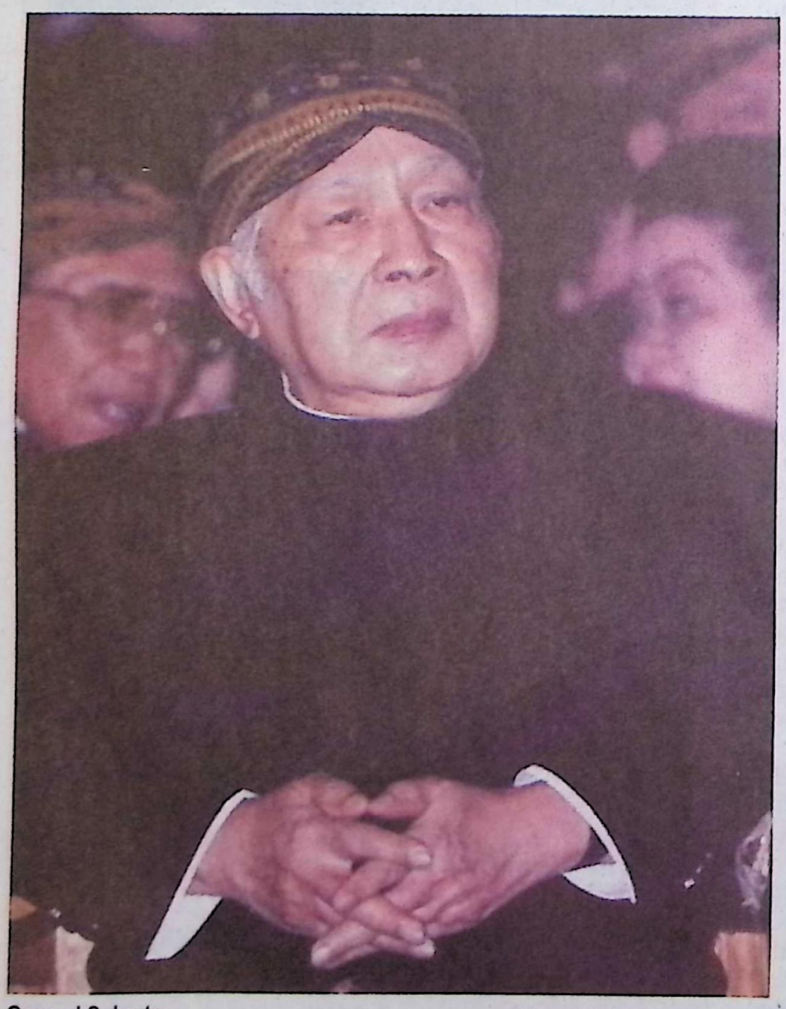
The Suharto Legacy-- as he Lay Dying-II

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General Suharto.

Continued from last week.

Human rights organisations as well as almost all leading historians have long accused Suharto of playing a key role in the 1965 US-supported military coup designed to sideline the charismatic, anti-Western President Sukarno, a founder of the non-aligned movement, and destroy the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), then the third largest communist party in the world.

On the night of September 30/October 1, 1965, a group of Sukarno's personal guards kidnapped and murdered six right-wing anti-Communist generals. Sukarno's guards claimed that they were trying to stop a CIA-backed military coup, which was planned to remove Sukarno from power on "Army Day". Suharto joined surviving right-wing general Abdul Haris Nasution to spearhead a propaganda campaign against the PKI and Sukarno's loyalists.

What followed was a military takeover and a months' long orgy of terror, the mass murder of PKI members, citizens of Chinese origin, progressive men and women, intellectuals, artists and anyone who was denounced by neighbours or foes. Massacres were mainly performed by the military and by anti-communist religious groups and their youth affiliates who went on a rampage against "atheists". Serious estimates of the pogrom range from 500,000 (Australian author Hamish MacDonald, Suharto's Indonesia) to 2 million deaths (novelist and long-time political prisoner Pramoedya Ananta Toer). What is certain is that Indonesia's killing fields were among the most blood-stained in world history. Tens of thousands more were imprisoned for decades or longer.

The US supported the coup, the CIA supplying Suharto and his allies with a list of 10,000 suspected communists. A subsequent CIA study of the events concluded that "In terms of the numbers killed the anti-PKI massacres in Indonesia rank as one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century." (George McT. and Audrey R. Kahin, Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia.)

Political dissent was destroyed. So were the trade unions and peasant unions. Indonesia became "open for business", mainly for multinational mining and oil companies willing to take advantage of a scared and docile work force and prepared to pay undisclosed amounts in bribes in exchange for access to the country's plentiful raw materials including oil, gas and timber.

Thousands of teachers were murdered. Artists were silenced, film studios closed. Places where