

MICHAEL LEIFER

Dictionary of the Modern Politics of SOUTH-EAST ASIA





Dictionary of the Modern Politics of South-East Asia

Michael Leifer



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Introduction

In the decades since the end of the Pacific War in August 1945, South-East Asia has evolved from a category of convenience employed by a military command for dispossessing Japan of its wartime gains into a distinctive region with a growing sense of coherence and selfconfidence. That coherence owes much to the institutional performance of the member Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which, from an inauspicious beginning in August 1967, has developed a corporate culture of close consultation and cooperation which has begun to influence and attract the other states of the region. Selfconfidence has arisen from remarkable economic performances by almost all ASEAN states based on export-led growth which its newest member, Vietnam, has sought to emulate.

South-East Asia comprises those states situated to the east of the Indian sub-continent, to the south of the People's Republic of China and to the north of Australia. The region is a mixture of mainland and island zones within which waves of migration and cultural and religious flows have left variegated imprints. It registers cultural and religious diversity, while political boundaries, in the main the legacy of colonialism, do not always fit the societies that they encompass. And yet despite an incipient separatism, there has not been a successful act of secession since the transfers of sovereignty; the case of Singapore is an exception which proves the rule, so far. Irredentism has been more successful, although the most recent act of political union, when Indonesia annexed East Timor in December 1975, was one of territorial aggrandisement. There is no standard model of political system, although authoritarian governments prevail. Within the region, however, there has been a consistent trend towards market-driven economies which is producing in its wake social changes that will have political consequences.

South-East Asia comprises ten states with

a combined population close to 500 million. Parliamentary systems of varying kinds obtain in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines; Cambodia has begun a new experiment in constitutional monarchy but democratic in form only. Indonesia's constitutionalism is a thin veneer on an authoritarian system underpinned by a military establishment, while military rule is blatantly exercised in Burma, now officially Myanmar. Monopoly rule by Communist parties has been sustained in Vietnam and Laos, while Brunei provides the only example of a ruling monarchy. Resistance to democratization is a common feature of many states in the region justified in the name of economic development and social and political order.

There is great irony in the fact that during the early phase of the Cold War, South-East Asia was often described as the Balkans of the Orient in an analogy with the turbulent and foreboding condition of south-eastern Europe before the outbreak of the First World War. At the end of the Pacific War, nationalism and communism, often opposite sides of the same political coin, contended with colonialism. The process of decolonization became drawn into global conflict, especially in Indochina, which was to be afflicted by successive wars over more than four decades. By the 1990s the challenge of revolutionary communism had been overcome, while Communist governments in Vietnam and Laos had been obliged to give up economic dogma in the interest of sustained development. South-East Asia overall in the mid-1990s suggests a zone of peace by contrast with contemporary south-eastern Europe with which it was once compared. Such a picture is both valid and misleading. It is valid for reasons indicated above. But it is also invalid because such a picture fails to take full account of the disturbing implications of rapid social change driven by economic development and of an uncertain strategic environment attendant on the end of the Cold War. That environ-

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ment is notable for the shadow cast by a military modernizing and irredentist China against the background of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the uncertain regional posture of the United States. ASEAN's attempt to cope with that new environment has involved an expansion of strategic horizons beyond South-East Asia's bounds.

This dictionary of politics and international relations of South-East Asia attempts to encapsulate the changing nature and experience of the region through individual entries arranged in alphabetical order. Information, analysis and commentary are provided about significant episodes and treaties, indigenous concepts and political parties, and movements and regional organizations. Biographical data are included on principal political figures, past and present, without any claim to being exhaustive. In the opening section, there are short essays dealing with each of the ten states of the region. A guide to further reading, both general for the region and particular to individual states, has been provided to aid further study.

This undertaking was begun in a fit of absence of mind in the expectation that a

political dictionary could be readily completed in so-called discretionary time while engaged in non-academic duties. In the event, the undertaking was easier to begin than to complete. That it has been completed is due in great part to the patience of Mark Barragry and Alex Clark at Routledge, the forbearance of John Ashworth, the Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the loving support of my wife, Frances. Christine Firth has been an understanding as well as a meticulous copy-editor. Helpful advice has been provided by Kathleen Kazer, Duncan McCargo, Derwin Pereira, James Putzel and Michael Vatikiotis. Errors of fact are, of course, my own.

> Michael Leifer London, May 1994

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M.L.

Brunei, Sultanate of

The Sultanate of Brunei or Brunei Darussalam (Abode of Peace), which is located on the northern coast of Borneo, is the only ruling monarchy in South-East Asia. Its head of government and state, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, celebrated twenty-five years on the throne in October 1992. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Brunei exercised suzerainty over much of Borneo (giving its name to the island) and into the Philippines archipelago. Its territorial extent has been whittled down considerably over the centuries and its separate identity was preserved only through British colonial intervention, albeit with further loss of territory. Brunei, which became a protected state in 1888, acquired internal self-government in 1959, with additional powers transferred in 1971 when Britain gave up its automatic defence commitment. It became fully independent in January 1984 when Britain transferred its residual power over foreign affairs. Brunei then comprised two territorial enclaves of some 5,765 square kilometres in total accessible from one another only by water and surrounded on the landward side by the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Its population is estimated at around 280,000, of whom 200,000 are Malays who dominate the political and bureaucratic life of the sultanate. Ethnic Chinese, most of whom are stateless, number around 50,000, while expatriates, including skilled professionals from Europe and construction workers from other parts of South-East Asia, amount to some 20,000. Non-Malay indigenous people add up to about 10,000. The official religion is Islam, while the state is represented as a Malay Islamic Monarchy (Melayu Islam Beraja) in the interest of political conservatism. The sultan, by combining religious and royal roles, seeks to contain resurgent Islam, which is viewed as a threat to the established political order.

Modern Brunei is bound up with the discovery and exploitation of oil and natural gas. Onshore production of oil began in 1929 with

the active involvement of the Shell Oil Company, which in time became the joint venture Brunei Shell in which the government of Brunei owns a 50 per cent share. Offshore production of oil began in 1963 and natural gas production in 1973 with the involvement of Mitsubishi. There are six offshore oil and gas fields which account for virtually the total of the sultanate's great wealth, either directly or indirectly through overseas investments funded initially from oil and natural gas revenue. Reserves from oil and gas revenue have never been disclosed (but are believed to amount to around US\$30 billion) nor has the great personal wealth of the sultan and other members of the royal family. The huge resources at the disposal of the state, which give it (at US\$19,000) one of the highest average per capita incomes in the world, have enabled the introduction of a unique system of social welfare in South-East Asia. Free education and health care as well as other benefits. including guaranteed pensions, are provided on a generous basis. Economic planning has concentrated on developing alternative forms of employment to the oil and gas industry and government service in the interest of political stability. Only limited success has been achieved in this enterprise.

The government of Brunei is literally a family business with the sultan as prime minister and minister of defence, one brother, Prince Mohammed, as foreign minister and another, Prince Jefri, as finance minister. During the British protectorate, the current sultan's father, the late Omar Ali Saifuddin, was persuaded to introduce a measure of democratic politics. Elections in September 1962 gave the majority of elective seats to the radical People's Party (Partai Ra'ayat) with links to President Sukarno's Indonesia. When the sultan refused to convene the Legislative Council, in December 1962 the People's Party, led by A. M. Azahari, launched a revolt which was put down with British military inter-

vention from Singapore. Brunei has been ruled by decree ever since without any reversion to electoral politics and with all political parties effectively proscribed. Moreover, in order to hold off British pressure for democratization, Sultan Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin abdicated in favour of his son Hassanal Bolkiah in October 1967 shortly before he was due to graduate from the British Military Academy at Sandhurst. Sir Omar remained a powerful and decisive influence behind the throne until his death in 1986. Following his father's death, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah sought to throw off the playboy image depicted in western media and to demonstrate a seriousness of political purpose in the absence of political change. Despite the neo-conservatism associated with the sultan, expressed in a ban on the public consumption of alchohol in January 1991, social delinquency has grown among a young unemployed sector. The vulnerability of monarchical rule is well understood in royal circles, especially to a military coup arising from social discontent. For that reason, the armed forces, on whom some 10 per cent of the national budget is spent, are well paid and provided for in modern equipment. The officer corps is also monitored and personal interests balanced in a way that ensures lovalty. Since the revolt was crushed in 1962, a battalion of British Gurkha Rifles has been deployed in the sultanate on rotation from their brigade headquarters in Hong Kong under a secret exchange of letters, ostensibly in a training role. In addition, the sultanate recruits an additional battalion of retired Gurkhas directly from Nepal. These forces serve as a deterrent against any challenge by rebellious elements.

In September 1984, shortly after independence, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations maintaining: 'We wish to be left alone and free from foreign intervention'. Brunei had been reluctant to assume full independence from Britain because of an acute sense of vulnerability arising from experience of hostile relations with both Indonesia and Malaysia. At one stage, Brunei had contemplated joining the Federation of Malaysia on its inception in 1963 but decided against political union. The

Brunei Revolt had served as Indonesia's pretext for its campaign of Confrontation, while, during the mid-1970s, Malaysia had sought to destabilize the sultanate in part to consolidate its control in northern Borneo. It was only in the late 1970s that the evident cohesion of ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations), to which Indonesia and Malaysia were strongly committed, encouraged Brunei to assume full independence and place its security in membership of ASEAN; which was openly pledged to uphold the sanctity of national sovereignty. Even then, independence was accomplished through a treaty of friendship with Britain in 1979 which contained a unique five-year grace period before the transfer of full sovereign status in January 1984. On independence, Brunei joined the Commonwealth and the Organization of the Islamic Conference as well as the United Nations and ASEAN. Diplomatic relations have been gradually expanded beyond Britain, the United States, ASEAN and other major powers to the Islamic world and the People's Republic of China. Tensions still obtain with Malaysia, with whom Brunei is in dispute in its Limbang Claim: the district of Limbang was incorporated into Sarawak in 1890 after Britain's protectorate had been established. In addition, there are differences with Malaysia over maritime jurisdiction in Brunei Bay and also with China and Vietnam over a peripheral reef of the Spratly Islands which falls within Brunei's continental shelf. Among its neighbours, Brunei has enjoyed a special relationship with Singapore with which a common vulnerability over size and location has been shared. Singapore bases an infantry battalion in the Temburong enclave, while military exercises are conducted with Australian forces. Relations have improved significantly with Indonesia, which has assumed a protective regional role, while an underlying coolness remains in the relationship with Malaysia. A residual relationship has been maintained with Britain, which still plays an important role in training and servicing the Royal Brunei Armed Forces. An agreement to deploy the Gurkhas beyond 1998 was concluded between the Sultan and Britain's prime minister in London in

December 1994, when they also signed a memorandum on defence sales. In addition, limited military links have been established with the United States.

see also: APEC; ASEAN; ASEAN Regional

Forum; Azahari, A. M.; Bolkiah, Mohamed; Bolkiah, Hassanal; Brunei Revolt 1962; Confrontation; Islam; Limbang Claim; Melayu Islam Beraja; People's Party; Spratly Islands.