

Modern Southeast Asia

Once India and Pakistan were given their independence by the British on August 15, 1947 Britain was forced to let go of its other Southeast Asian colonies.

Burma 1948 – Malaysia 1957 – Singapore 1965.

[The only area left under British control was Hong Kong which was given to Mainland China in 1997].

The British were willing to leave the region but not the Dutch or French. The Dutch had held control over the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) for centuries. Making a nation of the East Indies was difficult due to the geography and ethnic diversity. The Malay Peninsula and the 3000 islands that make up the East Indies are a mixture of Indian, Chinese, Buddhist and Islamic Religions, artistic, cultural and political thought. These people do not share racial, national, linguistic or social unity.

During World War II the Japanese conquered these colonial areas. However, after World War II, and before the colonial nations could restore their powers, the leader of the **Indonesian Nationalist Party, Ahmed Sukarno**, began to demand freedom and a war of national liberation broke out in 1945. The United States feared that this war would lead to communism taking control of the area so it persuaded the Dutch to hand over freedom.

In 1950 the Dutch East Indies became the **Republic of Indonesia**; its leader was President Ahmed Sukarno. He still feared European and American colonialism so in 1955 he sponsored the **Bandung Conference**. Twenty-Nine Asian and African Countries were in attendance, representing over one and a half billion people. The conference called for these newly independent states to form a neutral bloc in the Cold War. Prime Minister Nehru of India became the leading spokesman for the “neutralists”

At first Sukarno ruled democratically but in the late 1950's he created a policy called “**Guided Democracy**” which was closely linked to the Indonesian Communist Party. Sukarno moved closer towards Mainland China for assistance and his rule became a dictatorship.

In 1965 the army, allied with Muslim conservatives staged a coup which turned into a popular uprising. Nearly half a million people, mostly communists were killed. Sukarno was forced out of office in 1967. He was replaced by **General Thojib Suharto**. Suharto immediately allied himself with the Western World and created a nation of neutrality.

Even though Suharto had been associated with human-rights violations he promoted extensive economic growth in the area. He was anti-communist and a sincere ally of the United States and England.