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THE BRITISH IN SABAH & SARAWAK



GOODMARK

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PREFACE

Our country is well known as a country which was colonized. The colonialists had brought about some good and bad effects to the people of Malaysia today.

Besides that, there are immigrants of various races who have now become part of the people of this country.

These impact of colonialism and the migration of people of various races have made Malaysia unique.

This historical series is published to help students of primary and lower secondary schools to enhance their understanding of the history of our country.

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THE BRITISH IN SABAH AND SARAWAK

THE BRITISH IN SABAH

Before the arrival of the British, Sabah was under the rule of the Brunei and the Sulu Sultanates. During the mid-17th century, Sulu emerged as a strong government.

The northern and eastern coasts of Sabah were controlled by the Sulu Sultanate. Dignitaries of the Sulu government ruled these occupied territories. They were called *Datuk* or *Datu*.

Do you know when did the British first set

foot in Sabah? In 1865, Charles Lee Moses who was a Consul of the United States of America managed to obtain a leasehold on Sabah. The leasehold was enforced for 10 years. Charles Lee Moses only ruled the western coast of Sabah. The Brunei Sultanate had permitted the United States Consul to do so.

In 1865, Charles Lee Moses sold off his rights to the American Trading Company. The company was headed by William Torrey. However, William Torrey did not last long in Sabah. He in turn sold off his rights to Baron Von Overbeck who was the Consul General of Austria in Hong Kong.

In 1878, a treaty was signed between Overbeck, Dent and the Sultan of Sulu. With the treaty, the Sultan of Sulu agreed to hand over all his rights of Sabah to Overbeck's company. Overbeck would in return pay five thousand ringgit to him annually.

Overbeck's company did not last long either

in Sabah. Overbeck sold his shares to Dent. Dent then set up a new company. He applied to obtain his company's charter from the British government.

On 1 November 1881, the British government granted the charter and the Chartered Company of North Borneo was set up. The company was given full authority to rule over Sabah.

The Chartered Company of North Borneo had its own independent administration. Its chief administrator was a governor who was appointed by the Board of Directors. The first Governor of Sabah was William Hood Treacher. He was the Governor of Sabah from 1881 to 1887.

The Chartered Company of North Borneo chose Sandakan as the capital. Sandakan was also the administration headquarters in 1883.

During the rule of the Chartered Company of North Borneo, Sabah was divided into



The Map of Sabah

residencies. Every residency was headed by a Resident. The Residency system still remains until today. Do you know how many residencies are there in Sabah now? There are four residencies.

The residencies in Sabah were divided into a number of districts. Every district was headed by a District Officer. The District Officer did not carry out their duties all by themselves. They were assisted by local headmen. They were called the *Ketua Anak Negeri* (State Local Headmen).

Usually the *Ketua Anak Negeri* consisted of headmen from the local community which formed the majority race. Among the major races of Sabah were the Kadazans and the Muruts.

At the village level, there were chief villagers. The chief villagers were called the *Orang Tua* (Old Men). The main duties of the *Ketua Anak Negeri* and the *Orang Tua* were the maintenance of peace, the collection of taxes and the administration of justice in their own districts and



Multi racial society in Sabah

tration of justice in their own districts and villages.

Besides that, the Advisory Council was formed in 1883. The main duty of this council was to assist the Governor in his administration work. In 1912, the Legislative Council was formed. The function of this council was to gather the views of the various races in drafting the laws.

In legal aspects, the Chartered Company of North Borneo was empowered to try cases in connection with the natives. These cases were connected to the Customary and Syariah laws.

The Chartered Company of North Borneo brought major economy and social development to Sabah. Investors from the West were offered lands with low rates of payment. The purpose was to attract more investors from the West to Sabah.

When there were many investors in Sabah,



Kota Kinabalu — State Capital of Sabah

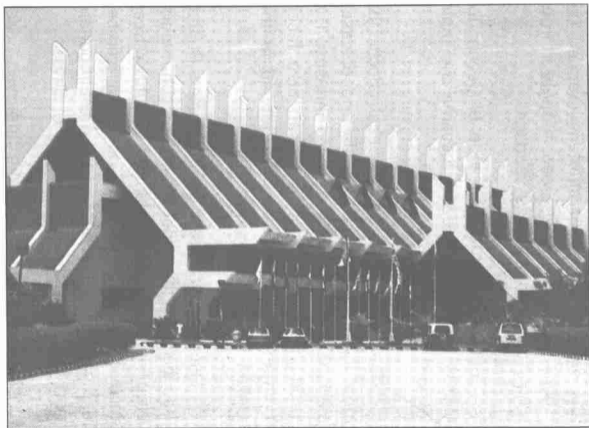
the problem of labour shortage cropped up. Therefore, many Chinese were brought in from China to ease the labour shortage.

Tobacco was the main crop of Sabah. Towards the 1880's, tobacco became the main export.

Natural disaster that struck Sabah effected the production of tobacco. Floods and diseases became a threat to the tobacco industry. The production of tobacco in Sabah also faced competition from tobacco produced in the United States of America.

Later, rubber trees were introduced. Rubber had become the most important commercial crop since 1892. The planting of rubber trees increased yearly. Other commodities were timber and gold. Sandakan became the most important port in the world for the export of timber.

The transportation system improved under



Sabah Museum

the administration of the Chartered Company of North Borneo. The first railway was built in 1896. This railway connected the town of Weston with Beauton. This 32 kilometre long railway was completed in 1900.

In 1902, another railway was built from Beaufort to Jesselton, now Kota Kinabalu. Next, in 1905, the railway was extended from Beaufort to Tenom. This was a 48-kilometre long railway.

Roads were built too. Towards 1941, there were a total of 165 kilometres of tarred roads in Jesselton, Sandakan, Kudat, Lahad Datu and Tawau. The administration of the Chartered Company of North Borneo had brought major development to Sabah.

However, there were also oppositions from the local people. This was because there were some policies carried out by the Company which were against the traditional practice and free-



Tapping a rubber tree

dom of the local people. The oppositions were led by Mat Salleh.

The British took a long time to arrest Mat Salleh. His expertise in warfare blocked the efforts by the British. In the end, Mat Salleh was killed on 31 January 1890 when the British attacked him at Tambunan.

Besides that, there were also oppositions from the Muruts. They were against the Company because they were heavily taxed. They were also forced to complete the works of constructing roads into the jungle.

In the Kinabalu district, the oppositions were led by Si Gunting. They consisted of the Dusuns. They started disturbances in the Kinabalu district in 1894. However, their oppositions were easily quashed by the British. This was because they were short of weapons. Other disturbances were also quashed by the British.



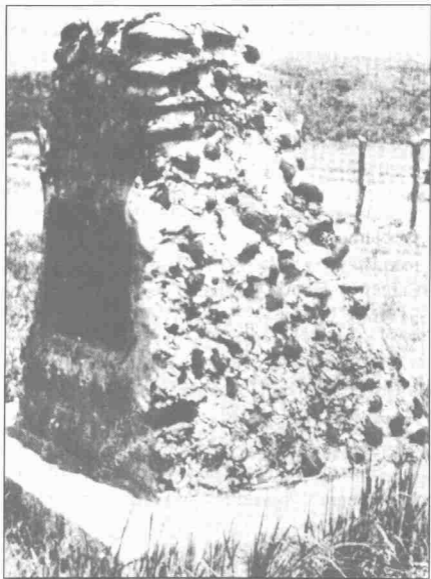
Mat Salleh

During the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia, from 1942 to 1945, North Borneo was also occupied by the Japanese. After the surrender of the Japanese, Sabah was again ruled by the Company. Later, on 15 July 1946, Borneo was officially handed over by the Company to become a British colony.

This was because the Company was facing problems. The problems were limited financial resources and the shortage of manpower to rebuild Sabah. Sabah had suffered heavy destructions as a result of the Second World War.

Therefore, North Borneo was administered by a Governor. The Governor was assisted by an Advisory Council, a State Executive Council and a Legislative Council. The Advisory Council and the State Executive Council consisted of nine members each acting as advisers to the Governor.

In the Legislative Council, the Governor acted



Mat Salleh monument

Secretary, the State Attorney General and the Secretary of Finance.

Under the rule of the British government, North Borneo was divided into four residencies. Every residency was headed by a Resident. The Residencies were then broken into a number of districts for the ease of administration.

Local Councils were introduced on 1 January 1952 in the Kota Belud district. This was followed by the Sipitang district and the Papar district on 1 January 1955. A number of local people were given the opportunity to become members of the Councils. They could voice their opinions and they were the representatives of the areas they came from.

Under the administration of the Chartered Company of North Borneo, Sabah had experienced vast changes. The handing over of North Borneo to the British convinced the British government of Sabah's potential. They believed



Handicrafts from Sabah



Tamu Besar

government of Sabah's potential. They believed that the rule over North Borneo should be continued. Therefore, they introduced the Local Council in every district.

THE BRITISH IN SARAWAK

Sarawak was originally a part of the colony of the Brunei Sultanate. During the reign of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin, Sarawak was administered by Pangeran Mahkota.

The original residents of Sarawak, were the native tribes of Iban, Dayak Laut, Malanau, Malay and others. The rule of Pangeran Mahkota did not receive support from the people. Pangeran Mahkota imposed heavy taxes on the people of Sarawak.

Therefore, the local people were against Pangeran Mahkota. The oppositions of the local people were supported by Pangeran Usop. Pangeran Usop was the uncle of Sultan Omar Ali. He was banished to Sarawak because of his opposition to Raja Muda Hassim. Raja Muda Hassim was also an uncle of the Sultan.

The collection of taxes in Sarawak was handed

over to the Brunei Sultanate. The Brunei Sultanate had financial problems because they were constantly being attacked by the Spaniards and the Portuguese. The people of Sarawak were pressured all the more.

An upheaval was staged in 1836 with the assistance of a local Malay leader, Datuk Patinggi Ali.

This opposition was participated by the Malays, the Bidayuhs and the Dayaks. The leader of the Dayaks was Sultan Samba. Raja Muda Hassim went to Sarawak in 1838. He tried to restore peace to Sarawak. His efforts failed. He was scared to act against the rebels.

In 1839, British traveller James Brooke arrived in Sarawak. Brooke took the opportunity to meet with the leaders of Sarawak, including Raja Muda Hassim and Pangeran Mahkota.

Brooke's purpose in Sarawak was to establish

trading relationship. The British government in Singapore wanted to obtain antimony from Sarawak. Raja Muda Hassim took the opportunity to request for assistance from James Brooke.

In 1840, James Brooke returned to Sarawak. The upheaval staged by the local people was still going on. Raja Muda Hassim requested assistance from James Brooke. He offered a few districts to James Brooke in return for his assistance in restoring peace.

A few rebellions were quashed with the help of James Brooke. After the rebellions had ended, Pangeran Mahkota went back to Brunei. Pangeran Mahkota objected to Raja Muda Hassim's plan of surrendering the Sarawak district to James Brooke.

James Brooke demanded the execution of the promise by Raja Muda Hassim. Actually, the promise was given without the knowledge of the Sultan of Brunei. Therefore, Raja Muda Hassim



James Brooke

had to stall James Brooke's demand.

This was not pleasing to James Brooke. Therefore, James Brooke reacted firmly by sending the *Royalist* and other warships to Brunei. This was to threaten the Sultan of Brunei. Raja Muda Hassim had to explain the truth to the Sultan of Brunei.

In the end, the Sultan of Brunei agreed to recognize James Brooke as the ruler of Sarawak. On 24 September 1841, James Brooke was officially recognized as the Raja of Sarawak by the Sultan of Brunei.



Charles Vyner Brooke

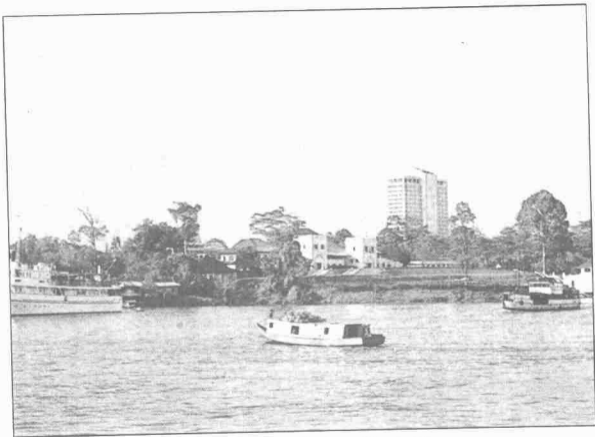
The Rule of James Brooke

The appointment of James Brooke was objected by the local people. However, the army troops of James Brooke managed to quash the oppositions. James Brooke was able to expand his territories.

In the early stages, the territory of Sarawak was only restricted to the surrounding areas of Kuching. James Brooke paid a tribute of \$2,500 annually to the Sultan of Brunei.

While ruling Sarawak, James Brooke introduced law codes in Sarawak. The law codes were used to maintain peace in Sarawak. Offences like stealing, murder and robbing were given severe punishments. Punishments were based on the Brunei Traditional Laws.

James Brooke also banned the practice of slavery and head-hunting. The people of Sarawak were given the freedom to trade, except in opium and antimony.



Kuching — State Capital of Sarawak

In 1855, the Supreme Council was set up as an advisory council to James Brooke. Members of the Council were James Brooke, his two nephews, James Brooke Jr. and Charles Brooke, together with four Malay *Datus* who were appointed.

The Sultan of Brunei was worried over the influence of James Brooke. The Sultan of Brunei himself was against James Brooke. The state dignitaries were also against James Brooke. In the end, Raja Muda Hassim who was friendly with James Brooke was killed.

James Brooke together with Admiral Cochrane went to Brunei to hold discussions with the Sultan of Brunei. The Sultan of Brunei refused to negotiate. Then James Brooke and Cochrane attacked and captured the Brunei Town.

As a result, the Sultan of Brunei had to escape to save himself. His throne would be returned to him if he agreed to cooperate with James Brooke.



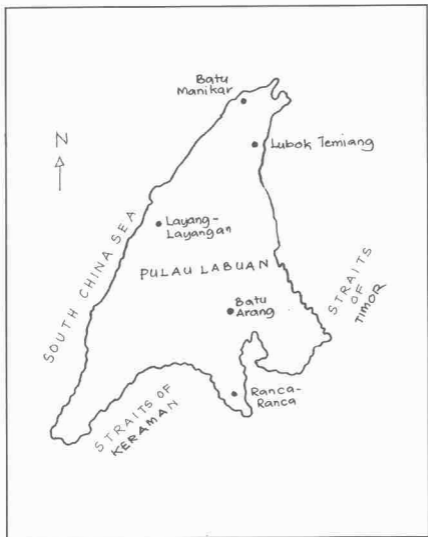
Map of Borneo, showing North Borneo

In the discussion, the Sultan of Brunei agreed to hand over Sarawak completely to James Brooke. The Sultan of Brunei would also hand over Labuan to the British. James Brooke and Admiral Cochrane would then return the Brunei Town to the Sultan.

James Brooke continued to expand his influence. He occupied the Rejang Valley in 1853. In 1861, the territory between Rejang and Brunei was handed over by the Sultan of Brunei to James Brooke. James Brooke paid a compensation of \$4,500 annually to the Sultan of Brunei.

In 1863, the British government sent a British Consul to Sarawak to assist James Brooke. The British government also recognized James Brooke as the Raja of Sarawak.

James Brooke returned to England in 1863. He passed away there in 1868. Before his return to England, Charles Brooke had been appointed to replace him. Charles Brooke started to serve



Pulau Labuan

in Sarawak as the *Tuan Muda* (Young Master) in 1852 in the district of Lundu.

The Rule of the Brooke Family

Charles Brooke divided Sarawak into three divisions. Every division was headed by a Resident. In April 1865, Charles Brooke formed the State Council.

Charles encouraged other races to immigrate to Sarawak. Chinese leaders were appointed to manage the Chinese immigrants.

He allowed schools to be set up. The setting up of factories and agriculture were encouraged. Therefore, the exports of Sarawak increased.

Charles returned to England and died on 17 May 1917. He was replaced by Vyner Brooke.

The Second World War began in late 1941.

Sarawak was occupied by the Japanese from 1941 to 1945. After the Japanese had surrendered, Vyner Brooke ruled over Sarawak again.

On 1 July 1946, Vyner handed Sarawak over to the British government. With that, Sarawak became a British colony.

