

Sarawak's role in the making of Malaysia

'MIGRATED ARCHIVES': Recently declassified UK records shed new light on the behind-the-scene intrigues in Malaysia's formation

A TREASURE trove of the most highly classified United Kingdom records, known as "the migrated archives", has been progressively opened to the public since April 2012.

These records document the turbulent times, the heated discussions and the set of compromises that resulted in the formation of Malaysia on Sept 16, 1963.

From these documents, it is clear that the creation of Malaysia was no foregone conclusion, and whether Sarawak would form the new nation was uncertain right up to the last minute. Malaysian history is full of excitement and of the unexpected.

As a student seeking to understand the politics of a multi-ethnic state in transition, I first arrived in Sarawak on M.V. *Bruas*, in December 1962. I have maintained a close

interest in Malaysia over the past 52 years, publishing various academic works along the way.

With the support of the Tun Jugah Foundation and Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, I am re-examining the evidence in the light of this newly-released documentation.

Based on top-level UK and United States documents, and interviews with key players, many new questions can be asked. These include:

WHY was Malaysia formed?

DID the Malayan prime minister really suggest returning Sarawak to Brunei?

WHY was the 1962 Brunei revolt the key to forming Malaysia?

WAS it true that the Malayan and

British governments feared that US president John F. Kennedy might broker a deal to settle "the Malaysia issue", a deal that satisfied their Philippine and Indonesian allies, at Malayan expense?

After Indonesian paratroops landed in Johor, were the British so scared of "Ganyang Malaysia" that they considered making a tactical nuclear strike against a Sumatran airbase?

Beginning tomorrow, the *New Straits Times* will exclusively publish a series of five articles on Sarawak and the formation of Malaysia.

The first article deals with the concept of Malaysia and focuses upon the drivers for its formation, cap-

italising upon the May 1961 speech given by Tunku Abdul Rahman.

The second article is about Sarawak's response to the plan for a "Greater Malaysia", comprising Malaya, Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo.

The government-sponsored Cobbold Commission of enquiry heard representations from across the state. The Malayan and British members had divergent views on the terms and conditions of federation, differences that had to be papered over before the report was made public.

The third article is the story of the Brunei Revolt of December 1962, and the start of Indonesian armed confrontation in April 1963.

The extensive use of emergency powers and wide publicity given to these new threats had a decisive impact on public opinion in Sarawak.

The fourth article focuses on the vigorous contestation over the looming reality of federation, over just what would be the political terms of engagement. That debate went right up to the last moment.

The final article looks at the first two highly turbulent years of Malaysia.

Both London and Kuala Lumpur feared that Indonesian confrontation could succeed, and were most concerned that the US might intervene to broker an "unacceptable" solution to the Malaysia issue.



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New Straits Times, Kuala Lumpur

A country born of a shaky idea

BY MICHAEL LEIGH - 11 SEPTEMBER 2014 @ 8:12 AM

FIFTY-three years ago, in May 1961, the prime minister of Malaya proposed the idea of a greater Malaysia. Important United Kingdom cabinet records indicate just how contingent was that idea, and indeed, the shaky premises upon which the new nationhood was based.

In 1961, the region was in flux. Communism was gaining strength throughout much of Southeast Asia in the wake of the emergence of a confident “new” China.

The Malayan Emergency had been won, as had the Korean War, but Vietnamese communism was growing ever stronger, as was the party in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. The rhetoric of Indonesian President Soekarno stressed the inevitable triumph of the new emerging forces (Nefos) over the old established forces (Oldefos) — that were made up of “neo-colonial” nations, such as Malaya and colonial remnants, such as Brunei, Sarawak and Singapore and British North Borneo (Sabah).

The immediate issues for Great Britain were what to do about Singapore, and how to de-colonise its remaining possessions in Southeast Asia. London wanted to get the United Nations and the non-aligned movement off their backs, whilst retaining economic links with Britain’s most profitable colonies.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, independent Malaya’s prime minister, was a very reluctant player. He was proud of his *Tanah Persekutuan Melayu*, his happy Malaya, and fearful of what it might mean to incorporate a troublesome and aggressive Singapore into his nation.

It was only after the Cuban missile crisis and the imminence of global conflict, that Duncan Sandys (UK secretary of state for the colonies) was able to gain Tunku’s attention with the assertion that “Singapore is your Cuba!”

Singapore already enjoyed self-government, and each election had resulted in a significant shift to the left. That was not surprising, as its overwhelmingly Chinese population was young and fast growing, and were infatuated by the “new” China. The rate of natural increase of Singapore’s population peaked at 4.1 per cent per annum in 1959. So much of its prosperity depended upon entreport trade with Indonesia and the extensive British base facilities, both of which were vulnerable to closure.

Singapore business needed to expand into the Malayan hinterland, and economic merger was viewed as the best way to create employment for Singapore’s rapidly growing workforce. Both Lee Kuan Yew and the British government shared a view that merger with Malaya was essential for Singapore’s political, security and economic survival, but they had to persuade Tunku that the terms of merger were to his advantage, that the benefits for Malaya outweighed the costs.

The man who showed the sense of urgency, almost desperation to form Malaysia, was Lee Kuan Yew. A telegram from the British High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, dated July 4, 1962, gives a frank British assessment of developments:

Meanwhile a member of PAP has resigned from party in Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew is now in a minority. ... We cannot rely on Lee surviving more than a matter of months and that even survival this long will depend on our reaching agreement with Tunku on Cobbold Report and on early implementation of Malaysia. There is absolutely no doubt that if Lee falls before Malaysia is established Barisan Sosialis will take his place and all hope of achieving Malaysia will be lost since Barisan itself is unalterably hostile to it and Tunku for his part would not pursue it with a Barisan Government in power in Singapore.

If Lee falls before Malaysia is brought about Tunku will close causeway and treat Singapore as a foreign country. He believes that Singapore would thenceforward be lost for ever to Communism, that we should progressively lose our defence facilities and our economic assets there and that the Borneo Territories would be left to be pulled about by neighbouring states with the likely long-term prospect of absorption into a completely Communist Indonesia.

To Kuala Lumpur, acceptability of Singapore was dependent upon inclusion of the three Borneo territories that were viewed as a counterweight, ethnically and politically. (This was a difficult task, as the whole territory of what became Malaysia had never been administered as one entity by the colonial power, unlike Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines). Tunku set about to win support for federation, a task that required understanding a range of Bornean aspirations and sensitivities.

Though on the surface, including the Sultanate of Brunei in the new nation should have been the easiest first step, Tunku had a very difficult set of dealings with Brunei. He was comfortable neither with the Sultan, nor with the leaders of the overwhelmingly popular Parti Rakyat Brunei. Personally he was quite upset at physical and verbal attacks on Malayan civil servants who he had seconded to serve in Brunei.

In the first stage he sought to appeal to Brunei's historical position in Borneo by suggesting the return of Sarawak to Brunei. In a memorandum on the Greater Malaysia proposals, enclosed with his telegram to the British Prime Minister of the June 26 1961, Tunku made the following observation:

It would be better of course if Sarawak could be returned to Brunei, at least the northern part of Sarawak, where the population is mainly Malays and Dyaks.

The British appreciated that even a whiff of that idea could sabotage any hope of getting Sarawak to join Malaysia:

Should the Tunku refer to the matter, the only possible answer is that HMG cannot consider it, and that any suggestion of it would certainly wreck the hope of getting Sarawak and most likely North Borneo to join Greater Malaysia.

The Parti Rakyat Brunei (PRB) had won all but one of the elected seats in the Brunei legislature, and was focused upon gaining executive power, with a view to elevating the Sultan to the position of a Constitutional Monarch, rather than an active ruler. The PRB was committed to a federation of the three territories of British Borneo, with the Sultan as their Monarch, and the idea of Malaysia cut across PRB strategy.

In January 1962, the Brunei Government's five member fact-finding commission recorded stiff and almost 100 percent opposition to merging Brunei into Malaysia from all sections of the population. That report was never released.

In fact, UK diplomats cabled that Lee Kuan Yew had threatened to remove the Reuters news agency from Singapore, unless their Brunei fact-finding commission news report was withdrawn from circulation. Reuters obliged. His hyper-sensitivity indicates that building a wave of support for merger was vital for PAP's survival.

There were other early glitches in the process of 'selling' Malaysia, as indicated when Sarawak Government officials cautioned that the Malay language service of Radio Malaya would be wise to stop translating Malaysia as Melayu Raya. That usage would not easily win over the hearts and minds of the majority of Sarawak's population, who did not consider themselves Malay.

Within Sarawak there was no great initial enthusiasm for "Greater Malaysia". Like the PRB, SUPP, the first mass political party in the state, called for independence before merger. The communists saw it as another form of colonialism. SNAP's early policy position was opposition to federation and even Parti Negara Sarawak (PANAS) was divided on the issue. The newly formed BARJASA was 100 percent in favour of federation, but the conservative Sarawak Chinese Association was quite cautious in its support. At the end of 1961, viewed from Sarawak, Malaysia looked a distant dream, unlikely to be realised in the foreseeable future.

Tomorrow: The selling of Malaysia.



(From left) Malaya Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, UK secretary of state for the colonies, Duncan Sandys, and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew enjoying a light moment while on their way to British Prime Minister Harold McMillan's official residence for the signing of the Formation of Malaysia Agreement on Aug 1, 1962.

New Straits Times, Kuala Lumpur

The selling of Malaysia

BY PROFESSOR MICHAEL LEIGH - 12 SEPTEMBER 2014 @ 8:07 AM

THE governments in Singapore, London and Kuala Lumpur were not about to give up the idea of Greater Malaysia, merely because there was hostility and indifference in the Borneo states.

In January 1962, the state government authored and widely disseminated a paper entitled, simply, "Sarawak and Malaysia". It was immediately translated into each of the principal local languages. Residents, District Officers, SAOs, Information Service Officers and other officials were instructed to immediately tour their districts, to discuss its contents with the local population and to highlight the benefits of a federation in those discussions. Each of the 24 District Councils met, with the issue of Malaysia as the first item on their agenda.

Efforts to persuade Borneans that Malaysia would be to their advantage included bringing a number of groups of local leaders on visits to Malaya and concentrating attention on the successful rural development schemes in the peninsula. Those visits did make a very positive impression on those leaders, most of whom had never even been overseas.

In early January, Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau, the highly influential paramount chief of the Orang Ulu, spoke eloquently to and for his people at Long San. He stated that they were not yet ready for Tunku Abdul Rahman's plan. He went on to say that he saw Malaya like a fruit garden, already flourishing with ripened fruit, fenced securely with a fence made of *belian*. On the other hand, their garden (Sarawak) was small, freshly planted, not fully mature, not yet firmly established. It had a fence made of bamboo.

He then asked, what would happen to a garden when you try to plant trees and shrubs under big trees? They would simply be eclipsed by the shadow and would never bear fruit. In his six-hour speech, he went on to warn of those who would show Tunku fresh fruit that they did not grow themselves, trying to persuade Tunku that the time was ripe to pluck it.

On Feb 15, a Dayak *aum* was held in the Fort at Kapit, attended by 51 of the 54 penghulu, led by Temenggong Jugah. In his speech, the Temenggong made three key points: the Iban did not wish to *karam dua kali*, the Malaysia Plan must have wide support, and if the plan did not materialise, there would be no alternative to Communism.

Those 51 leaders gave their support to Greater Malaysia, and attached their signatures and thumbprints to the 13 points, which were their conditions for supporting a federation. The agreed 13 points were:

THE head of the state of Sarawak to be a native of Sarawak;

THE head of each state in the Federation of Malaysia to be eligible in due course to be the head of the Federation of Malaysia;

ADAT Lama to be under the control of the state;

LAND to be under the control of the State;

ENGLISH to remain the official language of the state of Sarawak and to continue to be one of the official languages of Malaysia;

FREEDOM of religious worship;

THERE is to be adequate representation for Sarawak in the Federal Government;

BRITISH officers to remain until replaced by properly qualified local people. Natives to have a fair share of government employment;

SARAWAK natives to enjoy the same status and privileges as Malays in Malaya;

EDUCATION to be a federal subject and to be equalised throughout Malaysia as soon as possible. Sarawak natives to have a fair share of overseas scholarships;

IMMIGRATION to remain under the control of the State of Sarawak;

POWERS reserved in the constitution of a state may not be changed without the agreement of the state; and,

DEVELOPMENT in Sarawak to be accelerated.

The Malayan and British governments had decided to appoint a commission to assess the views of the people of North Borneo and Sarawak regarding Malaysia, to help legitimise this particular form of decolonisation. Prior to the launch of their enquiry, government officers intensified their persuasive efforts; touring the state, selling the virtues of Malaysia as Sarawak's future.

Cobbold Commission members were nominated by, and had to be acceptable to, both governments. The two Malayan members were Wong Pow Nee (a former MCA chief minister of Penang) and Ghazali Shafie (secretary-general of the Foreign Affairs Ministry), who had the confidence of Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and Tunku. Ghazali was never afraid to strongly articulate his views.

During March 1962, the commission toured Sarawak, meeting a wide range of local leaders and receiving written submissions. The government provided background notes to the commission, giving their view of the reliability and influence of each person and delegation that came before the commission.

After the completion of hearings, a draft report was submitted to the two governments for consideration. It was clear that the commissioners were seriously divided on the key issue of whether there should be a transitional period of three to seven years, during which an expatriate governor or chief minister should continue to exercise executive authority in each of the Borneo states, with authority on all matters except internal security, defence and external affairs.

The British members of the Cobbold Commission pushed hard for the recommendation to be in the report, supported by the colonial authorities in Kuching, Jesselton and London. Tunku instructed Ghazali and Wong to withdraw from the commission if the recommendation was to be included.

On June 3, 1962, Tunku told London that if the idea was even mentioned in the report, it would be better for Britain to retain sovereignty, and the Malaysia project was dead. At that time,

Tunku was advised by Razak, Home Minister Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman and other close confidants that with the political situation rapidly deteriorating in Singapore, Malaysia would be bad for Malaya. So, Tunku was in no mood to compromise.

To break the deadlock, all reference to divided sovereignty during a transitional period was deleted from the report. Lord Cobbold, instead, wrote a personal and confidential letter to both prime ministers, making the case that an expatriate governor and chief secretary would retain their present authority during the next few years, in both Sarawak and North Borneo. Kuala Lumpur had clearly prevailed.

The published Cobbold report concluded that roughly one-third of Sarawak's population enthusiastically supported forming Malaysia, another third were vehemently opposed and the crucial remaining third of the population, though open to the idea, were yet to be convinced of the merits of independence through a merger.

In the second half of 1962, the Information Service, State Administration and Sarawak Alliance parties campaigned for Malaysia, and the Sarawak United People's Party did all it could to argue for prior independence. But, as the resident of the 4th Division wryly observed, "our ammunition is certainly damp". It was the big event of Dec 8, 1962, that changed all that, which is the subject of our next article.



April 5, 1962: The new diesel railcar of the North Borneo railway, in which members of the Cobbold Commission travelled from Jesselton to Papar and Beaufort to sound out the views of rural folk on Malaysia.

New Straits Times, Kuala Lumpur Brunei revolt and the Indonesian 'konfrontasi'

BY PROFESSOR MICHAEL LEIGH - 13 SEPTEMBER 2014 @ 8:07 AM

ON the night of Dec 8, 1962, simultaneous attacks were launched against the government and police throughout Brunei, in Limbang and down as far as Sibuti in Sarawak. Why such violence?

In the most recent elections, the Parti Rakyat Brunei (PRB) swept all but one of the elected seats in the Brunei legislature, and expected the win would lead to legislative and executive power.

The sultan, his British advisers and the Malayan government were not happy with PRB exercising real power in Brunei.

So, the sultan kept postponing any meeting of the legislature, and meanwhile, was actively discussing the terms under which Brunei would become part of the proposed Malaysian federation. PRB was opposed to that policy, and firmly committed to a Borneo Federation of Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo, with Brunei's sultan as the constitutional monarch of "Bornesia".

Frustrated, a number of PRB members commenced military training in the jungles of Brunei and in the Lawas district of Sarawak. Their armed wing, Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara (TNKU), obtained a small supply of weapons from various sources.

For the PRB, the constitutional path remained blocked, and they feared that security powers would shortly be handed to a new Malaysian government, as was the British intention in Singapore.

Influential PRB members then planned to forcibly take over power in Brunei, and adjacent areas of Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah), and to do so during celebrations on Christmas Eve — when it was assumed that the British would be least capable of responding!

Arrests of TNKU leaders in Lawas precipitated the early action and the revolt did not go as planned. Capturing the sultan was key to success, as was his cooperation, but PRB failed to reach him. Instead, the sultan was surrounded by expatriates, and with their encouragement, he requested British military assistance to defeat the rebellion.

Greg Poulgrain, in his book, *The Genesis Of Confrontation*, sees that revolt in the context of broader British strategy to undermine President Sukarno. He accords a more manipulative and Machiavellian role to the UK in the abortive revolt, but I think he gives too much credit to British intelligence. However, there is still much to be discovered about the events of December 1962.

After some significant casualties, especially in Seria and Limbang, the Brunei revolt was suppressed, but it sent shockwaves throughout Sarawak. The government immediately gazetted a range of emergency powers and gave wide publicity to these new threats of violence.

Newspapers were proscribed, political activists arrested and held without trial, and the participation in the revolt of many Malay and Kedayan Sarawak United Peoples PARTY (SUPP) members, especially those in the Sibuti area, was widely publicised.

Following the crackdown, there was a steady flow of young Chinese communist cadres across to West Kalimantan, training in preparation for armed struggle. TNKU was headed by a highly influential Sarawak Malay leader.

This threat to public order had a decisive impact on public opinion in Sarawak and was crucial in swinging Dayak opinion in favour of Malaysia. No longer was it easy to argue that Sarawak should continue as it was, or seek independence just on its own — as SUPP had been arguing.

With the welter of government publicity, there was a groundswell either toward active support for the idea of federation or the passive view that Malaysia was a better option than Indonesia. The Sarawak government made much of the links between PRB leader Azahari and Indonesia, even though it has since been shown that top Indonesian security officials had no confidence in Azahari's ability to work strategically.

The government trumpeted clear that the simple choice for Sarawakians was a promising future in Malaysia. Radio Sarawak, beamed throughout the state, gave considerable publicity to resignations of native members of SUPP, and certain government officers pressured influential Dayaks to abandon their membership and support for SUPP, stressing the themes of communist influence and subversion.

Just the month before statewide elections in Sarawak, credibility was given to government arguments when Indonesian “volunteers” attacked the Tebedu police station, seizing weapons and killing officers — including the brother of Sarawak’s future first chief minister.

That was the start of the Indonesian armed *konfrontasi* against Malaysia. One might well argue that the title Bapa Malaysia should be held jointly by Tunku Abdul Rahman and President Sukarno, for without Indonesia’s support for the PRB and commencement of armed confrontation, it is quite unlikely that a majority of Sarawak’s Council Negri would have supported Sarawak making Malaysia.

Over 50 years, there have been four crucial state elections in Sarawak: 1963, 1969-70, 1974 and 1987, when the results were uncertain, the contest most vigorous and the course of history could have changed significantly.

The actual outcome from the 1963 District Council elections was much, much closer than many care to remember. The actual votes cast gave the SUPP/Parti Negara Sarawak (Panas) coalition 35.7 per cent, the Alliance 34.2 per cent and Independents 30.2 per cent.

In 1963, the composition of the Council Negri was based on a three-tiered system, with each district council selecting members of the Divisional Advisory Councils (DAC). They would then chose who would represent them in the Council Negri. At each level it was “winner takes all”. Whether the Alliance would carry the day was actually in doubt until the last minute.

That was because Panas and SUPP had formed a coalition, a link based upon pragmatism, not ideology. Panas and its leader, Datu Bandar, were savagely attacked for “selling out the Malays”.

Intervention of the Malayan Alliance added ferocity to that attack and the intense hostility between the top leaders of Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawal (BARJASA) and Panas became both personal and political.

After polling, the SUPP-Panas coalition controlled the 1st DAC and only needed to win a majority in the 3rd DAC in order to nominate 21 of the 36 elected members of Council Negri.

In the 3rd DAC, the Alliance and the coalition had secured 10 votes. The outcome swung on the support of one independent member of the Binatang District Council, who held the pivotal swing vote (see *Leigh: Rising Moon* p 75-76 for the story of how that vote was won).

Had the Panas/SUPP coalition then won the 3rd DAC, with the support of just one of four Mukah independents, they would have gained control of the Council Negri. The Panas/SUPP coalition agreement, signed by their respective leaders, stipulated that the United Nations conduct a referendum before the implementation of Malaysia.

Had that agreement held, it is doubtful that the Tunku would have waited for a favourable outcome, given the international and domestic pressures bearing heavily upon his government, and his absolute refusal to merge with Singapore prior to the inclusion of the Borneo states.

New Straits Times

Sarawak and the federation

BY PROFESSOR MICHAEL LEIGH - 15 SEPTEMBER 2014 @ 8:08 AM

ONCE the Sarawak Alliance had secured a clear majority of seats in the Council Negri, the next questions were who would form the cabinet, who would be the chief minister and who the governor.

Each of the successful parties had their own idea as to who should lead, as did the colonial authorities and the Malayan Alliance leaders.

Abdul Rahman Yakub was amongst those Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawak (BARJASA) members favoured by Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and Ghazali Shafie. However, electoral law had required candidates to stand in the council districts in which they resided.

In and around Kuching the more highly educated BARJASA leaders, including Rahman Yakub, had been soundly defeated at district level by Parti Negara Sarawak (Panas) and Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) candidates, so they could not become elected members of Council Negri.

British officials put forward the idea that, after the election, there should be a broad coalition of all parties, and that inclusion of moderate SUPP leaders in government would undermine the hard left of that party.

Malayan and Sarawak Alliance leaders immediately dismissed that idea, insisting that the Sarawak Alliance had won, had defeated both Panas and SUPP, and that the Alliance would govern and would not compromise their principles by any dealings with Panas/SUPP.

The ruling Sarawak Alliance Government had 23 elected members in the new Council Negri: Pesaka had 11 elected members, SNAP 6, BARJASA 5 and SCA 1.

Three new faces were then nominated to the Council Negri, the most notable being a bright young lawyer, Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Three expatriate officers remained ex-officio members of the legislature: the State Secretary, the State Financial Secretary and the Attorney-General. After lengthy discussions Sarawak Alliance members agreed that SNAP leader Stephen Kalong Ningkan would be the state's first chief minister, and Pesaka leader Temenggong Jugah to be the first Governor of Sarawak.

Both those choices upset the top leadership of the Malayan Alliance who believed that a chief minister should be chosen after consultation with the leader of the Alliance, as was the practice in the peninsula.

Tunku was angry that his advice was not taken, and the decision announced on July 22 before he could "talk sense to Sarawak Alliance".

KL leaders thought Ningkan was an unsuitable choice for chief minister "now we are in control", to quote Malayan minister and former Special Branch head, Senator Khaw Kai Boh. In Sarawak,

the British governor refused to delay the swearing-in, even by a day, offering his immediate recall if overruled by London.

After that rebuff, Tunku made clear that there was no way he would agree to Temenggong Jugah becoming governor. The London agreement stipulated that the first Sarawak governor would be nominated jointly by the Malayan Agung and British Queen, so Tunku had veto power over who would fill that position.

In the correspondence that ricocheted between Kuching, London and Kuala Lumpur, Tunku was quite disparaging toward Temenggong Jugah, suggesting instead that he be appointed to head some newly-created “Council of Chiefs”.

The British shot back that Dayak support was vital to the formation and success of Malaysia. It was Dayaks who populated the border regions subject to Indonesian attacks. With the imminent arrival of the United Nations secretary-general’s mission to assess whether the local population had voted in favour of federation, Dayaks could not be seen to withdraw their support for Malaysia, as the Temenggong had suggested in an angry outburst, hearing of his rejection.

Should Temenggong Jugah’s lack of formal education be the issue, the British governor suggested the names of three other Ibans: Edward Jerah, John Nicol and Edward Brandah. However, Razak responded with the observation that if you were worried about security, “Malays were a greater risk, being more open to exploitation by Indonesians”.

In early September, Tunku wrote that the first governor would be either Datu Abang Openg Abang Sapiee (recommended by the Malay National Union) or Mohamed Noah Omar from Johor, who was a founder of Umno and Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat.

Tunku was absolutely insistent that the positions of governor and chief minister could not be held by someone of the same race — that if a Dayak held one position, a Malay must hold the other, and that Chinese were already represented in government by Deputy Chief Minister James Wong. Years later, Tunku held to that position, cabling Rahman Yakub in 1970, stating that it was best that he not try to become chief minister, as a Malay should not hold both top positions.

Regional tension between Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaya steadily rose as the formation of Malaysia came closer and closer to reality. On July 31, 1963, President Sukarno, President Macapagal Arroyo and Tunku had a quite difficult meeting that did nothing to resolve the Philippines’ claim to Sabah, but did address Indonesian concerns on de-colonisation. Professor George Kahin travelled from Jakarta with the Indonesian president. According to Kahin, Sukarno wanted Tunku to acknowledge Indonesian concerns and accord him respect. For the Tunku, and his British advisers, that was the last thing they would do.

Jakarta and Manila argued strongly for a referendum to determine the wishes of the populace, which would have delayed or derailed the formation of Malaysia, a proposal that Kuala Lumpur opposed. The final compromise was expressed in clause 10 of the Manila accord that stated:

The Ministers reaffirmed their countries’ adherence to the principle of self-determination for the peoples of non-self-governing territories. In this context, Indonesia and the Philippines stated that they would welcome the formation of Malaysia provided the support of the people of the Borneo territories is ascertained by an independent and impartial authority, the Secretary-General of the United Nations or his representative.

Thus the plan to form Malaysia on Aug 31, 1963, was delayed for only a couple of weeks. A rushed mission toured Sabah and Sarawak. The UN secretary-general then concluded that the 1963 elections in Sabah and Sarawak had indicated majority support for Malaysia. The new nation was born on Sept 16, 1963.



(From left) Pesaka leader Temenggong Oyong Lawau Jan, the Chief Minister of Sarawak Datuk Stephen Kalong Ningkan and the Minister of Sarawak Affairs Datuk Temenggong Jugah clasp hands in Sibu to affirm their solidarity within the Sarawak Alliance on May 22, 1965.

Malaysia on the edge in its early days

By [Professor Michael Leigh](#) - 16 September 2014 @ 8:06 AM

THE declaration of Malaysia, on Sept 16 1963, ushered in the start of the two most tumultuous years for Asia's newest nation.

From late 1963, Indonesia ramped up its confrontation, viewing this "neocolonial" creation as an affront to the non-aligned movement; to the peoples of a region emerging from colonial rule and to Indonesian leadership of the region, particularly of the Indonesian diaspora (known here as "the Malay world").

Both London and Kuala Lumpur feared that Indonesian confrontation, that the efforts to crush, to Ganyang Malaysia, could, in fact, succeed. Both those governments were most concerned that the United States might intervene to broker what to them would be a quite "unacceptable" solution to the Malaysia issue.

It is important to recall that US strategic assessments viewed keeping friendly political links with the whole Indonesian archipelago, and the Philippines, too, was of considerably greater significance than was maintaining a political format called Malaysia.

For the US, Malaysia remained in the British sphere of influence, and the British had really messed up their relationship with Indonesia. Then United Kingdom ambassador Andrew Gilchrist virulently criticised and did everything he could to undermine President Sukarno and was rewarded by the torching and destruction of the British Embassy in Jakarta and its consulate in Medan straight after the formation of Malaysia.

The US Attorney-General, Robert Kennedy visited Jakarta at the start of 1962, just a year after his brother's inauguration. The US ambassador, Howard Jones, had become quite close to President Sukarno, and authored a seven-point plan to prevent Indonesia from falling under communist control and win it over to the West.

The first issue was decolonisation of West New Guinea. With Jones' help, Robert Kennedy brokered an agreement to return that territory to Indonesia, via a period of United Nations trusteeship, followed by a so-called "act of free choice".

The Australian government was absolutely devastated to find out that their "greatest friend and ally" gave higher priority to its relationship with Indonesia than to supporting Australian efforts to retain Dutch control of the western half of New Guinea. New Guinea was still seen as a strategically important Japanese "stepping stone" to the invasion of Australia in World War 2.

President Sukarno visited President Kennedy at the White House. They related well on a personal level. Britain feared that president Kennedy would revisit Indonesia, prioritise Indonesia's links with the West and broker a settlement of "the Malaysia dispute" that would satisfy Indonesia and the Philippines and add Malaysia to its list of failed federations, from East Africa to the Caribbean. Kennedy's assassination, in November 1963, ended that particular fear.

In August-September 1964, Indonesian forces were landed near Pontian, followed by paratroops dropped near Labis in Johor. Attacks in Borneo escalated. Soon after, British Special Forces commenced secretive cross-border counterstrikes well into Indonesian Kalimantan.

There is a passing reference in the files to the US cautioning the British not to think further about deploying their Singapore-based Vulcan and Victor bombers to make a tactical nuclear strike on a Sumatran base. That wild idea shows that both diplomatic and security threats to Malaysia's continuance were very serious, as the conflict escalated.

Domestically, the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore was proving to be a real headache to Kuala Lumpur. In what other nation were two men insisting on being called prime minister? Not content with governing only Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew's PAP set about contesting the 1964 parliamentary elections in the peninsula, causing a huge fight with MCA.

PAP had every intention of replacing MCA as Umno's principal partner in the leadership of the national government and MCA responded forcefully. Even more significant was that PAP directly threatened Umno and its cardinal belief in Malay leadership of the nation, with its campaigning slogan of "a Malaysian Malaysia". The racial and political temperature rose considerably. Bombings and quite serious race riots took place within Singapore.

In August 1965, Tunku chose to expel Singapore from Malaysia, indicating that this course of action was preferable to his second option of placing most of the members of the Singapore cabinet under preventive detention. Given the exacerbation of racial tensions, failing to act was not an option for him.

Less than one month later, a momentous change took place in Indonesia that ensured Malaysia's survival. There were two military coups, acts that deposed President Sukarno and installed General Suharto as that country's undisputed leader for the following 32 years — and resulted in the killing of between 500,000 and one million Indonesian citizens. Under President Suharto, confrontation ended with a whimper, not a bang, and a new Malaysian format came into being, now that Singapore was gone.

Malaysia was then fully accepted by its neighbours and could focus upon nation-building rather than defence, security and warding off charges that Malaysia was a neo-colonial creation. That criticism had been coming from the Afro-Asian movement and was voiced in UN hearings. The British and Commonwealth forces were no longer needed in Borneo and the remaining influential expatriate civil servants in Sarawak were asked to leave by early 1967.

Immediately after the shock of Singapore's expulsion, certain Sabahan and Sarawakian leaders raised the issue of renegotiating the terms of the Federation and several even asked if they could forge a link with Singapore rather than remaining part of Malaysia. Such ideas were quickly doused. Donald Stephens, the first chief minister of Sabah, was expeditiously removed from his Federal cabinet position after he spoke publicly of renegotiating the Federation.

The excision of Singapore meant that the racial arithmetic of Malaysia changed dramatically. Kuala Lumpur was able to take an active role in reshaping the political landscape of Sabah and Sarawak so as to more closely match the pattern of rulership that prevailed throughout

the peninsula. Sabah and Sarawak were progressively incorporated into the new Malaysia, simply as states of the Federation, rather than as two of three entities that came together to form Malaysia.



A special arch built to mark the birth of Malaysia at the Kuching town field. Pic courtesy of the Information Department