

THE NORTHERN REGION OF PENINSULAR MALAYSIA: HISTORICAL HERITAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY¹

Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail

Formerly of the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, MALAYSIA
Email: enjangtmub@gmail.com

The essay discusses the history and formation of cultural and political identities in the northern region which are of great significance since the early days. It examines the region's historical background and population composition, subsequent changes that had taken place through migrations from within and outside the region. It also looks at inter-ethnic cooperation between Malay and Chinese secret societies in Penang in the second half of the 19th century, publications and newspapers published in Penang and Taiping which were pioneered by the Peranakans (Jawi, Arab and Chinese) and how these contributed to political awareness among the Malays and other communities, educational development in the northern region covering English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil schools and the state of Perak as the centre of political activism including the Malay left and an Islamic party based in Gunung Semangol. The essay is based on a careful reading of the myriad secondary sources on Malaysian history, politics, economy and culture.

Keywords: northern region, historical background, cultural and political identities, education, publishing

INTRODUCTION

In this study, the northern region of peninsular Malaysia refers to the area that encompasses Perlis, Kedah, Penang and parts of Perak covering north Perak, Dinding and Manjung districts, Kuala Kangsar as well as the northern section of Central Perak and the Kinta district. The region comprises what is known since 2007 as the Northern Corridor Economic Region. The focus of this article is on the history and the formation of cultural and political identities within the northern region which are of significance since its early days. The discussion starts with the region's historical background followed by state formations, population and subsequent changes that had occurred due to the entry of new influences from within and outside the region. It ends with a discussion of the unavoidable result of the interaction between indigenous-Malay-Islamic heritage and the more recent migrant-foreign heritage.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE EARLY PERIOD

The northern region is among the earliest sites of human settlement and civilisation in Malaysia. The Lenggong valley in northern Perak has been established as one of the earliest places which had human habitation, not only in the peninsula but in Southeast Asia. In Kota Tampan for instance tools from the stone age dated between 30,000 and 34,000 years old had been found alongside work places where these tools were made. Unfortunately, there had been no traces of skeletal or human traces of the people who had produced them. However, the skeletal remains of a man, in his early 40s, believed to have been buried between 10,000–11,000 years ago, was discovered alongside several artefacts and ancient tools related to animistic beliefs and rituals in Gua Gunung Runtuh in Lenggong. This is the oldest skeletal remains discovered in Southeast Asia. However, a big question mark still remains among historians and researchers as to what had happened to this early group of people labelled "Orang Perak"² (Perak Man). In Gua Harimau, seven human skeletal remains were found along with axes made of bronze and moulds dated some 4,000 years ago. These indicate that the use of bronze can be traced to the year 2,000 BC (Zuraina, 1991). Although it cannot be fully determined whether the people were the ancestors of the present Lenggong residents, this and other discoveries provide evidence that Lenggong was an early settlement inhabited by different communities at different phases, each having its own value systems and rules.

The lowlands and valleys along the coast and river mouths such as Guar Kepah in Seberang Perai had been inhabited by humans during the stone age, about 5,000 to 6,000 years ago, similar to stone-age communities in several places in north Sumatra (Mokhtar, 2008: 1–14). Towards the south, Kuala Selinsing in Perak had been actively involved in regional and international trading activities some 2,000 years ago during the time when similar developments were taking place in Lembah Bujang. The discovery of several ancient Hindu-Buddhist temple sites and luxury items and trade commodities like beads and gold coins indicate that Lembah Bujang was not only inhabited by different communities but was also a thriving trading centre with ports, lodging facilities, and places of worship catering for both foreign visitors and locals. In 2010 settlements which had furnaces and other equipments that were used to produce iron products and an assembly hall dating back to the first century were unearthed in Sungai Batu in Lembah Bujang. These and other recent findings in Sungai Batu and nearby Jeniang indicate that the region was a centre for the production and export of iron through an international shipping network involving several established ports (Mokhtar and Suprayitno, 2011; Chia and Andaya, 2011: 1–94).

From such discoveries, it can be hypothesised that the northern region, other than an early centre of civilisation, had been influential in international trade some 2,000 years ago. These findings also reinforce the importance of the stretch

between the northern region and the Kra isthmus, which served as the main overland route for trade in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Siam from the 6th century until the 15th century before it was taken over by the Straits of Malacca (Coedes, 1968; Mohd Dahlan, 1979). In short, these new archaeological discoveries had not only changed the views of scholars on the historical significance of the northern region, but also their historical perspectives of Malaysia and Southeast Asia. However, the nature of the administration or governance in the northern region prior to the establishment of the Muslim-Malay sultanates of Kedah and Perak is still unknown. It remains unclear as to why these early civilisations, with a well-developed knowledge base, did not develop modern industries like Europe in the 19th century which had embarked on the industrial revolution. Similarly, historians have also been unable to establish the actual beginning of these Islamic sultanates due to the absence of historical records. Like Melaka and Terengganu, it can be stated that by the beginning of the 15th century Islam had become dominant in the governance, administration and way of life of the people in the northern region.

POLITICAL AND LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

The region's political and leadership history was dominated by two main players – Kedah and Perak. This can be gleaned from the Malay chronicle *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* which describes the founding of Perak and Patani by two princes and one princess who were descendents of Raja Merong Mahapudisat, a son of Raja Merong Mahawangsa, the ruler who founded Kedah Zamin Turan at the foot of Gunung Jerai. After the death of Raja Merong Mahapudisat, his youngest son became the ruler of Kedah with the title Raja Seri Mahawangsa (Siti Hawa, 1991: 37). According to this chronicle, the rulers of Kedah, Perak, Patani and Siam come from the same lineage and have blood ties. The founding of Perak has been attributed to an incident where an arrow with a silver head was released by the second prince of the king of Kedah. The prince had intended to start a new state, towards the south of Kedah and used the spot where the arrow had landed to establish this state. Another version, which did not mention Kedah, suggests that Perak was founded at a spot where a silver-headed arrow released by the grandson of Demang Lebar Daun from the Bukit Siguntang peak in Sumatra had landed (Winstedt and Wilkinson, 1974: 119). The second version links Perak with Palembang or Pagar Ruyung in Sumatra and to the history of Sriwijaya, Melaka and Johor. Just as in other places in the Nusantara region and the world at large, the acceptance of Islam by local communities had brought significant changes to the culture, thoughts and societal norms in the northern region. For instance, the "Old Malay" society reflected its societal values through a language that was rich in Sanskrit words and phrases, but after a few decades the concept of the "New Malay" based on the Islamic way of life and cultural

values resulted in the use of a language that was rich in Arabic words and the use of a Jawi script, one that was directly borrowed from Arabic (Abdul Rahman and Mahani, 2005: 115–118). The cultural norms of the "New Malay" had Islam as its base and soon after, the Jawi script became synonymous with the identity of the Malays until the use of the Romanised script in the mid-20th century. Islam and the Jawi script had placed Malays and the concept of Malay-ness on the wider international landscape paving the way for greater interaction with Muslims from around the world. This development facilitated the "Islamisation process" in the Nusantara region and "the process of Malayisation" of the Muslim immigrants in this region (Abdul Rahman, 1998).

From historical records of the Chinese, Indians and Arabs, it can be established that there were several governments in the northern region before the Malay-Muslim administration of Kedah and Perak. Among them were Langkasuka and Kadaram or Kataha in Tamil, or Chiehch'a in Chinese. Although the exact location of Langkasuka is still disputed, whether it was in the northeast or northwest of the peninsula, scholars agree that Kadaram, Kataha or Chiehch'a refers to Kedah which was visited by the Chinese priest and sailor I Ching during his journeys between China and India at the end of the 7th century. According to local traditions, the Islamic Sultanate in Kedah began when its ruler Maharaja Derbar Raja embraced Islam in 1136, and changed his name to Sultan Muzaffar Syah and renamed Kedah Zamin Turan as Kedah Darul Aman. Based on the history of this royal lineage, the current sultan of Kedah, Sultan Abdul Halim Muazam Syah, who ascended the throne in 1958 is the 28th ruler of the state (Muhammad Hassan, 1968; Buyong Adil, 1981).

Although Perak was way ahead of Kedah in terms of its early civilisation, its subsequent development lagged behind Kedah. The *Sulalat-us-Salatin* clarifies that the government of Gangga Nagara which was visited by Raja Syulan from India before the beginning of the Malay Sultanate in Palembang, had later established governments in Singapore and Melaka (Cheah, 1998: 74–75). Later, during and after the period of the Malay Sultanate, there is also mention of governments in Manjung and Bruas which were protected by Melaka (Cheah, 1998: 202; A. Samad Ahmad, 2003: 115–116, 285–287). Although the founding date is yet to be established, Manjung and Beruas were also believed to have been attacked by the Cholas in 1025 when it launched a war against its trading rival Sriwijaya (Coedes, 1968; Mohd Dahlan, 1979). The exact beginning of Perak as a sovereign state is yet to be established. The ancestry of the present Perak sultanate is traced to Raja Muzaffar, whose father was Sultan Mahmud Syah of Melaka who had married a Kelantan princess; Raja Muzaffar ascended the throne after Sultan Mahmud Syah's death in 1528 in Kampar (Cheah, 1998: 298–299; Winstedt and Wilkinson, 1974; Buyong Adil, 1981). Like most states in the peninsula, the administration and way of life in the northern region was closely related to the patriarchal *Adat Temenggung*. Before the arrival of the British, both Kedah and Perak were already known for their systematic

governance, complete with established procedures and laws regarding the selection of new rulers and senior state officials. *Undang-Undang Kedah* has many similarities with *Undang-Undang* or *Hukum Kanun Melayu Melaka*. *Undang-Undang 99 Perak* consists of 99 clauses that cover all aspects related to state administration including laws that guide ruler-subject relationship (Winstedt, 1969; Abu Hassan and Mariam, 1995; Jelani, 2008). However, historians have yet to establish when these laws were written and to what extent they were enforced. It is obvious that both Kedah and Perak had common laws and procedures that reflect systematic and civilised governance.

Penang and Perlis which were both administered by Kedah became new political entities in 1800 and 1842 respectively, mainly because of British and Siamese invasions and political manoeuvrings in the 18th and 19th centuries. Through the East India Company (EIC), the British, failed to honour the 1786 treaty with Kedah, forced Kedah to sign another treaty to gain control over Penang. Caught in between the danger posed by Siam and the hope of getting military protection from the EIC, Kedah signed another treaty in 1800 to lease Seberang Perai to the British (Bonney, 1971). Perlis became a sovereign state when Sultan Ahmad Tajudin Halim Syah II handed it over to Sayyid Hussain bin Sayyid Harun Jamalullail after the Siamese withdrawal in 1842. British intervention in Kerian in the south, which was also part of the Kedah sultanate resulted in its cession to Perak. Similarly, Setol and Sadao, were handed to Siam after the 1909 treaty between Great Britain and Siam. In short, what remains of Kedah today is a far cry from its former size.

The handover of Perlis to Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail adds to the uniqueness of the northern region. This handover, not only marked the birth of a new state in the Malay peninsula, but also marked a state controlled by those of Arab descent, a phenomenon that was also found in several places in the Nusantara region. The history of Perlis can be traced to Sayyid Hussain's father, Sayyid Harun, who was of Arab-Malay parentage from Palembang. He later married Tunku Safiah, the daughter of Sultan Dhiauddin Mukaram Syah of Kedah (1798–1804). In 1815 Sayyid Harun was later appointed the first Penghulu of Arau by Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin. The handover of Perlis to Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail in 1842 also foregrounds another important phenomenon but one that has only received scant attention from scholars – "the process of Malayisation" when Muslim immigrants voluntarily became Malays to enable them to play a bigger role in Malay society and culture. This phenomenon was not only confined to the masses but also to the ruling elites. The acceptance of the ruling family in Perlis as Malays is evident in the post-1957 *Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Perlis* which states that the ruler of Perlis must be a Perlis Malay who is a descendent of Syed Putra, Syed Safi, Syed Ahmad or Syed Hussain.

The influence of people of Arab descent (who usually carry the title Sayyid) is also found in Kedah. Three of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Syah's wives (reign 1882–1943) were from the Sayyid families (Mohammad Isa, 1990:

9) while four out of the seven Kedah Chief Ministers since independence were from Sayyid families but who had become Malays. Article 35 (2) of *Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Kedah* declares: "Nobody other than a Malay Muslim can become the Chief Minister of Kedah" (International Law Book Service, 1998: 82). In the same way the *Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Perak* also state that the Perak Chief Minister must be a Malay Muslim (International Law Book Service, 1991: 334). From this, it is clear that the national Malay heritage which is based on Islamic principles is a vital condition for the sovereignty of the Sultans in the Malay states including the northern region. Western powers who had arrived in the region since the early 16th century were aware of this and they did not interfere (or pretended not to interfere) in matters related to Muslims and Malay customs and traditions although they had intervened in the internal affairs of the country to exploit its rich natural resources.

POPULATION COMPOSITION AND IDENTITY UNTIL 1957

The Kedah cultural heritage, with its own style and uniqueness, represented particularly by the Kedah dialect, is also found in Perlis, Penang, Seberang Perai, and in the coastal areas of north Perak. Massive migration of Kedah people following the Siamese invasion in 1821 contributed to its widespread influence to north Perak. By the 1830s, about 70% of the Kedah population had migrated, mostly to Seberang Perai which was already under British administration. However to the west of the Titiwangsa range the inhabitants practised the customs of the east coast people due to the influence of Kelantan and Patani. In the past, as in the 1880s, waves of migration occurred when people in the east coast migrated to Kedah and Perak. These migrations were due to several reasons such as prolonged drought and epidemics especially in Kelantan, Madelung and Patani that led to starvation (Abdul Rahman, 1995: 181–183). Siamese pressure and repeated attacks coupled with Siamese repression before and after 1909 also contributed to the southward migration that led to the establishment of new settlements in Sik, Baling and Padang Terap in Kedah and in several areas in northern Perak, with the settlers practising a distinct way of life and dialect. Among these new settlers were Siamese who were mainly Buddhists and who had practised their own culture and way of life. These migrations have subsequently enriched the history of the northern region ever since.

There are records that indicate migrants from the east coast had settled mainly in Kedah and Seberang Perai on a seasonal basis especially during the paddy planting and harvesting seasons. Poor weather conditions in the east coast during the northeast monsoon was the main factor for these migrants who came to the west coast to work as labourers in the paddy fields. This seasonal migration was an annual phenomenon and in the long run elements of the cultural practices of Patani, Siam and Kelantan permeated into the cultural practices of the local

people. The influence was clearly evident in Islamic religious practices and the performing arts. Religious schools known as *sekolah pondok* in Kedah and Perak, for instance, were started by teachers from the east coast or by students who were educated in such schools in Kelantan or Patani, in addition to those that were initiated by others who had returned from Makkah or other parts of the Nusantara region (Jawatankuasa Penerbitan Buku Ulama Kedah Darul Aman, 1996). A number of religious texts that were used in these schools, madrasahs and mosques were written by religious scholars from Patani such as Syaikh Dawud bin Abdullah al-Fatani, Syaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad Zain al-Fatani (Wan Mohd. Shaghir, 1991) and so forth. Similarly, performing arts like *makyong* and *wayang kulit* had strong Siamese and Kelantan influences.

Many of the political and economic migrants from the north and east coast did not return home but instead settled down in the northern region. This augured well for Kedah which encouraged these migrants to settle down in the state and open up new areas especially for paddy farming at the end of the 19th century. The arrival of migrants from other states, not only contributed to the increase in paddy yields, but also increased Kedah's population which strengthened its position and relationship with neighbouring states/countries.

The Acehnese had also migrated to the northern region at the end of the 16th century and at the beginning of the 17th century when the Straits of Melaka became a contested site between local states and the Portuguese and the Dutch. History shows that Perak was once ruled by Aceh and that Sultan Mansur Syah's son married an Acehnese princess and later ruled Aceh as Sultan Alauddin Mansur Syah (1577–1585) (Buyong Adil, 1981: 9–10). As experienced by Johor and Pahang, this "war and matrimony" relationship between Perak and Aceh continued until the death of the Aceh ruler Iskandar Thani in 1641. Kedah was also attacked by Acehnese forces under Sultan Iskandar Muda Mahkota Alam in 1619 when thousands of Kedahans including the royals were taken to Aceh. At the same time, Acehnese soldiers, traders and others had taken the opportunity to move to the northern region. The Dutch attacks on Aceh in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century also led to cross-border migration and many Acehnese had escaped to the northern region and other parts of the peninsula. The Aceh influence can still be seen in Kampung Aceh in Yan, Kedah while the names of some places in Penang (Kampung Aceh, Pantai Aceh and Lebu Aceh) reflect the Acehnese influence. Acehnese descendants had also emerged as successful entrepreneurs and traders in the northern region. The famous award-winning actor P. Ramlee who was born and raised in Penang was the son of an Acehnese immigrant.

The northern region was also a focal point for the migration of people from other regions in the Nusantara region namely Bugis, Javanese, Minangkabaus, Banjarese and Bataks who came either as economic migrants, refugees, prisoners of war, sailors or soldiers who were involved in local warfare. The Bugis were involved in the civil war in Kedah in the 18th century, either in

support of the sultan or his rival. Several families from Minangkabau were among the earliest to start a settlement in Penang before and after the arrival of the EIC in 1786. There was also an influx of immigrants from beyond the Nusantara such as Arabs, Indians, Chinese and Europeans in the mid-19th century and early 20th century which enriched the culture of the northern region through inter-marriages which resulted in Peranakan communities involving Arab, Indian, Chinese, Eurasian or Siamese influence.

The above resulted in the formation of a "Malaysian" national identity as people of diverse races and ethnic groups with different cultural identities and values, made Malaya their home and in doing so enriched Malayan society although at times this had contributed to social and political problems. In other words, there was a process of Malayisation of migrants, particularly those from the Nusantara region, the Arabs and Indian Muslims. The history of the northern region bears witness to this process of Malayisation whereby these groups of migrants categorised themselves as Malays or half-Malays, and this was accepted by the local community.

Nevertheless, the simmering clash between cultures became intense after the British occupied Penang and reared its ugly head after the British intervention in the Malay states through the 1874 Pangkor Treaty. Although immigrants had initially displayed loyalty and respect to the local rulers and leaders along with their loyalty to their own countries, this became diluted after the arrival of the British especially in the Straits Settlement (Buyong Adil, 1981: 9–10). Eventually, the economic development that had taken place in Malaya due to the mining and agricultural (sugar cane, pepper, rubber, etc.) sectors encouraged immigration from outside the Nusantara region especially China and India. The British who wanted to extend their position in Malaya encouraged Perak to be part of a Federated Malay State (FMS) in 1896 together with Pahang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. The FMS was placed under a British Resident General. This development attracted more immigrants to the northern region especially Perak and Penang.

Migrants from the Nusantara region who were from different tribes and localities but having similar linguistic roots and lifestyles were broadly categorised by the British as Malays. This was acceptable to them as they were motivated by the need to preserve their status and importance in Malaya. Similarly, the immigrant communities from outside the region, with multicultural backgrounds and ethnicities were homogenised and labelled as Chinese and Indians. In the long run a new "Malayan" identity had emerged. Although this label was initially used in reference to the Chinese and Indians, it was eventually used for the entire population who had accepted Malaya as their homeland and gave their undivided loyalty to it.³

COOPERATION BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS AND SECRET SOCIETIES

Kedah and Perlis which continued to receive protection from Siam had also received Chinese and Indian migrants but at a much lower rate. Hence, it can be noted that, until today, the population in both states are predominantly Malays. There was little change in migration patterns even after Britain took control of Kedah and Perlis through the 1909 treaty.

Owing to the impact of British economic activities, there was rapid increase in the number of foreigners who arrived in Malaya over the years. The figures in Table 1 indicate the increase in their number from 1911 until 1970. Interestingly, in the late 1940s, the total number of immigrants from outside the Nusantara region was higher than the number of Malays and migrants from within the region.

Table 1: Population in the northern region according to ethnic composition 1911–1970

State	Ethnicity	1911	1921	1931	1947	1957		1970	
		%	%	%	%	%	Total	%	Total
Kedah	Malay	79.5	70.0	66.6	68.0	67.7	475,563	70.0	674,684
	Chinese	13.7	17.5	18.2	20.9	20.5	144,057	19.3	184,263
	Indian	2.4	9.7	11.8	9.5	9.7	67,094	8.4	80,365
Perlis	Malay	90.0	85.2	80.9	78.3	78.4	71,272	79.4	96,084
	Chinese	4.9	9.0	13.2	16.7	17.4	15,771	16.2	19,571
	Indian	1.14	2.0	1.9	2.4	1.8	1,639	2.0	2,437
Penang	Malay	41.1	36.3	32.7	30.5	28.8	165,095	30.7	237,780
	Chinese	40.4	44.5	49.8	55.4	57.2	327,240	56.1	435,366
	Indian	16.7	17.5	16.1	12.8	12.2	69,035	11.5	89,319
Perak	Malay	40.2	39.1	35.7	37.8	39.7	484,530	43.1	657,995
	Chinese	43.9	36.8	42.3	46.6	44.2	539,334	42.5	666,237
	Indian	14.8	21.7	20.7	14.7	14.9	186,803	14.2	222,718

Source: Sidhu and Jones (1981: 30)

The figures reflect a contrasting trend in the northern states: there was a Malay majority in Kedah and Perlis while the number of Chinese and Indian migrants outnumbered the Malays in Penang and Perak. The number of Chinese immigrants had increased rapidly in Penang and in the mining areas in Perak especially Larut, Gerik and the Kinta valley. In Kedah, the percentage of Chinese immigrants had increased from 13.7% in 1911 to nearly 21% in 1957. Similarly

in Perlis, the Chinese population had increased from 4.9% in 1911 to 17.4% in 1957. During the same period, the Indian population in Kedah increased from 2.4% to 9.7% and in Perlis from 1.14% to 1.18%. The visible increase in Chinese immigrants who comprised traders, miners and labourers in the districts of Kuala Muda and Kulim, for instance, resulted in Kedah appointing a Chinese *Kapitan* in 1866 to facilitate the handling of Chinese-related affairs. Kedah, Perak and Perlis continued to exist as a monarchy while Penang became a British colony and was governed from Singapore from 1826 until 1957.

The British managed the various ethnic groups in Penang and Perak by having policies that did not encourage interaction and communication with other communities. Nevertheless interethnic relations were quite prominent in the British administrative and trading centres like Taiping and Penang. Various institutions such as police stations, courts, prisons, hospitals and schools (English, Malay and Chinese) mushroomed in these areas. Penang developed rapidly as a melting port for people from different cultures making it truly cosmopolitan. Other than churches of different Christian denominations, temples were for Chinese, Hindus and Buddhists while mosques were built to cater for the Malays, Indian Muslims and Bengalis. This potpourri of people and cultures in the city of Tanjung (George Town) in 1870 was noted by Muhammad Ibrahim Munsyi.

Maka kebanyakan yang menjadi kuli dalam pekerjaan punggah-memunggah, angkat-mengangkat daripada bangsa Keling belaka. Banyaklah lain-lain bangsa dalam negeri itu dalam pekerjaan lain-lain dan berniaga. Maka orang-orang Melayunya banyak yang berkebun di darat-daratnya. Maka peranakan yang di dalam bandarnya itu berjenis-jenis pekerjaan masing-masing; ada yang berniaga dan ada yang makan gaji menjadi kerani. Kebanyakan peranakan Keling yang berniaga dinamakan bangsa itu "anak-anak Jawi Pekan", dan peranakan Melayunya banyak yang belayar-layar dan berniaga, dan ada yang menjadi tukang membuat kasut dan lain-lain di dalam Jalan Masjid Malayu itu – dalam bahasa Inggeris namanya jalan itu Acheen Street. Dan di situ sebuah masjid Melayu besar ... diperbuat daripada batu dan atapnya genting. Maka tempat perhimpunan bangsa-bangsa Keling and Jawi Pekan itu pada jalan yang bernama Chulia Street; terlalu ramai mereka itu dan ada pula sebuah masjidnya di situ daripada batu dan genting jua. Maka bangsa-bangsa yang ada dalam Penang itu berjenis-jenis iaitu Inggeris, Arab, Melayu, Keling, Cina, Hindu, Benggali, Serani, Siam, Burma, Aceh dan lain-lain.

(Mohd. Fadzil, 1980: 114–115)

Maka dalam antara bangsa-bangsa yang tersebut ini yang dikira-kirakan, lebih kurang jumlah bangsa Inggeris serta lain-lain bangsa orang putih di dalam Penang itu, 266 orang; dan bangsa Keling dan Benggali, Hindu serta lain-lain bangsanya orang-orang sebelah negeri Hindustan dalam Pulau Pinang itu, 14,000 orang. Maka orang Melayu daripada segala jenis bangsa di bawah angin ini, 72,000 orang; dan bangsa Arab serta lain-lain, 1,700 orang. Maka Cina, daripada segala jenis bangsanya, 39,000 orang; dan lain daripada ini, lain-lain bangsa itu sedikit-sedikit sahaja.

(Mohd. Fadzil, 1980)

The confluence between people of different races in centres like Penang had produced multiple facets in the cross-cultural heritage of the northern region which further enriched its social and cultural fabrics. As a result of mixed marriages between the Malays (mostly females) and Indian Muslims, a distinct Malay group known as Jawi Pekan or Jawi Peranakan had emerged. They were regarded as "Malays" because they practised basic Malay cultural norms and used the Malay language for communication. Members of the Jawi Peranakan group were supported by the urban social environment which allowed them to function as a distinct group of their own. However, they were largely influenced by the Malay culture especially in terms of language and the customs they practised, borrowed from their Malay wives or mothers-in-law. In the long term, the Jawi Peranakan community became distinct and interacted among themselves with particular linguistic peculiarities and unique Malay-Indian culture. Inter marriages between Malays and Arabs, on the other hand, gave rise to the Arab Peranakan community, who considered themselves either as Arabs or Malays depending on the environment they were in. Basically, it was Islam, the Malay culture and language that acted as catalysts for inter marriages between people of different groups – Malays, Indians, Arabs and sometimes Chinese. The cultural identity of these mixed-race groups was fluid and constantly changing according to circumstances, needs and choice of individuals or members of the group. This imperfect "Malayisation" process, at times, caused communication problems. For instance, when nationalism among the Malays was on the rise at the beginning of the 20th century, partly as a result of the ideas and writings of individuals of mixed parentage, there was a raging debate as to who could be defined as Malay and whether they could participate in Malay social and political movements.

When the Singapore Malay Union was formed in 1926, it was decided that only those who were offsprings of Malay fathers could become members while the involvement of those whose mothers were Malay was questioned. As a result, the Penang branch of the Singapore Malay Union rejected the involvement of the Jawi Peranakan and Peranakan Arabs, some of whom have been active in efforts to improve the livelihood of the Malay-Muslim community. The Penang

Malay Association which was established in 1927 opened its membership to everyone who claimed to be a Malay and practised the Malay culture.

Seven years later, through the newspaper *Saudara* which was published by Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi who was of Malay-Arabic parentage, the Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena Malaya (PASPAM) was formed in April 1934, with the main aim of unifying the Malay nationalist movement. PASPAM also opened its doors to any individual who claimed to be a Malay and was committed to enhancing the status of the Malay language and culture. Nevertheless, when state Malay associations that were formed between 1936–1939 convened a congress in 1939 and 1940 to formulate action plans for the advancement of the Malay race, the issue of ancestry and the definition of who could be considered "Malay" dominated the discussion to the extent that there was no room to deliberate on other issues. The controversy surrounding Malay ancestry led to the introduction of new terms like "Darah Keturunan Keling (DKK)" and "Darah Keturunan Arab (DKA)" which was a conscious effort to reject the involvement of these groups in Malay social and political movements. However, in the northern region generally, and in Penang and Kedah, specifically, the initiative to create a dichotomy between Malays according to paternal-maternal ancestry did not have any significant impact. The Malay community in the northern region, on the whole, accepted any individual as Malay as long as he/she was a Muslim, used Malay for communication and practised the customs/culture and lifestyle of the "pure Malays". One significant development that occurred as a result of the formation of associations like PASPAM, the Penang Malay Association, United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and Pan Malaya Islamic Party (PAS) was the rise of several prominent political figures among both the pure Malays and Peranakan Malays who played pivotal roles in social and political movements at state and national levels like Sayyid Alwi al-Hadi, Zainal Abidin B. A., Sayyid Omar Shahabudin and Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

Among the non-Muslims, the interaction between Europeans and Asians, also resulted in cross-cultural communities such as Chinese and Indian Christians and Eurasian communities who communicated in a variety of English that was influenced by their native language. Similarly, the initial interaction between the relatively small Chinese community and the locals resulted in the adoption of some local customs and practices by the Chinese and vice-versa. The initial interaction was instrumental in the birth of the Chinese Peranakans who are also known as the Baba and Nyonya community whose members converse in a specific form of pidgin Malay that was heavily characterised by the use of mixed-vocabulary from Malay, Hokkien, Javanese and English and new vocabulary that was coined from their interactions.⁴ Hence, this group which practised a unique lifestyle as reflected in their costumes, entertainment and food, catalysed the birth of the Baba culture in the northern region which was markedly different from Melaka or other parts of the Nusantara region. Apart from the unique language features and types of food, the influence also spread to folk songs as seen in the

"*dondang sayang*" and the "*kebaya nyonya*" attire. All these were conspicuous features which characterised the unique identity of the Chinese Peranakan community. However, due to certain developments, especially the establishment of Chinese vernacular schools, before and after independence, the unique identity of the Peranakan community gradually diminished. In areas near the Malaya/Siam border, the interaction between the Malay and Siamese communities resulted in the birth of the Samsam community which composed mainly of Muslims who wore Malay attire but communicated in the Thai language (Sharom, 1984: 5).

The arrival and presence of foreign immigrants had both positive and negative impacts to the peninsula and the northern region. On the positive side, the British and foreign investors were able to use the labour from the foreign community for economic returns while on the negative side, the Chinese immigrants had brought along the culture of secret societies, contributing to the violence in several Malay states in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Disturbances caused by stiff competition to control tin mining areas in Larut in 1861–1862, 1865, 1872–1874 (Mohd. Zamberi, 2001: 45–63) gradually expanded that also led to the involvement of local Malay leaders. This provided the British who were already in the Straits Settlement with the golden opportunity to intervene in the conflicts, which initiated the colonisation of Malaya. The violence that was perpetuated by the secret societies also spread to Kulim, Kedah in the 1880s (Sharom, 1984: 7). Prior to this, Chinese secret societies in the early 19th century conspired with Ligor to attack Kedah and defeat the Kedah forces which was attempting to free the state from the Siamese (Mahani, 2003: 28–30).

Interestingly, the presence of Chinese secret societies encouraged the formation of Malay secret societies namely the Red and White Flags which were involved in violent clashes in Penang, Butterworth and Perak in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The feud between these two Malay groups eventually led them to form pacts with rival Chinese secret societies like the Ghee Hin and Toh Peh Kong. This is evident in the official report on the Penang Riots of August 1867 which states that the riot began when the White Flag which was supported by the Ghee Hin clashed with the Red Flag that was supported by the Toh Peh Kong (Zainol, 1995: 47–49). As observed by Leon Comber, members of the White and Red Flags were very diverse comprising Malays, Jawi Peranakans, Indians (including those who were Hindus), Javanese and Boyans (Zainol, 1995: 47). According to Zainol Jusoh there were instances of Chinese participation in Malay secret societies in the rural areas and villages. Similarly, several Chinese secret societies which had Malay, Portuguese, Indian, and Jawi Pekan participation were reported to be active in the 1870s (Vaughan, 1977: 103). The involvement of members of different ethnic groups in such societies and related activities was facilitated by interracial marriages. The leader of the Red Flag in Penang, Syed Mohamed al-Attas was the son-in-law of Khoo Poh, a pepper merchant who was also the leader of the Toh Peh Kong (Mahani, 2003: 42).

Despite the alliances, it must be noted that the rivalry between members of the Red and White Flags was more social and psychological. It was triggered by the desire to establish superiority and not motivated by economic power as the case of rival Chinese groups. Several decades before the Second World War, fracas often erupted during *Boria* (a performing art that is popular in Penang) performances which featured during the month of *Muharam* (the first month in the Hijrah calendar). The *Muharam* festivities and *Boria* performances are both examples of cultural manifestations that were derived from the racial and cultural amalgamation of the Indian Muslims and the Malays. *Boria* which was also enjoyed by non-Malays, including the Chinese have unique features. Other than their colourful and attractive costumes, the lyrics carry messages that reflect their experiences and lifestyle. The two stanzas from a *Boria* performance in 1919 by the Jalan Baru Red Flag group stress the importance of unity between people of different races and cultural backgrounds for the mutual benefit of all.

*Kita Arab bangsa Maghribi,
Di dalam gua terkejut mimpi,
Dengar musuh di dalam negeri,
Jalan Baru sedia menanti.*

*Troop Albania jajahan Itali,
Iramat rimau mati berdiri,
Alatan dunia tak ambil peduli,
Jalan Baru sedia menanti.*

(Zainol, 1995: 51)

PUBLICATIONS, NEWSPAPERS AND POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN THE MALAY COMMUNITY

The Indian Muslim and Jawi Peranakan communities were quick to adapt to the changes in the increasingly cosmopolitan urban areas brought by technological advancements and competitive business markets. Fluent in more than one language, they were more information savvy and were more aware of ongoing developments. Against this backdrop, the Jawi Peranakan community who were living in Penang contributed significantly as language teachers, translators, and liaison officers for the British and the local community but also between the local community and the urban cosmopolitan world. They were also among the first to initiate changes in the publishing industry, incorporating modern printing technology in the production of newspapers and magazines. The founder of the *Jawi Peranakan* (newspaper) which was printed in Singapore (1876) was Muhammad Said bin Dada Muhyiddin who was from Gelugor in Penang. He had studied the Malay language in Kedah, had visited several areas in the peninsula

and later resided in Singapore. Several others from the Jawi Peranakan, Arab and Arab Peranakan communities were also key figures in the publishing industry and initiated the production of several newspapers and magazines in Penang. Among them were S.P.S.K. Kadar Sahib – *Tanjung Penagri* (1895), Muhammad Ali bin Harun al-Hindi – *Pemimpin Warita* (1895–1897) and *Lengkungan Bulan* (1900–1901), Abdul Ghani bin Muhammad Kassim – *Bintang Timur* (1900) and *Cahaya Penang* (1900–1908), Sayyid Syaikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi – *Al-Ikhwan* magazine (1926–1928) and the *Saudara* newspaper (1928–1940). Other than newspapers and magazines, they also produced a variety of religious and educational books for schools (Roff, 1972; Ahmat, 1992).

Publishing activities also gained momentum partly due to the presence of several printing companies in Penang such as the Criterion Press which was founded in 1883 while the Muhammadiyah Press, Freeman Press and Kim Seck Hean Press were established in the 1880s (Jelani and Azmi Iskandar, 2008: 1–28). These printing presses continued active publishing until the mid-20th century. However, the newer printing companies were owned by Chinese entrepreneurs. Among the Arab-Malays, Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi who founded the Jelutong Press in 1928 was not only known for starting a monthly magazine called *Al-Ikhwan* and *Saudara* but also known as an educator, preacher, and writer who wrote novels and books related to various disciplines like religion, etiquette and history. Persama Press which was started by Haji Sulaiman Rawa in Lebuh Aceh in 1930 was well-known as a publisher of Islamic religious treatise and books including the "yellow treatise" which earned its name because these were printed in yellow paper.

As book publishing was still in its infancy, newspapers and magazines played a vital role to relay information to the public by providing a platform for discussing important issues besides serving as educational materials for Malay schools. It was the publisher of *Saudara* who proposed the setting up of a national organisation for Malays PASPAM in 1934. With the slogan "Hidup Bahasa Hiduplah Bangsa", PASPAM soon formed branches in almost every state in Malaya, Singapore, and North Borneo. It even had members from Sumatra and Sri Lanka. PASPAM organised several assemblies for the Malays beginning with the one in Taiping in 1935. PASPAM's approach was to capitalise on the growing Malay nationalism. The Taiping gathering became the catalyst for another assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 1939 followed by Singapore in 1940. These assemblies paved the way for the setting up of several national associations covering the interests of the Malays in the entire peninsula and Singapore like the Malaya Independence Union (registered as Kesatuan Melayu Muda or KMM) in 1938, the Malay National Party (MNP) in 1945 and UMNO in 1946.

Similar to the Jawi Peranakan and to a certain extent the Arab Peranakan, the Chinese Peranakans were among the earliest to publish Malay dailies. The difference is that the Jawi Peranakans were known for the publication of Malay dailies in the Jawi script while the Chinese Peranakans were pioneers of Malay

dailies in the Peranakan pidgin dialect and Romanised letters. Although not the equal of Singapore, the *Pemimpin Warita* newspaper made headlines in Penang when it was published. The editor was a Malay but the owner Chinese – Khor Teow Han who also owned the Kim Saek Hean Press which published the newspaper.

Taiping which was one of the earliest British administrative centres in the Federated Malay States, had adequate infrastructures like police stations, courts and a prison. The first and second Malay newspaper outside the Straits Settlements namely *Seri Perak* (1893–1895) and *Jajahan Melayu* (1896–1897) were published in Taiping. The chief editor and prime mover of both was Muhammad Umar bin Abu Bakar who originated from Permatang Sintuk in Seberang Perai. Like *Pemimpin Warita*, the entrepreneur who pioneered these newspapers was an Indian Muslim from Madras by the name of Sayyid Abul Hasan Burhan who came to Malaya as a language teacher for British sepoy.

In Malaysian history, developments in education and publications especially newspapers were closely associated with Malay nationalism and heightened awareness among the Malays. Penang also emerged as a centre for nationalist movements that left deep and long-lasting impact. Soon after the formation of the Singapore Malay Union in 1926, the Penang Malay Union was initiated. Unlike its Singapore counterpart, the Penang Malay Association (formed in 1927) was open to anyone who practised the Malay culture and customs including those who regarded themselves as Malays because their mother tongue was Malay. PASPAM later outshadowed the Penang Malay Association and became better known among the Malays through *Saudara* which acted as communication channel and platform for discussion. The Penang Malay Association became active in Penang when PASPAM was disbanded following the introduction of the Malayan Union in 1946. It remained as a separate entity which allowed its members to become actively involved in UMNO while it focused on economic and community-based activities.

EDUCATION AND THE MOVEMENT FOR NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The British influence in Penang and the arrival of a large number of foreign immigrants from outside the Nusantara region especially China and India had a significant impact on the identity and history of the northern region. It was from Penang that many immigrants eventually moved to Kedah, Perak and Perlis. Besides becoming a melting pot for people of different communities, it also paved the way for the formation of clusters of different communities and mixed-races as discussed earlier. Penang also became a hotspot that fostered new developments in term of education and technology. The first English medium school in Malaya – the Penang Free School was established in Penang in 1816.

The first Malay school, the Sungai Gelugor School which began operation in 1826, was also started on the island. Subsequently, other schools were set up in Penaga, Bukit Tambun and Permatang Pauh in 1863. In Perak, the first English school was established in Kamunting, Taiping, followed by another school in 1883 which was renamed King Edward VIII School when it moved to its new premises in 1905. In 1897, a Government English School was also set up in Kuala Kangsar, which was named Clifford School in 1928, in honour of the British officer who played a key role in the spread of British influence in Malaya. In 1905, the Malay College was established in Kuala Kangsar at the request of the Malay elites. The school was started to cater specifically for children from royal families and high-ranking officials. It served to transmit knowledge and inculcate values that would enable the students to eventually serve in middle and lower management positions in the colonial administration.

Realising the positive changes that were taking place in the FMS, the Kedah government took measures to bring about several developments far ahead of their time. Among these were the setting up of "Jawi/Melayu" schools beginning with the Padang Lepai school in 1861 (Noor Arini, 1983: 68–70) and the Government English School in Alor Star in 1908. Both the first and fourth Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Dr. Mahathir Mohamad were alumni of this school which was renamed Sultan Abdul Hamid College in 1935 (Mansur, 1983: 93).

Christian missionary groups also established English schools in the urban areas while Chinese philanthropists and organisations established Chinese independent schools. In Penang, the Chung Hua School was established in 1904 (Tan, 2007: 65) and Chung Ling in 1917. Initially, the Chinese schools operated on their own and used Chinese dialects like Hokkien, Kwangtung, Hakka and others as the medium of instruction. From the early 20th century the Chinese government under the Ch'ing dynasty took control of these schools and began to provide financial aid to reduce the risk of their becoming breeding ground for anti-government sentiments. Beginning from the early 1920s following the cultural revolution which was taking shape in China, the majority of these schools began using Mandarin as their official language. The move was instrumental in nurturing Chinese solidarity in Malaya. To ensure that Chinese students had the opportunity to learn the English language, Anglo-Chinese schools were established while Tamil schools were set up in the estates to cater for children of Indian workers.

Among the Malays, the more modern religious schools which were known as *maahad* or *madrrasah* with its progressive curriculum were set-up by the government and the local Malay community alongside the more traditional *sekolah pondok*. Among these schools were the Madrasah al-Masyhoor in Penang (1918), Maahad Mahmud in Alor Setar (1926), Madrasah Idrisiah in Kuala Kangsar and Maahad Ihya Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol (1930s). The prime movers were individuals of the younger generation who had been exposed to

religious revivalism in Egypt, India and Indonesia. In the 20th century some of these religious institutions later became the nourishing ground for the birth of social and political activists who were guided by religious beliefs and principles. It was from these institutions that well known religious figures and social activists from the northern region such as Syaikh Tahir Jalaluddin al-Azhari, Sayyid Syaikh al-Hadi, Syaikh Abdullah al-Maghribi, Syaikh Junaid Thola, Ustaz Abdul Rahman Mustaffa Mahmud, Syaikh Abdullah Fahim and Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Bakir emerged. Other well known religious figures like Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi and Syaikh Abu Bakar al-Assy'ari were students of the Madrasah al-Masyhoor in Penang. Musa Ahmad who led the Barisan Tani Se-Malaya which later joined the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was also from the same school. Syaikh Abu Bakar al-Assy'ari played a crucial role in Perlis by officially declaring that the administration of Muslim affairs in the state should be guided solely by the Syafi'i school as practised in the other states.

Except for a small percentage of the Chinese Peranakan who enrolled their children in English schools, the majority of the Chinese sent their children to Chinese schools where books and the teachers were brought from China. The close relationship of the Chinese with their country of origin was continuously strengthened through education that enabled them to follow developments in China including politics. The multi-faceted Chinese nationalism and political sentiments in China were also experienced by the local Chinese community in the northern region. In this context some members of the community became involved in political organisations like the Tungmenghui, Kuomintang, Kunchandang and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) making the northern region notably Perak a "hot" region in Malaya from the end of the 1930s until the Japanese surrender in 1945. The MCP which was formed in 1930 was an offshoot of the Nanyang Communist Party which had close ties with the Chinese Communist Party. The MCP produced several notable leaders such as Chin Peng (Chin Peng, 2003) and Eng Ming Ching (Suriani Abdullah) who were raised in Perak and studied in Chinese vernacular schools. Malay MCP leaders like Rashid Maidin and Abdullah Che Dat were also from Perak. They became involved in political activities as a result of interactions with Chinese political activists, before, during and after the Japanese Occupation (Rashid, 2005; Abdullah, 2005; 2007; Chin Peng, 2003; Suriani, 2006).

Japanese control of Malaya and anti-Japanese nationalism not only united those of Chinese origins worldwide including those from the northern region but also sparked anti-colonial sentiments among the Malays and a cross-section of the Indians. This resulted in Chinese and Malay participation in anti-Japanese and anti-British movements that later facilitated the Pusat Tenaga Rakyat-All Malaya Council of Joint Action (PUTERA-AMCJA) cooperation in the 1940s. The Japanese Occupation also triggered feelings of animosity between the Chinese and Malays who were accused of being pro-Japanese. This caused racial rifts during this period and after the Japanese Occupation. The attacks by Bintang

Tiga (Three Star) elements on Malay villages in Bekor (near Kuala Kangsar) in March 1946 and Kampung Cepor (near Gerik) created ill-feelings and suspicion between Chinese and Malays. However, the anti-colonial spirit nurtured during the Japanese Occupation had paved the way for Malay-Chinese cooperation in anti-colonial nationalist movements after the Occupation. The close cooperation and understanding that were created made it possible for the participation of Malays especially former members of the MNP in the MCP through the 10th Regiment which was specifically established to take advantage of the anti-colonial sentiments among the Malay left. The MCP political cooperation model was quite different from the UMNO, Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) cooperation in the Alliance that allowed each party to exist as separate entities. Caught between the aspiration to drive out the British and the difficulties caused by the constant British attacks and later by the government of the Federation of Malaya, the cooperation between these groups was manifested through their participation in the MCP and the close affinity among them that transcended racial and ethnic boundaries. Rashid Maidin, a Malay of Rawa origin married Chau Chi Chu, who became Selamah Abdullah after her conversion to Islam (Rashid, 2005) while Abdullah Cek Dat (Abdullah, 2007) married Eng Ming Ching who changed her name to Suriani Abdullah (Suriani, 2006). The inter racial marriages that transcended cultural and ethnic boundaries is not an isolated phenomenon; what is notable is that members of the 10th Regiment, remained as Muslims and maintained their identity as Malays even though their religious knowledge was shallow and they had married non-Muslims who subscribed to communist ideology.

PERAK AS CENTRE FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Perak, especially its northern part was a fertile ground for the left, religious-based and radical groups which transcended ethnicity. The MNP which was formed in Ipoh on 17th October 1945 was the first official political party in Malaya after the MCP which can be regarded as a full-fledged party. It publicly announced its intention to fight for an independent Malaya together with Indonesia (Abdul Rahman, Azmi and Nazarudin, 2006). Besides several areas in Malaya and Singapore, the MNP and its women wing Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), and youth wing Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API), were active in Kuala Kangsar, Balik Pulau, Penang, Perlis and several other places in the northern region. Although the MNP supported the move to unite all the states in the peninsula, it opposed the formation of the Malayan Union because it excluded Singapore and did not include any plans for immediate independence for Malaya. In fact the Malayan Union was for the establishment of greater colonial role in the Malay states. Under the leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmi who hailed from Tanjung Tualang in Perak, the MNP became active in the Congress of Malay Associations

which opposed the Malayan Union and in the formation of UMNO in May 1946. Several other prominent figures from the northern region had also played important roles in the opposition against the Malayan Union. They included Mustapha Hussein from Matang, who had led the KMM alongside Ibrahim Haji Ya'kob before and during the Japanese Occupation; Bukit Gantang territorial chief Dato' Abdul Wahab, President of the Perak Malay Alliance; Haji Hussain Cek Dol, Senu Abdul Rahman and Mohd. Rejab bin Haji Darus from the Kedah Malay Union; and Mohd. bin Jamil and Azahari Taib from Syarikat Berkerjasama Kedah dan Saiburi (SEBERKAS). The gathering of 50,000 Kedahans initiated by the Kedah Malay Union on 19 January 1946 was the first gathering of such proportion aimed at opposing the Malayan Union. This was one of the earliest gatherings with protestors carrying anti-British banners like "British Pecah Amanah" and "Kita Tidak Boleh Percaya Lagi Kepada Kerajaan Inggeris" (Ibrahim, 1981: 66).

Although it rarely existed separately, the roles played by religious theologians and teachers like Abdullah Fahim, Abu Bakar al-Bakir and Haji Hussein Cek Dol in the anticolonial stirrings are significant. If Chinese schools and night classes had been instrumental in raising the political awareness of Chinese youths, a sizeable number of Islamic educational institutions like the *pondok* and *maahad* had played a similar role to create political awareness among the Malays. In Perak the Maahad Ihya-Assyarif of Gunung Semanggol often hosted gatherings of people from all walks of life to discuss issues related to the Muslim community and the future of the nation. These gatherings which were open to all including UMNO members and non-Malay observers represented organisations like the Malayan Democratic Union and the MCP. Following these gatherings several working committees on the economy, religion and education such as the Pusat Perekonomian Melayu SeMalaya (PEPERMAS), Majlis Agama Tertinggi SeMalaya (MATA) and Lembaga Pendidikan Rakyat (LEPIR) were set up in 1947. In March 1948 the first Islamic political party in the country the Hizbul Muslimin was established (Nabir, 1976). The stirrings in Gunung Semanggol caused exasperation among UMNO leaders who felt threatened while the British government was confronted with demands for independence based on Islamic principles. After the murder of three European estate managers in Sungai Siput on 16 June 1948, a state of Emergency was declared on 18 June and many MNP and Hizbul Muslimin members were subsequently arrested. These arrests considerably weakened both parties. It was in Bagan in Penang, the second Islamic political party which was earlier known as Persatuan Muslim Se-Tanah Melayu (PAS) was launched on 23 August 1951 (Safie, 1981). The only seat that was won by a party other than the Alliance in the first general elections in 1955 was the Kerian Utara seat which is located in the northern region. The remaining 51 seats were won by the Alliance which comprised UMNO, MCA and MIC. Towards the end of December of the same year, the Baling Peace talks were held in Kedah, between the newly elected government and the MCP to end the

emergency. Whether by chance or design, the talks failed and the MCP continued its armed revolt until the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1989 in Sadao.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of ethnic identity and political ideology, historical development in the northern region appears to provide pointers of the future developments in the region. The cooperation among the various parties that formed the Alliance prior to independence, also appears to have determined that the Chief Minister of Penang should be from the Chinese community while the Governor's post is held by a Malay. Only the state of Penang implemented this leadership principle. Until May 1969 the Chief Minister was from the MCA. When the Alliance was defeated in Penang in the 1969 elections, the post was held by Gerakan which controlled the majority of seats in the State Assembly. After the May 1969 riots and to reduce racial tension, a coalition government consisting of Gerakan and the Alliance was formed in Penang in February 1972. In June 1974 the National Front or Barisan Nasional (BN) came into being to replace the Alliance and this paved the way for Penang to be governed by a group of parties which also controlled the federal government in Kuala Lumpur. This continued until the 2008 general election when the coalition of opposition parties comprising the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and PAS took control of the Penang state assembly. As a result the Chief Ministership and Deputy Chief Minister II went to the DAP while the post of Deputy Chief Minister I was held by the PKR. For the first time, in the history of Penang, the northern region and the country, an ethnic Indian was appointed deputy chief minister of a state. The 2008 general election also marked the first-ever defeat of the BN and the victory of the DAP-PKR-PAS coalition in two northern states – Kedah and Perak. The government of Kedah was led by PAS which held the Chief Ministership; PAS also had several members serving as State Executive Councillors. In Perak, after an agreement between DAP and PAS, a PAS member was named Chief Minister although DAP had won the most number of seats in the state. This was because the state constitution does not allow a non-Malay-Muslim to become Chief Minister. Nevertheless, this arrangement did not last long when two assemblymen from PKR defected allowing the BN to take power with a single seat majority. Following this the Perak ruler declared BN was given the mandate to form the new Perak government. In the subsequent general elections on 5 May 2013, BN managed to maintain its political power in Perak, albeit with a small majority. Pakatan Rakyat spearheaded by PAS was unsuccessful in its bid to defend its position in Kedah as the BN had won more seats. All developments relating to the 2008 and 2013 general elections and the formation of four new state governments after these elections was the manifestation of the climax of the historical heritage and the

formation of a new political race in Malaysia following the confluence of indigenous-Malay-Islamic traditions with the immigrant-foreign heritage following the social and political developments of the 19th and 20th centuries.

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NOTES

1. A Malay version of the essay was published as "Wilayah Utara Semenanjung Malaysia: Warisan Sejarah dan Asas Rupa Diri Kebangsaan" in *Warisan Wilayah Utara Semenanjung Malaysia* ed. Ooi Keat Gin. Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia Press.
2. The term "Orang Perak" (people of Perak) used here has the same meaning as the "Perak Man" which is used by other scholars.
3. As decided by the "Perlembagaan Rakyat" (Peoples' Constitution) which was agreed by PUTERA and the AMCJA, both Malays and non-Malays have decided that the Malayan nationality was to be known as "MELAYU".
4. The language of the Melaka Babas was estimated to be made up of 70% Malay words and 30% Hokkien words while for the Penang Babas it is 70% Hokkien words and 30% Malay words.

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