Unlike Student Revolt of 1973 and 1976 which was dominated by the students, in the popular uprising of May 1992 people participated from across the society. Many student leaders of 1973 and 1976 uprising who were teaching at various Thai Universities took the initiative again in 1992 and raised their voice against the government headed by army General Suchinda Kraprayoon. These academicians who included Thirayuth Boonmee, Seksan Prasertrul, Somyas Chauthai, Kaewsan, and Atipah initially played very important role to build up the momentum.

However, the real crisis started way back in February 1991 when a group of military leaders staged a coup in the name of "termination of injustice and corruption". After the coup of 1991, the National Peace Keeping Committee (NPKC) was organised by the coup leaders. The NPKC designed a more oppressive, systematized dictatorship by drafting a new constitution in favour of the military. For example, the new constitution provided that the chairman of the Senate, appointed by

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the military, could automatically become the speaker in the parliament. Also the new constitution authorised the senate to exercise the non-confidence right upon the cabinet. In short new constitution specified many provisions that bestowed an ever-increased power upon the senate.\(^2\) So the new constitutions proposed by the NPKC could be viewed as an action which systematically blocked the possibility of converting the fluctuating process of liberalisation into democratization.

In December 1991, the new constitution was successfully passed in cooperation with the pro-military parties in the political society who supported the military despite the resistance from opposition forces. Accordingly ever-repressive dictatorship was successfully carved into a more elaborated legal system. On March 22, 1992, a general election was held as planned. As a result, no single political party won a majority seat and thus, a coalition government was formed with the help of five pro-military parties. In early April 1992, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, a key player of 1991 coup and Vice-Chairman of the NPKC was sworn in as prime Minister. Later on a majority of NPKC members were appointed as minister or other important government posts.\(^3\) This process was nothing but a typical scenario in which the power bloc returned to more

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repressive dictatorship. Moreover, the opposition became more interactive with the power bloc as the enlightening words and actions of “exemplary individuals” were viewed as viable political alternative by the people and groups who were formerly isolated in the civil society. The members of the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) called on MPs to be dressed in black, a symbolic action that suggested “death of democracy”. Thousands surrounded the parliament and Suchinda’s opening speech in parliament was drowned by “boos and jeering”.

From election day, March 22, to the fateful day, May 17, when government forces massacred hundreds of unarmed demonstrators, following incidents took place:

1) March 22 - In the general elections, five political parties namely Chart Thai, Samakkhi Tham, Social Action Party, Rassadorn and Parachakorn Thai Party won 195 seats in the parliament. Most of these parties had very strong military connections. Pro-democracy parties such as Democrats, New Aspiration, Palang Dharna and Solidarity Parties won 165 seats.

2) March 25 - The five coalition parties selected Narang Wongwan, leader of Samakkhi Tham Party with 79 seats, as prime minister.

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designate. The nomination raised question over Mr. Narong's suitability as Prime Minister because of previous speculation about his alleged links to narcotics trafficking. In its response Washington also confirmed that Mr. Narong was denied a visa to the United States because of his alleged links with narcotics trafficking as a result Narong's name for the post of Prime Minister was withdrawn.6

3) April 5 - The coalition switched its support from Mr. Narong to Supreme Commander and Army Chief General Suchinda Kraprayoon, a move widely interpreted as planned and orchestrated for National Peace Keeping Council to retain power after it staged the February 23 coup against Chatichai administration in the previous year.

4) April 7 - The opposition warned of possible street protests as General Suchinda resigned from his military post and was appointed Prime Minister.

5) April 8 - Former democrat MP Chalard began a hunger strike outside parliament in protest against Gen. Suchinda's appointment as Prime Minister.7

6) April 17 - Two groups of men tried to forcibly prevent Mr. Chalard staging his hunger strike but were blocked by students. Police were asked to provide protection for Mr. Chalard.

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6 Ibid., p.7.
7 Bangkok Post, April 9, 1992.
7) April 20 - About 50,000 people turned up to join the opposition parties in a mass demonstration at the Royal Plaza in protest against the "undemocratic rise" of Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon to Prime Minister. Thirty two people joined Mr. Chalard and eight other in the hunger strike in front of parliament. Gen. Suchinda accused the opposition of foul play while newly appointed Supreme Commander Air Chief Marshal Kaset Rojananil warned against unrest, saying that he would take necessary steps to maintain peace and order.8

8) April 29 - The Student Federation of Thailand (SFT) and the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) announced a major rally on May 4 at Sanan Luang against a non-elected Prime Minister - The main opposition parties also agreed to join. Hunger striker Chalard Vorchat collapsed in front of Parliament and was hospitalised but his daughter Jitrawadee, 26, continued the fast in his place.

9) May 2 - Slum Angel and Magasaysay Award winner Prateep Ungsongtham Hata joined Chalard Vorchat in a hunger strike outside Parliament. Special Branch Police expressed concern that a pro-Suchinda rally could be held at the same time as that of pro-democracy demonstration.9

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8 The Nation, April 21, 1992.
10) May 4 - Palang Dharma Party leader Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang dropped a political bombshell and increased the political stakes by announcing that he would start a hunger strike to the death to press for the resignation of Gen. Suchinda. Maj. Gen. Chamlong's announcement attracted a huge crowd, 60,000, in anti-Suchinda rally. The opposition called for another major rally to be held in front of Parliament on May 6 when the Government would deliver its policy statement. Meanwhile Gen. Suchinda stood firm in his refusal to recognise intensifying opposition against him. He said opposition was "running out of strength" and that extra-parliament pressure would not force him to resign.

11) May 6 - A group of academicians petitioned His Majesty the King to advise Gen. Suchinda to dissolve Parliament to end the political deadlock and avert bloodshed as nearly 100,000 protested in front of Parliament. About 80 academicians submitted a letter to Gen. Suchinda urging him to resign. Inside Parliament, the opposition walked out in protest after Gen. Suchinda started delivering his government's policy statement. But they returned to debate the policy by unleashing stinging attacks against the prime minister questioning his integrity and credibility for failing to keep his word to not become prime minister.
Gen. Suchinda was also criticised for including politicians declared "unusually wealthy" in his cabinet.\textsuperscript{10}

12) May 7 - Tension outside Parliament built up as the opposition continued their attack against Gen. Suchinda. Gen. Suchinda sparked uproar in the Chamber when he accused New Aspiration party leader Gen. Chavalit Yong-Chaiyuth of trying to create a leftist “presidium-style” government system and accused Palang Dharma Party leader Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang of creating new religion. He also said that as a natural outsider, he was in the best position to ensure that corruption would not be rampant because many MPs had acquired their seats through vote-buying.

Meantime Supreme Commander Air Chief Marshal Kaset Rojananil and Army Chief General Issarapong Noonpakdi urged the public not to joining the protests which they said were organised and joined by “ill-intended persons”. But by May 8 pm, Maj. Gen. Chamlong decided to move from Parliament to a strategically advantageous location-Sanam Luang. Some 150,000 joined him, disregarding calls for not to join the protests.\textsuperscript{11}

13) May 8 - Negotiations were poised to start between the opposition and, which proposed four constitution amendments, and government

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{The Nation}, May 7, 1992.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Bangkok Post}, May 8, 1992.
coalition parties while Gen. Suchinda remained adamant that he would not step down because it would set a bad precedent. Interior Minister Anan Kalinta gave assurances that forces would not be used against the pro-democracy protestors. He said that lenient measures will be used and there would be no arrests. News blackouts and censorship, which had already affected local state-run television and radio station spread the international networks such as the Cable News Network and Asahi Television. But about 9 pm, demonstrators led by Maj. Gen. Chamlong started leaving Sanam Luang for royal Plaza but were blocked at Phan Fa bridge by police backed by troops. A tense stand-off ensued as troops scaled off Ratchadamnoen Avenue.

14) May 9 - After "sounding out" the wishes of remaining member of protesters at the Democracy Monument, Maj. Gen. Chamlong called off his hunger strike so he could continue to lead the struggle for democracy. House speaker Dr. Arthiet Urairat announced that the opposition and the government coalition parties had agreed to the proposed charter amendments. The proposed amendments were that the House Speaker be made President, that the Senate's powers will be reduced to simply screening Bills, that the second ordinary session of Parliament also included submission of motions and interpellations and that the prime minister would be an elected MP.12

15) May 10 - The opposition agreed to a cease-fire and called off the demonstration at the democracy monument but vowed to return within a week to press for the honouring of a compromise agreement on the proposed constitutional amendments.

16) May 12 - Government coalition party members said that an agreement on the proposed constitutional amendments announced by Dr. Arthit still had to gain party approval. Some coalition members said Dr. Arthit had spoken out of line. But Dr. Arthit reaffirmed that an agreement had been reached.

17) May 13 - In response to report that more people would turn up for the pro-democracy demonstrations, Prime Minister Suchinda said that provincial governors would be held responsible if they could not prevent people from coming to the city to join the protests. Gen. Suchinda also said that cabinet had the authority to sack Bangkok Governor, Krisda Arunwongseva Ayuthaya because he assisted the pro-democracy demonstrations.

18) May 14 - Report appeared saying that provincial governors throughout the country were ordered to organise pro-Suchinda rallies to counter the pro-democracy demonstrations calling for his resignation.

13 *The Nation, May 14, 1992.*
The Interior Ministry denied such orders were issued. The confederation for Democracy was formed.

19) May 15 - Pro-Suchinda rallies mushroomed across several provinces such as Buri Ram, Kalasin, Sakhon Nakhon, Loei Khon Kaen, Vdon Thani, Ayutthia, Kamphaeng Phet, Nakhon Ratchasima and Sankhla. But a pro-Suchinda rally at Phatthalung Province ended in confusion when a group of people got into the stage and turned the rally against the government. In Bangkok Suchinda said he could not guarantee that there would not be violence during a pro-democracy rally scheduled for the next day - May 16.

20) The confrontation of 17-18 May - In the days leading up to May 17, the confederation for democracy prepared for the resumption of protest. A concert was held in Chatuchak Park, and members of confederation's executive met a member of senior politicians and military officers. All seven executive members joined in the ceremonies held to commemorate Wisak Bucha Day on 16th May.

There was considerable discussion concerning the best location for the resumed demonstration. Some favoured Government House, where Chalard was still continuing his hunger strike. However for various reasons the protest was eventually convened at Sanam Luang: there were limited space around Government House, and because of its
proximity to the Palace, a minor affray such as stone-throwing by few protesters could readily be interpreted as an attack on the royal institution. But the confederation's executives did decide that if size of the protests was sufficiently large, they should aim to lead the Sanam Luang demonstrators towards Government House, with the aim of holding negotiations with Suchinda. They believed that if Government House was surrounded by demonstrators, Suchinda would eventually have to negotiate. The fact that Chalard was outside Government House was another reason cited for moving there, as the demonstrators could give him support; third reason was that the Government House site would be more convenient for the demonstrators, since there were more schools, temples and restaurants in this area. The executive members were aware that they would probably find the ways to the Government House blocked by troops at the Phan Fa bridge, as had happened on the night of 8 May. Should this happened, they would make no attempt to break through the barricades. In this eventuality, they planned for small groups of demonstrators to slip away from the main protest site and make their way to Government House by other routes.

Fears that the confederation would attempt to move the crowd, precipitating a violent clash with the authorities, were cited by CPD

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leaders to explain their reluctance to cooperate with the 17 May protest. Chamlong had moved the crowd twice during the earlier phase of demonstration, on both occasions at night. Confederation leaders argued that there were sound reasons for the plan to move the crowd on 17 May. The plan was put into effect at around 9.00 p.m. in the evening, when at least 200,000 people were gathered in the area around the Sanam Luang. The plan was to move in three groups, each group led by two or three of the executive members.

Just as before, the demonstrators were halted at the Phan Fa Bridge. A small members of people in the crowd, mainly teenagers, began provoking troops and police. Unlike other demonstrators, they consistently ignored the instructions of the protest leaders. Water was sprayed at them by fire engines, and the first injuries of the night took place when the police began using batons. A group of demonstration retaliated and tried to seize one of the fire trucks and take it to their zone. Anti-riot police rushed forward and started clubbing the protesters on board. The protesters started pelting with stones. A see-saw running battle ensued with police also throwing stones at demonstrators. Maj. Gen. Chamlong, shouting from top of the van through a loud-hailer, tried to stop the group from attacking police, but in vain. He was too far away and drowned by baton-wielding police. Nearly 100 protesters were
injured in the initial clash. Twenty were taken to Wachira Hospital. About 21 policemen were also injured.¹⁵

By about midnight the violence went out of control. Two fire engineers were set on fire and Molotov cocktail were lobbed at the police. Some 700 police troops were moved in to reinforce the police line at the intersection near the Ministry of Agriculture after a group of demonstrators managed to break the police line and were locked between Phan Fa Bridge and the Ministry of Agriculture. Close to midnight, a group of protesters moved in on Nang Lerng Police Station. Police at the station put little resistance as they had been ordered to evacuate at any sign of trouble. The protesters torched the station as well as the Youth Welfare Centre and bashed in several police vehicles.

The clash with police caused General Suchinda and Interior Minister Anan Kalinta to announce a state of emergency in Bangkok, Pathum Thau, Samut Sakhon and Nonthabury. The announcement said the state of emergency was necessary because of unrest caused by a group of people affecting public safety, national peace and security. Gatherings of more than ten people were banned and people were urged to go home. But it appears that drastic measures had already been taken and reports poured in that people had been killed and large numbers had

been injured. However, the number of dead ranged from three to eight and number of injured were 150 to 250, but no exact figure could be confirmed.

Automatic gunfire from the troops manning Phan Fa Bridge could be heard throughout the early hours of May 18. The strength of pro-democracy demonstrators was still quite strong. At 3.00 a.m. Maj. Gen. Chamlong wrote a message to the demonstrators which was read out by a spokesman. Chamlong told the protesters that he was prepared to continue to fight in order to achieve democracy and he was prepared to face arrest for his actions. About 4.10 a.m. troops fired more shots. Most of the firing was into the air but a number of people were wounded. Just before 6.00 a.m. as the crowd was singing the Royal Anthem, the troops opened fire once again. In open defiance, the demonstrators clapped their hands and raised their arms in the air to show that they were unarmed. As the morning progressed, troops started tightening their grip on Ratchadamnoen Avenue by blocking all access roads, as the number of demonstrators dwindled to seven thousand. As the city woke up to the shock of clashes, Armed Forces deputy spokesman Col. Banchorn Chawalsin tried to justify the use of arms by saying that the troops had to use weapons against the demonstrators because they were fired on first but admitted that not all demonstrators had guns. The
office of the Prime Minister meanwhile announced a three day holiday for all government agencies to speed the restoration of peace and order. The capital security command issued an appeal to all Bangkok residents not to leave home for the whole day. Earlier the Ministry of Education ordered all schools under its jurisdiction in Bangkok, Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon and Nonthaburi to close as a safety precaution for students.  

Just before 3.00 P.M., the troops moved in on the remaining core of demonstrators surrounding Palang Dharma leader Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang, who had previously told the crowd not to resist and allow authorities to arrest him. The troops took some time looking for the populist leader. Two military police officer handcuffed him. Maj. Gen. Chamlong's wife, Mrs. Siriluck, tried to intervene but was pushed away as he was escorted to a waiting jeep. Maj. Gen. Chamlong was driven first to the capital security command and later to 11th Infantry Division in Bangkheni-Troops also rounded up 300 supporters, stripped them of their shirts and bundled them onto truck with their hands tied behind their backs.

With Democracy Monument under their control, three division of soldiers, totaling about 10,000 men, then started to secure.

Ratchadamnoen Avenue firing their weapons continuously into the air and moving to disperse the remaining crowds, which had gathered in clusters. The soldiers' control of the historic avenues did not last long. The people refused to retreat. About 10,000 protesters remained in front of Public Relations Department, with their number swelling rapidly between 6.00-7.00 p.m. They jeered and booed at the troops. Some defiantly challenged the troops to open fire on them. The demonstrators moved to construct makeshift barricades from large pots and then torched two Air Force Transport trucks in front of Public Relation Department.

Troops and demonstrations soon clashed in the battle for control of the area in front of Public Relation Department. The worst of the clashes took place between 10.20-10.40 p.m., when troops continuously fired their weapons. At least 20 people were killed during the fight and at least 100 injured by troops' bullets. By about 11.00 p.m., the shooting had subsided, but a number of demonstrators were taken into custody.

Inside the Loyal Hotel, volunteer doctors and nurses frantically tended to scores of wounded brought into hotel. The hotel lobby was packed with demonstrators who rushed in and out each time soldiers fired. At about midnight, there were reports that the hotel's power
supply would be cut off by troops. The management asked the soldiers not to do this because many wounded were in the Hotel.

However, throughout most of the confrontation, clashes between troops and demonstrators centred on Ratchadamnoen Avenue with the rest of the city spared. But on the night of 18 May, the violence spread across the city as about 100 bikers left Ramchadamnoen Avenue close to mid night and roamed the major streets smashing and vandalising traffic lights and telephone and public booths.

21) May 19 - Perhaps the most vivid pictures of military brutality broadcast around the globe were the events shortly after dawn in front of and inside Royal Hotel. At around 5.00 a.m. troops in front of the Public Relation Department lined up and started their final advance in typical fashion - firing repeatedly into the air. Hundreds of demonstrators fled towards Sanam Luang as troops moved to squeeze the die-hard demonstrators in front of Royal Hotel.

As they reached the hotel, dozens of protestors were ordered to lie face down on the sidewalk and pavement. The soldiers shouted and pointed their M-16s downwards. A number simply walked on demonstrators. As troops rushed into the Hotel lobby, they shouted for everyone to lie face down. Those who did not crawl fast enough to where soldiers directed were grabbed by the collar, pulled forward and
kicked. One soldier used the butt of his weapon to beat demonstrator who had his hand above his head but not yet lain down on the floor. But that was not enough. He kicked the man twice before he was satisfied.

After Royal Hotel was secured, troops started mopping up operations along Ratchadamnoen Avenue area and arrested as many as 3000 protesters. At least 1500 male protesters were rounded up in front of the hotel before being carried off by military trucks to the Bang Khen Police Private School. Blood stains were seen on some of the protesters back, bleeding from head wounds inflicted by soldiers rough treatment during the arrest.\(^17\)

Appearing on state television Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon said that he was saddened by the incident and government forces have had used utmost patience in taking action against the rioters. He claimed that the riots were engineered by a party leader associated with Communist Party of Thailand.\(^18\) Although Gen. Suchinda did not name the party leader, it was apparently meant New Aspiration Party leader Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyuth. Separately speaking to the reporters, Air Force Commander in Chief Kasit Rojananil identified former NAP Secretary General Prasong Soonsiri as one of many politicians who would be arrested on charge of inciting riot.

\(^{17}\) Bangkok Post, May 20, 1992.  
\(^{18}\) Catalyst for Change, op.cit., p.11.
Despite the military's complete control of the street and areas around Sanam Luang, the spirit of protest was evidently not doused. At roadblocks leading to Ratichandamneon Avenue protesters gathered in defiance of the ban on gatherings. Finally protesters shifted to a new place to put up their resistance peacefully. Around more than 20,000 people gathered in front of Ramakamhaeng University. Expecting assault by troops, students blocked Ramakamhaeng Road with sand bags, concrete blocks, potted plants and metal barricades later they moved inside the campus where they held an all-night vigil.

In the provinces army's crackdown in Bangkok spurred mass protest in support of protesters in the capital. More than 30,000 people took part in demonstrators against governments use of force in southern, northeastern and northern regions. Over 20,000 protesters gathered in Nakhau Si Tahmmarat to demand the ouster of Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon. IN Chiang Mai about 10,000 people rallied in front of Tha Pae market to protest against the premier and a religious ceremony was held to mourn the protesters killed in Bangkok by soldiers. Small protests were also reported in Songkhla, Krabi, Trang, Pattani, Nakhon Ratchasima and Khon Kaen.

22) May 20 - The last pockets of anti-Suchinda protest continued at Ramakamhaeng University and small gathering appeared spontaneously
in defiance of the army, Bangkok was kept on edge. Royal intervention seemed to be the only way to restore peace and order. Many people believed that His Majesty the king was the only person who could bring about an end to the use of force. On Ratchadamnoen Avenue, the situation appeared to return normal in the morning as troops pulled out of the area. However, crowds begun to built up along the Avenue from Kok Wao intersection and the State Lottery Bureau Building. Another, crowd formed in front of the Royal Hotel. By noon, the crowd swelled to an estimated 3000. Two hours later some protesters collected plastic plant pots to farm a barricade at the intersection, soaked them with oil and fire to them. Minutes later two garbage trucks were hijacked and torched by those believed to be motorcycle gangsters near the Democracy Monument. The violence prompted about 700 troops to move in to disperse the crowd. They marched from Phan Fa Bridge to Pin Klao Bridge as smoke bellowed into the sky. Protesters disappeared into the small lanes between buildings on the avenue or mingled with spectators.\textsuperscript{19} Around 3.00 p.m., Prime Minister appeared on television and made a statement that the capital security command had been in full control of the situation. He said that the tool from days of suppression of demonstrators was 40 dead and 600 wounded. But reporters and eyewitnesses estimated that at least 100 had died.\textsuperscript{19}

Reiterating his claim that there were a lot of ill-intentioned individuals mixing with the protesters and causing violence by destroying official buildings, he said there were also motorcycle gangs causing trouble and trying to rob gun shops. He added that the authorities were forced by these actions to use drastic measures.

Despite Shuchinda's claim that the situation had been fully under control, rumours swept the city in the afternoon that troops loyal to former Prime Minister Prem Tinsulananda were to rebel against the ruling commanders. One rumour spread that rebel troops loyal to Gen. Prem were marching to Bangkok from Nakhon Ratcharima and Chiang Mai provinces. Another said government forces were blocking the highways in the Rangsit area to prevent those opposed to Gen. Suchinda from Saraburi and Nakhon Ratchasima. There was rumour even split into government forces also.

Tension built up when at about 7.30 p.m. when Interior Minister announced a curfew affective from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. Most streets because deserted by 8.30 p.m. but anti Suchinda demonstration at Ramakamhaeng defied the order, making it a major target of the crackdown. The crowd, which continued from Tuesday midnight, dwindled to 3,000 in the morning. Earlier in the day students made speeches urging Gen. Suchinda to leave the country. As the crowd
swelled in the afternoon, a large number spilled into Ramakamhaeng Road. In an attempt to impede troops advancing to the university, blockades were erected at the Mall 3 and Hua Muk Indoor Stadium. In the blockade zone tight security was arranged to prevent infiltration by provocateurs. By late Wednesday night the whole section of the blocked streets was more like an autonomous town. People walked freely, motorcyclists roamed freely and few shops remained opened whole night.²⁰

At midnight on 20 May, an extraordinary scene was broadcasted on Thai television. Prime Minister Gen. Suchinda Kraprayoon and Maj. Gen. Chamlong Srimuang knelt before King Adulyadej Bhumibol, as king told them that they had brought great trouble upon the country and asked them to find a means to resolve their differences.²¹ King said that the immediate problem was the people’s safety and morale. It was not matter of winning or losing because it would be a defeat for the country and its people. The king advised both of them to resolve the political crisis immediately and bring back city to normalcy.

Following the kings address, Gen. Suchinda and Maj. Gen. Chamlong appeared on television together. The premier said that he would support quick amendment to the constitution and that Maj. Gen.

²¹ Ibid.
Chamlong would be allowed to return home immediately and an amnesty would be issued to protesters. But Gen. Suchinda stood firm on his stance on further gatherings. He said that the state would take strict legal action against those who still insisting on causing trouble, and asked demonstrators to go home.

With no sign of Gen. Suchinda's intention to resign as prime minister, the protesters at Ramakamhaeng vowed to continue the rally peacefully until their call for an elected prime minister was met. However, the crowd later decided to disperse about 4.00 a.m. on Thursday morning but students made their demand very clear that Gen. Suchinda must resign and take full responsibility for bloody crackdown.

Four days later, Gen. Suchinda resigned. In a television resignation speech Gen. Suchinda declared that he felt very upset about the disturbances, and was stepping down as prime minister in order to take political responsibility for what had happened, as well as to allow the constitution to be amended.  

With resignation of Suchinda from the post of prime minister, demonstrators achieved their goal but at the cost of hundreds of lives and loss of property over million baht. As it has been earlier mentioned that those who participated in anti-Suchinda demonstrations came from

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across the society. A survey was conducted by Social Science Association of Thailand, in which more than 2000 questionnaires were distributed among the crowd at Sanam Luang on May 17, showed that of all the respondents 45.7 per cent worked in private sector; 13.7 per cent were businessmen; 14.8 per cent from the state sector; 8.4 per cent were students; and 6.2 per cent were state enterprise workers. The question of education was also prevailing; 52 per cent of all respondents held bachelor's degree; 14.5 per cent held qualification of a higher levels. The survey also found that 30 per cent of the respondents earned 10,000 to 19,000 baht per month. Those with earning between 5000 and 9,900 baht accounted 28.5 per cent and 15.5 per cent respondents earned between 20,000 to 50,000 per month.23

From the survey mentioned above, it is very clear that those who participated in May 1992 uprising had come from different socio-political and economic backgrounds. They might have different interests and motives behind joining the demonstration but one thing was very clear that all of them were opposed to General Suchinda Kraprayoon and wanted an elected prime minister.

The composition of opposition forces may be categorised as follows:

23 Ibid., pp.70-71.
The first group made up of those who were dissatisfied with the National Peace Keeping Committee (NPKC) which had masterminded the drafting of an undemocratic constitution. To them this new constitution was allegedly a tool for the NPKC to hold on to power. They could not understand the political circumstances and dynamics that drew Suchinda to power. They firmly believed that the NKPC had engineered the rise of General Suchinda and that it wanted to monopolize political and military power. The Democrat, the Palang Dharma and New Aspiration Parties were in the forefront of this movement. In fact, the movement started with hunger strike of Mr. Chalard Vorachat, a Democrat M.P., on April 8, 1992. The movement got strengthened when Major General Srimuang Chamlong announced his hunger strike to the death on May 4th, 1992. Although he called off his 'fast unto death after few days, Chamlong became a leading figure in reconvening mass demonstration against Suchinda on May 17, 1992. The Chamlong led movement was eventually instrumental in forcing General Suchinda Kraprayoon out of office on 24th May. After May event, Chamlong emerged as leader of anti-Suchinda movement, he became most disputed leader of the movement at the same time some of the people compared Chamlong's 'fast unto death' with Mahatma Gandhi's

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24 Khein Theeravit, *op.cit.*, n.3, p.25.
'fast unto death' against British imperialism. But some of the well known Thai academicians like Khein Thiravit became very critical of Chamlong's role in May events. Professor Khein accused Chamlong of attempting to deal with his political opponents like enemies on battlefield, launching an extra-parliamentary offensive against a legitimate elected government with a prime minister who had been appointed in accordance with the constitution. Chamlong was also accused of provoking the people and leading a demonstration which led to the death of hundreds of innocent people. Another prominent leader, General Chavalit of New Aspiration Party, was accused by the prime minister Gen. Suchinda of engineering riots with the help of a former key member of the Communist Party of Thailand. Although Chavalit's name never figured among politicians who directly influenced the anti-Suchinda movement.

Second group was made up of metropolitan businessmen and technocrats. This group was rooted in the big business corporations of the capital. Businessmen of Bangkok made an alliance with senior technocrats and mandarins, civil and military official who derived their status, income and power from their position in the structure of

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26 Khein Theeravit, *op.cit.*., pp.30-34.
27 Catalyst for Change, *op.cit.*, n.5, p.11.
government, responsible for economic management. This small group derived its influence from the command of money and position. They were responsible for making and implementing policies. This alliance had a well organised lobby and acted as an almost invisible force in the political background. This group wanted to develop Thailand into a modern and wealthy nation. Bangkok Business grew rapidly after the Second World War. Its political assertiveness developed in parallel. At first, Business leaders worked with the generals as politically passive partners but in the 1970 they took a more active role. After the anti-military revolt of 1973, they participated prominently in the development of parliamentary government. Business people formed a majority in the constitution convention of 1974 and in the parliament and cabinet formed in 1975. Leading figures from Bangkok Business group became office bearer in political parties, while corporate interests gave financial support.

In 1975-76 and again in 1979-88, this alliance gave metropolitan business a strong influence over economic policy making. Throughout this period, the top corporation received more active governmental help than at any time before. They were protected from outside competition by rising levels of tariffs and other trade barriers. They were helped by

rules which forced non-US companies into joint ventures with local firms. They were defended against local competition by formal and informal market policies.\textsuperscript{29}

The technocracy had developed with the institutions of modern economic management - the Bank of Thailand, founded in the early 1940s, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and other economic bodies, created in early 1960s. The US withdrawal from the region after 1975 reduced the role of foreign experts over technocratic institutions. As a result new generation of technocrats emerged. Most of them were trained overseas, mostly in the USA and Japan, they took wider perspective on the economy and its potential. They helped to create a new arena of open debate over economic strategy and policy making. While some of these technocrats came from traditional bureaucratic families, many came from the second and third generation of Chinese immigrant families which were also the source of major business group.\textsuperscript{30} The period from 1973-76, when army lost its dominance in Thai politics, gave them an opportunity to pull down many of the barriers which had separated technocrats from politics. From example, Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, a patron and role model for many of new

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{30} \textit{Ibid.}, p.27.
\end{footnotes}
technocrats, became a prominent political figure. He had served as the Head of the Bank of Thailand and during the 1973-76 upsurge he was rector of Thammasat University, the centre of student politics of that time. He became an advocate of liberal, modernising reforms, but was forced into exile during the 1976 military coup. 31

The dramatic economic transition of the 1980s strengthened the links between technocrats and metropolitan business. The early part of the decade saw debate over economic strategy, in which new-generation technocrats and business leaders figured as advocates for change towards 'Asian Tiger' model. The path from the recession of 1983-84, through the economic take off of the mid 1980s and the bubble economy of 1988-90 greatly boosted the role of technocrats, whose skill were needed to manage startling changes in economic pace and direction. This period also saw an increased migration between the technocracy and metropolitan business. Big firms lured away technocrats with packages worth many multiple of any official salary. The firms hired technocrats partly because they simple needed skilled people to handle the sudden surge in business activity, but partly also to strengthen their linkages into government. 32

31 Pasuk Phongpaichat and Cris Baker, op.cit., p.27.
32 Ibid., p.27.
This rapprochement of technocrats and businessman tightened when their growing influence over policy making was checked. In 1998 Chati-Chai appointed a cabinet dominated by provincial business people. This cabinet diminished some of the institution through which technocrats and metropolitan businessmen had acquired greater influence over economic policy. While business people and technocrats retained their role in the policy making, their growing influence and growing independence was brought to an abrupt end.

A survey conducted by Social Science Association of Thailand showed that of all the respondents 13.7 per cent were businessmen and 45.7 per cent worked in private sector. It means that around 60 per cent of the May 1992 protesters were very much linked with Bangkok business. Some of them were members of business-technocrat alliance who used to be very much part and parcel of government policy making before Suchinda took over the prime ministership. Rest of them were working in enterprises owned and managed by this alliance. They opposed General Suchinda government because he did not realise that the basic demand of the people was that they wanted a government which serves them, ensuring fair play in the economy and not a government which hurts them and their business. Among those who participated in anti-Suchinda demonstration, who came with mobile
phones and cars, most of them started their career in the 1970s and were intellectually, if not physically, involved in some political activities before and after the October 14, 1973 over throw of Thanom - Prapas dictatorship. They were of the view that the modern business sector had driven the economy through consecutive years of double digit growth and business executives were making decision involving millions of baht and thousands of jobs every day. They felt that the prosperity they had created was the most effective guarantor of security and stability of the nation, not the army.

The third group consisted of salaried, small businessmen, writers, journalists academicians and those who were working in NGOs. It is believed that this group played most important role in the May events by using modern means of communications and information technology. They formed core of the Thai society and most of them were the product of post 1973 phenomenon. Export-oriented and capital-intensive industrialisation created a high demand for skilled labour. Between the 1960s and the late 1980s, the number in white collar jobs grew from around half a million to 4.5 million. Over these three decades, Thailand acquired a new white collar working class often known as middle class though they did fit in middle class definition of Europe. This new class

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33 Catalyste for Change, op. cit., p.75.
34 Ibid., p.74.
was a child of growing urban capitalism in Thailand. In the urban boom, members of this new class were richly rewarded with incomes, facilities, consumer goods and the like. They identified their well-being with continued success of urban economy. Besides, their outlook has been shaped not simply by their relationship to the economy but by their specific historical experience. They were the children of new globalising world. They grew up in the period of American influence and got matured in the era of global information - CNN, MTV, Satellite news and the internet. They wanted to see Thailand as a modern nation - not just prosperous, but sophisticated and politically mature.35

Most importantly, the emergence of this new class was shaped by the experience of 1973-76 and its aftermath. The students who protested in the 1970s were the vanguard of this new class. They were the first to be recruited into higher education in large numbers from more modest ranks of society, and to be channeled towards something other than a bureaucratic career. They were caught up in the enthusiasm of the world-wide student protest movement of 1970s and played a historical role in undermining military dictatorship. In the unprecedented period of intellectual liberalism after the 1973 revolt, they studied Marxism, debated the future of Thailand, helped in organising movements of

peasants and workers, and exerted pressure through street demonstrations. After a bloody repression of 1976, thousands fled to jungle to join the communist insurgents.\textsuperscript{36} However, within five years most of them had returned under a general amnesty, disillusioned with the idea of a rural based revolution. Many of this generation were then swept up in the booming urban economy, with some entering to politics after making a substantial fortune. Several continued as writers, journalists, lecturers - roles through which they could pass on some of the radical spirit to the later generation. Some of them formed left and liberal political party, New Force Party, but could not make any impact inside parliament. They continued to dominate outside parliament through the press, the public platform and non-government organisations (NGOs). Majority of this group joined newspaper and made it more daring. Throughout the crisis of 1991-92, when parliament ceased to exist, the press adopted the role of political opposition. During the May 1992 incident, most newspapers resisted military attempts to censor coverage. Strengthened by this experience the press emerged as a watchdog of democracy.\textsuperscript{37}


Another important component of this group were those who joined Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs). The first independent NGOs were formed during mid 1970s, but were forced into retreat in the second half of the decade and re-emerged in the early 1980s. They attracted many graduates of 1970s radicalism, who sought a means to pursue their political and social goals without inviting polarisation and violence of 1976. Several NGOs worked in the rural development, helping to create an alternative model which strengthened village community rather than subjecting it to greater urban domination. Some provided social goods such as education, legal help and health care those who were excluded from government schemes. Others worked to extend civic rights through constitutional changes, legal and judicial reform and liberalisation of the media. During 1980s, NGOs evolved into a recognisable movement. They opposed excessive centralisation of the state and the uncontrolled thrust of urban based economic growth. They wanted fairer society, better access to government, a clearer definition of human rights and more control on abuse of power. 38

The press and NGOs threw up a cadre of 'public intellectuals' who became the mouthpiece for the ideas mentioned above. They often appeared on public platforms, wrote regular columns in the press and

journals, spoke on television and radio and published books and pamphlets. Many of the most prominent were well known graduates of 1973-76 era. Others included medicos, university professors, campaigning lawyers and talented journalists. When the military took power by coup of 1991 and then prepared to re-institutionalise military rule under a new constitution and a military premier, the press, intellectuals and NGO networks forged a counter movement which eventually drew huge crowd in form of demonstration against General Suchinda government, and ultimately forced him to resign from premiership. In reality this was the group that played an important role during May 1992 crisis by writing in the newspapers, staging demonstrations and spreading anti-Suchinda feelings among general public through mass media.

The urban workers and peasants, those who migrated to the cities in search of better livelihood in the era of booming urban economy, represented another group who opposed the General Suchinda government during May 1992 crisis. In fact majority of the people who died during May crisis were from this group. Throughout the era of rapid industrialisation and economic boom, the number of workers

39 Pusuk Phongpaichat and Chris Baker, op.cit., n.12, p.35.
40 Khein Theeravit, op.cit., n.3, p.55.
increased enormously. In the decade after 1980, the number of industrial workers doubled to around three million.

Thai workers have a long history of political struggle but they got prominence when they collaborated with the students in October 1973 uprising which ultimately forced army generals Thamon and Prapas to step down and flee the country. The period between 1974-76 saw a series of strikes by various Workers union groups. Both the fractions of students organisation, National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) and Federation of Independent Student of Thailand (FIST) supported the cause of Workers union groups. However, Thai workers movement came to an abrupt halt when right wing forces killed hundreds of students and workers and took over the government. As a result many workers also fled to the jungle along with the radical students.

Rapid industrial growth had increased reliance on the industrial labour force, but the history of repression by successive military governments ensured that this should not be reflected in greater political torque. On the other hand workers believed that the trend of externally oriented growth offers them the best chance of raising level of remuneration and social security up to international level. They also felt that they had been poorly rewarded for their role in the long economic boom. Therefore they opposed the Suchinda government and joined the
demonstrations because they believed that representative democracy offers them best chance to exert political influence and seek the necessary reforms for better access to power. 41

Unlike the student revolt of October 1973 when students got world-wide attention, in the political turmoil of May 1992 they did not get much attention, although most of the young protestors who resisted the General Suchinda government throughout the May crisis were the students from various Thai universities. The students were organised under the banner of Student Federation of Thailand and in the beginning, they became one of the most important component of the campaign for Popular Democracy which announced a major rally on May 4, 1992 at Sanam Luang against a non-elected prime minister. The students participation in May crisis should not be compared with the student revolt of 1973 as some of the scholars have tried to undermine the role of students by saying that the students in 1992 were less interested in politics and public affairs than those in 1973 because they were happy and enjoyed freedom under Gen. Suchinda's regime. 42

Instead comparing May crisis with Student Revolt of 1973, one should look May crisis in a broader perspective. Those who participated in the May crisis, one way or an other, all of them were influenced by the

41 Ibid., p.38.
42 Ibid., pp.28-29.
success of student revolt of 1973, a major source of inspiration for all of them. In fact what the student dreamt two decade earlier was achieved after the May crisis of 1992. Therefore the achievement of the May crisis should be seen as a continuation of long struggle for the restoration of democracy in Thailand which was started by the students way back in 1973.