CHAPTER III

MILITARIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia, stretching from Burma in the North west to the Philippines in the East, consists of ten countries—Burma, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. This spacious corner of the Asian continent extends more than 3,000 miles east to west and over 2,000 miles north to south. Its total land area is somewhat less than half that of the United States. Geographically speaking, Southeast Asia is situated in the monsoon belt and except for a small portion of Burma located between the tropics. However, nature has divided the land here as nowhere else in any of the Asian segments, effectively fractionalizing it into diverse social and political units, making the validity of a common approach to the entire region questionable. Its people are fragmented ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically; they are also divided politically.

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Southeast Asia can be seen as to geographical regions: 'mainland' Southeast Asia to include the countries of Burma, Thailand, and countries of Indochina; and insular Southeast Asia comprising Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines.

From Colonialism to Democracy

All Southeast Asian countries, except Thailand, were under foreign domination for over about 250 years; Philippines had fallen under the control of Spain as early as the beginning of the 16th Century. The Second World War brought decolonisation in its wake, and the first state to gain independence was the Philippines in 1946 and the last was Brunei in 1976. Immediately before decolonisation began, four different colonial systems functioned in different Southeast Asian countries: the Ameraican, Dutch, French and British. The Philippines got independence from the United States; Indonesia from the Netherlands; the two Viet-Nams\(^2\), Cambodia and Laos from France; Burma, Malaya\(^3\) and Brunei from Great Britain.

\(^2\) The North and South Vietnam were unified under communist rule in 1975, after thirty years of war.

\(^3\) Greater Malaysian Federation was implemented in 1963 with the full support of the British. Singapore was a member of the federation but Lee Kuan Yew took Singapore out of the Federation in 1965.
All the four colonial masters had introduced into their respective dependencies, in greater or smaller measure, the ideas and institutions of the industrial age—reason, individual liberty and an impersonal system of law—and thereby caused a conflict between the modern and traditional systems, the latter resting on religion, personal authority and customary obligations.

At the dawn of independence, all the countries of Southeast Asia, except Vietnam, opted for a democratic form of government. Some of these countries accepted the system substantially, some others superficially. The Philippines, South Vietnam and Indonesia became democratic republics with a presidential form of government. The remaining countries accepted the parliamentary form of democracy with a Prime Minister as head of government, (as in Malaya, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand) and a monarch as President (as in Burma and Singapore). In Brunei, the head of the state is a Sultan. Only the Democratic republic of North Vietnam began its independent existence as a communist state with powers vested, under the constitution of 1959, in a unicameral...

legislature. But, in course of time, most of the Southeast Asian countries abandoned or suspended the system of democratic forms of government.

The liberal face of Southeast Asia began to change from the middle of 1950's. In 1965, the constitutional monarchy of South Vietnam was changed to a republic which quietly passed under the dictatorial rule of the first President, Ngo Dinh Diem. Indonesia abandoned its democratic system in 1957, as did Thailand for the second time in the same year, and Burma in 1962. Cambodia's skeletal democracy collapsed in 1970. In 1972, the Philippines came under martial law. In 1975 Laos fell to the communists.

Collapse of Democracy and Emergence of Authoritarianism

While analysing the question as to why the democracies collapsed in Southeast Asia, B.N. Panday, a noted Southeast Asian historian from the University of London states:

...the fact that liberal democracy, on the very first stage of its journey in Asia, was called upon to perform certain functions which it had never discharged before in the entire history of its birth and growth in the western world. The Asian votaries of the system expected that it would

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5 This system was based on the National Assembly with a four-year term of office, its standing committees, the President of the Republic and the Council of Ministers.
destroy the roots of tradition, preserve the precariously balanced unity of the state, establish social and economic equality and, above all, that it would, perform these functions in the minimum possible time. Democracy was thus put to a severe test which it had never stood before.

From a closer look at the issue of the collapse of democratic governments in Southeast Asia, one can identify certain specific factors which led to the failure of democracy in Southeast Asia. They are: one, issues like the infights and internal competition among the political elites for power as in the Philippines; two, the growing role of the military in politics as in Indonesia, Thailand and Burma; and three, the communist insurgency and U.S. intervention in internal political affairs, etc., as in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos.

While justifying the imposition of martial law in the Philippines, President Ferdinand E. Marcos\(^7\) put the main blame on the political and media elites. He argued that both the reactionary right and the radical left had joined with the subversive forces in leading the country to chaos. According to Marcos, a series of activities organised by

\(^6\) Pandüy, op.cit., P.29.

leftists, rightists, and Muslim secessionists led him to declare martial law. But these were not the only reasons. In order to suppress people's growing resistance and to ensure his continuance in power, President Marcos used his powers unconstitutionally. With the support of the military Marcos was able to stay in power till February 1986.

Indonesia made a promising start with a constitutional democracy under the leadership of Sukarno with the support of four national political parties—Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI), Masjumi Partai Socialis Indonesia (PSI) and the Partai Kommunis Indonesia (PKI). However, none of Indonesia's political parties ever acquired the requisite strength to form a viable government on its own. As a result of this, several coalition governments came into power but none of them lasted as long as even two years. Each of the coalition fronts, collapsed because of rift within the Front. Parties like PSI and the Masjumi were either discredited or banned in the late fifties and early sixties for sponsoring the regional revolution in alliance with the local army.

President Sukarno himself played a vital role in discrediting the political parties and civilian governments.

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8 Panday, op.cit., p.44.
He encouraged the military to intervene in the internal politics of the country. This was a strategic move to keep himself in power. As part of this tactics, Sukarno abolished constitutional democracy and introduced his new policy—'guided democracy'. He re-enacted by a decree the constitution of 1945, which vested the President with supreme powers. Sukarno was able to gain the support of the military for this move, with the result that members of the armed forces came to occupy for the first time a quarter of all posts in the new Indonesian cabinet.9

Sukarno became tired of the overbearing presence of the military in the government. From 1959 until his downfall in 1965 President Sukarno followed the strategy of dividing the military, making it more submissive, while contriving to bring Communist Party (PKI) gradually to power.10 During this time the Communist Party was the only party left with some political force to set against the military.

Circumstantial evidence proved that in 1965 October the PKI organised an attack against the military in which six


generals were arrested and killed in public. This was done, as an army officer proclaimed, to forestall an army coup against the President\textsuperscript{11}. One of the generals, General Suharto, understood the situation and acted cautiously but decisively to fight against the conspirators. Within a short time, President Sukarno became a prisoner to General Suharto. From October 1965 the country was governed by General Suharto, though Sukarno was allowed to retain the Presidency till 1968, when Suharto started to act as the President officially. Since then Indonesia has been under the control of a military regime.

Thailand was under military dictatorship for a long time. Since 1932, the country was under a military rule, interrupted by only three spells of democratic experiment; 1944-1947, 1955-1957, 1973-1976. Civilian democratic governments were shortlived, and, therefore, unable to present a viable party system in Thailand. Political parties used to sprout on the eve of every election and, they never showed any political and mass base. Whenever there were coalition governments (as in 1973 and 1976), those governments were weak and under the constant

\textsuperscript{11} Pand\textsuperscript{a}yu, \textit{op.cit.}, p.45.
surveillance of the military, which distrusted them. "Any crisis whether arising out of an alleged communist threat or student riot was used by the military as an excuse for bringing the civilian interlude to an end." After overthrowing the coalition government of Seni Pramoj in October 1976, Admiral Sangad declared: "The government cannot govern the country properly, and in order not to let Thailand become a prey to communists and to uphold the monarchy and royal family, this council has seized power." 

Since the two border countries of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia had turned into communist countries by 1975, the military had been citing communist threat as the excuse for military domination in Thai politics. The military, always distrustful of the politician's ability to handle grave situations, gained sufficient strength after 1975 for pulling down the civilian government.

Burma started its independence with a political army. Most of the army officers were involved in the independence movement and after independence they were assigned, in an

12 Ibid., p.43.
13 Quoted in, Ibid., p.44.
almost random fashion, to careers in the army. The military in Burma was united and the officers showed no intention, at least in the first decade of independence, to share political power with civilian governments. A democratic Prime Minister, U Nu ruled the country from 1948 to 1958 except for a period of nine months, under the banner of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). But the armed insurgency of the communists and of the ethnic minority communities weakened the U Nu government. In order to suppress the rebellion of those groups the government had to depend on the army. The army, which got more power, started to consolidate the authority of the civilian officers against the leaders of AFPFL. Tensions between the army and the ruling AFPFL arose and also a split occurred in the party in 1958. U Nu lost his majority in Parliament and finally he announced that he was handing over power to General Ne Win and the army.

Army rule became unpopular and the military government tried to make political parties impotent. In the next general election U Nu group of AFPFL won a majority and General Ne Win handed back power to U Nu and he became the

Prime Minister again. U Nu had to face the same old problems, such as the secessionist movements, military unrest, strikes by students, etc. These groups were feeling suffocated under the military rule. With the restoration of constitutional democracy they revived. At the same time, U Nu’s government was under the constant surveillance of the military. General Ne Win had been under considerable pressure by a group of army officers to intervene in the civilian government. Finally, on 2 March, 1962, the army overthrew the democratic civilian government by dismissing Parliament and abolishing the constitution.

As for the third factor—communist insurgency and U.S. intervention—it was evident in the case of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It should be observed at the outset that liberal democracy had only shallow roots in South-Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. In the twentieth century, no people have suffered so much, for so long, and for so little, as had the Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians during the twenty five years from 1950 to 1975.

The establishment of communist rule in China, and the recognition of Ho Chi Minh's communist rule in North Vietnam by China and Soviet Union were considered by United States as a threat to the non-communist countries in Southeast
Asia. The U.S really feared communist uprisings or infiltration in the non-communist states of Southeast Asia. The communist threat seemed real and more disturbing to the Eisenhower administration. American obligation to contain communism became more pressing after the French withdrawal from Indochina in 1954. In the same year, an effective American intervention in South Vietnam began with President Eisenhower’s letter to Prime-Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, in which the former pledged American support in developing South Vietnam into a viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The United States began pumping money and military skills into South Vietnam in order to resist communism. But, in reality, U.S intervention only increased the strength and will-power of communist forces to liberate South Vietnam.

The U.S trained South Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian armed forces even with the support of the U.S forces were no match for the communists who waged a guerilla war. The communist strength, together with the popular support to them was more than that anticipated by the U.S. Therefore in order to resist the communist insurgency, a

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counter-insurgency operation was planned by the Kennedy administration. But it did not achieve full support of the U.S military officials and also the plan was not sympathetically welcomed by the Vietnamese people. Ngo Dinh Diem had also lost his usefulness to the American leaders. As he was unheeded by his supporters, the Vietnamese Generals also disowned him and the military coup of 1 November 1963 brought to an end the civilian dictatorship. Ngo Dinh Dien was murdered during the coup.

In the case of Laos, under Dulles plan for the containment of communism it became a 'bulwark against communism' and a 'bastion of freedom'. The United States had poured money to train Laotain army in the American model but it was misused and corrupted the army officers. This widened the gap between the Laotain Capital, Vientiane, and the countryside. Conflict arose also between U.S and the Royal Leo government of Prince Sauvannaphouma. Souvanna wanted his government to pursue a neutral policy. This was his way of keeping Laos non-communist and also forming a coalition government with the leaders of the communist Pathet Lao. As far as the Americans were concerned, they

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16 Panday, op.cit., p.51.
could not tolerate this move. Souvanna was suspected of being a communist. The U.S declared that Souvanna must go.

When the U.S decided to refuse rice and oil to Laos, Souvanna turned to the Russians who came forward to support him immediately. This provoked the U.S. In December 1958 Souvanna was thrown out of office by a coup planned by American agents operating in Laos. Another two coups took place in 1960; the first brought Souvanna back to power, the second, once again supported by the Americans, drove him out. Souvanna took shelter in Cambodia and came to be on good terms with the Pathet Lao leader-Souphanon Ving. Thus, the Eisenhower administration of U.S, by rejecting the neutralist alternative, had driven the neutralists into closer alliance with the communists and, furthermore, brought in open Soviet aid to the Pathet Lao17.

A civil war ensued in Laos between the Right-wing government and the Pathet Lao, the latter having come to control nearly half the country. Finally, in order to retrieve the situation, President Kennedy accepted the policy of neutralisation of Laos, and with Jawaharlal Nehru’s intervention succeeded in getting the Russians to

17 Ibid.
agree to negotiate\textsuperscript{18}. In 1961, the Geneva settlement asked all alien forces to withdraw from Laos. But, it was not properly implemented. In 1962, a coalition government was installed with Souvanna as the head. Because of American opposition and the discord in the front, the coalition did not last. By 1973 the Pathet Lao had come to control eighty per cent of the South Vietnam and Cambodia in April 1975 and the Pathet Lao assumed effective control of Laos. In December 1975 the communists seized total power.

Cambodia got independence from French domination in 1953. Prince Sihanouk who had been ruling the country since 1941 with the support of the French, abdicated in favour of his father King Norodom Suramario in 1955. Sihanouk believed that he could lead his country more effectively from a less exalted position. After that Sihanouk ruled Cambodia for fifteen years and experimented with a multi-party democratic system.

Sihanouk tried to overcome the danger of multiplicity of political parties and the power struggle by forming a unified political party - People's Socialist Community. Having always enjoyed support for his policies, Sihanouk did

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
not have to take the role of a dictator. He was always upholding neutrality. This attitude began to irritate the United States. There was a move to overthrow his neutral government. Sihanouk was provoked when the U.S. planes violated Cambodian territory and dropped bombs on suspected communist areas and so he gave up diplomatic relations with the U.S.

Cambodia was gradually slipping into the communist fold. Cambodia had always had a small segment of communist Maquis and in 1969 they were estimated to be about five thousand. But the Nixon-Kissinger policy of bombarding Cambodia resulted in an increase of strength for the Khmer Rouge to over 70,000\textsuperscript{19}. When Richard Nixon took over the Presidency in 1969, he allowed the U.S. commands in Vietnam to bomb Cambodia. This ruthless action caused irreparable damage in Cambodia and killed thousands of people.

The North Vietnamese communists started to infiltrate into the countryside of Cambodia and they became more and more powerful. Sihanouk was critical of the U.S. attack as well as the Vietnamese infiltration. However, in March

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 54.
1970 when he was in Moscow he was ousted in a bloodless coup by his Prime Minister Marshal Lon Nol. On his return, to Peking Sihanouk became fully committed to the Khmer Rouge and gave up his neutral policy. He had to depend on Chinese and North Vietnamese support for his bid to liberate Cambodia. Civil war between Lon Nol's forces and the Khmer Rouge continued from 1970 to 1975. Finally, the Khmer Rouge began its final onslaught. Lon Nol relinquished power and fled to the United States.

Military involvement in Southeast Asian Politics

In 1972, the governments of five Southeast Asian countries were headed by Army Generals: Thanom Kittikachorn in Thailand, Ne Win in Burma, Nguyen Van Thieu in South Vietnam, Lon Nol in Cambodia and Suharto in Indonesia. Except in Thailand, the army had come to power in each of these countries at a time of crisis -- the sort of crisis that would in any case demand some kind of military solution.

In Thailand, for many years the military dictatorship had been an integral part of the bureaucratic structure.

Thailand had always a straightforward military rule with absolute power apparently vested collectively in the National Policy Council of senior military and police officers. The highest offices in government -- Prime Ministership and major Cabinet posts -- were held by military officers. The fifteen year long Thanam era, from 1958 to 1973, saw the continued occupation of the Prime Minister's office and the Ministries of Defence and Interior by military men.

The military in Thailand was composed or dominated by the upper part of the bureaucracy. There had been a high degree of boundary maintenance in the Thai case with the military generally remaining outside but competing with the civil service and not prone to using the civil bureaucracy as a patronage base.21 Military officers held civil posts even in the Provinces. Although Provincial Governors had often been active or retired military men, Thailand differed markedly from other military-dominated Southeast Asian states where the normal development had been for the military to gain political control initially at the local level.

There had been significant variations among post-coup cliques as to the role of the parliamentary system in Thailand. Over the past four decades, parties had been wooed, encouraged, tolerated, ignored or eliminated by different military cliques. After Thanom's rise to power, national parties, elections and parliament were dismissed and a military controlled Constituent Assembly was appointed. The Thai military dominated education and the socializing process. Ideological differences had not been a major issue in the post-war Thai military.

The military dominated the economic sphere in Thailand. Military men were to be found on boards of state run enterprises. Military controlled governments provided a favourable climate for private investments. Further, the military also gave protection and support to both domestic and foreign investments.

When we look back, we find that military cliques that came to power through coups dominated Thai politics always. It has been proved that Thailand progressed immensely in economic and social development during the period of military domination. Unlike the other Southeast Asian countries, the character and role of the military in Thailand had varied since 1932.
The military rule in Burma inaugurated in 1962 was distinguishable from other authoritarian systems in that, it had a flavour of communism. When General Ne Win seized power in 1962, the country was passing through a political and military crises. Ne Win’s authoritarian system resembled a communist order only in its structure of one-party rule. It took about ten years for the Burmese Socialist democracy to emerge under the military rule. The process started with an explicit denunciation of parliamentary democracy.

Ne Win’s government was civilian in appearance but it was essentially military without uniform. Burma’s military authoritarian rule seemed stronger and more stable than that of some other Asian counterparts. The country’s self-imposed isolation policy since the coup, helped it to gain an image of political strength. But, in reality, the old problems such as insurgency, civil war and subversive activities, etc., remained unsolved. The Burmese way of socialism had simply failed, but Ne Win’s leadership and the military’s dominance in Burmese politics and government continued. Despite the constitutional trappings, Ne Win’s government constituted a dictatorship with very little fundamental freedoms available to the people.
In South Vietnam the coup which overthrew the Ngo Dinh Diem regime was led by an Army General Doung Van Minh. That was aimed not at a dictatorship as absolute as any to be found in Southeast Asia\(^2\). The military had stayed in power ever since but this was as much a consequence of the military crises and the immense American presence and influence as of a desire on the part of the military to cling to power.

In Cambodia, up to 1955 the army had been a professional one playing the traditional role of protecting the country and especially its King. After 1955, the scene changed and the Army was brought into the political life of the nation. The Cambodians were at war and the Army's strength had increased. Sihanouk had been deposed and a coup led by General Lon Nol seized power in 1970. The new government, later named the Khmer Republic, demanded the departure of Vietnamese Communist forces from Cambodian territory, then acquiesced in a major military incursion by United States and anti-communist Vietnamese forces.

Analysing the tradition of the Cambodian army, M. Jenowitz says: "Cambodia represented an aristocratic model

\(^2\) Waddel, op.cit., p.266.
of political-military elite structure. Political control is still civilian control because there is an identity of interest between aristocratic and military groups. Even now this aristocracy in military leadership is visible in Cambodia.

Since 1945 the military in Indonesia had been called to perform active political roles. When President Sukarno declared martial law in Indonesia, the moderate elements in the army were called to stabilize the political situation. During this period the army expanded its role with control over civil and military affairs. The case of Indonesia would be close to an example of the ideal type of military take-over, since constitutional democracy had died at the hands of a civilian President.

When General Suharto seized power after a military coup in 1965, the army had replaced charismatic politicians in high ranking and middle ranking positions of power and influence. The military became the technocrats and started to perform vital functions for the country. Among the various elite groups in Indonesian politics that exercised

power, the military bureaucrats played the most significant role. They occupied strategic political posts in the central and regional governments and in the army\textsuperscript{24}. "As the new military leaders of the nation and the army have assumed authority over a rich supply of jobs and monies, they have been able to reward their supporters and to disarm their rivals so shrewdly that they have succeeded in bringing the army under their control"\textsuperscript{25}. The military in Indonesia has acknowledged its role as an instrument of the state over the years.

Compared to all these countries and the involvement of their military in the past in their respective countries, the military in the Philippines had not threatened to break into the normal political process. David Warfel has said that the Philippines Army is "one of the least politically oriented armies in Southeast Asia",\textsuperscript{26} and it is true that until Marcos became President the army's role was limited.

\textsuperscript{24} Alexander G. Nadesan, "The Role of the Military in current Indonesian Politics", \textit{Asian studies Monograph}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.24.

\textsuperscript{25} Quoted in \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{26} Quoted in Waddel, \textit{op.cit.}, p.279.
### Table 1

**Military Expenditure, Armed Forces and Population in Southeast Asian Countries (1986)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Military Expenditures (Million US dollars)</th>
<th>Armed Forces (Millions)</th>
<th>People (Thousands)</th>
<th>Armed Forces (per 1,000 people)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1547</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>176.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1183</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1657</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Compiled from *World Military Expenditure* and *Far Eastern Economic Review* Year Books.*
After Marcos came to power, the armed forces were given a wider role. Later, the armed forces acquired more vested interest and Marcos used the military for his political gains.

It has been argued by certain political scientists that the military is the only institution which can produce stability. Though this is obviously true for a short term, in the history of several countries it has not been proved positively. People in Southeast Asia have started to experience bitter realities. They have realised that military rulers ban political parties, suppress and censor news media, dismiss or emasculate legislative bodies, curtail freedom of opinion, use repressive measures continuously to silence people's resistance, etc. Military's performance has proved that the military cannot effectively deal with problems of their country.

Factors Contributing to Militarization in Southeast Asia

The military has been taking part actively in the politics of most of their post-colonial histories in Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. In the Philippines, military has been exercising substantial political influence over the civilian leadership and
decision making process. In Malaysia and Singapore, military establishments assumed subordinate roles in relation to their civilian leaderships.

Harold Crouch of the National University of Malaysia has painted a vivid picture of Southeast Asian politics which gives clear insights into the characteristics of Southeast Asian militarized politics. He says:

In each, the governing elite has established a more or less authoritarian political structure making it impossible for opposition groups to capture power by constitutional means. Opposition leaders are arrested or absorbed; newspapers are controlled; and potentially independent mass organizations undermined and supervised when not banned. Elections, when they are held, always take place in circumstances ensuring victory of the government. The main political battle is thus limited to struggle between factions of the governing elite which, whatever be their immediate rivalries, have a common interest in preserving and stabilizing the system.

In the absence of effective constitutional opposition, the most serious resistance comes from insurgents, both communists and regionalists. Insurgencies of one sort or another are in progress in almost all the countries of Southeast Asia but so far they are essentially major irritants rather than immediate threats to the survival of the governments. 27

Militarization in Southeast Asia thus perverts both politics and the military itself: politics, because force, not persuasion, becomes its principal process, and coups, not elections, the normal way of changing governments; and the military, because repression, not protection, of the people becomes its major mission.28

The process of militarization has not been uniform throughout Southeast Asian countries. In the countries which got independence without a structural social change, the ruling elites opted for a capitalist model of government and they are unable to meet the people's demands for land and decent living conditions. In these countries a growing awareness is noticeable among the people. People started questioning authoritarian governments and demanding better living conditions. People's movements gained momentum and cause-oriented groups formed umbrella organisations to collectively bargain for their rights. In order to escape from people's demands, ruling elites started suppressing people's voice and imposed militarization.

In other countries where independence was accompanied or was afterwards followed by major social changes, and

where leaders had chosen the communist model of development, the rulers are apprehensive of a counter-revolution led by the ousted elites with the co-operation of the West. In order to protect themselves from further counter-revolutions the rulers resorted to militarization.

Role of Superpowers

Superpower intervention is a common factor in militarization in Southeast Asia. The competition between U.S.A and U.S.S.R added fuel to the fire. These Superpowers competing with each other to establish their own dominance and influence over the governments are trying to install or maintain governments, no matter how tyrannical or anti-people such regime may be, merely to keep them under their influence or loyal to them.

The U.S has strategic and economic interests in the Southeast Asian region and as the guardians of U.S interests in the region, the ASEAN regimes are spending heavily for defence. ASEAN countries continue to be an oasis especially for U.S investments. In Thailand, the U.S has special privileges for its military and capital. The U.S monopolized several concessions for mineral and other resources in Thailand. The U.S military maintained a number
of bases in the country where as many as 50,000 troops were stationed in 1973.\textsuperscript{29} The U.S forced Thailand to fight against her neighbours in Indochina. It organised and helped financially militant right-wing organizations like NAVAPOL. Many who opposed U.S imperialism are believed to have been assassinated by CIA agents.\textsuperscript{30} No one at that time could challenge the U.S position in Thailand. Faced with the development of multiple guerilla fronts inside Thailand, the U.S deployed tens of thousands of airmen and troops in Thailand.

The U.S economic and military buildup intensified Thailand's traditional social conflicts. U.S military assistance was increasingly used to repress the indigenous Thai revolutionary movements. The U.S provided a large degree of help in the enlargement and improvement of conventional Thai police and armed forces.\textsuperscript{31} Right after World War II', the U.S intentions to maintain a close

\textsuperscript{29} "Three years of Thai Democracy", (Manila: Third World Studies Centre, 1976), ASEAN Series Paper No. I, (Unpublished)

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} "The U.S Military and Economic Invasion of Thailand", \textit{World Empire Telegraph}, (California), August 3, 1979.
alliance with Thailand and to turn her away from either Britain or Japan became clear.

In Indonesia, the U.S failed to bring Sukarno down by supporting a young officers' revolt in 1958. But by 1966, it had secured enough of a foothold in the Indonesian army to topple the government. Later, the survival of Suharto was mainly dependent upon U.S military and economic assistance. At one time the U.S.S.R also provided assorted economic assistance projects all over Indonesia. The Soviet assistance to Indonesia was designed not only to obliterate western influence in Indonesia but also to counter potential Chinese domination of the most populous country in Southeast Asia.32

In the three countries of Indochina the U.S singlehandedly fed, financed, trained and armed a succession of unpopular regimes until 1975. The non-communist Khmer resistance forces under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk after the debacle sent out desparate appeals for U.S aid to carry on the struggle. The ASEAN foreign ministers, disturbed by the events, also issued an unprecedented appeal for support and assistance to the Cambodian people in their

military struggle against the Vietnamese-backed Heng Samrin government. The response from United States was positive, and the Foreign Affairs Committee authorised U.S $ 5 million as military aid to the non-communist resistance forces. The communist faction of the resistance was supported and aided by China. In addition Peking also continued to keep what was termed as "heavy military pressure" on the tense Sino-Soviet border. Thailand from amongst the ASEAN countries maintained the most aggressive policy towards Vietnam. South Vietnam was a recipient of substantial U.S aid, having been categorised as a frontline state in U.S global foreign policy strategy. Vietnam, on the other hand, was largely dependent on Soviet military aid to safeguard its interests.

Joel Rocamora, an outstanding political analyst of Southeast Asian politics, comments in this connection that "the magnitude and pure horror of U.S military efforts to maintain the regimes in Indochina are difficult to fit into humanly understandable terms". 33 In the Philippines, the U.S shored up the tottering Quirino regime with large scale economic and military assistance, then built up Ramon

Magsasay to replace Quirino. After that, Marcos was supported by the U.S for seventeen years. The survival of Marcos was based mainly on different kinds of U.S assistance. The U.S had significant commercial and political interest in the Philippines.

Analysing the U.S influence in Southeast Asia, Joel Rocamora further says: "the impact of the U.S on the region goes much deeper than bullets and loans. Taken together, the multifarious and ubiquitous U.S influence in the region has been a key factor in the development of authoritarian regimes." The U.S had promoted the strengthening of both civilian and military bureaucracies in Southeast Asia. The expansion of the military and police apparatus in several countries of Southeast Asia region has been heavily influenced by U.S advice and assistance. The armed services of the Philippines and Thailand were equipped almost entirely with American armaments. The Indonesian military, which was largely Russian-equipped under Sukarno, is gradually being reequipped with U.S arms. Military and police in Southeast Asia were trained on the basis of U.S organisational and tactical methods. U.S training and

34 Ibid.
equipment have played a dominant role in the growth of Southeast Asia's military apparatus.

The Soviet Union had found itself in strong competition with China due to ideological conflicts since the late sixties. During the American Vietnam war, Vietnam was careful to maintain a balance in its relations with the Soviets and the Chinese, while maximizing its own independent positions. Sihanouk in Cambodia was also able to manipulate Soviet interests to balance the Chinese. The Burmese, though in many respects close to the Soviets structurally and ideologically, had allowed them only a limited economic role and even less of an ideological role.35

In 1975, with the fall of South Vietnam and the U.S withdrawal from Indochina, the Soviet policy changed. The U.S.S.R gained an ally in Vietnam, with whom it signed a treaty of friendship. This alliance was turned to Soviet advantage as the Vietnamese agreed to Soviet use of port facilities and airfields, giving the U.S.S.R a new strategic role.35

flank position in its competition with the People's Republic of China.\textsuperscript{36} Vietnam openly hesitated to allow the Soviet Union full use of the vacated U.S military facilities at Cam Rahn Bay and elsewhere, but Vietnam's dependence on Soviet support made continued refusal impossible.\textsuperscript{37}

The new position of Soviet Union in Southeast Asia was not achieved through diplomatic or political skill. Rather, it came as a reaction to the U.S containment policy, the subsequent unwillingness of the U.S to try to win Vietnam away from the Communist orbit with reconstruction and development assistance, and the previously under estimated animosity of the Vietnamese toward the Chinese.\textsuperscript{38} Soviet Union considered its link with Vietnam as a great factor in relation to its two foremost global objectives—containing China as well as competing with the United States for worldwide influence and power.\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Communist Insurgency

Communist insurgency in different Southeast Asian countries also caused militarization. The People's Republic of China (PRC) had played a major role in the process of militarization in Southeast Asian countries. After China broke with the U.S.S.R, the Communist Party of China supported indigenous Communist Parties in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines; and the growth of these parties served as the rationale for the militarization of the societies of developing southeast asian capitalist countries. The communist threat to the stability of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore became more visible since 1975. This caused the increase of the authoritarian tendency among certain rulers in Southeast Asia. Some of the PRC-supported Communist parties in Southeast Asian countries were outlawed or were maintaining a state of rebellion.

Communist insurgency became a dominant political factor in Southeast Asia. The political-military activities of communists in several countries won the support of a significant proportion of the population. For example, in the Philippines, the Philippine Communist insurgency emerged as a full fledged popular movement. Over the 1975-1985 decade, the New People's Army, the military wing of the
outlawed Communist Party of Philippines, developed from a small group that could be dismissed as a nuisance to, a guerrilla army capable of taking tactical offensive in some areas and straining to reach a stage of military equality with the Armed Forces of the Philippines.40

The rulers in Southeast Asia faced the insurgency problem in different ways. In some cases the military was deputed to suppress the insurgency movements. The rulers sometimes took inconsistent approaches to the insurgents which normally ended with the intensification of militarization and large scale counter-insurgency operations.

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Of the ten Southeast Asian countries, the Philippine human rights situation is not considered in this chapter since a detailed study of it is presented in the following chapters.

The human rights situation in Southeast Asia is not very bright. People in the countries of Southeast Asia have been

struggling for human rights and human dignity. The peoples of the capitalist oriented ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Brunei) as well as those of the communist countries (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) and also Burma, are struggling to free themselves from militaristic and authoritarian systems. Despite elections and promises of reforms, the governments in Southeast Asian countries have become intolerant of criticisms and they use the military to suppress popular dissent. Authoritarian rule is strengthened by enforcing repressive measures.

Indonesia had been witnessing flagrant denials of human rights since 1965. Under General Suharto, the Indonesian military coordinated the slaughter of between 500,000 and one million people suspected to be members of the PKI.\(^1\) In order to consolidate its power, the government instituted a continuing programme of systematic repression. Under the state ideology, Pancasila, the government moved to destroy virtually all progressive or independent organisations. The Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI) was entrusted with the dual

\(^1\) Julie Triedman and Ma. Rosario Garcia, "ASEAN and State Repression. A wider Picture", *Justice and Peace Review*, (Manila), First Quarter 1989, p.27.
role of both maintaining national security and furthering socio-political development.

The situation of political prisoners in Indonesia was profoundly disturbing with regard to numbers, time-scale, methods used by the government, mass killings and massive arrests. In 1977, Amnesty International reported that "tens of thousands of political prisoners in Indonesia are held captive without trial or used as servants by local military commanders, or exploited as forced labour. They are ill-treated by the authorities...Men, women and children are held prisoners arbitrarily and at the discretion of local military commanders." A number of people were arrested in late 1984 for distributing leaflets criticizing the actions of the military during the Tanjung Priok demonstration; at least thirty people were killed by security forces during the demonstration. 43

Over one hundred Muslim activists, many of them possible prisoners of conscience, were tried and convicted during 1985 for offences ranging from subversion to

spreading false information. It was reported that suspected criminals and alleged government opponents were extra-judicially executed.\textsuperscript{44} Again in 1986 Amnesty International observed that hundreds of political prisoners remained in detention, including prisoners of conscience.

In the case of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, political detentions were taking place in the name of internal security. Although active communist groups have been defunct since the early sixties in these three countries, the rulers still justify the arrest of non-violent critics and activists in terms of a communist threat.

Malaysia, a constitutional monarchy since its independence from British colonialism in 1956, maintains parliamentary democracy, despite occasional ethnic and racial strife. But, a comprehensive and systematic culture of silence has been imposed on both students and teachers, as well as on intellectuals in society. Article 10 of the Malaysian Constitution provides for the freedom of speech, assembly and association. But the same constitution takes away with one hand what it gives with the other, for it also

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}
says "parliament may by law impose... such restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation or any part thereof, public order or morality." 45

Constitutional amendments bar the people from discussing any sensitive issues in the country and have taken away the parliamentary immunity of Members of Parliament even in the debating chambers of Parliament. 46

In this connection, INSAF, the official organ of the Malaysian Bar Council voiced fear of a constitutional dictatorship in Malaysia. The editorial said:

What is disturbing is that Parliament has in the last twenty years amended the Constitution so very often that the repercussions of these amendments may be felt in the future when it may be too late to do anything. 47

The Bar Council further warned the rulers that amending the Constitution for their convenience would only increase the temptations to someone in the future to cause


46 Ibid.

47 "The Constitutional Road to Dictatorship", INSAF (Kuala Lumpur), Bar Council, States of Malaya, June 1979, pp.1-2.
an Emergency to be declared on vague grounds simply in order to retain himself in power.

The so-called Communist threat was often used as an excuse for the enactment of repressive laws. Since colonial days, there have been a succession of government-declared states of emergency. The essential features of emergency regulations were incorporated and enacted into a new law known as the Internal Security Act (ISA). ISA provided the police with powers of search and arrest based on hearsay or suspicion, the detention of suspects during the first sixty days of investigation followed by a further two year detention based on allegations extracted during the investigations.48

These regulations were enforced by the government to control the people. For example, in 1974, there were widespread demonstrations. First, by the squatters in Tasek Utara who were being evicted; later by small-scale rubber planters in Baling protesting against high prices of food and falling rubber prices. Students’ organisations demonstrated in sympathy with this. But, the following year,

the University and Colleges Act was amended in order to curb student's rights further.

Repressive laws such as Industrial Relations Act, Trade Union Ordinances, Internal Security Act, Essential Security Cases Regulations, etc. were introduced to keep different sectors of dissenters under control. People detained without trial under several black laws included members of opposition political parties, particularly the labour party and the Malayan People's Socialist Party, trade unionists, workers, academicians and students. However, the enforcement of repressive laws was by no means neutral, or rather, were inconsistent. The followers of the ruling party seemed to enjoy special privileges. They were just left alone even if they violated the so-called laws.

In Singapore, authoritarianism has been growing over the years. As a result of this, repressive laws are being implemented to curtail the freedom of the people. Like Malaysia, Singapore also introduced the Internal Security Act (ISA) which has become a main tool to curtail the freedom of the people. Under this Act, the rulers enjoy enough powers to handle their critics. Two particular clauses in the Internal Security Act of Singapore provide ample proof of this. Section 8 of ISA states:
(I) If the President is satisfied with respect to any person that, with a view to preventing that person from acting in any manner prejudicial to the security of Singapore or any part thereof or to the maintenance of public order or essential services therein, it is necessary to do so, the Minister shall make an order,

(a) directing that such person be detained for any period not exceeding two years...

Section 74 of ISA States:

(1) Any police officer may, without warrant, arrest and detain pending inquiries, any person in respect of whom he has reason to believe (a) that there are grounds which would justify his detention under Section 8; and

(b) that he has acted to act or is likely to act in any way prejudicial to the security of Singapore or any part thereof.  

The ISA of Singapore gives the government extensive powers of Preventive Detention without charge or trial. Despite the apparent economic prosperity and political stability of Singapore, the legislation is being used to arrest the critics of the government. In its application of the ISA, the government has used this law to arrest and detain suspected communists or some other elements of the radical left, but who are not necessarily themselves supporters of violent revolution. And the government has also used this act to curtail individual liberties and to

49 Cited in Ron O'Grady, Banished. (Hong Kong: CCA-IA, 1990), p. 84.
violate the right of those journalists whose reporting was considered by the government to be deliberately slanted against it.

Over the years, the number of political prisoners has been increasing in Singapore. Amnesty International continued to appeal for the release or prompt trial of political prisoners held in preventive detention under the ISA. Despite pressures from international human rights organisations, violations of human rights such as arrests, detention without trial, solitary confinement, denial of freedom of expression, of trade union activities, freedom of the press, etc. are increasing.

Thailand, is known to be violating the rights not only of its own citizens but also of the crowds of refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam who pour through its borders by land and sea. The Anti-Communist Act promulgated in 1952 set the legal framework for arrest and imprisonment without trial of anyone suspected of "communism". The National Administrative Reform Council extended its authority under this act with Decree No. 22. This set forth various categories of "troublemakers", including those who help

50 Julie Triedman and Ma.Rosario Garcia. op.cit. p.29.
instigate disturbances or perform "acts which make people agree with a system which is undemocratic and does not have the King of Thailand as its head".51 Those detained under this decree need not be charged with any crimes, and as long as there is one witness, no other evidence is required. Under the shelter of this law the government arrested journalists, intellectuals, trade union leaders, civil liberty activists, educators, etc. Each branch of the military and police worked from its own arrest list which, according to Saiyudh Kerdphol, Director of Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), the government's counter-insurgency organisation, totalled about 60,000 persons in 1976.52 Arbitrary arrests, arrests without trial, etc. have been quite common in Thailand for the last two decades.

Labour and peasant organisers are the prominent victims of right-wing terrorist attacks. Censorship of the press and academic repression had become very strong in the country. In the days following the 1976 October coup, over one million books were seized and burned. Newspapers and magazines were forced to shut down. The military has been

52 Ibid.
trying to convert the country into a military camp. Over the years, the relationship between government and people has become like that between a general and a private. This kind of a system in Thailand has destroyed the dignity of the citizenry.

The "re-education" policy of Vietnam caused systematic violations of human rights since 1975. Several thousand people, including prisoners of conscience, were held for "re-education" on account of their alleged political activities or beliefs. The policy of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, which ruled from the end of April 1975 until the reunification of the country on 2 July 1976, towards personnel of the former regime was outlined in a policy statement. On "re-education" this policy, requires that soldiers non-commissioned officers and officers of all the armed forces, as well as members of the former civil administration, who had not rendered services to the revolution must spend three years in a "re-education" centre. Thousands of people have undergone "re-education" since 1975. According to Amnesty International, several thousand people remain in detention
The "re-education" process was really an instrument to take revenge upon those who did not cooperate at the time of the revolution. And also those who did not cooperate with the revolutionary administration were warned that "those who refuse to report to the administration for re-education courses" will be brought to trial in due courses.54

The effect of this policy was that thousands of people who had expected to be released after three years were kept in detention without charge or trial, which resulted in severe hardship for the detainees and their families. Living conditions of the detainees inside the "re-education" camps were poor. There were reported cases of torture or ill-treatment of individuals in custody and also or death penalty.55 A Code of Criminal Law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was introduced in 1985. This law gave powers to the state to imprison people who peacefully exercise their fundamental human rights. According to the provisions of this new Code of Criminal Law at least 24 different types of penalties were provided.

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54 Article 11 of Policy Statement No. 02/C5/76, cited in Ibid.
55 Ibid.
offences are punishable by death. Among these were offences against national security; the life, health, dignity and honour of individuals; socialist ownership; obligations and responsibilities of military personnel, etc.

Like Vietnam, the "re-education" policy of the Democratic People's Republic of Laos also caused violations of human rights. Persons who were taken into custody are believed to have been held in detention or restriction for "re-education" for as long as ten years without ever having been charged, tried or sentenced, contrary to international human rights norms entitling them to trial within a reasonable time or to unconditional release. The information available to Amnesty International as in the latter part of 1985 suggested that at that time perhaps 500 to 600 veterans of battalions No. 402 and No. 979 were still being held for "re-education" in province Attapeu in Laos.56

Available evidence indicate that the policies and practices of the rulers of Cambodia resulted in mass human rights violations. Amnesty International observed that security units of People's Republic of Cambodia were

56 AI Index: ASA 26/01/86, (London: Amnesty International)
responsible for arrest, interrogation, decisions on detainees guilt or innocence, and prison administration. Methods of torture described by the prisoners to Amnesty International as having been used since 1979 included beatings with truncheons, sharp-edged wooden staves, and iron bars and whipping with chains and rubber hoses. Near-suffocation with Plastic bags, near-drowning in vats of water, burial alive, and forced ingestion of irritant liquids have also been reported to the organisation.  

It was estimated that detention centres throughout the PRK have held several thousand political prisoners without charge or trial during recent years. Fishermen, factory workers, teachers, and Buddhist monks, etc., were imprisoned. While the PRK authorities do not make public comprehensive data on political prisoners and rarely refer to legal provisions as a basis for arrest and detention, they indicate broad categories of political suspects which appear to be based on a decree-law promulgated in 1980. The law enumerates five levels of political offences, ranging from hiding "a traitor to the revolution" to "wrecking the

revolutionary state power". 58 A number of detainees were reportedly arrested for printing and distributing leaflets which advocated support for opposition groups. The official Vietnamese army newspaper Quan Doi Nan Dhan described in 1984, the arrest of two Cambodian women who allegedly circulated leaflets describing the appearance of an 'Ox God', thereby invoking Cambodian mythology and suggesting that the PRK "will collapse and be replaced by a three-party coalition government." 59

Twenty thousand political prisoners were reportedly killed between 1975 and 1978. Available evidence indicates that the policies and practices of the Communist Party of Cambodia implemented through its security forces after the party assumed power in 1975 resulted in the death of between one and two million Cambodians. 60

Records of human rights violations in the Southeast Asian countries reveal the fact that repression and violations of human rights exist in all Southeast Asian countries irrespective of their capitalist or communist

58 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
affiliations. Repression can be fascist, militaristic, authoritarian or dictatorial. State repression is manifested by the growing militarization in several of the Southeast Asian countries since it is legitimised by so-called "security acts" introduced by the rulers.