UNIT 25 ETHNICITY AND NATION BUILDING

Structure

25.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you will learn about ethnic politics in the various countries of Southeast Asia. After reading this you will be able to:

- understand the ethnic composition in these countries
- see how ethnic factors determine the politics of these countries
- explain what measures are being taken or are likely to be taken in the future to accommodate the various ethnic groups in the political configuration of these countries.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

The distribution of ethnic groups in Southeast Asia constitute to the region's single most important strategic factor. Other factors varying in importance according to specific location and time, do, of course interact with the ethnic factor. Thus the topographical, political, economic and transportation maps all contribute essential elements to our knowledge of the region. Nevertheless, the settlement pattern of distinct culture groups, as defined by the language and dialect map, is clearly the most critical of all tangible phenomena. The complex and asymmetrical nature of the ethnic map of Southeast Asia has a number of characteristics. Four of the Characteristics are as follows:

1) Each of the states contains a number of ethnic groups.

2) Numerical data on ethnic composition must be used only in conjunction with the ethnic map, because the traditional homelands of the ethnic minorities are often much larger and strategically more significant than the numbers would indicate.

3) Lending additional strategic significance to the territory of a number of ethnic minorities is the fact that, with very few exceptions, it is the minorities and not the state's dominant group that populate the border regions.

4) With few exceptions, the region's land borders bisect ethnic homelands.

25.2 HOMELAND PSYCHOLOGY

Comparative analysis establishes that people living within their ethnic homeland demonstrate substantially different behaviour than do those living outside. Those living

within the homland, for example, manifest a much stronger ethnocentrism, which in turn, manifests itself in resistance to other cultures (including an unwillingness to marry outside the group or to learn a second, state-wide language) and in harbouring feelings of hostility towards other groups. But a far more consequential aspect of homeland behaviour has been the seemingly universal conviction of homeland peoples that they possess a primal and exclusive proprietary claim to that territory. As manifested in emotion-laden terms such as homeland, native land, or land of my fathers, territory becomes mixed in popular perceptions with notions of ancestry and family, that is to say, blood. Malays commonly refer to Malaysia as **tanah tumpah nya darah ku** (the land where my blood spills).

The emotional bond to home land flows from a perception of the latter as the geographical cradle of the ethnonational group. The perception need not and usually will not accord with historial fact. The homeland people consider the territory that they occupy theirs by historic right even if history records that their ancestors migrated to the territory, as in the case of Malaysian Malays and Sri Lankan Sinhalese. Homeland psychology is determined by perceptions or felt history rather than reality or recorded history. As a consequence of this sense of primal ownership, non-members of the ethnic group within the home land are viewed as aliens, even if they are compatriots. They may be tolerated, even treated equitably. Their stay may be multigenerational. But they are outsiders or settlers in the eyes of right to execute their primary and exclusive claim to the homeland whenever they desire. The "intruders" are usually migrants from an adjoining homeland, as is true of Bengalis who have been migrating for decades into nearby Assam. But Southeast Asia also contains several important clusters of people whose ancestral homeland is far distant from their country of settlement. The Tamils of Malaysia and Singapore and Han Chineses of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, and Singapore are examples. The Chinese position in Singapore is most unusual in that they are numerically and politically dominant, although the Malay minority is declared by the state's constitution to be homeland people. Act 152, Para 2, requires the government to recognize "the special position of the Malays," who are the indigenous people of Singapore. Recent official histories which insist that the island was practically uninhabited at the time of European exploration might be interpreted as an indirect, expost facto effort to destory the underlying rationale of Art. 152 and, in so doing, to deny the validity of any future claims, that might be raised at home or in the neighbouring states, in the name of a primal Malay claim to homeland.

In any case, it is evident that homeland psychology is a vibrant force within Southeast Asia. The bloody expulsion of Vietnamese from Cambodia under the Lon Nol government, the reported eradication of Cambodia's Chams under Pol Pot, the expulsion of Chinese from Vietnam during the late 1970s, the mass atrocities committed against Bengalis in Assam in 1950s and 1983, and periodic race riots with Chinese as targets are conspicuous illustrations of this phenomenon at work within the region. Numerous and often unreported incidents carried against an individual or a family who are members of an ethnic minority are less conspicuous manifestations. Policies tied to the notions of **bumiputra** or **pribumi** also draw their legitimacy from the ideal that homeland peoples, as "sons of the soil", have rights not enjoyed by strangers within their gates.

Check Your Progress 1

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What is homland psychology?

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25.3 POLITICS OF INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS

We shall attempt to identify some of the politically salient patterns of intercommunal relations in the contemporary postcolonial phase of Southeast Asia's history and analyze some of the problems these plural societies encounter as their elites attempt both to modernize and to create viable political systems. Relations, that is, the proportion and the quality of conflict and cooperation among two or more communal groups, depend on the following factors :

1) The **relative resources** at the disposition of each group. These resources are demographic—relative number; organizational—degree of mobilizatioin and capacity to put resources to political uses; economic—control of finance, means of production or trade channels; technological—possession of modern skills, locational—control or influence over the instrumentalities of the state; and ideological—the normative basis for group objectives. In addition to these objective determinants of power the quality of intercommunal relations are:

2) The **congruity or disparity in goals** between those who control the state apparatus and the leaders of constituent groups. If the goals are the same, for example, assimilation, then whatever the relative resources, the outcome is likely to be consensual . If, however, the goals are incompatible, one group seeks assimilation while the other demands autonomy, the consequence will be tension and conflict and outcomes will be determined by the relative resources controlled by the parties. More likely, groups may agree on some issues (for example, criteria for citizenship) and disagree on other (national language) so that outcomes may be affected by bargaining.

3) This introduces a third determining factor, the conventions, rules, procedures, and structures, the **institutions for conflict management.** Without such institutions there can be no predictability in intergroup relations and no framework for channeling group demand or for regulating outcomes.

25.3.1 Five Patterns of Communal Conflicts

The first, and by far the most common and the most significant, is the **centre-periphery** pattern. One group, in this case a communal group or communal coalition —dominates the centre of the political system, the resources and the apparatus of state power, and exercises hegemonic control over other communal groups at the periphery of the system, the political centre need not be located at the geographic centre of the polity though this would clarify the metaphor. In Southeast Asia, however, the two tend to coincide, with the peripheral groups located at some geographic distance from the political centre. Their relative autonomy is thus affected by the ability of the centre to penetrate the areas they occupy with military forces and administrative services. The communal group that controls the centre need not represent a majority of the polity but is usually the largest constituent group.

The Burmans control the centre in Burma. Much of the history of that troubled country since achieving independence in 1948 has resulted from the inability of the Burman political and cultural elites at the centre and peripheral peoples—Shans, Karens, Kachins, Arakanese, and Mons—to agree on terms of coexistence. Though the constitution provides for federal institutions to protect the positions of the minorities, the centre generally has promoted "national unity" while the peripheral groups have claimed greater autonomy. In neighbouring Thailand, the peripheral groups are a larger proportion of the population than in Burma, but they are less effectively

mobilized. The Thai government's approach to these groups—Malay Muslims in its four southern provinces bordering Malaysia, Meo, Yao and other hill tribes in the north, the large Thai-Lao group in the depressed northeast and the Vietnamese enclave bordering Laos—has until recently been one of neglect, rather than enforced assimilation, since the existence of these outlying peoples had not been considered a threat to the security of the state. The Indochina war and certain other international developments in the region have now altered the perception of the Thai central government towards the peripheral peoples, and the government has improvised several measures for coping with the unwelcome expressions of minority discontent. None of them is designed to encourage effective participation by any of these groups in the political system.

The Indochina states have not enjoyed sufficient peace since their formal independence in 1954 to sort out their ethnic problems. The peripheral peoples located in the mountain cordillera of Indochina occupy more than two thirds of its territory. Moving freely, often in disregard of formal state boundaries, they have been an important factor in these civil wars. The Hanoi regime in Vietnam, profiting from Soviet minority doctrine and practice, has taken great pains to promote the dignity of the tribal peoples, to foster their language and culture, and thus to win their allegiance to the regime.

From their densely populated heartland, the Javanese occupy the geographic and political centre in Indonesia. An important dimension of the politics of independent Indonesia has been the struggle of the non-Javanese minorities, particulary the Sundanese in Java, the Achinese, Batak, Minangkabau and coastal Malays in Sumatra, Makassarees and Buginese in Sulawesi, and coastal Malay in Kalimantan, to resist Javanese hegemony and maintain their autonomy. The outer islands tend to be more richly endowed with natural resources, more productive economically and, allowing for every considerable linguistic and cultural diversity, more oriented to Islamic values and practices than Java. On the other hand, the Javanese dominate the over blown administrative systems and armed forces. Indonesia has oscillated between unitary and federal constitutions and has suffered major rebellions by outer islanders against alleged political domination and economic exploitation by the Javanese. The Sukarno policy of encouraging "transmigration", to help relieve the over population of Java by government sponsored settlement of ethnic Javanese in the sparsely populated outer islands, was bitterly resented and resisted as Javanese colonialism.

The Javanese have not attempted to impose their language or customs on their compatriots. They have accepted a version of Malay, spoken as the natives language only by the Malay and Minangkabau minorities, as Bahasa Indonesia, the national lingua franca and offical language of government and administration. Bahasa Indonesia seems to have been accepted both practically and symbolically by all Indonesian ethnic groups and along with the nationalist ideology and the Indonesian national army, has been the chief unifying force in this large heterogeneous country. The military leadership under General Suharto is aware of the importance of restraining Javanese hegemony by providing non-Javanese with some military, political and administrative posts in the Jakarta government and guaranteeing them a measure of economic and administrative autonomy.

The elites in the centre, in all the polities that we reviewed above, fondly hope that the peripheral groups will gradually acculterate and one day assimilate into the dominant society. In this way the troublesome pluralism that afflicts their polities would eventually—and sooner the better—be liquidated. Most of the peripheral peoples, however, have little enthusiasm for rapid acculteration and none whatever for disappearance through assimilation. Because the latter occupy large and often strategically important territories, the central governments have been compelled—albeit—reluctantly to accept the persistence of the peripheral people and to seek appropriate accommodations. The pattern of demands depends on the degree of mobilization of the peripheral groups. Their elementary demand is for territorial and cultural autonomy and freedom from colonization of their lands by the dominant group. At a more mobilized stage, they demand also a fair share of political representation and positions in the central government, public services and public investments on behalf of their economic and social aspirations, and even the right to control the foreign exchange proceeds of their economic activities. The terms of accommodation depend on the ability of the peripheral groups to compel the centre to

take their demands seriously and of the centre to accept the unwelcome necessity for autonomy and other special treatment of peripheral peoples as compatible with their conceptions of the national polity.

The **second** pattern of interethnic politics involves the role of the pariah entrepreneurial minorities. Except for the Vietnameses minority in Cambodia and dwindling Indian community in Burma, this refers to overseas Chinese minority. In every Southeast Asian country there is an important and conspicuous Chineses minority which has a leading and often the dominant position in wholesale and retail distribution, finance, small industry, transport and skilled trades. Independence in Southeast Asia has generated political and cultural nationalism.

This has led in every case to economic nationalism and the most vulnerable target has been the Chinese. Except in Malaysia and Singapore, where this pattern does not apply, the post-World War II period in Southeast Asia has been one of insecurity and harassment for the overseas Chinese. They have been charged with disloyalty, as agents of foreign (both Kuomintang and Communist) expansion and subversion; they have been denied citizenship in some countries, declined to accept it in some, and hold it on precarious and often second class terms in others. Their schools and cultural institutions have been harassed and frequently closed; they have been forced, at least legally, out of certain occupations and even certain geographic areas; some have returned to Taiwan and to mainland China. Yet despite official hostility and persecution, the overseas Chinese have demonstrated enormous resilience, resourcefulness and survival power, due, in large measure, to the inability of indigenous businessmen and governments to take over the crucial economic roles as middlemen, skilled tradesmen, and small scale producers while the Chinese perform effectively and profitably. Each Southeast Asian government has improvised its own policies toward resident Chinese and has varied its policies over time. To simplify a complex reality, they approached the problem as follows:

Assimilation, encouraging Chinese to accept local citizenship, use the local language, espouse the local religion, intermarry—merge their identity into the dominant group. For generations many Chinese in the region haves chosen this path voluntarily, so that today many of them are fully integrated Cambodians, Filipinos, Thais, or Javanese. With assimilation—a policy being pursued actively by current Thai government and encouraged by Indonesia—Chinese would be expected to give up their descendents would gain personal security and their economic skills would be available to the indigenous society. The outcome would not by pluralism but the disappearance to the Chinese as a separate group. **Pariah Status**—Under this pattern, Chinese are excluded from political rights, tolerated in a limited range of occupations and subjected to petty extortions and payments for protection and services by police and other civil servants and to shakedowns by local politicians and military officers. Their schools and cultural institutions lead a shadowy and insecure existence. They are either denied citizenship, or the opportunity to acquire it is fraught with complexity, or the right, once granted, may be insecure and subject to second class treatment. Yet despite humiliation and oppression, Chinese continue to prosper economically, to enjoy significantly higher living standards than indigenous peoples, and very few opt to migrate to China. They choose to suffer pariah status as the price for higher living standards than they could expect elsewhere, hoping that conditions may improve as the early phases of nationalism recedes in their adopted countries. **Capitation**—A symbiosis between men of power and men of money. Many of the ruling elites in Southeast Asia, including but not limited to the Generals in Thailand and Indonesia, find wealthy and commercially sophisticated Chinese to be useful partners in business ventures ranging from marketing of Sumatran rubber to building hotels in Bangkok. In this way, enterprising Chinese, profiting from such opportunities, can enrich themselves, distribute jobs and contracts to their families and friends, and intercede with their powerful local patrons to protect Chinese interests.

The hostility and envy of Southeast Asian intellectuals and politicians and the vulnerability of Chinese to xenophobic attacks have been matched by the ambivalence of Chinese themselves toward the status they desire in Southeast Asia. It appears that most of them, having been born in Southeast Asia, no longer look forward to "returning" to China they have never seen. Unlike the Kuomintang regime which claimed all ethnic overseas Chinese as subjects, the Beijing government has advised Chinese in Southeast Asia to identify with and integrate into their country of

residence. But on what terms? It appears that Nanyang (overseas) Chinese would prefer a plural outcome with full citizenship privileges and unrestricted economic opportunities, but with the right to maintain their educational and cultural institutions and thus preserve their separate group identity. This is precisely what Southeast Asian governments are not willing to concede. At best they seem willing to permit, even encourage, Chinese to assimilate completely, as in Thailand, at the sacrifice of their continuity as a separate people. At worst, they expect that the Chinese will depart or remain a closely supervised foreign enclave. Thus, the outcome will reflect not only what native elites are willing to grant, but what Chinese in Southeast Asia are willing to accept, and both will be influenced by the pace at which indigenous enterpreneurs and skilled personnel can displace the Chinese from their current economic roles and to reduce the indispensability of the latter to the operation of Southeast Asian economies.

The third pattern of communal politics in Southeast Asia is **balanced pluralism**—a set of arrangements which recognizes the salience of communal cleavages and legitimizes communally based social structure and political activity as essential to peaceful and consensual coexistence. The classical case is Malaysia. These communal cleavages define and dominate the political struggle. The major conflict group are the Malays who comprise nearly half the population and the Chinese whose numbers protect them from the pariah status of their coethnics elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The country has been governed since before its independence in 1957 by a multi-ethnic elite coalition (the Alliance party) controlled by moderate English-educated Malay aristocrats and Chinese capitalists, with representatives of the smaller Indian minority also participating. The incorporation of the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak in 1963 to form Malaysia has not fundamentally changed this political structure. Malays are politically dominant, controlling the national parliament the cabinet, the sector civil service, most state governments, and the expressive symbols of the polity. Non-Malays, however, enjoy the rights of citizenship, office holding and political participation, but may not bid for political control. On the other hand, Chinese dominate those sectors of the modern economy—finance, industry, trade and the professions—which are no longer controlled by Europeans. Though there are many poor Chinese, they are better off than many Malays.

While they recognize that they are better off than their brethren elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Singapore excepted, Malayan-Chinese resent their second class citizenship, the establishment of Malay as the sole official language, and educational measures which they regard as economically discriminatory pose a threat to the maintenance of Chinese culture. Such feelings obviously create stress and strain within the Alliance Party. Despite such strains as those which led to the post-election communal riots in the Kuala Lumpur area in 1969, a modified Alliance structure has survived because it seems to be essential to legitimate government, alternative being a destabilizing and potentially oppressives one-race regime. The basic reality in Malaysia is plural and this is reflected in its religious, cultural, residential, occupational and political structures. Seldom have two peoples been so divided by ethnicity, religion and life-styles been fated to coexist in the same territory, yet so intermingled that regional autonomy is not available as a device for conflict management. Despite chronic strains, occasional breakdown, continuing grievances both among Malays and Chinese, and the failure as yet to incorporate the indigenous groups in East Malaysia, the Alliance coalition has provided this plural society with a stable government. In this mutual deterence situation where each party is capable of inflicting unacceptable damage on the other, the Alliance or its functional equivalent appears to be the **sine qua non** for the peaceful maintenance of the system.

Another pattern of balanced pluralism can be found in the Philippines. The Christian Philippines contain eight major ethno-linguistic groups, the largest of which comprises less than a quarter of the population. These regionally based groups have proved to be effective articulators of group interests. The failure of Tagalog to be accepted as the national language can be traced to the opposition by the other seven non-Tagalog groups. The failure of the Huks in the middle 1950s to extend their insurrection beyond the Papango-speaking areas in Central Luzon has been traced as much to the unwillingness of non-Papango-speakers to become involved as to the effectiveness of Magsaysay's counterinsurgency efforts. Yet among Christian Filipinos, ethinic cleavages are not as critical and ethnic solidarities do not constitute the same burden

on the polity that they do in other Southeast Asian countries. There is a strong sense of national identity, class cleavages are frequently more pronounced, and the presence of as many as eight groups prevents any one of them, including the Manila-based Tagalogs, from achieving hegemony over the other. The Filipinos have learnt how to manage the ethnic competition among their Christian populations, who comprise 92 per cent of the total. This balanced pluralism, however, has not incorporated the small but geographically concentrated Muslim minority.

A **fourth** and less pervasive, but nevertheless important pattern in Southeast Asia is epitomized by the **irredentist** struggle for the Philippine Muslims who occupy Western Mindance and the Sulu Archipelago adjacent to the Muslim-dominated Malaysian state of Sabah and Indonesian Borneo. Despite efforts to provide their elites with political patronage and to extend a modicum of public services, the Muslims, comprising only 4 per cent of the population, have never been successfully integrated into the Filipino polity. Their alienation has been aggravated by government sponsored migration of thousands of Christian settlers into Western Mindanco, encroaching on areas which the Muslims had traditionally regarded as their own, even though they had never secured firm titles to these lands. At the moment, a well-organized separatist movement exists in Muslim Mildanco which is a fostering wound for the government in Manila. There are other minor irrendentist situations in the complex distribution of peoples in Southeast Asia. Among them are the Malay Muslims in the four southern provinces of Thailand bordering Malay, Cambodian minorities in Thailand and especially in Vietnam and the Thai-speaking Shans in Burma.

A **fifth** occurs in **Singapore** and it is a special case. Of its 2.75 million people, 75 per cent are ethnic Chinese, 15 per cent Malays, the balance Indians, Eurasians and Europeans. This Chinese enclave must establish its security in a region dominated by Malay peoples who are deeply suspicious of foreign penetration into their part of the world and envious of Chinese economic dynamism and prosperity. Thus the policy of the Singapore government is to underplay the Chinese theme. The national language is Malay, symbolic gesture to the region. Four languages, Mandarin, Tamil, Malay and English, enjoy official status in government and education through the secondary level. But the deeper reality in Singapore is the paramountcy of the English language. The architects of the "rugged society" conceive of Singapore as the cosmopolitan and technologically sophisticated centre of finance, trade and industry in Southeast Asia. This requires, in their view that the international language of finance and high technology have precedence in Singapore's educational, economic, professional, and governmental institutions. While at the symbolic and cultural levels, Asian languages are fostered, English is the key to personal opportunity. The Malay minority, however, is frustrated in a Chinese-dominated, English-speaking society, but their capacity to act is limited by their economic marginality and small numbers and the disinclination of the Malaysian and Indonesian governments to intervene on their behalf. An important long range issue is whether a prosperous and self-confident Chinese majority will remain indefinitely in the low-profile policy of the present government which de-emphasized the Chinese dimension of Singapore life in deference to the suspicions of its neighbours. Already there are trends in Singapore government's policy toward the language issue under which there is a strong emphasis on promotion of Mandarin as a language for the Chinese population and a very subtle propagation of the country's Chinese identity.

Check Your Progress 2

Note : Tick-mark the correct answer.

1) Shams, Koreans and Kachins are ethnic groups in

   a) Cambodia

   b) Thailand

   c) Burma

2) Since the Second World overseas Chinese have faced insecurity and harassment everywhere in Southeast Asia except;

   a) Laos and Cambodia

b) Thailand and Indonesia

c) Malaysia and Singapore

25.4 FUTURE OF ETHNICITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The present territorial states in Southeast Asia will survive without important boundary changes. Despite the breakdown of the Soviet Union as well as division of Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe, the institutional pressures of the international state system are geared more toward the maintenance of the territorial status quo. The end of the cold war reduces the prospects of major international conflict in the area. Elsewhere, the present boundaries of territorial states are likely to hold firm, the chief pressure being Muslim dissidence in the Southern Philippines. This stability will provide opportunities for elites to continue the process of consolidating control over their "national" territories and peoples. The relative power of centre over peripheries is likely to grow further. This is the inevitable consequence of economic and administrative developments and is abetted by current international practice which distributes economic, technical, and military assistance exclusively through central governments and requires foreign investors and traders to negotiate terms of business with central government agencies. The centres in Southeast Asia will further try to penetrate their peripheries with instruments of control and public service and that the domestic economies of these countries will become increasingly integrated. Because of their antipathies, it is unlikely that the peripheral peoples will be able to sustain common fronts against expanding central power, augmenting the latter's relative strength.

There will be countervailing influences, however. With modernization some peripheral groups will mobilize more effectively and gain economic resources which should strengthen their bargaining power. Since a few of the ethnic minorities in the centre-periphery states desire assimilation into the dominant groups, the issues to be sorted out are the terms of their incorporation into the polity and economy. The terms that are worked out will depend on the relative resources available to the parties and their differential aspirations. Within the same country, therefore, the status of communal groups which are regarded as indigenous may vary greatly. In Indonesia, the more sophisticated peripheral peoples in Sumatra or in Acheh have sufficient resources to make credible claims for a degree of administrative and economic autonomy and still demand resources—jobs, representation and public services from the Javanese centre. At the other extreme, the weak and divided peoples of West Irian or for that matter the East Timorese where the Indonesians have forcibly imposed their rule, will be forced to accept the status of dependency with only geographic remoteness and inaccessibility to protect them. In Thailand, the northern hill tribes have so few resources in relation to the central government and the latter has so little interest in them, that with the end of the Indochina war and less prospect of external intervention on their behalf, mutually agreeable arrangements of benign neglect will probably result in their becoming even more insignificant, whereas the group in the northeast will certainly demand and in fact is already receiving far more in benefits from the Bangkok government than in the past, but it is not clear whether they will claim greater regional autonomy or accept gradual assimilation and integration into the Thai political and administrative system, which is certainly what the Thai government prefers. The peripheral minorities in Burma have continued to maintain their standard of revolt against the central government in Rangoon which is now under the control of a very oppressive and authoritarian military dictatorship and which has violated all international norms in denying to its people democratic rights and has so far refused to abide by the verdict of the people to let them form an elected government. Once the democracy movement in the country succeeds in overthrowing the autocratic military government and in restoring democracy, there is likelihood that the peripheral minorities will get a better deal from the centre.

Unless they are to be determined by pure imposition or by warfare, the successful management of centre-periphery conflicts requires institutional structure for bargaining for the assertion and resolution of demands. The practice of managing intercommunal relations through normal administrative channels symbolizes neglect by the centre of the claims for distinctive status and the special problems of the peripheral peoples, to

organize politically, or in extremes, to mount insurgencies in order to enchance their negotiating position. In their aspiration for national unity, those in control of the centre prefer to treat all their subjects as individuals following the methods and the criteria used in relating government to the populace within the dominant community. This, however, is seldom satisfactory to the peripheral peoples consensual arrangement which requires the establishment of formal or informal institutions for regulating communal relations, thus legitimizing pluralism. These institutions as a minimum, provide some channels for the articulation and processing of communal interests. Concretely, they may include communal parties, political parties, elite coalitions, central government ministries, federal arrangements, or regional units specially concerned with the management of communal differences. Such structures can be expected to increase as central governments in Southeast Asia, in their political development, become reconciled to the plural reality of their societies.

One may expect that the emerging generation of Chinese born in Southeast Asia will opt in the coming years in growing numbers for assimilation through deculturation and intermarriage. Painful as it may be to their parents, many of them will follow this path, simply because a satisfactory and rewarding Chinese way of life will not be possible in Southeast Asia. There will be no salvation from China, and a more attractive personal alternative will be available. Cultural memories and practices will survive vestigially and so will valuable local and international links, but the solidarity structures which give vitality to Chinese as a community will wither away. The success of this policy in Thailand and Cambodia will induce elites in other countries—Indonesia and perhaps even the Philippines—to adopt this approach as it promises to "solve" their Chinese problem. It will be increasingly appealing to local Chinese in the absence of opportunities for personal fulfillment or group survival on equal or even dignified terms. The most difficult problem will be encountered in the strongly Islamic areas of Indonesia where popular hostility to the Chinese is most intense and the pork-eating Chinese find Islam unattractive way of life.

In the two systems which have legitimized pluralism, opposite developments can be anticipated. The Philippines will have no serious problem managing the pluralism among their eight Christian ethnic communities because none of them is a serious threat to the status or survival of the others. Earlier pressure to impose the Tagalog language has been abandoned. The system is sensitive to the needs to distribute benefits with some degree of equity among constituent groups, and a strong integrative national sentiment has emerged. It is even possible that in the Philippine system, class will supplant ethnic cleavage as the main dimension of conflict. Malaysia, by contrast, will see not a relaxation but an intensification of the bipolar tensions between Malays and Chinese. The present generation of politicians, especially among the Malays, is more strident than accommodative in its communal demands. Malays will continue to use their control of government to enforce the Malay language policy and to push for continued increased Malay participation in education and in the modern economy, while denying the non-Malays the weight in government that their numbers warrant and even the legal right to argue for a "Malaysian Malaysia". Embittered Chinese will be divided between those who favour military and those who favour accommodative tactics within the present system, and those who would resort to revolutionary action. Chinese will be forced to defective tactics to protect their educational and economic advantages, with little hope of realizing their aspirations for political parity. A recurrent theme in the literature on structural pluralism is the inevitability of stratification, of one communal group emerging in a dominant position. Malaysia is a concrete test of this prediction or, alternatively, of whether balanced pluralism can be sustained in a polity which was originally organized on that premise.

25.4.1 Class and Communal Factors

The Southeast Asian region is not without its class conflicts; Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, Malays, Christian Filipinos, in rural as well as in urban areas, class tensions are growing and are eroding the patron-client lines of responsibility and deference which once integrated these societies. Every indicator points to the intensification of class conflicts in these societies. With few exceptions such as Singapore, there will probably be insufficient resources to mitigate conflicts in the European and North American

consumption, welfare-state pattern. Yet there is no evidence in any of these politics that class solidarities within structures have effectively cross-cut communal cleavages where the latter retain their salience or have in any measure reduced their intensity. At all strata individuals transact for mutual advantage across communal lines. Though often quite civil, these are nevertheless, calculated dealings. They seldom develop an effective element and they have not evolved into solidarity structures which effectively challenge the pull of communal loyalties. It would be easier to demonstrate that class conflicts can be diverted into communal hostility and violence than that ethnic conflict can be transmuted into class struggle, except where class and communal cleavages coincide. Even in the latter situation (for example, Malays in Singapore) the struggle is likely to be articulated in communal, not in class language, because the former draws on deeper layers of identity and consciousness than the latter. Contrary to earlier expectations, urbanization, which has been regarded as a modernizing phenomenon in which traditional, particularistic, communal loyalties become irrelevant, is having the opposite effect. Rapid urbanization tends to aggravate communal antagonisms quartered competition for scarce resources—jobs, housing, educational opportunities and political influence.

25.5 PRESCRIPTIONS FOR ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC PLURALISM

Southeast Asia will be a theatre both of class and of communal conflict for many years to come. Class conflict will intensify within the more modern, differentiated communal groups, but in all likelihood it will not cross-cut or supplant the other. Though some of the hundreds of small ethnic groups may merge into more viable communal formations, most of the larger ones will retain their boundaries. Pluralism in Southeast Asia's territorial states will persist and will continue to generate important, if unwelcome, issues on the agenda of political elites. In the meantime, for integrating the peripheral minorities into the national mainstream of their polities, the Southeast Asian governments may adopt the following prescriptions. The seven prescriptions are drawn from actual experiences of states and are offered as guidelines for governments which wish to peacefully accommodate ethnic heterogeneity.

1) Decentralize decision-making, particulary with regard to such matters as education, language, religion, which are most apt to effect ethnic sensibilities. Nominal autonomy as practised under the 1947 Burmese constitution, will not work. Even a substantive policy of cultural pluralism, if directed from the centre, may not provide sufficient immunity against secessionist sentiment, as attested to by the histories of Belgium and Canada.

2) In general, representatives of the central authorities should maintain as low a profile as possible.

3) Staff local law enforcement agencies (particularly at the "Street level") with members of the group indigenous to the locale. Otherwise, perceptions of police brutality and discrimination are apt to fuel ethno-national hostility.

4) Avoid creating an administrative unit that approximates an ethnic homeland or that is larger than the homeland but leaves a particular ethno-national group clearly dominant (as in the case of the former Nigerian province of Biafra). In either case, there is a strong probability that the administrative unit becomes an emotional focus for separatist sentiment.

5) Draw administrative borders so as to subdivide significant ethnonational people into several administrative units within each of which they are dominant. This division will give rise over time to several sets of administrative elites whose status would be threatened by any movement, secessionist or otherwise, involving the entire ethnonational group. These administrative units should be endowed with sufficient powers to give the elites a vested interest in the survival of their particular unit. Switzerland offers one successful model.

6) Avoid policies that encourage immigration of outsiders into traditional ethnic homelands. As noted, a homeland is more than a territory in the perceptions of the indigenous group. Indigenous people believe that they have a unique and exclusive proprietory right to their homeland and a significant intrusion by non-indigenes typically gives rise to hostility. The **transmigration** policy of the Indonesian government is likely to reap a harvest of bitterness.

7) Grant any important concessions to autonomy simultaneously to all roughly equivalent ethno-national groups. Ethno-national groups are extremely sensitive to perceptions of unequal treatment, and concessions made to one group trigger exceptations by others.

The omission of two other commonly employed techniques for amelioration of ethnic discord needs some explanation : a) the co-optation of ethnic leaders by appointing them to offices in the central apparatus, and b) the "buying off" of ethnic groups through the economic development of their region. The efficiency of both strategies has been exaggerated and proved to be ineffective in many cases. In the case of co-optation, appointing leaders of important ethnic groups to positions of high visibility and prestige is a common play of governments, but, unless accompanied by real concessions to the group's ethno-national aspirations, the tactics is unlikely to succeed and may be counter-productive. Total exclusion of a national minority from office will almost certainly increase secessionist sentiments but a policy of co-optation will boomerang if the members of the group interpret appointments as the tossing of scraps. Indira Gandhi's appointment of Zail Singh to India's Presidency for instance, was followed by more militant actions in the name of an independent Khalistan. Co-optation may also lead to charges that ethnic leaders have been "sold out", and therefore give rise to a more militant leadership.

The tendency to stress economic inequality as the basis for ethnic unrest is widespread and is most commonly described as "the theory of relative economic deprivation". While flagrant economic inequality is often used by ethno-national leaders to fan separatist passions, even the awarding of special economic privileges to a minority is not likely to quell its political aspirations. Moreover, governments should realize that popular perceptions of a group's economic situation are far more significant than its actual situation. The Sikha in India is one example. While governments should therefore try to correct marked inequalities among groups, they should not expect economic formulae in themselves to nullify autonomist and separatist sentiments. Ethnic resentments is more intrinsically a product of perceived, political deprivation than of relative economic deprivation.

The granting of autonomy would not guarantee political stability, of course. Autonomy is a term covering a broad spectrum of devolution from very limited home rule to near independence. As such there remains sample opportunity for misunderstanding and bad faith even after agreement on autonomy has been reached. Moreover, even a very generous measure of autonomy is not apt to satisfy the more determined **independistas.** What we can say is: a) that in most instances a large majority of an ethnic, politically non-dominant group desires, and is willing to settle for, some degree of autonomy and b) that the granting of meaningful autonomy will undermine popular support for militant separatists. Beyond this, the fact that autonomy agreement will not create a stable, fixed-for-all time division of authority between the government and non-dominant ethnic elements. As in Switzerland (one of the most successful states in managing ethnic competition peacefully), the balancing of authority will be a dynamic process, subject to continuous redefinition in the face of new problems and new demands. But again this imperfect prospect would appear more consonant with the self-interest of governing elites than would the most stable hegemony coercively maintained over hostile, non-cooperative peoples.

Check Your Progress 3

Note : i) Use the space below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the Unit.

1) Mention any three prescriptions which could help accommodate various ethnic groups politically.

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25.6 LET US SUM UP

Each of the states of Southeast Asia comprise of a number of ethnic groups. More importantly the border areas of most of these countries are largely inhabited by their ethnic minorities and hence they become a crucial factor in the strategic interests of these nations. Since homeland psychology is a very vibrant force in Southeast Asia, it does have a hearing on the politics of inter-communal relations. The patterns of ethnopolitics which have emerged in each of these countries is determined by its history, level of economic development and policies of the rulers. Ethnic conflicts have manifested themselves from mild form like demands by a group to severe risks disturbing the normal lives of citizens. Each state has taken a unique path to solve its ethnic problems and this has varied from indifference towards a not-significant minority to active efforts to co-opt them into the mainstream politics of the concerned state. Economic well-being and rapid development by themselves do not eliminate ethnic conflicts although the root of most conflicts lies in various groups claims on scarce resources. Similarly autonomy too may not bring ethnic groups together. A combination of various measures taken dispassionately and on the basis of a wide consensus may go a long way in keeping ethnopolitics within bounds and this is absolutely essential for stability and harmony which all Southeast Asian countries need for a balanced development.

25.7 KEY WORDS

Primal : Chief; First in importance.

Congruity : Harmonious.

Lingna France : Language adopted for local communication.

Pariah : Outsider (original word is in Hindi).

Co-optation : Add as member to a group.

25.8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Nather Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihar, 1974 : *Ethnicity* (Cambridge; Mars; Harvard University Press)

Donald L. Horowitz, 1985 : Ethnic Groups in Conflict (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press)

Mark Borthwick, 1972 : Pacific Century (Boulder : Westview Press).

25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) Homeland psychology invovles an emotional, if not rational, bond towards one's native land. It leads to an ethno centric mentality that is closeness towards members of one's own ethnic groups and hostility towards others. Homeland psychology also means the apparent Universal belief of the homeland peoples that they posses an exclusive propriety claim to that territory.

Check Your Progress 2

1) C

2) C

Check Your Progress 3

1) De-centralize decision-making in areas like education, language, culture and religion.

2) Local Law-enforcement agencies should be staffed with members of the ethnic groups indigenous to the locale.

3) Any important concessions should be simultaneously and equally granted to all groups.