this Burma applied to the United Nations for the 'Least Developed Country' status, which was granted in December 1987.

But what really hastened a political crisis was the virtual collapse of the public distribution system around this time. In 1986-87, the official procurement of rice fell by about 49% from the previous year. The reasons were an artificially fixed low procurement price with the simultaneous existence of a high black market price and the lure of a lucrative smuggling trade. What added to this was the inefficiency and sometimes the connivance of the local bureaucracy. But the result was a nearly complete breakdown of the public distribution system, compelling the common people to buy rice at exorbitant prices from the open market.

The distressing situation forced General Ne Win to openly acknowledge the failures of his economic policies in a special meeting of the party on 10 August 1987. He promised to rethink and the outcome was a series of dramatic measures taken in the first week of the following month. On 1 September, trade in certain essential food crops, such as paddy, maize and seven varieties of beans and pulses was decontrolled. As a result, endeavour to keep the rationing system going, it was decreed that land revenue would be collected in kind and the wholesale traders were charged a 5% turnover tax which was also to be paid in grains. But in spite of this, food prices immediately began to rise. As a further measure to check profiteering in grain trade, the government demonetized 25, 35 and 75 Kyat (Burmese currency) notes on 6 September, thus invalidation, according to one calculation, about 80% of the currency notes in circulation. The measure adversely affected the businessmen and the blackmarketeers no doubt, but the worst affected were the middle classes. For, the demonetization was announced in the afternoon of 6 September which was incidentally a Saturday, i.e., the first weekend of the month, when the employed middle class Burmese people had just drawn their monthly salaries. There was no prior warning and even the high ranking civil servants had no inkling about it. So at one stroke they lost nearly a whole month's income and no compensation was paid. This really infuriated the middle classes, while the lower classes were already distressed by the soaring food prices. The obvious result was a conflagration which could no longer be prevented by any concession.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
 ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain the main reasons led to the single party rule in Burma.

- 2) Critically examine the various development policies followed by Burma.

19.5 THE MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

Immediately after the demonetization, there was a fierce student riot in Rangoon, which was ruthlessly suppressed and the Rangoon University was closed. But the disturbances recurred again in March and then in June 1988. While the student protesters were being beaten up by the riot police, *Loon Htein*, Ne Win was also thinking of some policy reforms to revitalize the economy. The measures he was contemplating were those his prospective foreign donors were insisting on for a long time, i.e., to give more facilities to private enterprise and to open the gates for foreign private capital. Presumably there has been a considerable opposition within his party to such a drastic reversal of the earlier policy of autarchy pursued for the last twenty-six years. It was in this context that at a special congress of the party on 23 July 1988, Ne Win offered to resign and suggested a referendum to decide whether the single party rule was to continue or not. But his suggestion was overruled and Sein Lwin, known to be an arch conservative and a strong man within the ruling conterie, now took over power. Many Burma watchers believe that some liberal concessions and economic reforms would have satisfied the middle classes at this juncture. But when Sein Lwin took over power, this unnerved the people, for he was a man who was behind all repressive acts undertaken during the last twenty six years' rule by the BSPP. He was the brain behind the hated *Loon Htein* which had mercilessly tortured the student protesters on the earlier occasions and this had earned him the reputation of a 'butcher'. So his succession was immediately received with massive protests and the tide began to taken its own course. Under pressures, Sein Lwin also declared that he would initiate some liberal economic reforms, like giving more privileges to the private businessmen or allowing investment of private foreign capital. But there was now a complete credibility gap, as boundless repression also continued simultaneously. The demand for multi-party democracy now took the foreground in the protest movement and its forerunners were the students and the monks. To deal with the situation soon martial law was declared in the whole of the country.

19.5.1 End of BSPP Rule

The stringent measure of the new government could not control the mass protests which demanded the restoration of democracy and resignation of the new president. Particularly on 8 August 1988, there was a massive rally in Rangoon, largest indeed in the history of the last quarter century, participated by about 100,000 people defiantly violating the martial law. The nervous authorities now unleashed violence. But even this state terror failed to control the anti-government riots, which ultimately compelled Sein Lwin to resign on 12 August, only after seventeen days of what was truly a reign of terror.

A week later, the former Attorney General Dr. Maung Maung became the first civilian President of the Republic since the coup of 1962. Under his stewardship, the BSPP offered to hold a multi-party general election within three months. But this concession failed to satisfy the opposition forces, consisting mainly of students, Buddhist monks, civil servants and workers. They now demanded the establishment of an interim government. Mammoth pro-democracy rallies continued to take place both in the capital city of Rangoon and outside. And now there were also reports of defection from the army, particularly from the

airforce. Therefore, as a further concession to the people, Maung Maung asked the military personnel to resign from the party—a move that really threatens to rob them of the political privileges which they have been enjoying for the last twenty six years. Under these circumstances, the Chief of Staff, General Saw Maung on 18 September 1988 took over power from the civilian president and announced the formation of a nine member cabinet, which called itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). It included only one civilian member with an insignificant portfolio. Immediately after assuming power, the army junta unleashed a full scale reign of terror, killing about 1,000 men in two days. It was widely remoured that the octogenarian leader, the BSPP's ex-Chairman Ne Win, was operating from behind the scene. The dissenting students initially tried to resist, but then went underground. Some crossed the border to take refuge in Thailand or India. Others went to the ethnic rebels to receive armed training. Under severe army repression, the movement now began to pull in different directions. The situation in Burma was now even worse than what was before the commencement of the movement. Instead of being administered by a single party (BSPP) dominated by the army, the country passed under direct army rule.

19.5.2 Weaknesses of the Pro-Democracy Movement

During the initial phase, the movement for democracy was spontaneous, disorganized and leaderless. Because in course of the last twenty-six years of single party rule all organized opposition had been liquidated. The only organized force in this situation of virtual chaos were the students who now formally announced, as a symbol of further solidarity, the re-establishment of the All Burma Students Union. The symbolic act took place at the same spot in the Rangoon University campus where twenty-six years ago in July 1962, Si Lwin's troops had gunned down 148 student protesters and thus had crushed the last organized opposition to the newly instituted army rule. The students now declared democracy through peaceful means and refused to accept armed assistance from the ethnic insurgents or the Burma Communist Party. In this peaceful struggle they could have with them the Buddhist monks, the professional classes and a segment of the working class. In other words, the urban middle class character of the movement was pronounced from the beginning. Even during its peak period, it remained confined to the urban centres from Maudalay to Moulmein in central Burma, leaving the countryside more or less unaffected. It is always easy to suppress localized urban movements with superior striking power. And this was precisely what happened in Burma in 1988-89. The students initially tried to resist the state violence in amateurish ways, and then fled to the jungles, to the ethnic rebels across the borders or to the neighbouring countries.

The other leaders who had emerged in course of the movement also lacked in experience and vision of guide it properly. Among them the most important was Aung Gyi, who had written a few open letters to Ne Win, criticizing his socialist economic policies. The others were General Tinco, who had been expelled from the BSPP in 1983, and Captain Win Thein, the leader of the abortive army coup in 1976. There was also another name which surfaced during this time and that was of Daw Aung San Syuu Kyi, the daughter of the nationalist hero Aung San. None of these leaders, except perhaps U Nu, had any political experience necessary for leading a nationwide political movement. Nor did any one of them have any pre-existing following and therefore had to depend fully on the students for political support. What was worse, conflicting ambitions prevented them from forming a united front against army rule. By November 1988, 230 political parties had registered their names, indicating utter disunity. The movement therefore could not sustain itself in the face of severe repression, though people's antipathy to army rule did not die down.

19.5.3 Towards the Election of 1990 and After

To legitimise its rule, the SLORC also took a number of political measures aimed at placating public opinion. Its first strategy has been to whip up Burman nationalism and to magnify the threats to national unity and security. As a first symbolic move, the BSPP changed its name into the National Unity Party. Then in June 1989, the name of the country was officially changed from Burma to its vernacular equivalent Myanmar. Similarly the Anglicized versions of some other city names were replaced with the original indigenous names, e.g., Rangoon became Yangon and so on. Next, 16 May 1990 was announced as the date for a general election. But nowhere in the announcement it was mentioned that power would be handed over to the elected representatives of the people.

To supervise the elections, an Election Commission was appointed. But its neutrality was questioned by many political parties.

The people were initially deceived and they responded enthusiastically to the prospect of having a free and fair election. The early possibility of the opposition to National Unity Party (or BSPP) being divided, with the registration of 230 political parties with the Election Commission, was also soon averted. An electoral alliance, called the National League for Democracy (NLD) was formed with 41 of them. Tin Oo became its president and Aung San Syuu Kyi became the secretary. Aung Gyi, on the other hand, headed another formation, named the Union National Democratic Party, which became to some extent friendly to the SLORC. Many other parties subsequently withdrew their names from the Election Commission.

But none of the political parties that intended to contest the election had any political base whatsoever. Nor was it possible to prepare it now. Just when the NLD was about to start its election campaign in the countryside, which had more or less remained unaffected by the pro-democracy movement so far, martial law was clamped on the country on 17 July, 1989. Syuu Kyi was put under house arrest, while other front ranking leaders were either interned or arrested. About five to six thousand students and political workers were arrested. Public meetings were prohibited, meaning that campaigning for election was virtually put to a stop. The foreign press was practically expelled from the country to plug the information leakage to the outside world.

But the results of the election held under such circumstances, were quite astonishing—amounting indeed to a silent revolution. The NLD had a sweeping victory, with a clear sway over seventy per cent of the seats (396 out of 485 contested seats). The SLORC officially accepted the results, but refused to hand over power to the elected representatives of the people. It was announced that the newly elected body would only frame the third constitution of Myanmar (Burma). Nor were the arrested leaders, including Syuu Kyi, released to facilitate a peaceful transition to democracy. Thus Burma or Myanmar still effectively remains under military rule which had been initiated thirty years ago in March 1962.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with the answer given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain the main features of pro-democracy movement in Burma.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Write a note on factors contributed for weakening pro-democracy movement in Burma.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9.6 LET US SUM UP

The military rule in Burma had never been accepted by the non-Burman ethnic minorities, who had taken to prolonged insurgency to assert their autonomy. Gradually the regime lost its legitimacy among the majority Burman population as well. This was to a large extent

because of the breakdown of the economy. From the 1970s onward Burma had been accepting bilateral and multilateral foreign aid to boost her economy. In 1976, an Aid Burma Consortium was formed, with Japan, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Australia and USA as its partners. In view of the pro-democracy movement, all these countries had stopped their aid. This has been a great pressure on the military government, as already by September 1988 the country's foreign debt had amounted to 70% of her GDP. All these countries had been demanding more facilities for private enterprise and removal of remaining restrictions on foreign investments. The Burmese government had first succumbed to this pressure in 1977, when it had passed the 'Rights of Private Ownership Law'. Then in November 1988, the SLORC further removed restrictions on private foreign investments. It was hoped that this would attract more foreign capital resulting in a revival of the economy and strengthening of the army rule.

In 1989, a few more steps were taken by the SLORC in this direction. To encourage indigenous private investments, four Joint Venture Corporations were set up. It was hoped that this would both attract private investment and ensure official control. Apart from this a Foreign Investment Commission was also formed. In May 1989, it announced that in nine particular sectors there would be no restriction on foreign investment. Several tax exemptions were also announced for these sectors. The only rider was that the profits had to be transferred through the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank.

It is true though that some countries have responded favourably to such concessions, the amount of foreign investment has been far short of the expectations of the SLORC. The result has been a continuing economic crisis which may cause in the present political context another popular outburst. The army rulers therefore tried to divert people's attention by reviving counter-insurgency measures against the ethnic rebels near the Thai frontier and mounted a renewed onslaught on the Muslim Rohingyas near the Bangladesh border. Both these manoeuvres involved the SLORC in controversies with the Thai and Bangladesh governments, creating for it an opportunity to whip up Burman nationalism. But this strategy may not ultimately succeed in quelling public discontent. The world opinion seems to have been awoken to the crisis of democracy in Burma. The award of the 1991 Novel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, is symptomatic of that. Under the circumstances it is hoped world-wide that soon the intransigent army rulers of Burma would be forced to bow down to the wishes of the people.

19.7 KEY WORDS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Imperialism | : Imperialism is chiefly characterised by the power of monopolies and finance capital in economics and politics within a given country and in The World Market. |
| Nationalization | : Transition from private ownership to state ownership of land, industrial enterprises, banks, transport, etc. |
| Political System | : A totality of state institutions, political parties, public associations and norms (rules) of human behaviour in accordance with which state power is exercised and political life organised. |
| Political Revolution | : The overthrow of state power of a given ruling class and establishment of state power of another class. |

19.8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Bertil Lintner, 1989. *Outrage : Burma's Struggle for Democracy*, Hong Kong.

David J Steinberg, 1981. *Burma's Road Toward Development : Growth and Ideology under Military Rule*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado.

Hugh Tinker, 1957. *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence*. Oxford University Press, London.

Frank N. Trager, 1958. *Building a Welfare State in Burma, 1948-1956*. Institute of Pacific Relations, New Yorks.

Joseph Silverstein, 1977. *Burma, Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.

Louis J. Walinsky, 1962. *Economic Development in Burma, 1951-1960*. The Twentieth Century Fund, New York.

Robert H. Taylor, 1987. *The State in Burma*. C. Hurst & Co., London.

19.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) The Burmans,
ii) The Shans,
iii) Mans,
iv) Kachins,
v) Karen,
vi) Chins, and
vii) The Arakanese

- 2) i) Colonial exploitation
ii) Agricultural policy
iii) Protests against the British policies
iv) Emergence of the indigenous educated middle class imbued with radical and liberal ideas.
v) Indian influence

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) Mixing of Religion (Buddhism) with politics
ii) Left adventurism
iii) Failures of the Burmese nationalism to integrate the ethnic minorities with the mainstream national politics
iv) Removal of the national leaders—assassination of top leaders in 1947.
v) Policies of Burmanization of the minor ethnic groups
vi) Unitary system of government in the multi-ethnic state
vii) Cleavages in the AFPFL.

- 2) i) Welfare of the people
ii) Measures to prevent the punctuation of the foreign economic interests
iii) State ownership of land
iv) Nationalisation of monopolistic enterprises, foreign trade etc.
v) Protection of the labouring masses from under exploitation.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) i) Multiparty System failed to deliver goods
ii) After the foundation of the officially backed BSPP all other parties were banned
iii) Endemic political instability
iv) Growing economic crisis.

- 2) i) Foundation of one party system leads to curb the political liberty of the people
ii) Nationalisation leads to Burmanization rather than socialization
iii) Agricultural policy and the industrial policy both in the first decade of the one party rule did not register much progress
iv) Too much control gave birth of a thriving black market
v) However despite many short comings, the quality of life in Burma under socialist system improved.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) i) Movement was initiated by the students whose dominance continued throughout the period of the movement

- ii) Growing movement accompanied severe repression
 - iii) The movement which was initially a student movement, transformed soon into a mass movement.
 - iv) Continuing pressure of the movement encouraged defection from the ruling party
 - v) Movement demanded multi-party democratic system, privatization and liberalization of both economic and political systems.
-
- i) Movement was initially spontaneous, disorganized and leaderless
 - ii) Movement was dominated by the students and the urban middle class
 - iii) Conflicting ambition in the participants in the movement prevented them to form limited front
 - iv) Very fact that the leaders and the sponsors failed to get underground shelter within the country shows that the masses in general had little sympathy for the movement. They had to flee away.

UNIT 20 VIETNAM

Structure

- 20.1 Objectives
 - 20.2 Introduction
 - 20.3 Early History
 - 20.4 Colonial Rule
 - 20.5 Nationalist Movement
 - 20.6 Vietnam and American Intervention
 - 20.7 Economy
 - 20.8 Constitution and Government
 - 20.9 Foreign Policy
 - 20.10 Let Us Sum Up
 - 20.11 Some Useful Books
 - 20.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
-

20.1 OBJECTIVES

The unit deals with Vietnam, a communist country in Southeast Asia, which became famous in following possibly the bloodiest independence struggle it led against colonial rule and later, against direct military intervention by the United States of America. The key to understanding Vietnam is its history and the armed struggle it waged under the leadership of the Communist Party. As far as the objectives of this unit are concerned, after going through this unit you should be able to :

- talk about the history of the country, including its struggle for independence.
- discuss the difficulties in unification of Vietnam and its impact on economic development.
- discuss the constitution and government of Vietnam.

20.2 INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is one of the three countries of Indo-China in Southeast Asia. Apart from its fascinating history of long subjugation by the external powers, it has to its credit a nationalist movement unparalleled in history. It was under the Communist Party of Vietnam and the leadership of Ho Chi Minh that the Vietnamese fought against the Japanese occupation during the Second World War and later against the French (who were driven out by the Japanese) who tried to regain their control over their former colony. After defeating the French forces at Dien Bien Phu led by the guerrilla forces of General Giap in 1954, Vietnam was divided into two countries under the Geneva Accord. The promised election to ascertain the opinion of the people was not held and the Americans sent large number of troops to fight the Vietnamese communists. It was part of the strategy of global containment of communism in the world. But, it proved to be possibly, the worst disaster for the Americans. Although Vietnam was subjected to one of the worst kinds of military aggression by the world's mightiest power, the United States, the Vietnamese national fervour could not be subjugated. At the end of nearly twenty years of war, Americans had lost about 55,000 troops in the war against Vietnam and finally had to make an ignominious exit in 1975.

After a resounding victory, however, Vietnam had to face serious problems relating to the unification and re-building of the war ravaged land. Also because of ideological rivalry between the Soviet Union and China, Vietnam's former supporters, it had problems. Due to circumstances, Vietnam had to side with the Soviets who provided

generous economic aid. The collapse of the communist Soviet Union and unsatisfactory performance of the economy, Vietnam recently had to adopt certain capitalist measures of development. At present, Vietnam is undergoing a rapid transformation on almost all fronts. It now seeks closer relations with the anti-communist Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its formal rivals China and the United States. It has now embarked upon a liberalised, market-oriented economic policy.

20.3 EARLY HISTORY

There is nothing much in the early history of Vietnam except languishing under the Chinese rule marked with sporadic violent uprisings for independence. In 207 B.C., in the aftermath of the collapse of Chin dynasty in China, Trieu Da, a Chinese general commanding the Kwantung and Kwangsi provinces brought the Red River Delta as well under his jurisdiction, carving out an independent kingdom called Nan-ueh or Nam Viet. After the liquidation of the Nam kingdom in 111 B.C., Nam Viet was turned into a Chinese province and kept under its suzerainty for the next thousand years. Large number of Chinese came to settle down in the Red River Delta and introduced Buddhism, Confucian values and Chinese culture into Vietnam.

20.3.1 Medieval History

In the medieval history of Vietnam, two families dominated the scene, the Trinhs and Nguyens, related to each other but political rivals. Until the fifteenth century, the kingdom of Daico-Viet was limited in territory, more or less to the Tongking Delta. After a major defeat of Champa in 1471, the Vietnamese state extended to little south of the Annam range. Vietnam's partition took place for the first time in 1540. This was when Vietnam's ruling Le family, supported by a nobleman, Nguyen, suffered a serious setback with a general, Mac Dang Dung, seizing power in Tongking. A Chinese mediation supported partition of Vietnam. However, by 1592, another nobleman, Trinh, overthrew the Mac regime in Tongking and usurped power in the name of Le Dynasty. Trinh managed to smuggle the nominal Le ruler from Hue to Hanoi. As the suzerain power, China undid the previous "partition", recognising the Le Dynasty as the only legitimate ruler of all of Vietnam. But the Nguyens could not be liquidated. A wall from the Annam mountains to the sea near Dong Hoi separated the territories under the control of Trinh and Nguyen families.

Nguyen power grew rapidly after removing the Trinh threat. The final extinction of the remnants of the Champa Kingdom came in 1720, its last king fleeing with most of his people to present day Cambodia. The Vietnamese extended their control in the Mekong Delta of Cochinchina, then a part of Cambodian khmer kingdom. By the middle of the eighteenth century, virtually all the Khmer territories of the present southern Vietnam had become part of the Nguyen kingdom.

20.3.2 Upheavals during the Last Quarter of the 18th Century

Vietnam witnessed great social and political upheavals during the last quarter of the 18th century. The old established regimes were overthrown both in the North and South. The three brothers Nguyen Van Nhac, Nguyen Van Lu and Nguyen Van Hue (who adopted the name of the southern ruling family Nguyen) from Central Vietnam raised the banner of revolt; in part helped by public disgust of Trinh's regime which was corrupt and nepotistic. By 1788, they had obtained control of all of Vietnam. Nhac was proclaimed Emperor of Annam with Hue and Lu in charge of Tongking and Mekong basins respectively. Though these three brothers brought about the unification of Vietnam, they did not enjoy much respect in the South, where people considered them unscrupulous for taking advantage of the original Nguyen king dying without leaving an adult heir. The teenage prince, Nguyen Anh, received sympathy and secret support from the people.

20.3.4 Beginning of Interactions with the French

A French missionary, Pigneau de Behaine, began interactions with the French, one of the supporters of Nguyen Anh, took Anh's son, Canh, to France to the court

of Louis XVI, seeking military assistance for restoration of Nguyen Anh to power. Despite political convulsions the monarch was undergoing just before the French Revolution in 1789, a Franco-Vietnamese treaty was signed, providing French military aid in exchange for grant of monopoly for external trade, the cession of Puolo Condore island and the port of Da Nang. The French government directed its colonial governor of Pondicherry (near Madras) to provide military assistance, an order he failed to carry out. De Behaine, however, raised 300 volunteers and funds in Pondicherry—enough to purchase several shiploads of arms. He arrived in Vietnam in June 1789, barely a month before the fall of Bastille which marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

Even before the arrival of French help, Nguyen Anh had captured Saigon in 1788. By the time he conquered Hue in 1801 and Hanoi a year later, there were only four Frenchmen in his army. However, the French helped in the construction of Vauban-type forts, casting better and larger cannon and creating a navy. Nguyen Anh was proclaimed emperor of Annam in 1802 with the title of Gia Long, signifying the political unification of the Tongking and Mekong deltas. In the following years, he sent a tribute to the Chinese court and for the first time China recognised the Nguyen dynasty. Credit should be given to Gia Long who successfully reconstructed the war ravaged country, including a road covering the distance of 1,300 miles linking Saigon, Hue and Hanoi. He was without doubt not only the unifier of Vietnam but also its greatest monarch ever.

20.4 COLONIAL RULE

Though the French connection with Vietnam could be traced back to the seventeenth century, the colonisation as such did not take place till the second half of nineteenth century. Consistent interest in proselytisation had resulted by the end of 18th century in about a quarter million Vietnamese converts, mostly in the coastal provinces. Large-scale persecution of converts and missionaries began in the 1820s under Minh Mang and was continued under Thieu Tri (1841-1847) and in the early part of Tu Duc's reign (1847-1883). The hostility towards the Catholics was further enhanced by continued missionary involvement in Court politics. The close association of the missionaries with semi-independent, rebellious Governor of Cochin-China who attempted to prevent Minh Mang's succession to the throne when Gia Long died in 1820, earned them the extreme wrath of the monarch. Minh Mang forbade in 1825 any further entry of missionaries. Eight years later, an extremely severe decree ordered churches to be demolished and made profession of the Catholic faith an offence punishable by death. This was in 1836 and it almost coincided with Chinese strictures against foreign shipping. The Vietnamese monarch closed his ports to European shipping.

20.4.1 Persecution of Missionaries and French Intervention

Persecution of missionaries became an excellent excuse for the French to intervene directly in Vietnam. In 1846, French ships blockaded Da Nang for two weeks and then bombarded the port, demanding the release of Mgr. Dominique Lefevre, who had been condemned to death by the Vietnamese government. The French government of Napoleon III also wanted to use the opportunity to compensate for his domestic fiascos by success in Cochin-China. The new French imperialism of the time was widely based on a coalition of diverse interests of the Church, traders and manufacturers in search of new markets, and was aided by an egoistic Emperor's lust for colonies for augmenting national power and prestige. The business interests were aware of the exclusive geographic advantages their position in Vietnam could give them particularly with regard to seeking access to the lucrative markets of interior China. French businessmen interested in overseas markets were supporting the government of Cochin-China in the hope of establishing a base in Saigon rivaling Singapore and Hong Kong for funneling South China trade.

20.4.2 Treaty of Tu Duc

including Saigon, to France and assured that no part of his kingdom would ever be aligned to any other power except France. He further agreed to pay an indemnity of four million **plasatres** in ten annual instalments and open three ports into French trade. Christianity was to be tolerated in the future and there would be the right to navigate the Mekong. Five years later, the French obtained the remaining provinces of Cochinchina to enable them to establish full control over the Mekong delta. The treaty of 1873 provided France the excuse to pressure the Vietnamese emperor for more concessions, for the French alleged that being a French protectorate, Vietnam committed a breach by giving tribute to China. Utter helplessness forced the emperor of Annam to become formally a French protectorate, to surrender administrative responsibility for the Tongking province to France and to accept a French Resident at Hanoi and Hue. After a prolonged fight and defeat, the Middle Kingdom of China signed a treaty in 1885 recognising the French protectorate over Annam and Tongking, permitting French traders in South China, conceding preference to France over all other European powers in Yunnan and granting France the right to construct a railway paralleling the Red River Valley from Hanoi to Kunming. The treaty marked the end of nearly two thousand years old subordinate relationship between Vietnam and China and completed the French domination over all of Vietnam.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What were the factors that led to the intervention by the French in Vietnam?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What are the main aspects of the French colonial rule in Vietnam?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

20.5 NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Southeast Asia is unique because probably this is the only part of the world that has witnessed the presence of almost all the colonial powers at some time or the other : the French in Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos), the British in Malaya, Singapore, Brunei and Burma, the Dutch in Indonesia, the Americans in the Philippines and the Portuguese in East Timor. Whole of the region also came under Japanese rule during World War II. Equally significant were the nationalist movements across the region which ranged from one of the bloodiest in Vietnam to the most peaceful in Brunei.

The Vietnamese history is replete with examples of large-scale movements to overthrow Chinese rule at various times. In Vietnam, like the rest of Southeast Asia, education played the most important role in creating nationalist consciousness. Many of the elite who were educated in the West came under the influence of various ideologies, particularly Marxist, and came back to their native countries to lead the nationalist movements, many a time, militant. Other events that fuelled the nationalist sentiments were: the Boxer Uprising in 1899 against Western presence and domination of China; the resounding military victory of Japan over Russia which shattered the myth of invincible Western power; the successful overthrow of the decadent Manchu dynasty in China and proclamation of the Chinese Republic in 1911; the Russian Revolution in 1917 which for the first time resulted in the establishment of a proletariat state under the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; and the nationalist struggle in India. But, more importantly, it was the Japanese defeat of all metropolitan powers that were present in Southeast Asia and occupation of the region that acted not only as a catalyst but provided the necessary inspiration to the nationalist movements.

Although opposition to the French rule started as soon as the French occupied Vietnam, it was in the early 20th century that propelled the independence struggle to greater heights. Many youths from well-to-do families who had the benefit of education in France and who had crossed over to China after the Chinese Revolution in 1911 instigated a number of small uprisings, particularly in Tongking and Cochin-China, and a somewhat serious one in 1916, all of which were severely suppressed by the French rulers. In the 1920s many underground secret organisations were set up, both Marxist and non-Marxist. But the most important event in the recent history of Vietnam was the entry of the legendary Marxist, Ho Chi Minh, in the nationalist struggle. He had gone to Europe as a cabin boy but soon got inspired by Marxist and other socialist writings. After spending some time in Moscow, he went to China in 1924 to organise the nationalist movement on communist lines. In 1925, he formed the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth and started training hundreds of people in Marxism. In 1930, Ho fused the three prominent communist groups in Vietnam into a single party and named it the Indochina Communist Party. This was in line with the dominant thinking that a united nationalist movement could be built up comprising all the three countries of Indochina.

An abortive and ill-planned uprising led by a prominent non-Marxist organisation, called Vietnamese Nationalist Party (found in 1927), in early 1930 was brutally suppressed by the French. The efforts by the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) to exploit the peasant unrest by organising strikes and non-cooperation movements were also suppressed. However, the ICP could quickly reorganise itself because of its superb organisation and party discipline. The ICP took advantage of the liberal political situation in France to organise a broad Democratic Nationalist Front under the leadership of Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap aimed at uniting all social classes and political groups. With the outbreak of war, the Popular Front government fell in France resulting in the banning of ICP.

20.6 VIETNAM AND AMERICAN INTERVENTION

During World War II, after a brief clash between the French and Japanese forces, Japan and the Vichy government of France came to an agreement which provided for the continuation of French sovereignty and administration in Indochina in return for placing military facilities and economic resources of Indochina at Japan's disposal. Ho Chi Minh was released from a Chinese prison on Chiang Kai-Shek's order to enable him to lead a resistance movement in Vietnam against the Japanese-dominated Vichy government. He was provided with military and other material supplies.

Meeting of the ICP which met in China in May 1941 decided to launch an agrarian movement. A new organisation, the Viet Minh, or the Vietnam Independence League, was launched to include all people without distinction of age, wealth, sex, religion, or political outlook with the sole aim of liberating the country. A military force under the leadership of Vo Nguyen Giap consisting of 5,000 people was constituted. After taking over the administration of Vietnam from France in three months before surrender by the Japanese, Viet Minh had already established guerrilla bases and administration over six provinces. Vietnam occupied Hanoi close on the heels of

Japanese departure and Ho Chi Minh declared independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Interestingly, the whole programme that was adopted on that eve was nationalist and not communist in character. This can be seen from features, such as abolition of inequitable taxes, gainging of independence, developing a military, promulgating democratic rights, redistribution of communal lands and friendship with the Allies. In fact, when Ho Chi Minh addressed a crowd of half-a-million to proclaim the birth of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, he quoted largely from American Declaration of Independence of 1776.

The new republic was however not recognised by any country and the Allies, meeting at Potsdam, decided to put northern part of Vietnam under Nationalist China and southern part under the British. The British, after releasing the French prisoners, put France in charge of administrating the South. The French tried to reassert their colonial rights in Indochina.

20.6.1 French Ambitions and Designs

To get rid of the Chinese troops, Ho Chi Minh announced the dissolution of ICP and offered to share power with other independent organisations in late 1945, mainly to get French recognition. Though France also agreed to sponsor a referendum for determining whether Cochinchina should join the Union and to withdraw its troops gradually from all of Vietnam, it did not show any desire to give up power. On the contrary, France started strengthening their military and political position. Upon backtracking on referendum, it announced the creation of an autonomous Republic of Cochinchina. Finally, on 23 November the French cruiser *Suffren* bombarded the Vietnamese quarter of Haiphong, killing over six thousand persons in a matter of few hours. That sparked off the outbreak of hostilities between Viet Minh and France. The first Indochina war, which lasted from 1946 till 1954, broke out both in North and South Vietnam. What attracted the people in a big way was more the militant character of the Viet Minh than the communist ideology per se.

The fight that continued all across Vietnam resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Many cabinets fell in France because of Vietnam war. The French forces were thoroughly demoralised, particularly, by the public opinion at home, which overwhelmingly pressed for ending the "dirty war". Apart from losing lucrative rubber and rice supplies, the French were worried about the impact of Vietnam's independence on other French colonies, especially in Africa. But in the end the French had to face a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954 at Viet Minh hands led by General Giap, a primary school teacher, who became one of the greatest guerrilla fighters. The French rout resulted in the Geneva Agreement of 1954 whereby Vietnam was divided into North and South along the Seventeenth Parallel and the question of reunification were to be decided by a country-wide election in 1956.

20.6.2 Vietnam and Shadow of the Cold War

The unimaginable suffering the Vietnamese had to undergo probably could have been avoided had the Cold War not been brought to Vietnam and big powers avoided the power play. The elections were to be supervised by an International Control Commission under India's chairmanship, with Canada and Poland as members reporting to Britain and the Soviet Union, the co-chairmen of Geneva Conference. America, committed to the policy of containment of communism, created a regional security organisation called the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in September with the U.S., Britain, France, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan as members. SEATO's Article IV included the countries of Indochina as "protocol" countries to be defended by SEATO powers, thereby legitimising later American intervention in Vietnam conflict.

20.6.3 American Support to Ngo Dinh Diem

With active American support, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was appointed Prime Minister by the French while the Geneva Conference was in session, declared himself as Chief of State after rigging a referendum held on October 1955. Soon, he proclaimed South Vietnam a Republic with himself as the President. Diem also announced plans for a unilateral election of a national assembly in March 1956 by repudiating any obligation to the Geneva Agreement. The republic was recognised by the U.S. and its

allies and for all purposes treated as an independent country. In fact, Diem had neither popular mandate nor was he in touch with the people.

Intoxicated by the American support, Diem ruled like a dictator distributing largesse to his close kith and kin. As a Catholic, and thus unduly favouring Catholics, in a predominantly Buddhist country, he further distanced himself from the common people. He ruthlessly persecuted both the communists and the non-communists, whenever they showed even the slightest opposition. Because of his ill-conceived agrarian policies, he could not contain the simmering discontent of the peasants. The communists in order to liberate and unify the country established the National Liberation Front (NLF) in South Vietnam in December 1960. Americans simply turned a blind eye to the socio-economic problems by extending full support to Diem. By the time they realised Diem's unpopularity, a Buddhist resistance had snowballed into a major crisis in the early sixties. They did not discourage when the military generals overthrew president Diem and assassinated him. But, that did not solve the basic problems of South Vietnam. On the other hand, the intra-military fight for power among generals, who were exclusively dependent on the U.S. for help and support, further aggravated the situation.

20.6.4 Tonkin Incident of 1966

The Tonkin Incident of 1966, when an American ship was attacked by North Vietnam close to its coast while on a spying mission, was the only excuse Americans needed to escalate the war beyond all proportions. By 1968, the U.S. had committed more than half-a-million troops. The Americans who were pitted against the aroused nationalism of Vietnam inflicted devastation upon that country on a scale which had no parallels in history. The U.S. dropped more than seventy lakh tons of bombs on Indochina—nearly three times the total tonnage of bombs dropped in World War II and the Korean war combined—plus one lakh tons of defoliants and other noxious substances. About 8,000 U.S. planes and helicopters were destroyed. The direct U.S. war expenditure in Vietnam was more US \$150 billion. Americans used all possible experimental weapons such as chemical, gas, napalm, phosphorous fragmentations weapons and bacteriological weapons. 'Agent Orange', 'Carpet bombing', 'Lazy dog', and a variety of other appellations were invented and used extensively in Vietnam as new modes of devastation. Dykes, bridges, and canals were bombed and destroyed so that people would flock to urban areas which could be more easily managed. Defoliants were sprayed on crops and forests to deny food and shelter to the guerrillas and carpet bombing was done to wipe out the villages.

By the time the Americans realised that Vietnam War was unwinnable, they had lost more than 58,000 men, but had at the same time killed more than forty lakh Vietnamese. More than the humiliation of defeat, even today the U.S. is haunted by psychological trauma of what is called the "Vietnam Syndrome". The Vietnam debacle was also the beginning of a definite American decline. On the eve of departure, it was reported that the 5-lakh U.S. Expeditionary Force had become "a drugged, mutinous, and demoralized rubble". In 1973, Paris Talks were held as a face-saving device for the Americans to withdraw from Vietnam. In the spring of 1975 the communists won not only in South Vietnam, but also in Cambodia and Laos. On 2 January 1976 South Vietnam formally unified with the North to become of a single country once again.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- i) Briefly explain the genesis of the nationalist movement in Vietnam ?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Assess the role of Vietminh in the struggle for Independence particularly against the United States of America.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) Describe the American military role in Vietnam

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

20.7 ECONOMY

Vietnam's economic planning and development till the late eighties, had been similar to developing socialist countries to a great extent. One of its chief objectives has been to gradually transform an agricultural patriarchal-feudal system into a socialist economy.

20.7.1 Genesis of Economic Planning

Economic planning was introduced in North Vietnam in late 1955 with the establishment of a National Planning Board and a Central Statistical Office. A Three-Year plan for Restoration of the Economy and the Development of Culture was initiated wherein substantial outlays were allocated to the industrial sector. After successful conclusion of the two three-year plans, the first Five-Year plan was launched in 1960. By the end of the Third Plan period (1965), though most of the set targets were achieved, the collectivisation of agriculture did not show the desired results, resulting in food shortages. With the escalation of war into North Vietnam abetted by direct American military intervention, there were no plans for the period 1965-73. The whole economy was geared to the war effort.

20.7.2 Post War Economic Planning and Development

Only after its victory over the USA Vietnam could restart its planned economic development. The Second Five-Year Plan (1976-80) listed agriculture, industry, trade, culture and public health, and improvement of general living conditions of people as areas of priority. This plan, made originally in 1974, had to be revised and implemented in the whole of Vietnam after the sooner-than-expected victory over the

United States in 1975 and a reunification of North and South Vietnams. However these events created more serious problems than anticipated. The socialist pattern of economic development could not simply be extended from North to South Vietnam. South Vietnam under the American tutelage had been modeled on market-oriented free-enterprise system primarily geared to serve the American war machine. Once again, because of large-scale war, the human settlement was drastically disturbed denying Viet Minh a chance to extend its influence to the rural areas. People were encouraged to move to the cities, basically Saigon, thus disrupting the traditional agro-based economy of Vietnam.

20.7.3 Social Problems

In addition, the communist leadership had to tackle insurmountable social problems which were ramifications of American military presence. They had to deal immediately with one million soldiers of the South Vietnamese regime. These soldiers were demobilised and remained largely hostile to the victors. In addition there was the problem of one million civilians who were working in various capacities for the former regime. There were about two million unemployed peasants who had flocked to urban centers under the forced urbanisation programme during the war. By the time the Americans left, Vietnam was beset with many social problems. As the whole economy was solely propped up by American support, it collapsed as soon as the Americans left.

20.7.4 Problems Created by Hurried Unification

A hurriedly pushed through unification of two divergent parts, developing on two opposite models, had its repercussions on the social and economic contours of development. The communists over enthusiasm virtually eliminated the enterprising mercantile class, primarily ethnic Chinese, who were either forcibly resettled in rural areas, or had to flee the country in shanty boats—the so called "Boat People". The biggest disaster in South Vietnam centred on collectivisation.

20.7.5 Internal Problems

By mid-seventies, the American intervention ceased but not Vietnam's problems. By 1977 border skirmishes started with the notorious Pol Pot and his clique ruling Cambodia and as a result a serious rift with its nearly four-decade old mentor, communist China. Because of various reasons, Vietnam was forced to get closer to the Soviet Union ideologically and depend heavily for economic assistance. The dependence on Moscow and East European communist countries did not help Vietnam's economy. In fact, it had a negative effect.

20.7.6 Perestroika in Vietnam

After the introduction of Perestroika in the former Soviet Union by Gorbachev which resulted in an aid cut, and partly because of disappointing economic performance, Vietnam had to change its economic strategy. Because of collectivisation, the agricultural output sagged, and the performance of industry was disappointing. The highly centralised command economy coupled with Western ban on aid and embargo on trade because of its military intervention in Cambodia in late 1978, and the collapse of the Soviet Union left Vietnam with no option but to go the whole hog its own version of Perestroika. Since the introduction of reforms since 1987, foreign investments are gradually increasing providing much needed fillip to the industry. Reforms in agriculture have enabled Vietnam to emerge one of the largest exporters of rice by early nineties. A major stumbling block for a full recovery was American ban on aid and trade. Recent political developments have finally resulted in the American decision to lift the trade embargo on Vietnam and has opened the way for the restoration of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States.

Compared to its ASEAN neighbours, Vietnam is backward economically, but its progress in education and health, despite poverty are highly commendable. After waging a nationalist struggle unparalleled in history and ultimately humbling world's mightiest power, it is unfair to discredit it as "backward" by ignoring the intensity and destruction of the war. Again, because of past, its recovery and progress are bound to be slower compared to any other developing country. Recent measures are expected

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit

- 1) What were the main characteristics of economic development adopted by the Communist Party of Vietnam?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What is the new strategy adopted for economic development in Vietnam in recent years?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

20.8 CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT

Like other communist systems, Vietnam is also governed primarily by the Communist Party of Vietnam, which sets the socio-politico-economic agenda and takes major policy decisions. A small core group called the Politburo is the most powerful body consisting of most influential members of the party's leadership.

There is a Central Committee below the Politburo which periodically meets and gives broad direction to the party and the Politburo. The Congress of the Communist Party, which is generally held once in three to four years, consisting of party delegates from all over the country, is the most important where any change in the leadership of the party, including Politburo and Central Committee, is brought about as well as thorough review of the party's and government's functioning. It is the Congress that provides guidelines till the next Congress is held.

Congress also elects the Central Committee which in turn elects the Politburo and the Politburo chooses a General Secretary for the Communist Party. Though the communist party's powers and authority are more pervasive, it is different from the government.

20.8.1 New Constitution

A new constitution, the third one, was adopted in 1980 which is still currently in use, but is soon to be replaced with necessary modifications. The National Assembly is an elected body but with no legislative powers. There is the powerful Steering Committee of the National Committee, called a Council of state. The executive powers are vested in a Council of Ministers which is headed by a Prime Minister. Additionally, there are National Defence Council, the supreme military authority, and a Supreme People's Court, headed by a Chief Justice.

20.9 FOREIGN POLICY

Since Vietnam won independence under the leadership of the communist party, it adopted a radical posture in its foreign policy dealing with the ASEAN countries which were pro-U.S. and pro-capitalist. Vietnam depended heavily on the Soviet Union and China for political direction and economic help. Though Vietnam tried to maintain equi-distance from the Soviet Union and China which were at loggerheads on the question of ideology, it did not succeed. Various factors, particularly those pertaining to Cambodia under the genocidal regime of Pol Pot which chose to side with China, led Vietnam to move closer to the Soviet camp. After its military intervention in Cambodia in late 1978, the anti-communist ASEAN countries found a good excuse to isolate Vietnam. Because of close friendship, Vietnam also offered military bases at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay to the Soviets. Because Vietnam was instrumental in overthrowing the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, China attacked Vietnam in early 1979 to teach it a lesson. However, the changes that have occurred in East Europe and the Soviet Union in recent times have forced Vietnam to modify its foreign policy. Vietnam has withdrawn all its troops from Cambodia and is in the process of liberalising its economy. Relations with ASEAN countries have improved considerably in the recent past, so also with China. It is likely that soon diplomatic relations will be re-established with the United States too. Vietnam today is more interested in alleviating its economic backwardness rather than pursuing revolutionary goals.

Check Your Progress 4

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Describe briefly the role of the Vietnamese party in the government

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- ## **2) Assess the foreign policy objectives of Vietnam**

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

20.10 LET US SUM UP

In conclusion it may be stated that Vietnam has a special place in the recent history of not just Southeast Asia but also the world. Its uniqueness lies in its struggle for independence: first against the Chinese who had subjugated the country for more than thousand years: second, against the French colonial rule: third, against the Japanese during World War II: fourth, against the French once again when they tried to reoccupy the country: and finally, against the Americans who resorted to massive military intervention to defeat the communist led nationalist movement.

To the credit of the Vietnamese, they defeated all those powers that tried to subjugate

States, which Vietnam achieved after waging a guerilla war. Of course, the consequences of the war were very grave which could not be overcome easily. Vietnam's military intervention in Cambodia led to its diplomatic isolation and its main supporter, the former Soviet Union, disintegrated itself. Vietnam at present seeks to have friendly relations with its former foes and runs the economy on capitalist lines without, however, doing away with the political role of the Communist Party.

20.12 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

- Chester A. Bain, *Vietnam : The Roots of Conflict* (New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 1966).
- D.G.E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (London : Macmillan, 1981).
- George Mc T. Kahin, *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia* (New York : Cornell University Press, 1967).
- Noam Chomsky, *At War With Asia : Essays on Indochina*, (New York : Pantheon Books, 1970).
- Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam : A History* (London : Century Publishing House, 1983).

20.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 20.4 and Sub-section 20.4.1
- 2) As Above

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 20.5 (National Movement)
- 2) See Section 20.6 (VietMinh & the American Intervention)
- 3) See Sub-section 20.6.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 20.7
- 2) See Sub-section 20.7.6

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) See Section 20.8
- 2) See Section 20.9