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# THE BRITISH IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

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Goodmark Enterprise  
Kuala Lumpur

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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 PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

Our country gained independence from the British colonial rule on 31 August 1957. The British left the most effect on the people of Malaya as compared with the Portuguese and the Dutch. The Portuguese and the Dutch colonized only Melaka but the British colonized the whole of Malaya.

The actual British colonization started with Perak in 1874. However, the colonization began in 1786. The British occupied Pulau Pinang in that year. How did this happen?

Kedah was being threatened by the Siamese from the north and the Bugis from the south. Sultan Muhamad Jiwa needed a foreign power to provide protection from the attacks of these two countries.

Francis Light was looking for a port for the British East India Company. Sultan Abdullah who had succeeded Sultan Muhamad Jiwa offered Pulau Pinang to the British with the hope of gaining protection. Francis Light promised to provide assistance to the Kedah Sultan. That was how the British came to occupy Pulau Pinang.

The Kedah Sultan requested Francis Light to honour his promise of providing protection. However, the British East India Company refused because it did not want to oppose the Siamese government. The Kedah Sultan was then all ready to attack Pulau Pinang.

Francis Light reacted swiftly and planned an attack on the Kedah army. In 1791, Francis Light

managed to defeat the Kedah army which was based in Seberang Perai. Sultan Abdullah was forced to sign a treaty with the British East India Company on 1 May 1791.

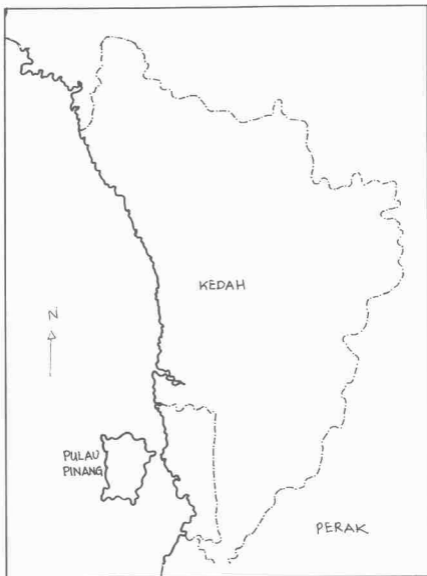
According to the treaty, the British East India Company agreed to pay the amount of £6000 for the surrender of Pulau Pinang. The British would pay this money every year as long as they occupied Pulau Pinang.

The treaty did not touch on the military assistance of the British to Kedah. Therefore, Kedah was still under the threat of the Siamese.

In 1798, Sultan Abdullah died. The throne of Kedah was ascended by Sultan Diyauddin Mukarram Shah. At that time, the British were planning to obtain a piece of land from Kedah coast opposite Pulau Pinang.

In 1800, the Lieutenant Governor of Pulau Pinang, Sir George Leith held negotiations with





*The map of Pulau Pinang*

the Kedah Sultan. As a result of the negotiation, a treaty was signed between the Kedah Sultan and Sir George Leith.

According to the treaty, the Kedah Sultan agreed to surrender Seberang Perai to the British East India Company. The Company agreed to pay £4000 a year. With that, the British East India Company had to pay £10 000 a year to the Sultan of Kedah.

The position of the British became stronger. They controlled both sides of the port of Pulau Pinang. The defence was also strengthened. At the same time, Kedah was still under the threat of the Siamese.

In 1821, Siam attacked Kedah because it was angry with the Kedah Sultan for surrendering Pulau Pinang to the British. Siam occupied Kedah until 1842. However, the Kedah Sultan was allowed to receive protection in Pulau Pinang.



After occupying Pulau Pinang, the British wanted to occupy Singapore too. They found that Singapore was more suitable as a port. Singapore was situated in the middle of the trade route from the East to the West. Stamford Raffles who was sent by the British Governor General in India was attracted to the location of Singapore.

At that time, there was a power tussle in the Johor empire. Sultan Mahmud who died in 1812 had two sons. Sultan Mahmud should have been succeeded by Tengku Hussein.

The Bugis who were very powerful in Johor, however, appointed Tengku Abdul Rahman, the younger brother of Tengku Hussein, as the Sultan. Tengku Hussein was unable to regain the throne of Johor. The Dutch recognized Tengku Abdul Rahman as the Sultan of Johor.

The tussle over the throne of Johor provided Stamford Raffles with an opportunity. Tengku Hussein would be recognized as the Sultan of



*The straits of Melaka*

Johor if the British were allowed to establish a settlement in Singapore. Temenggung Abdul Rahman agreed to Raffles offer, because he supported Tengku Hussein.

In the end, on 30 January 1819, a treaty was signed between Raffles and Tengku Hussein together with Temenggung Abdul Rahman. According to the treaty, the British were permitted to build a factory in Singapore. Temenggung Abdul Rahman would be paid a sum of £300 a year as gratuity.

Raffles felt that Sultan Abdul Rahman of Johor would never accept the treaty. He was under the influence of the Dutch. Therefore, the British recognized Tengku Hussein as the legal Sultan of Johor.

On 6 February 1819, Raffles signed another treaty with Temenggung Abdul Rahman and Tengku Hussein. According to this treaty, Tengku Hussein and Temenggung Abdul Rahman agreed to relinquish all their claims.



*The map of Riau Island*

The British East India Company was ready to pay a yearly pension of £5000 to Sultan Hussein and £3000 to Temenggung Abdul Rahman. By this treaty, the British had full control over Singapore.

The British occupation in Singapore was opposed strongly by the Dutch. The Dutch claimed that Singapore was under their rule. They wanted the British to retreat from Singapore and threatened to use force to drive away the British from Singapore.

The British would not budge. They remained defending the occupation of Singapore. Singapore was made a free port. The port of Singapore progressed rapidly within a short period of time.

Later, the Dutch and the British agreed to negotiate for a solution to the Singapore problem. Therefore, on 17 March 1824, the Anglo-Dutch Treaty or the London Treaty was signed.





The map of Sumatra

By this treaty, the Dutch agreed to recognize Singapore as part of the British controlled territory. The Dutch handed Melaka over to the British. In return, the British handed Bangkahulu over to the Dutch. Bangkahulu was situated on the west coast of Sumatera.

The British promised not to set up any settlement south of Singapore and in Sumatera. As for the Dutch, they agreed not to establish any settlement or sign any treaty with any state to the north of the Teberau Straits.

A boundary was drawn to separate each other's ruling territories. With that, Melaka fell into the hands of the British. The British had been eyeing for Melaka for a long time. At last, they managed to occupy Melaka in an easy manner.

The British occupation of Pulau Pinang, Singapore and Melaka was a new era for the Malay Peninsula. At the early stages of their occupation,



*Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*

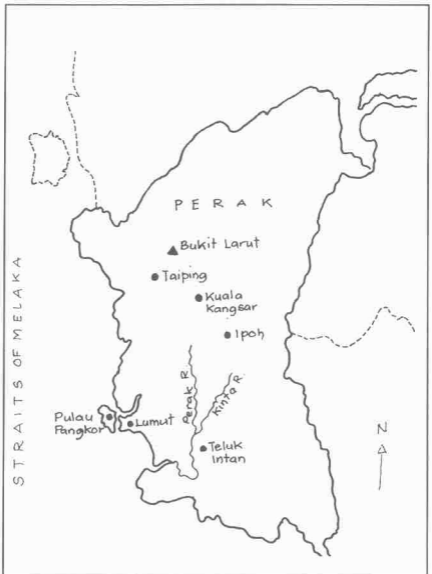
the British did not want to practise the policy of interfering with the affairs of the Malay States.

However, in September 1873, the British started the policy of interference. The decision was made by Lord Kimberley who was the Secretary of British Colonial Office in London.

The British interference started in Perak. At that time, Perak was in a chaotic state. Clashes took place between the Chinese triads. They were fighting over the tin mining areas.

Tussle over the throne of Perak also took place. This provided Sir Andrew Clarke with an opportunity to interfere. Sir Andrew Clarke was the Governor of the Straits Settlement with its headquarters in Singapore.

The tussle over the throne of Perak started with the death of Sultan Ali who lived in Sayong. Raja Ismail, the Raja Bendahara, was installed as



*The map, showing Perak*

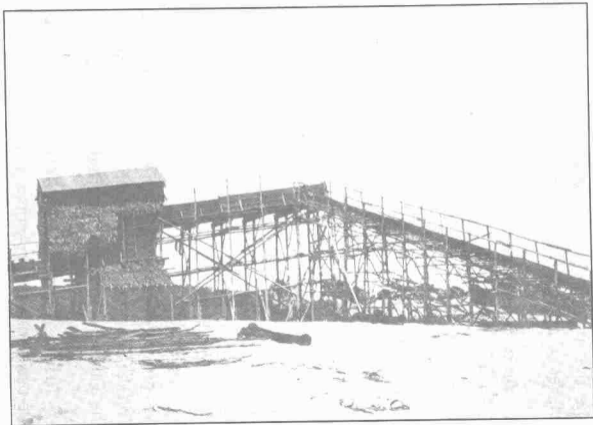
the Sultan of Perak. Raja Abdullah, the Regent of Perak, objected to the installation.

According to the ascension system of the Perak Sultanate, when a Sultan died, the Regent would succeed him. In this manner, Raja Abdullah should have become the Sultan because he was the Regent. Therefore, Raja Abdullah proclaimed himself the Sultan. Raja Abdullah was supported by a few headmen from southern Perak.

Clashes between the Chinese triads erupted in Larut. The Chinese in Larut were separated into two groups. The groups were the Ghee Hin and the Hai San. Their clashes led to the Larut War.

The situation became more chaotic when the two groups were involved in the civil war of Perak. The Hai San group supported Raja Ismail, whereas the Ghee Hin group supported Raja Abdullah.

To settle this dispute, Raja Abdullah requested the assistance of Sir Andrew Clarke. Sir Andrew



*The tin mine*

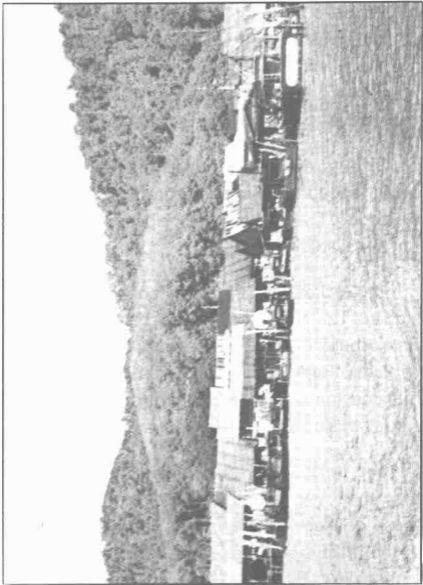
Clarke, the Governor of the Straits Settlement, stayed in Singapore. He planned to interfere in the Perak affairs. This was due to the fact that Perak was rich in tin. The British traders urged their government to take control of Perak.

Sir Andrew Clarke invited the Malay leaders and the leaders of the Chinese triads to attend a meeting. The meeting was held in Pulau Pangkor on the warship *Pluto*.

On 20 January 1874, the Pangkor Treaty was signed. The treaty ended the dispute in Perak. Raja Abdullah was installed as the new Sultan of Perak. Raja Ismail was given a pension and retained the title of the Regent of Perak. Sultan Abdullah also agreed to accept a British Resident.

The function of the Resident was to advise the Sultan on administration matters, except those connected with religion and the customs of the Malays. The first British Resident in Perak was J.W.W. Birch.





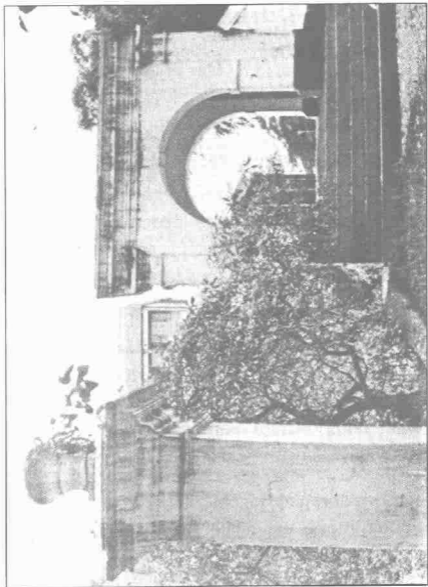
Fishing village at Pulau Pangkor

However, Birch acted beyond the authority given to him. Raja Abdullah and the leaders of Perak murdered him. The British then attacked Perak and this led to the Perak War. Raja Abdullah was defeated. The British continued to rule over Perak but learned to be more cautious.

The same thing happened in Selangor. Civil war erupted between the leaders. The Chinese miners also fought against one another. This gave the British an opportunity to interfere.

The civil war which started in 1867 in Selangor was between Raja Abdullah and Raja Mahdi. Both wanted to control the Klang district which was rich in tin. At that time, the Sultan of Selangor was Sultan Abdul Samad. He appointed his son-in-law Tengku Kudin to end the Klang War.

This enraged Raja Mahdi. He was against the appointment, especially where Tengku Kudin was helped by Raja Ismail to oppose Raja Mahdi. Raja Mahdi was the son of Raja Abdullah.



*Raja Mahdi's Fort*

The Klang War grew worse due to the disputes between the triads. Tengku Kudin was supported by the Hai San Group. Raja Mahdi was supported by the Ghee Hin group. In the end, Tengku Kudin was victorious in the battle. He was helped by a mercenary army from Pahang and Yap Ah Loy. The Klang War ended in 1873.

Towards the end of 1873, a new problem cropped up in Selangor. Pirates were actively roaming the seas. Later, a group of pirates attacked a ship along Sungai Jugra.

Sir Andrew Clarke had been waiting for such an opportunity. The pirate attack was taken as an excuse to interfere in Selangor. A British Resident and a Deputy Resident were positioned in Selangor. J.G. Davidson was appointed as the Resident and Frank Swettenham as the Deputy Resident.

The British interference in Negeri Sembilan started in Sungai Ujong because of a dispute



*Tengku Kudin*

between two leaders, Dato' Kelana Sayid Abdul Rahman and Dato' Bandar. These two leaders were fighting over the right to collect taxes in Sungai Linggi. The taxes were for the tin brought out through that river.

Dato' Kelana Sayid Abdul Rahman requested Andrew Clarke to recognize him as the ruler of Sungai Ujong. A letter of agreement was signed between Dato' Kelana Sayid Abdul Rahman and the British on 21 April 1874.

Dato' Bandar opposed the agreement and attacked Dato' Kelana Sayid Abdul Rahman. Dato' Kelana Sayid Abdul Rahman sought the help of the British. With the assistance of the British, Dato' Bandar was defeated. Therefore, Dato' Kelana Sayid Abdul Rahman agreed to receive a Deputy Resident. The Deputy Resident was W.I. Tatham.

The British were still not satisfied with their efforts. They wanted a wider influence over the Malay States. The Governor of the Straits Set-

tlement, Sir Frederick Weld, went to Pahang. His purpose was to persuade Sultan Wan Ahmad to accept a British representative. The British wanted to obtain timber from Pahang and did not want the state to fall into the hands of the Germans. Sultan Wan Ahmad had sold pieces of land to German traders.

Sultan Wan Ahmad refused to listen to persuasion. However, in 1887, Sultan Ahmad agreed to receive a British Agent. The British Agent was Hugh Clifford. Sultan Ahmad agreed after the persuasion of Sultan Abu Bakar (Sultan of Johor).

In February 1888, a British citizen of Chinese descent, Go Hai, was killed within the palace grounds of Sultan Ahmad in Pekan. The British seized this opportunity to force Sultan Ahmad to receive a Resident. In the end, a British Resident was appointed in Pahang. J.P. Rodger was the first British Resident.

After successfully interfering in Perak, Selangor,

Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, the British wanted to obtain other states as well. The Northern Malay states became the dream of the British.

The Northern Malay States were Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis. These states were the protectorates of Siam.

The British government tried hard to persuade the Siamese government to let go of these protectorates so that these states could be obtained by the British.

In 1909, a treaty was signed between the British and the Siamese governments. Through this treaty, the states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu were handed over to the British. These states were called the Non-confederated Malay States.

Another state that was called the Non-confederated Malay State was Johor. The British tried to rule in Johor but failed. This was because the



Johor government was very firm when dealing with the British influence.

In 1914, Sultan Ibrahim received a British Adviser. However, the British failed to control the administration of Johor because the Sultan and the leaders managed to uphold the sovereignty of Johor. Sultan Abu Bakar was assisted by a few leaders like Datuk Jaafar bin Haji Muhamad, Abdul Rahman bin Andak and Datuk Mohd Salleh bin Perang.

Many changes were carried out by the British to develop the Malay Peninsula, though actually for the benefit of the British. The British developed the economy.

In 1876, Sir Henry Wickham brought 70 000 rubber seeds from Brazil. The seeds were sown in the Botanical Garden in Kew, London.

Only a handful of seeds germinated. In 1877, some of these seedlings were brought to Singa-

pore and Kuala Kangsar. Sir Hugh Low planted these rubber seedlings in his own front garden. Later, these rubber trees managed to supply rubber seeds for other rubber planters.

The British developed the tin industry by introducing the dredge. They took over the tin industry from the Chinese.

The system of education also improved. Before the arrival of the British, the education in the Malay Peninsula was mainly religious. During the British rule, there were four types of schools. There were Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil schools.

The first Malay school was built in Glugor, Pulau Pinang, and was a branch of the Penang Free School. Penang Free School was the first English school in the Malay Peninsula. In 1856, two Malay schools were started in Singapore. However, the British were not sincere in providing education to the people of Malaya, especially the Malays.

The position of the British started to dwindle with the coming of the Japanese army. The Japanese army first landed in Kota Bahru and Alor Setar on 8 December 1941.

The British army was unable to defend Malaya. They had to retreat. Two of the British warships, the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* were sunk by the Japanese off the coast of Kuantan.

The British had to retreat to India after the Japanese occupied Malaya and Singapore. The Japanese took only two and half months to capture Malaya and Singapore. Singapore fell into the hands of the Japanese army on 15 February 1942.

After the Japanese had surrendered on 15 August 1945, the British returned to Malaya in September 1945.

During the Japanese occupation of Malaya, the British government in London planned to set up a new government in Malaya. Sir Harold Mac

Michael was sent to Malaya to obtain the consent of the Malay Rulers.

The Malayan Union was opposed by the Malays. Malay organizations were formed to protest against the British government.

The Malays under the leadership of Dato' Onn bin Jaafar set up the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) to oppose the Malayan Union. This organization was formed in Johor Bahru and united all the Malays. UMNO organized rallies and protests all over the nation to oppose the Malayan Union.

The strong objection from the Malays surprised the British government. The Malayan Union which was established on 1 April 1946 was boycotted by the Malays and the sultans. The sultans did not attend the swearing in ceremony of Sir Edward Gent as the Governor. Sir Edward Gent was first and also the last Governor of the Malayan Union.

On 25 July 1946, the British government appointed a working committee to draft a new constitution for a new government to replace the Malayan Union.

An agreement was reached in December 1946. Later, the Federation of Malaya was pronounced on 1 February 1948. However, the communists were against the formation of the Federation of Malaya. They rebelled in June 1948.

Since then, the efforts of achieving independence were started. In January 1956, Tunku Abdul Rahman led a mission to London. The mission was called the Independence Mission. The purpose of the mission was to negotiate with the British government for the independence of Malaya. The negotiation went on from 18 January to 6 February 1956.

As a result of the negotiation, the London Agreement 1956 was signed. The British government promised to grant independence to Malaya on 31 August 1957.

Tunku Abdul Rahman returned to Malaya and announced to the people of his success. He announced at Padang Hilir Melaka that Malaya would gain its independence on 31 August 1957.

As a result of the London Agreement too, a commission was formed. The commission was called the Reid Commission because it was headed by Lord Reid. The Reid Commission drafted the constitution.

On 31 August 1957, Tunku Abdul Rahman proclaimed the independence of Malaya at Stadium Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur. Stadium Merdeka was built specially for this purpose. The Queen of England was represented by the Duke of Gloucester.

The first Malayan Prime Minister was Tunku Abdul Rahman who was known as the Father of Independence. The first Yang di-Pertuan Agong was Tuanku Abdul Rahman Ibni Al-Marhum Tunku Muhammad. Tuanku Abdul Rahman was the Yang

Dipertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan. Tuanku Hishamuddin Alam Shah from Selangor was appointed as the Deputy Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Truly the British colonization of Malaya had left many effects on us. One of them was the language. The vocabulary of Malay language has been enriched with English words like *gelas* (glass), *pena* (pen), *radio* (radio), *televisyen* (television) and others.

The system of education also improved during the British colonization. After the arrival of the British, education of secular or worldly nature was introduced.

From the 20th century, the Malay education started to develop rapidly. The British had set up Malay schools and a few teacher training colleges. These colleges trained teachers before they were posted to schools all over the country. For example, the Sultan Idris Training College at Tanjung Malim was set up in 1922.

However, it should be remembered that all these achievements were the fruits of the people in fighting for their rights and not merely the sincere efforts of the British government.