

Family Quarrels
www.time.com
Nov. 15, 1968

There is a gloomy mood in South east Asia these days that has nothing to do with the problems of Viet Nam. The trouble has to do with family quarrels in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The group is a promising experiment in political and economic cooperation, but today four of its five members find themselves involved in bitter nationalistic disputes. Malaysia and the Philippines are squabbling over Sabah, a small state in Borneo that now belongs to Malaysia but is claimed by the Philippines. Indonesia and Singapore are at odds over the Singapore government's execution of two Indonesian saboteurs three weeks ago. Only Thailand is still friends with all its ASEAN partners.

> The Philippines v. Malaysia: At the heart of what so far remains this war of words is, quite fittingly, one particular word. That is *padjak*, which today in Malay means "mortgage" or "pawn" but a century ago meant "to lease" or "to cede." The issue is whether the Sultan of Sulu in 1878 ceded his rights to Sabah, as the Malaysians claim, or simply leased those rights, as is maintained in Manila. There is nothing much new about the Philippine claim—former President Diosdado Macapagal raised it during his election campaign in 1961. It remained a relatively minor issue until this summer when President Ferdinand Marcos seized on it as a handy way to win votes for next year's national elections. In what appears to have been a bid for support from the 3,000,000 Moslems living in the southern parts of the archipelago, Marcos dredged up the issue and signed a congressional bill asserting Philippine sovereignty over Sabah. The Philippine Moslems, who are mostly underprivileged and poor, would like access to Sabah's prospering economy. They also feel a kinship with Sabah's 200,000 Moslems.

Although he has on several occasions described the claim as strictly pro forma and pledged that "we will not act on it militarily under" any circum-stances," his signature of the bill triggered an angry Malaysian response. In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah's capital, effigies of Marcos were burned. A brief attempt at a cooling-off period (TIME, Aug. 16) failed. Malaysia passed legislation purporting to nullify the Philippine action and condemned it as a "composite of fantasy, fallacy and fiction." Now, diplomatic contacts are minimal. Largely overlooked in the imbroglio are the 600,000 Sabahans themselves, who, including the Moslem minority which has considerable cultural and economic influence in Sabah, would clearly prefer to stay in Malaysia. >Singapore v. Indonesia: In March 1965, a band of Indonesian marines infiltrated Singapore, then still a part of the newborn nation of Malaysia, on a sabotage mission. They planted a 25-lb. explosive charge in an office building, and the blast left three dead and 30 injured. Two of the marines were captured, tried for murder and sentenced to death. The incident was one of the nastier moments of Indonesian President Sukarno's campaign against Malaysia, which ended for all practical purposes with the coup against Sukarno later that year.

Indonesia's new leaders did their best to mend the ruptured relationships caused by Sukarno's irrationalities. They also tried hard to persuade Singapore not to carry out the executions of the marines. The Singapore government, however, stuck to its decision, pointing out that the act of sabotage had resulted in the deaths of three persons. And so, in a cold, misty dawn at Singapore's Changi Prison last month, the two were hanged.

Indonesians were outraged. As police casually watched, some 300 students stormed the Singapore embassy in Djakarta and gutted it. Across Indonesia, other rioters seized on the fact that Singapore's population is mostly Chinese and staged rampages through Chinese

sections, burning cars and shops. The two marines were given a state funeral in Djakarta. Last week tempers had begun to cool. Foreign Minister Adam Malik, backed by President Suharto, made it completely clear that there would be no break in relations. In a further attempt to hold ASEAN on course, he offered his nation's help in mediating the Sabah dispute.

Copyright © 2007 Time Inc.

Source : <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,723859,00.html>