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Assessing Democratic Evolution in Southeast Asia

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Editor's Note

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Dr Anthony L. Smith
Editor
Trends in Southeast Asia

About the Speaker

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INDONESIA

From the outset it is important to answer the question concerning what sort of democratic development has taken root in Indonesia. In order to be clear about this, I would like to bring out some of the positive developments. Indonesia now has, since the fall of the Soeharto regime in May 1998, a multi-party system that operates freely. There is now an open environment for the creation of any political party. In fact, it only takes 50 people to do so. Today there are about 168 political parties. On the whole this is a good development for democracy, although it will complicate the political situation, and may have implications for stable and effective government. But after such a long period of authoritarian government, this is just an opportunity for everyone in Indonesia to express views and create parties. This situation will take time to settle.

Another major factor is the freedom of expression. In Indonesia, for individuals or the media, one can say anything one wants, although there are still people who are wary of this new freedom. But basically, if one listens to the radio, or those activists who were so afraid during Soeharto's time, they can now freely express their ideas — and the media will publish them. The other positive development is the strengthening of civil society: namely the university, the academics, the students, and crucially, the NGOs. This development occurred during the Habibie administration, and in the lead up to the general elections in 1999. Civil society is mushrooming, and keeps increasing, not just in Jakarta but in other regions.

Another positive development is the prospect of ongoing electoral reform, and this is the area that I have worked on a lot over the past three years. In last year's amendment, the MPR (the People's Consultative Assembly) established a direct election system for a president and vice president. So now a president and vice

president will assume office if they are elected with a 50% plus one majority, and at least 20% of electoral support in at least half of the provinces. This change was pushed by NGOs, and the many legislators have publicly said that if not for the pressure of the public, and the pressure of civil society, this kind of new system would not be in place, and the amendment would have died. The question remains as to what would happen if the president and vice president cannot meet the requirements of achieving an absolute majority. It is still to be decided whether a second round of voting would occur or whether it would be returned to the MPR. This remains to be resolved this coming August in the General Session of the MPR.

There is also the development of increasing public consultations, especially with regard to the legislative process. As mentioned, the prime example is the direct presidential election, which was a public, or NGO, initiative. Many NGOs are now active, especially in Jakarta, and they are very lively in discussing all manner of legislation. It is questionable that this is always effective, but the point is that as NGOs we can meet with, and lobby, legislators — and they are receptive to it. There are only a couple of conservative factions, which try to minimize change in Indonesia, and are thus resistant to civil society.

But on the flip side of these positive developments there are major problems. First of all, the lack of party institutionalization, in general, is very weak. It is obvious to all that recently there is open conflict within all the major parties. This may well end in party splits. This is particularly evident in Gus Dur's PKB (the National Awakening Party), Hamzah Haz's PPP (the United Development Party) and the PBB (the Moon and Star Party). There is potential conflict inside Golkar and Megawati's PDI-P (Indonesia Democratic Party-Struggle). In both these parties there is a struggle between the new members and the old guard.

Furthermore, there has been a recent tendency, especially in the conservative political parties, and also the current government, to restrain the work of various NGOs. Megawati's visit to the United States last November is a good example. She lobbied to stop the foreign funds for NGOs, because she feels that many NGOs are bothering her government — especially over serious flooding in Jakarta. Indonesian intelligence has accused some of the NGOs of using the flood issue to topple the governor of Jakarta, as well as the President. Effectively, they are arguing that this

group of NGOs are taking advantage of this situation. It seems that the message is going out that certain officials are not open for criticism from the public.

The issue of the military looms large for Indonesia, and has undue influence. A new Kodam (regional command) has been established in Aceh. The problem in Aceh cannot be resolved in this way, and it is going to mean even more civilian casualties, without any attempt to address the political problems in the province. Both houses of the parliament still have military representatives (non-elected) which gives them influence over the Constitution. The current plan is to end the military presence in the MPR in 2009, but this could be altered as well. The incapacity of the current government to solve the issue of military involvement in the public sphere remains a big problem in Indonesia.

Indonesia is still in the grip of an economic crisis, has large debts and cannot solve problems in Aceh, Irian Jaya and many other conflict areas. The government is not always prepared to act on these issues. The development of democratization is considerably bolstered by a strong group of active NGOs. It is the central government, the military, and also the conservative factions in Parliament, which have slowed down the reformation process.

Finally it is important to assess the role of external forces on the process of democratization in Indonesia. International bodies like the IMF and the World Bank, in particular, now require all government decision-making to be transparent and also in consultation with community groups. They are providing not only funds, but a lot of technical assistance. The IMF and the World Bank are not working directly with the NGOs, but they are also trying to work with the government, directly including the legislature and the various political parties. But there are also some problems with the involvement of international actors. For example, there is a group of international NGOs working in Aceh, which are principally working for local regulations, in particular the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh. These kinds of international NGOs may fail to be involved with the national or the local NGOs who have a grassroots perspective. Support coming from the UNDP has to go through government channels, where it comes under the aegis of Indonesia's National Audit Board. This is a problem for community groups, because the National Audit Board has not shown a long history of impartiality. NGO groups are worried that if they are

audited, then it opens up the potential for a control mechanism over issues and programmes. Many NGOs do not want to take UNDP support for this reason. This situation poses a dilemma for NGO groups, many of whom would like to be involved with UNDP programmes.

On balance it is in fact very hard to say whether Indonesia is going in the right direction in this democratization process. There is some hope, but the current government seems conservative and there is a fear that opportunities to improve this process are being lost. But this should be seen as part of the long process of the transition in Indonesia — in some Eastern European countries the process took a decade. Indonesia, which is much bigger in size, may take longer. And hopefully Indonesians, and the Indonesian government, will remain on course to achieve democratic stability in the future.

About the Speaker

Shamsul A. B. is Professor of Social Anthropology and Director, Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia. He researches, lectures and writes extensively on the theme of politics, religion, culture and economic development with an empirical focus on Malaysia and Southeast Asia. His most well-known and award-winning book is From British to Bumiputera Rule (Singapore: ISEAS, 1986), and his most recent book is Japanese Anthropologists and Malaysian Society (Osaka: Minpaku, 1998, co-editor with T. Uesugi).

MALAYSIA

The word democratization denotes a process rather than any new and confirmed model of democracy itself. In looking at this issue I am guided by the arguments available in the general literature, whether it is academic or in the public sphere. On one side of this debate are the American scholars (predominantly) who argue that the growth of free enterprise leads to the development of democratic government, but historical evidence does not bear that out. In Germany, there was a large middle class from 1871 to 1914 for example, while an autocratic government remained in the absence of a democratic system. It was not until 1945 that a democratic government came about. So this is one argument. But history does not prove that. The middle-class is necessarily a torch carrier for democratization.

The other argument is that we may not be talking about democratization, like, for example, in Russia, but liberalization. This democratization is confused with something else. There is also the case in some societies where the discourse is not about democratization in the sense of the American model that is being proposed, but the development of mediating institutions between state and society, and state and the individual. The American model is not so straight forward. The journal *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* featured a special issue in 1999 called "Corruption and Democratization". The argument or theme throughout is that the loosening of control and accompanying liberalization and democratization can lead to massive corruption, because new political parties can be manipulated and controlled by individuals and business consortiums.

So there are a myriad of arguments, explanations, and an equally complicated set of empirical evidence in front of us. So how do you marry these great ideas, or not

so great ideas, and the reality in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines? This is the most critical part of what is being looked at. The other important idea to bear in mind is that when one talks about democracy, there are broadly speaking two types of democracies. One is the parliamentary democracy which is the most common, while the other is the American-style presidential democracy. Thus the sort of democratization process is also very critical.

In the context of Malaysia, historically, if one considers elections to be the pillar of democracy, Malaysia had elections during the colonial period. Now I do not imagine the British introduced elections because they wanted their colony to be democratic. That is the last thing that they were thinking. In fact, elections came before democracy. So when did democracy arrive? Malaysia has evolved a system where everyone has an opinion and every opinion is included.

This revolves around what I call the three pillars of Malaysia's economic and political modernization. The first one is security, the second is the ethnic bargain, and the third is development planning. These three pillars were set from 1945 onwards. The immediate challenge was the Communist Emergency. Is the Emergency over in Malaysia? We must still be under an Emergency, otherwise the Internal Security Act (ISA) would not be there. This is to say that there are still threats and we have our "fire department" standing by all the time. But Malaysia must be very careful all the time. There are small and large threats externally and internally. So security is very critical in the context of Malaysia. The structures are still there, and all the rules and regulations are still there. These regulations were introduced by the British in 1914.

With regards to the ethnic bargain, modern electoral politics have allowed Malaysians to argue and show dissatisfaction. The interesting part about democracy in Malaysia is the centrality of the ethnic bargain. Like Bretten Woods or the Marshall Plan, we have our own version, called the development plan — a 5-year plan — that continues to be practised today. In all these areas, I would argue, Malaysia's democracy is more like a discussion of competing ideas that continuously inform the system. While some have been more privileged than the others in this, the fact is we do not have a two-party system like Britain or Australia. In Malaysia everyone can be part of the ruling coalition — they go out and come in. So the ruling party in Malaysia is more like a bus terminal in Kuala Lumpur — you come in, you go out —

today you are friend, tomorrow you are enemy, and in the future you are a friend again. That is the model that we call consensus politics, or whatever beautiful name you want to give it. But I think what is more critical here is not so much the institution, but how the ability to actually express these differences is designed. Sometimes we look at press regulations, and words like “draconian” and other negative words which the press likes to use, are thrown about. But Malaysia has an alternative press too. The best alternative press is not the official one, but through so-called rumour-mongering. The internet looks scientific and sophisticated, but it is rumour-mongering because nobody knows what is true and what is not. It may be very scientific in production, but the content is as bad as my grandmother’s “news”. So in that sense, the content has not changed, but we may have changed the form. The latest technology provides the latest information on Malaysia’s democracy, and with this rumour-mongering on the internet, especially *Malaysia-kini*, you can get critical views. The idea here is the excess and the possibility of continuously putting forward ideas which people think the Malaysian government cannot accept, but in reality Malaysians can say all those things. In that sense you see that these people who have set up in opposition have been recycled into different parts of the whole system again. And this is the nature of democracy in Malaysia. One day you are there in the detention camp, tomorrow you will be running the newspaper — which is the case with the current editor-in-chief of the *New Straits Times*. Or today you are running the newspaper, and tomorrow you will be in the detention camp. People do not take that seriously anymore, but outside groups around the world take it very seriously. It is a bit like this question that I have to answer all the time, who is going to be the successor after Mahathir. The answer for the Malaysians is that it does not matter. We cannot get another Mahathir, that is for sure. We may get a Hussein Onn type — but what can we do? We have to survive with it. But others are interested in having another Mahathir because Mahathir allows investors to bring in one ringgit and go out with twenty. In Malaysia there is the ability to continuously argue and debate despite all those rules and regulations. So that form of democratization is equally important, not just simply the institutional form. The “house” is built but we keep on making extensions to the house everyday, to suit new situations. The possibility of fluctuations and changes becomes an instrument in itself to contain

differences and conflicts. So while the matter and process is important, so is the whole exercise. For example, recently there was an issue relating to ethnicity and the election of students in the primary school. It was a big issue brought up by Indian groups and the school teachers' groups. There was a two-month long discussion until it was decided to set up a committee to look after the issue. Another month was taken to select the committee members, and another three weeks to select the chairman for this Commission. So while this process went on the heat went out of the debate. Professor K G Ratnam is the chairman and his comment to me about the issue was that "it's gone". "This is the beauty of Malaysia", I replied. We continuously argue about having to organize ourselves to solve this problem because the first reaction to any problem in Malaysia is to introduce a new law. But Malaysia has more than enough of these laws; the real problem is a lack of people who enforce this law. There are laws for everything — you can even leave your wife behind but you cannot leave your IC (identification card) behind because one gets fined 50 Ringgit. As a result we are not fearful of rules and regulations. The point is that we cannot look at democracy as being simply about elections. Because of Malaysia's First-Past-the-Post system, the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) is able to gain a large majority. BN does not get more than 50% of votes but they have a two-third majority. This democracy in Malaysia relies on the ability to present alternative positions and views. Different democracies result in different party formations, for example, Britain has an intra-party democracy. The nature of protocol party formation in Malaysia is not as straightforward as the two-party systems in the US, Britain or in Australia, because Malaysia has two big umbrella coalitions. Parties can become members of these different umbrellas. In Malaysia there are now a wide range of voluntary organizations — NGOs, NPOs (Non-profit Organisations) or simply POs (People's Organisation). Malaysia's democratization process has also seen the emergence of political Islam. This aspect of Malaysia cannot be missed because the political Islam aspect of Malaysia is very critical as an ethnic identifier. So ethnicity is attached to religion, and because of that, ethnic politics is also religious politics in many ways in the context of Malaysia. There is now a civil society movement amongst the Muslims called *masyarakat mandani*, which is an attempt to re-interpret traditional religious sources in pursuit of democracy, civility and civil society, and is consciously

organized by different groups — sometimes calling themselves *reformasi* groups. Constitutionally there is a role for Islam, but the debate about an Islamic state in Malaysia is between the Islamic party (PAS) with its own version of an “Islamic state”, and Dr Mahathir’s post-September 11 declaration of an “Islamic state”. The difference is quite obvious. PAS’ Islamic state is the notion of an Islamic state prior to the formation of the modernization state, first evident in Europe. So their notion of an Islamic state is one prior to modern nationalism. But Mahathir’s Islamic State, which he pronounced with the agreement of Barisan Nasional, is an Islamic State embedded and framed in the constitution based on the notion of a modern-nation state. Both sides have been talking past each other, for they are climbing different trees. In the recent Perlis by-election, fears were expressed over this. And there are popular misunderstandings about what this means. It is said that in a PAS-Islamic state people will lose their hands. If they have an UMNO — Islamic State, they will supposedly lose their incomes. Now which Islamic State do you prefer? I for one do not mind losing my income, but not my hand. This is the kind of popular reaction to this debate about an Islamic State in Malaysia, because it has to be brought down to a level where a single individual can understand it. In the Barisan Nasional (BN) vision of the national Islamic state, one may lose income because of increasing taxes, but one will not see the horrifying spectre of thieves losing their hands. The importance of popular understanding is obvious, because at the end of the day, elections still play an important role (such as the PAS victories in Kelantan and Trengganu). To what extent, for example, PAS can continue and sustain its support (because apparently now more and more Malays are joining) is hard to say — I do not know where they get the statistics — probably from the rumour-mongery, because they have nothing to offer in terms of hard evidence that people are supporting the PAS Islamic state. There is a fear, probably a fear of foreign investors mainly, that PAS may take over, especially if it continues to win a lot more seats in the rural areas. However the empirical evidence does not bear that out. The results of the 1999 elections cannot be taken as representative of the whole of Malaysia, because the swing against UMNO was a Peninsular Malaysia issue, and not relevant to Sarawak and Sabah.

The most recent issue relating to September 11 and how it has affected Malaysian politics, is an interesting issue to close with. Interestingly from the first

day of the event itself there was a swing between a humanitarian response to a political response. (Humanitarian in the sense that the Muslims and others condemned this attack and its consequences, because there were Malaysians killed too.) When there was an attempt to take action against terrorism, it then became political. Slowly, the reaction changed again when America wanted to bomb Afghanistan. The humanitarian response in Malaysia saw many wanting to go to Afghanistan to save the refugees under the Red Cross programme. The PAS pronouncements, from day one, were not in support of what had happened in America, but that America somehow deserved the attacks. You just have to look at *Haraka*, the newspaper — the lead stories and the editorials have not changed. Even though inside they feature other opinions, the main argument is still that America brought this on itself. But would Muslims in Malaysia now not support America? I was asked by this friend from the US State Department. I think the answer lies with the Americans, not with the Malaysians — we cannot change anything, but America can.

Democratization in Malaysia is still a work in progress. It has unique characteristics. Discussing the other models is illuminating, but Malaysia has taken its own path.

About the Speaker

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THE PHILIPPINES

In the last 15 years two defining events have transformed Philippine politics. In the first instance, in February 1986 a military mutiny and a massive popular mobilization ended the 14-year authoritarian rule of the Marcos presidency and restored a formal democratic process. In the second instance, in January of last year, a sustained people's protest climaxed with the withdrawal of military support and forced out of office a popular, even charismatic, incumbent President, Mr Joseph Estrada. These two seminal episodes in the country's recent history, dramatized to a large extent the issues and problems underpinning the process of democratic restoration and consolidation in the Philippines.

The Philippines has had the longest experience of electoral democracy in Southeast Asia, but it continues to face a difficult and highly contested process of democratic consolidation. There is a minimum procedural definition for understanding what is meant by a democratic system, otherwise we will never get to agree about what is being discussed. Most authors on democracy agree that there must be a basic guarantee which is usually a constitutional guarantee for the exercise of basic civilian political rights — freedom to organize, freedom of speech — that is at the core of basic political rights.

Secondly, there must be a system of elections which would have two important characteristics, they must be competitive and fair. Fair meaning that there is no systematic attempt to manipulate the results. Competitive meaning the opposition parties must be allowed to freely organize and freely articulate their programmes. Beyond that scholars will agree or disagree on other kinds of qualifications which they would like to attach to this minimum requirement. I agree, for instance, that there should be some kind of a democratic way of life sustained by a

vibrant civil society. And in order to sustain democracy there also needs to be a certain level of economic development and economic growth.

Many transitions to democratic rule, which took place during the so-called third wave of democratization, roughly from the 1970s to the 1990s, were the product of negotiations between the incumbent and opposition elites. The experience in the Philippines saw the replacement of the Marcos dictatorship through the combination of a military mutiny and a massive civilian resistance. The opposition to authoritarian rule demonstrated the extraordinary vibrancy of a civil society constituency that was never crushed, even at the height of authoritarian rule by Marcos.

There are therefore three important features of the transition process that took place in 1986 that would manifest themselves at varying times in the consolidation of democratic rule in the Philippines today. First, there exists a very vibrant civil society, representing various political persuasions, from the left to the right, all steeped in popular mobilization and direct political actions. The second feature is that the military, as an institution, has come to play a more pronounced role in the resolution of political issues, particularly in moments of political confrontations between central state authority and civil society. And the third is that the Philippines has inherited a legacy of a relatively weak central state apparatus — weaker certainly than Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia — that is forced to negotiate and accommodate the demands of civil society at varying times.

The process of democratic consolidation may be seen taking place at two levels. First, the embedding of formal democratic political institutions and procedures that guarantee the rule of law, the exercise of basic civilian political rights, and fair and competitive elections. Second, the cultivation of a democratic way of life, much of which is nurtured by a robust civil society. Built within this framework the process of democratic consolidation in the Philippines faces a number of difficult challenges.

A significant level of national unity in the country, usually a pre-requisite for a working democratic order, cannot be achieved without successfully finding a political solution to the continuing armed challenges posed by the local communist movement and various insurgent Islamic movements. Again, among the Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines is unique in having up to now the threat of a communist movement and armed Islamic separatist movements. Indonesia, Thailand and

Malaysia have basically resolved the threat from the communist movement, but not the Philippines.

The resilience of the local communist movement in the face of the breakdown of various communist systems and parties abroad, and the general retreat of the communist ideology worldwide, clearly suggests that the local communist movement has a political constituency whose needs have to be seriously addressed. The Muslim-based armed challenges have fractured into three organizations: the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the original organization; the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF); and the Abu Sayyaf. Most people are probably more familiar with the Abu Sayyaf because it has been in the news for the last two years. This group has been engaged in international kidnappings and has been linked to the Al-Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden.

The Muslim-based insurgency challenges, having been fractured into three organizations, require a more nuanced political solution appropriate to the particular ideas of its group. Again this is a very difficult process. The MNLF is the more secular movement; the MILF are fundamentalist; and then the Abu Sayyaf has basically degenerated into a criminal bandit group, although many members of the Abu Sayyaf originally were also from either the MNLF or MILF, so there are probable linkages between them.

Rooted in a long history of struggle against the central government, dating back to colonial times, the Muslim armed movements are proving to be quite intractable because they articulate ethnic and religious interests that overlap with material inequalities. For instance the provinces dominated by Muslims — Sulu, Tawi Tawi and Basilan — also happened to be the country's most depressed areas in terms of income, life expectancy and functional literacy. Thus the problem of the Muslim South sees an overlapping of ethno-religious identity with the problems of poverty.

Furthermore, another major challenge to democratic consolidation lies in the pervasive poverty of a significant segment of the population. Protracted conditions of poverty weaken the commitment to the democratic order as it creates constituencies of people who are indifferent to, or who are prepared to challenge these rules, since they have little to lose. In fact, such a dramatic mobilization and confrontation took place

in Metro Manila just a few months after the installation of President Arroyo last year, when large numbers of the urban poor, organized by the opposition, attacked the Presidential Palace. Thus, in a more fundamental sense, the problem of poverty for large numbers of people ultimately translates into a weak constituency for democracy, particularly when it is seen that the democratic order cannot provide basic economic and social needs.

A major theme in the working out of the democratic order in the Philippines concerns the complex relations of conflicts and compromise, negotiations and accommodations, between state authorities and the robust civil society. For historical and political reasons, there exist a vibrant and dense network of civil society organizations in the country. Of course when one speaks of civil society, in reality this is of course constituted by all kinds of organizations and groups representing different political persuasions — some of them in fact have very strong authoritarian tendencies like the Catholic Church, while some are relatively more democratic in their orientation. More than the weak institutionalized mainstream political parties, it is these civil society organizations which have played a more effective role in articulating societal interest, monitoring government performance, and organizing and mobilizing their constituencies for political action.

The continuing challenge for the state, therefore, is how it can find creative ways of harnessing the collective dynamism of the civil society organizations, while respecting their institutional integrities and not falling captive at the same time to the particularistic programme espoused. For instance, the state has created mechanisms for directly involving civil society representatives in policy-making agencies, as best seen in the provision of the local government code of 1991. Together with the mass media, these organizations have also been the most important factors for pressuring government agencies and authorities to be more transparent in their governance practices.

The potential danger of the military playing a more activist role in political affairs was showcased in the military mutiny that triggered the ousting of Marcos in 1986, the seven coup attempts against President Aquino between 1986 and 1989, and most recently, of course, the military's withdrawal of support from President Estrada in the wake of the massive people's protest. However, this is an important difference

between the Philippine military and that of Thailand and Malaysia. Even while the military experienced a process of politicization during the authoritarian rule of Marcos, it has not developed a coherent institutional corporate interest independent of the civilian elite. This means that the threat of a *coup d'état* in the post-Marcos period now is possible only if there are enough key members of the civilian elite prepared to cooperate, unlike in the classic *coup d'état* where the coup itself is basically a project of the military. I do not think that this is possible any longer in the Philippines. The participation of civilian elites would be the more critical factor.

Therefore, as long as the electoral option of contesting power remains a credible and viable one, it is unlikely that opposition mainstream elites will risk participation in a coup. Moreover, a new generation of ex-soldier politicians have emerged, again a relatively new phenomenon. In the post-Marcos era there are now former leaders of the coup actually being elected into public office and there is now a new generation of former military officers who have actually become elected public officials.

There are two institutional reforms which are worth noting in terms of their potential impact on the strengthening of democratic practices. First, there was the local government code passed in 1991, and second, the party-list system which was formally put in operation in the 1998 elections. The local government code provides more power and financial autonomy to local governments, and it is hoped that these reforms will attract more progressive-minded and competent leaders, who will challenge the traditional control of local politics by established political clans. Indeed, there have been outstanding cases of new mayors and other local government officials elected under these reforms, but there is a need for a more systematic study to assess the short and long-term impact of the code.

The party-list system allocates twenty percent of the total membership of the Lower House to parties representing the poor and marginalized sectors of society. Very recently the Philippine Supreme Court came out with a ruling which decided which of these party-list organizations are legally representing the poor and the marginalized sectors. In the past, even traditional parties and politicians took advantage of the party-list by putting up their own dummy party-list systems, so there was a constitutional challenge to this. Fortunately both the Commission on Elections

and the Supreme Court came out with a clear basis upon which to determine which of these organizations are really representing the poor and the marginalized.

A party-list organization can win from one to a maximum of three seats, depending on the percentage of votes it gets out of the total votes cast for the party-list candidates — at least two percent for one seat, which is the minimum requirement; and six percent or more for three seats. While suffering from several flaws in its conceptualization in practice, the party-list system nonetheless is a step in the right direction, for it allows marginalized political groups easier access to the legislative process. In this sense it cultivates a wider and broader constituency of support for democratic political institutional rules and practices.

Finally a note on the Philippine diaspora and its possible consequences for the consolidation of democracy in the country. In terms of its impact and democratic consolidation in the country, there is one unexamined aspect of the diaspora worth looking into. One estimate is that there are now about 10 million Filipinos working all over the world — overseas contract workers and professionals. The overseas contract worker returnees, many of whom are already college educated to begin with, constitute a potentially new and powerful constituency of more competent, more confident, more tight skilled individuals who may demand more exacting performances from public officials or who may themselves run for public office. They may also establish small businesses, adding to their sense of empowerment and independence. This potential can be multiplied a hundred times given their direct influence on a network of family and friends. Even while they are physically separated from political events in the country, they have been able to directly intervene in various ways, of course through the magic of modern communications technology. For instance at the height of the mass mobilizations against former President Estrada, a number of electronic discussion groups were set up, and actively participated in by many professionals abroad. This is one aspect of globalization that may yet energize the democratic process.

About the Speaker

Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead teaches in the Department of International Relations, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. She graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. In 2001, she was a Fulbright Scholar teaching in the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University. Her academic interests centre on the relationship between globalization and state transformation as well as regionalism in which she has various publications. Her forthcoming books are The Lineaments of Thai Absolutism (in English) and The English and French State Transformation in the Context of the World Economy (in Thai).

THAILAND

It is quite appropriate that in the year 2002 we choose to address the question of democratization in Thailand. This year marks the tenth anniversary of an uprising against an attempt by a military leader, General Suchinda, to become Prime Minister. How far has democratization taken root in Thailand?

There are three areas that can be treated as indicators of Thai democratization: bureaucratic reform, decentralization and the development of civil society. This paper will deal with each of these topics and will make concluding remarks about the present government.

First of all, there are many reasons why bureaucratic reform is the key to democratization in Thailand. Many people believe that the modern bureaucracy has not changed much since its inception in the late 19th century during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. In fact, during the Cold War, the U.S. was responsible for extending the Thai state apparatus for the dual purposes of serving the liberal world order and warding off communism. These two major periods of state building turned the bureaucracy into a gigantic mammoth with vested interests in holding or sharing state power. It was only with the popularly elected government of 1988 in Thailand that the bureaucracy's involvement with the state power was suspended (apart from a brief interlude during the military coup of 1991-92).

For the Thai bureaucracy, loss of state power has meant the end of military involvement in politics, but it does not stop bureaucrats from enriching themselves through their positions. This is particularly true for the army, which can generate money through the possession of arms. Certain members of the armed forces are reportedly involved in drug trafficking and debt collection, to name but a few illegal activities. Under the democratic regime, the bureaucracy played a key role in rampant

money politics. It has acted as an accomplice in getting politicians elected and recouping money spent during the election. This spawns corruption at all levels of government. Bureaucratic positions become commodities; the lowest positions in the teaching profession and the police reportedly cost 50,000 baht. This situation is the opposite of good governance.

As a child of the absolutist state and military regimes of the Cold War, the Thai bureaucracy has been unable to deal with the demanding tasks of a globalizing world, which is the context in which the Thai state currently operates. Because of its size, innate inefficiency and corruption, the bureaucracy has been in need of a major revamp for some time, and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has been attempting to address this problem. However, given the lack of political commitment, this has proved too big a task for the CSC, and reforms have never been initiated.

It was during the financial crisis and the tutelage of the IMF that work toward bureaucratic reform gained momentum. Leading principles consisted of accountability, transparency and privatization. However, the new bureaucratic structure was only recently unveiled. On the surface, the plan seems mainly concerned with rationalizing the bureaucratic structure, with the puzzling outcome of increasing the number of ministries from 14 to 20, plus 61 bureaus. This appears to work against the pressure for a leaner bureaucracy.

However, the heart of the bureaucratic reform lies in its new method of budgeting. The present budget system encourages the patron-client relationship between government agencies and the Budget Bureau, which has become extremely powerful thanks to its role in resource allocation. The system is also wasteful, because new budgets are predicated on previous allowances and allow little room for any changes. Under the draft Budget Act, government agencies will have more power to design their own budgets, but they must come up with a clearly stated plan of action and take full responsibility for their own performance. They will be monitored by a Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, which will authorize the budget requests. Such a performance-based budget will make the government effectively accountable to Parliament. The new budget act will drastically change the function of bureaucracy and it is difficult at this time to evaluate how much resistance the plan is facing.

Another bureaucratic revolution is brewing outside the confines of the bureaucratic reform — there are strong demands for decentralization.

In the early 1990s, dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy was also expressed in the form of demands for changes in the highly centralized Ministry of the Interior. It quickly gathered momentum and the four political parties running for the 1992 election, after the May 1992 uprising, adopted decentralization as a part of their election platforms. However, the previous government, led by the Democrats, refused to adopt it into policy, arguing that the platform belonged to the individual parties and not the coalition government.

A proportion of the people actively behind the call for decentralization were those who saw the Thai state as highly centralized — a situation which impedes democracy. The others were provincial urban intellectuals who wanted to let the growing provincial middle-class have a say in matters directly concerning themselves, instead of being dictated to by officials from the Ministry of the Interior in Bangkok. Urban intellectuals demanded that provincial governors be elected.

The demand had sufficient support to prompt the ministry to come up with its own version of reform. In 1994 the first ever female provincial governor was appointed. Towards the end of that year, with little fanfare or preparation, a scheme for local self-government was launched at the sub-district level. These new administrative bodies, or TAO (Tambon Administrative Organization), remained very much under the control and guidance of the Ministry of the Interior.

In so doing, the ministry preempted further decentralization by shifting the focus from the provincial urban areas which, at the time, were considered more ready for self government than the local villages. Reformers were extremely disappointed by this move, believing that the process of learning self governance would take a long time. This could indirectly provide evidence for the inappropriateness of the scheme, and a rationale for its future abolition.

Currently, subdistrict self governance is, in many respects, a replica of the national political system. Vote-buying is widespread, and money politics is as ferocious, albeit on a smaller scale as on the national level. It is still a learning process and local politicians face all sorts of obstructions from Ministry officials. For example, it took a TAO member four years to realize that a public park in his district

was in fact under his jurisdiction, and not under the ministry's, as claimed by one of its officials.

However, there are some areas for optimism that local self-government could eventually significantly contribute to democratization. Many villagers have already figured out that the subdistrict election process represents a powerful tool for advancing their interests. They can change their representatives every four years. You might argue that this power exists at the national level, but it is difficult for villagers to ascertain what their MPs are actually accomplishing in Bangkok. At the local level, however, villagers can easily articulate their interests and work more effectively at defending them. At this stage, the emerging trend is for villagers to shop around for their "best representative".

Another positive development is the emergence of a new crop of village leaders who have been educated in Bangkok, and return to make their political career in their own villages. There is a case of a highly popular and successful TAO member who got villages under his jurisdiction to jointly deliberate on how to allocate the budget and gave them full responsibility in implementing their own projects. He acted only as the monitor. This case shows that a grass-root democracy is beginning to take root at the local level. Similar experiences are emerging in areas where villagers have formed people's organizations to deal with local issues.

My last observation concerning decentralization is that ultimately it could be the way for more and more people to articulate their interests at the national level, and keep money politics at bay. Granted, this is going to be a long-term process, but one cannot expect democracy to develop overnight.

Among the three topics outlined at the beginning, civil society was the first to emerge in the process towards democratization in Thailand. By civil society, I mean the non-state and non-business sectors which have influence upon the political process. Civil society became a major political force in the early 1970s when a student movement effectively brought down a military regime. Since then, a political cadre, functioning in the form of NGOs, has existed outside the state and business sector. They work on the two main tasks of fighting for democracy and representing the marginalized people.

In 1992 when a military leader, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, took advantage of an imperfect constitution and became Prime Minister, political NGOs were at the vanguard of the civil society movement to remove him. They mobilized substantial support from other sectors such as the media, the student movement, people's organizations, and the growing middle-class. The success in unseating Suchinda was very much the victory of civil society. It also created a consensus among various groups that a more democratic constitution was needed. The support also came from the grass-roots, which saw their way of living invaded by forces of globalization.

The 1997 Constitution, which establishes a new framework for Thai politics, came out of a compromise between two opposing forces in society: the conservatives and the progressives. The conservatives, consisting of bureaucratic leaders and conglomerates in Bangkok, saw their turf being invaded by new provincial capitalists who were resorting to money politics. The conservatives had a strong desire to clean up the Parliament. The NGOs, on the other hand, looked for a constitution which would protect community rights and encourage participatory democracy.

The 1997 constitution reflects the strength of the civil society. The first aspect of the constitution is an extension of rights and freedoms, especially at the grass-roots level. It guarantees local community rights, environmental impact assessments and public hearings. Secondly, it creates political accountability by establishing constitutional and administrative courts, independent counter corruption agencies and by calling for asset declarations by cabinet members and senior bureaucrats.

The success of these two principles has generated more accountability and transparency in the political system and greater participation in local politics. Vote-buying still continues, but is being curbed by the Election Committee. Many office holders were found guilty of false asset declarations and were removed from power. A draft signed by 50,000 people was submitted to preserve their traditional rights to a forest community.

After gaining such spectacular successes in political reform, what has happened to the vanguard of democratization? NGOs and membership-based peoples' organizations appear to have diverged. Those NGOs that work for the poor have found themselves marginalized in the wake of the people's organizations' ability

to effectively organize themselves and create their own leadership. Those NGOs that work for government agencies have come under criticism for being career-orientated, and have also been co-opted by the state. They have been unable to gain support from the middle class in their struggle on behalf of the poor. Many NGO members are going through a soul-searching process about their future roles.

The strength of the people's organizations offers reasons to be optimistic about the process of Thai democratization. They turned into various social movements. Of these movements, the Assembly of the Poor was one of the most effective. It successfully staged a long series of protests against the government on several issues. The movement showed that the poor cannot only articulate their own interests, but also take action accordingly, thus expressing the principle of participatory democracy. In sub-local areas where contentious issues exist, there has been a strong development in people's participation in the TAOs. Many issues concerning the environment, the use of natural resources, and what are considered to be the people's rights, such as liquor distilling, remain unresolved, and greater grassroots participation can be expected in the future.

At this stage I will discuss the present government. Two driving forces behind Thaksin's government make it radically different from all previous ones. The first force consists of former student activists. These were some of the first members of the civil society that started working towards democratization in the early 1970s. They began working for Thaksin well before the election and were behind "populist" policies such as the 30-baht healthcare system, the debt moratorium to Thai debtors, village funds, etc. In many ways these policies go hand in hand with the spirit of the new constitution. One spectacular success of this group is to materialize decentralization, as promised in the constitution, in the form of the increase in the local authorities' budget from the 9% of previous governments to 20% in the year 2001. This will further increase to 35% in five year's time.

As for the second force represented by Thaksin himself, and the group of people of people working with him, I would like to go beyond Thaksin's image as a business tycoon and concentrate more on where these leaders come from. They represent a new generation who spent its formative years under dictatorial regimes and became professionally successful without being part of the established order. As

such, these leaders have an unorthodox *modus operandi*, exemplified by the lack of respect they show to the bureaucratic elite. But more importantly they have set out to turn the bureaucracy into an effective instrument of policy implementation. They are shaking up the bureaucracy well beyond the confines of mere bureaucratic reform. Together, these two forces have strongly impacted Thai democratization and the nature of the Thai state. By its strong commitment to social welfare, an effort which could possibly fail due to a lack of resources and opposition from the bureaucracy, the government has set a precedent for future popular demands, especially at the grassroots level. Bureaucracies at all levels will now be evaluated more on their performance. Casualties at the top of the bureaucracy are sending a strong message to top bureaucrats to change or perish.

One can legitimately ask how the Prime Minister will refrain from using his position to favour his own family business interests. There is a strong possibility of this and should it occur we will be able to assess whether the checking mechanisms provided for in the constitution actually work. And it would also offer an opportunity to test the strength of the civil society.

At this juncture, there is no consensus on the performance of the present government. With over 300 out of the 500 seats in parliament belonging to Thaksin's coalition, there is a growing outcry against parliamentary dictatorship. Some say that Thaksin's government is an example of crony capitalism pure and simple. But one could also look at his government as being on the cutting edge of an unorthodox development of democracy, with a new type of leadership running a society which has become more and more politicized at the grass-roots level. These views remain open to debate.

DISCUSSION

Question

Dr K. S. Nathan (Senior Fellow, ISEAS): I would like to direct my question to our first speaker, Mr Hadar Gumay. Could you enlighten us on the relationship between democratization and disintegration of the state. When there is more democratization, the plurality of forces also encourage certain levels of national self-determination and we can see how the Soviet Union, or the Soviet Empire, disintegrated after *glasnost* and *perestroika*. In the case of Indonesia, do you see any national ideology that can co-exist with the democratization process after Soeharto so that Indonesia can remain intact and still have democratization? What is the national ideology of Indonesia today? Is it *Pancasila* or has *Pancasila* been discredited? Is there a national ideology vacuum in Indonesia under Megawati? Can Islam be an integrating force for a country which has 90 percent Muslim population but which also says it is not an Islamic state? What is the relationship of ideology to democratization and how do you see development itself, strengthening democratization or the lack of development further undermining the democratization process in Indonesia?

Mr Hadar Gumay

I think *pancasila* is still very relevant. Indonesians are well used to the *pancasila* ideals, in terms of justice, freedom and tolerance, which have been problematic in Indonesia.

For example, Aceh is quite a rich province, and its resources have been diverted to Jakarta, in Java. In a way to resolve the problem in Aceh, it seems this practice has to change — in Aceh and elsewhere.

Islam, I do not think, could be a major or unifying ideology for Indonesians, because it cannot be said that although the majority of the population is Islam, that they favour an Islamist agenda. Most of the Muslims in Indonesia do not want to have this as the state ideology. The case of separatism also appears in West Irian, where they also have not been given the chance to participate nationally. The

separatist groups have no opportunity at all to participate in the political process, to be as the legislature, or as the governor, the mayor, or even part of the executive. There is no way of bringing them inside of the democratic circle because there is an article that says the candidates for the governor, candidates for the mayor, and so on, must espouse loyalty to the unity of Indonesia. But there should exist the opportunity for GAM or the activists that favour Acehese independence, to be part of the mainstream.

To answer your question, if the government really wants to solve the problem of separatism, to avoid the disintegration of Indonesia, there needs to be improvements in justice, welfare and economic development.

Question

Adrian Villanueva: I would like to pose this comment to the panel. The problem of democracy in Asian countries could be problems of culture. Some sociologists, for example, have noted that there are distinct differences between the West and Asians. Where Asians are concerned there is more of groupism, and where Westerners are concerned, the rights of the individual are very important — that is very distinct. The other part is that where Asians are concerned, our power distance is large, in the sense that we accept in most countries authoritarianism, whereas in the West, it is a very narrow gap. As it is we see, of course, there are various degrees of democracy in Asia. Do you feel that with the new generation that is coming up with exposure and dedication, and, of course, economic growth, this will change, or will Asia have its own brand of democratization?

Professor Shamsul A. B.

While I like to use the culture argument, uniqueness of society — which society is not unique, everyone is claiming uniqueness — there is a limit to using culture, but it is very important also to consider the difference between groupism and individualism.

Democracy did not emerge in a vacuum in a particular country. It comes into a particular social historical structure that combines with democracy. The same is true of political Islam too. This can vary from a violent variation to a democratic one. So it is not so much Islam that counts there, it is what was there before Islam came

that counts. Democracy came to Malaysia, but what system did it come into? We have thirteen states, and I have to carry my passport to go to Sabah, or get a work permit to work in Sarawak. That is democracy to us. Is that cultural? No, it is constitutional. I cannot go to Sabah and do anything I like, yet I am a Malaysian citizen. These little things are not cultural, and they are constructed from the historical period. We have to be very careful to use the word culture in analyzing political development.

Professor Temario C. Rivera

I also have some uneasiness with using the cultural explanation as it pre-supposes that there are core values which never change. In the same way that Professor Shamsul was trying to explain it, I think that even our most cherished cultural values do change given the impact of a lot of things — the impact of economic development and growth, the impact of state policies, and the impact of globalization. Although I do not reject the argument that there are in fact certain strengths to a more communitarian outlook and practice, as it can strengthen democracy also, I think what is happening in many Asian societies right now is that all our traditional values are undergoing changes to varying degrees. To a large extent much of what is called communal groupism was also a function of a lack of economic growth. When there is more economic growth and development, people become more empowered, they do not have to rely on an extended family network. State policies of course would be a crucial factor too, because if the state deliberately cultivates an atmosphere of strictness, then that will also impact on cultural values. When one speaks of Asia one needs to examine the concrete social and historical circumstances, but core values do change.

Dr Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead

I would like to support the other two comments about giving too much emphasis to culture, using it as independent variable to explain political processes. In the case of Thailand, the way in which the people at the grassroots level have actually organized themselves, changed the whole perspective of the passive inward-looking peasantry, into bodies which are very articulate, and provides leadership. It is almost like a

shock for academics and middle-class NGOs, going to work with villagers and discovering these natures of villagers. They are well organized, and responding to the opening of political space.

Question

Shee Poon Kim (East Asian Institute): I have two questions. The first question is for Mr Hadar, and the second question is for all the speakers. The first question is the relationship between leadership and democracy. How do you see the traditional and conservative leadership of President Megawati, and the Islamic leadership like Amien Rais and Vice-President Hamzah Haz. How do these types of leaderships affect the future of democracy in Indonesia? Specifically, how does the rise of Islamic forces affect the future of President Megawati, whose popularity and credibility is slowly eroding, like Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. Do you think that the next President is likely to come from an Islamic party?

The second question is an important one which the four speakers have not touched upon. How do you see the Al-Qaeda link of the Islamic terrorist movements in Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, as well as Singapore and its impact on the prospects for democracy in Southeast Asia?

Mr Hadar Gumay

The important thing is that a good democratic system of selection will also get a good, or representative, leader. What I am trying to emphasize here is that the democratic elections are more important. I think Indonesia is also learning, as are the people of Indonesia. There are failures: even Abdurrahman Wahid was elected by the MPR, but it was only for a very short time. Many people are increasingly convinced that each individual can vote themselves. Of course I cannot really deny that many Indonesians, especially the lowly-educated people, are confused, as they do not know how to choose and how to elect their leaders. Most Indonesians will prefer to decide directly who will be leaders. Not just because this particular person has been a leader in their group, or because he is a Muslim, or because he is from a particular ethnic group. The experience shows to everyone that the indirect system of election for president is no longer appropriate if it is to be fair.

To the question of whether Megawati will be president, or Amien Rais, or Hamzah Haz, it is quite difficult to predict. Actually none of them are popular enough at this moment to be elected outright with the system that has been amended in our Constitution. Probably for Megawati it is also very difficult because of her patchy performance, and this issue can be easily used by her opponents. The Muslim parties may also argue that a woman cannot become the leader in Indonesia. At the moment these parties have made an exception because she was a Vice-President, then, by the Constitution, she has been accepted as President right now — but for next time, it would be difficult to say. There may be somebody else who emerges by 2004 but it seems, for an independent candidate, it is just impossible. Only those who come through a political party can realistically be a candidate. I suppose that Amien Rais and the current legislature have seen it in their interests to set up the system like this.

Professor Temario C. Rivera

The relationship between individuals and institutions, and the social historical environment is an interesting one. For a long time in the Philippines, for instance, we have elected lawyers to the presidency. People now believe that these professionals do not get things done, and patterns have changed. So in 1998, we elected Mr Joseph Estrada, a very popular movie actor who never finished college. A charming rogue, as one commentator put it. A little after two years into his six-year term he was removed because people also realized that this President could not deliver. Now we have a new President, and she has a Ph.D. in Economics, and was trained in the US. One complaint by the business community is she is too cold. She comes across as a technocrat with no common touch with the masses. Some have even said she should develop her emotional quotient, and be more charismatic. It is a very difficult question, how do you balance the individual against the institutions. The role of the individual is important, but any individual has to work within certain institutional constraints, and it is very difficult to find a balance between those two.

Democracy also, because of the electoral process, often ends up with the most popular person, not necessarily the most competent. Again there is a need to have an institutional environment that can provide support for the leader. In any case, our experience, of course, is that hopefully through the electoral process itself, and

experience, will convince the people to be more careful about their choices in the electoral system.

On the Al-Qaeda question, most likely two of the Muslim groups have linkages with the Al-Qaeda, because there was a time when a brother-in-law of Mr Osama bin Ladin actually lived in the Philippines. In fact he took a Filipina wife. The intelligence community says that he did have direct ties with at least two groups, the Moro Islamic Liberalization Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf. The Abu Sayyaf was founded by a Muslim who actually fought in the Afghanistan wars against the Soviet Union; and from that there is a very direct linkage.

We are now facing a very difficult position there because the current administration has taken the decision to actively collaborate with the US — the US has even sent troops. The problem was there was a lack of transparency by the administration in discussing the objective of the American forces. We do have a law which allows American forces to come in for training exercises, but when you have about 600 military personnel coming in, what type of operation is that? Is that simply training, or will they now engage in actual combat? The administration says they will just train. Because of the lack of transparency initially in discussing this, it has created a problem both within the government — the Vice President himself has serious reservations about it — and of course many civil society organizations are opposing it. The Nationalist groups, for instance, are vehemently opposed to this because they see it again as an intrusion on the sovereignty of the country, especially in the context of a strong love-hate relationship with the US.

In another sense, however, you can see it from the point of view of the Philippine state, as an attempt to strengthen state capabilities in terms of improving the training and the resources of the military. But there was some mishandling and that is the reason why it has created controversy.

Shamsul A. B.

Just briefly on Al-Qaeda connection — in the Malaysian context we have to look in a broad, wider, longitudinal sense of Malaysia's history dealing with all sorts of extremist fundamentalisms. Communism in Malaysia, which had an international dimension, probably more so than Al-Qaeda, and richer than Al-Qaeda, created an

insurgency problem. The Red Army even visited us from Japan, and now there is Al-Qaeda problem. There are always local and international cults that we have to deal with — using the ISA is nothing new. I do not know how it is going to affect democracy, but it is the case that we are using the ISA more and more often. Perhaps that is the only impact — whether it is a minus or plus, I do not know.

Question

Michael Montesano (Southeast Asian Programme, National University of Singapore): Professor Rivera, I was wondering if you could tell us more about what you know about the decision-making process that did lead the Arroyo administration allowing American troops to go to the southern Philippines and whether the debates tell us something about the status of the military relations in this current administration. You seem not as pessimistic as one might expect in terms of the status of the military relations. I hear rumours, for example, that it is partly Manila's lack of control of troops in the southern command that has led to the acceptance of US troops. I was wondering if you could elaborate on the decision-making process.

Dr Kullada, I was very much intrigued by your reading of the Thaksin administration. I want to ask you three things in particular. One, I would like to ask you to elaborate a little bit on the new generation leaders who have previous bad experiences with earlier Thai regimes that you see playing such an important role in this administration. Second, in view of your optimism about bureaucratic reform, I wonder how you understand the police and military reshuffles of last fall, and whether you take this to be an elaboration or an example of the way that Thaksin in fact is relating to the bureaucracy given the reports of cronyism in both the police and military at the time of those reshuffles. Third, I wonder how you see Thailand projecting its democratic values in the area of foreign policy in the current administration. There seems to be retreat from the line taken by the previous Democrat-led government, especially by the Foreign Minister, Surin.

Professor Temario C. Rivera

Returning to the Al-Qaeda problems in the Philippines, from what I know we can understand the presence of American troops in particular as a confluence of two

factors. To begin with, the Philippine military obviously has been unable to solve the problem, not only with the Abu Sayyaf, but with the other groups. There was a politically-negotiated settlement with the major Islamic group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under Ramos when he was president. It was partly successful until very recently. The head of the Moro National Liberation Front, was in fact elected as Governor of the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao, which by the way is an interesting example of how concepts of autonomy can be used to address not only Islamic but separatist problems.

So you have a long history of the Philippine military's inability to address the problem, even at the military level. The political aspects of course are more complicated. After September 11 the US is now trying to address all kinds of terrorist problems in the world. So what happened was, President Arroyo consented to this arrangement where American troops will come to support the Philippine military. As I said earlier, there was no public transparency in discussing the decision. Even the Vice President, who was supposed to chair the committee, who was in charge of this decision-making process, was effectively by-passed.

When the news became public about the arrival of about 600 American troops, of course, some questions were raised, both in the legislature as well as in civil society. The official explanation now is they are coming here to help train the Philippine military under the visiting forces agreement. That is the official explanation. They are not actually coming in to engage the Abu Sayyaf in actual combat, like what occurred in Afghanistan. But it is difficult to say once they are in the field. Of course there was a qualification, "unless they are attacked", and as a principle of self-defence, they will have to defend themselves. So we would not be surprised if the Americans find themselves in actual battle situations. It is a very complicated situation there right now.

From the point of view of a weak state, relatively speaking, the Philippines can take advantage of these resources to strengthen state capabilities. Nationalists of course would disagree violently there, and would immediately dismiss this as another blatant measure of intervention in the sovereignty of the country.

Dr Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead

On the first question — I look at the developments of Thai leadership in the perspective of history. First the technocrats have become part of the democratic process, and after that there was a surge of the provincial capitalists, who are very much co-opted by the bureaucracy in making money, and are involved in money politics. For people working with Thaksin they just belong to a different group of people, and, as I said, Thaksin himself as a businessman knew the kind of pressure that he had to work under, trying to advance his business. Somehow they have generated a kind of new ethos in dealing with the bureaucracy, which I think is quite important. There is a change in the style of government.

Let us look at the performance of the police force and the military force at the moment. There have been some changes as well in terms of the way in which the police force has become more outward and more committed to deal with crimes linked with local politics. Fifty-two spots in three provinces were searched last week by the police and that indicates quite a dramatic change in the way in which this government is taking local influential people head-on. It is also true that quite a few military personnel are being arrested. In the past, these cases would be put under the carpet for a couple of months and people would never hear of it again. Now military personnel are very heavily built, have a crew-cut hair style, and carry handcuffs. This is quite a new picture. I think there is new commitment to clean up the bureaucracy, especially in dealing with the police and the military. They have come up with a list of policemen involved in the drug trade, which is really a major problem in Thailand.

The second question concerns democratic values in foreign relations. Strangely enough yesterday on the plane I read through two major English newspapers, both of them addressed the failure of Thaksin's government in foreign relations. Thaksin's government did not follow Surin's footsteps in singing the American tune. He has done a lot in terms of enhancing one-to-one regional relationships with neighbouring countries and maybe starting the process of consolidating regional cooperation. He worked quite hard at the beginning of last year to deal with that, including improving communications, and cooperation in setting up certain agricultural prices. All these things seem to escape the attention of the press.

If we take the terrorist problem as the case in point, he had to work under many constraints. Firstly, is the prejudice against him among foreign press. Secondly he was under the obligation of the previous agreements with the American government concerning alliances. Thirdly he had to be very wary of the Islamic opinion. Therefore he did not really come out upfront in denouncing terrorism. Taking all these constraints, it is quite understandable why he took the turn that he did.

Question

Khoo How San: I would like to direct my question to Mr Hadar. When one thinks of international NGOs, one invariably thinks of western international NGOs. I am intrigued by your remark that in Aceh the international NGOs tend to put some distance between themselves and the domestic NGOs. Does this apply to the international Islamic NGOs? Assuming they do operate there.

More broadly I would like to address the next question both to Mr Hadar and Professor Shamsul, on whether the international Islamic NGOs operate in both your countries. Are they welcome there? Given that the assumption is they are rich in funds, do they have the propensity to influence the domestic Islamic NGOs?

Mr Hadar Gumay

When I addressed the practice of international NGOs in Aceh, it was based on just a couple of examples there, and this occurs elsewhere too. For example, we are trying to advocate the creation of the constitutional commission for amendments to a new constitution. In fact after two years we noticed that this process of amendment is not engaging the public. But for this process, it is important to involve the legislature, the political parties, as well the NGOs.

For the second question, again about international NGOs, there are not very many, but the support is much less than the other international NGOs. I do not know exactly whether there are certain international NGOs supporting radical Muslim groups in Indonesia.

Professor Shamsul A. B.

It is very easy to classify — international, local, Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and so on. What I would like to begin with is by saying that there are Islamic groups in Malaysia who get money from all sorts of sources, both halal and haram. Interestingly it is not Islamic NGOs that support these Islamic NGOs in Malaysia, it is government bodies. You look at Mercy, Mercy is a Saudi Arabian funded international NGO where Malaysian doctors go to, and is related to Osama bin Laden. But I think more money comes from the non-Islamic NGOs, if you want to use that category, that support Islamic NGOs. For example, the think-tanks that we have in Malaysia, organized by Anwar Ibrahim and friends, received money from Germany and elsewhere.

The mainstreaming of Islam into the economy has spun off many rich Malaysians, who have created Salam. Salam is a new Malaysian version of peace corps.

Question

Helen Nesadurai (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore): I would like to direct my question to Professor Rivera. I was struck by the point you made about the relationship between deep pockets of poverty and democracy, or the consolidation of democracy. I think you made the point that when you do have large groups of poor and the marginalized, that there are weak constituencies for democracy because they feel that the present system does not take care of their needs. And yet we see worldwide an increasing trend where precisely these groups are clamouring for a democratic process because they see democratization as the best chance of offering them a voice in their communities or their countries. I am wondering are the poor really a weak constituency for democracy per se? Or are they a weak constituency for the political status quo, that they may be actually challenging elite-dominated democracy where the bargains and the negotiations are the just the preserve of a small elite, despite the presence of elections? Do you see the poor being an effective force for a more participatory form of democracy as the Thai experience seems to suggest?

Professor Temario C. Rivera

My statement earlier was not meant to argue the idea that the poor automatically constitute a weak constituency. I was speaking of course of a concrete situation and, as you pointed it out, in a situation where the existing administration have not been able to address a very important social and economic need. In this case there tends to be some kind of an erosion of confidence that democracy, which they identify with a particular government, may in fact be a weak form of governance. But you are right. In one sense they are in effect clamouring for what you may refer to as a more effective form of democratic governance. Of course one can also make the argument that effective governance can exist side by side with democracy. At the same time we should also prevent the romanticizing of the poor, because given a situation where their day-to-day concerns are so tied down to very basic things, they can also be constituencies for what might be termed as anti-democratic forces, because they can be cultivated by authoritarian elements as a support base. To some extent that happened last year in what I referred to as the massive mobilization that took place against President Arroyo. We know that the urban poor have very legitimate demands and yet precisely because of that also, they became prey to what can be termed as a misguided attempt by some of the opposition elites to redirect that kind of anger and frustration. Democratizing countries have to be wary of that.

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