

establishing full relations with China group.

The trouble with even cautiously optimistic forecasts is that so much can still go wrong in Southeast Asia.

Cambodia and Laos are in danger of ceasing to exist as nation states. The almost desperate overtures of the Khmer Rouge leaders to Peking and Bangkok indicate realization of how vulnerable they have made their country to North Vietnam dismantling its infrastructure and dehumanizing its people. The non-violence of Communist takeover of Laos has taken its place to the haste of the Pathet Lao leaders to overcome the special characteristics that saved the Lao people from oppression in the past. When Hanoi is pushing for North and South Vietnam together, its "revolutionary" cadres can concentrate on supporting Thai guerrillas as the Laotian panhandle.

The danger in Indonesia, the Philippines and Burma is that the purblindness of their leaders in equating their own interests with the welfare of their peoples will lead to fresh civil war and possibly international conflict. Students are daring to challenge the army officers under Ne Win who ruined Burma's economy. As in India, there is little evidence in the Philippines of the "new society" arbitrarily established by Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos worth the destruction of a democratic system that could have been used to redress economic inequities. In Indonesia, disclosure of the mismanagement of Pertamina, the state oil monopoly, has led to doubts that foreign investment aid are benefiting anyone but repressing corrupt military officers; the problem compounded by the fact that political opponents to the Suharto regime have been abolished.

In Malaysia, the Malay leaders know what has to be done to "restructure" a multi-racial society fairly but they have not done it. Even in the more adaptive city of Singapore, the People's Action Party under Lee persists in believing that it has all the answers for economic growth without political accountability.

Early in 1974 Seni Pramoj, Thailand's actual opposition leader and Kukrit's brother, laughed off questions about economic development by saying that all peasants had enough to eat. In mid-1974 a few months after he had served, for the second time in Thailand's history, as interim Prime Minister, Seni engaged in a long monologue about the need for more economic development measures, especially to help landless peasants who are increasing in number in the central

rice-growing plains. The contrast says something about what is happening in Thailand.

Following the student overthrow of backward military rulers in October 1973, constitutional democratic government has been relaunched. But the Thais quickly realized that it would succeed only if rapid development of the countryside brought the rural population into the country's mainstream. Kukrit's civilian coalition government is trying to bypass and deflate Bangkok's economic balloon and build the first defence of the nation and the rest of non-Communist Southeast Asia among the surplus rice-producing peasantry. There are risks involved, as the fascist-like goons paid by reactionary police officers to riot against change have demonstrated. But Kukrit has not panicked; most Thais are offended by unnecessary violence, and the risks of not changing to suit Thailand's real nature are greater. The Thais, the only Southeast Asian people not to be colonized, are in a race whose outcome will influence their destiny and that of other Asians.

### Economic and social justice

The scenario for Asia in the next 25 years will be determined largely, as it was in the past 25 years, by how governments and peoples react to the proposition that political stability and liberty can grow only out of economic and social justice. The difference with the past, the new Asian realism, lies in the recent dramatic evidence of what happens when this principle is rejected or ignored.

It is too late to prevent widespread suffering, repression and probably chaos in India and the subcontinent because this simple notion was never taken seriously there. With luck, what may be prevented as the peoples of the subcontinent grope toward new national identities is the spread of conflict to other parts of Asia and the world. If we are unlucky, the opportunities of others for peace and progress will be sapped by mass agony spilling out of India.

The Chinese people are beneficiaries of the apparent acceptance of the crucial lesson for developing Asian countries. If the lesson is rejected because only Chou En-lai among the Communist leaders learnt it well or because a violent struggle for political power takes precedence, then not only China but other Asian nations will lose, and the Soviet Union will gain.

Japan is the progenitor in Asia of the link between economic and political vitality. Japan as model and partner for China and Southeast Asia will help spread peace,

*Thailand seeks to bring rural areas into mainstream*

*India's agony could destroy world's peace*