

UNIT 17 GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA

Structure

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

17.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

17.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

17.2.1 Parliamentary System in Indonesia

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

17.2.2 Elections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 1

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

- 1) Critically examine the political instability in Indonesia.

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

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

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1.3 SOEKARNO'S CONCEPT OF GUIDED DEMOCRACY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 2

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

- 1) Briefly explain Soekarno's concept of Guided Democracy

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

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17.5 THE ARMY IN POWER : THE EMERGENCE OF NEW ORDER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17.5.1 Process of Renewal and Army Rule in Indonesia

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

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

Check Your Progress 3

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

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

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

17.6 LET US SUM UP

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

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

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

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

17.7 KEY WORDS

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

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17.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- 1)
 - i) Nationalism which had united people to fight foreign ebbed away.
 - ii) Freedom movement failed to give birth of a cohesive political party.
 - iii) Post-independence period was marked by intense cleavages in the political parties.
 - iv) Unusual delay in holding elections.
 - v) Numerous political parties.
 - vi) Parties fought only for power.
- 2)
 - i) Coalitional character of the successive cabinets.
 - ii) Parties had no unity.
 - iii) Parties were more interested to utilize the extra-parliamentary forces rather than the people.
 - iv) Involvement of army in politics.
 - v) Top leader Soekarno's distrust on political party.
- 3)
 - i) Election is a sine-qua-non for democracy.
 - ii) Election cleanse the parties and society.
 - iii) Election helps polarisation of political forces.
 - iv) Elections reveals how united the state is.
 - v) Election provides legitimacy of the government.

Check Your Progress 2

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

Check Your Progress 3

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