




Malay College Kuala Kangsar  
1905-2005

# LEADERSHIP But What's Next?




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## Contents



Foreword	6
Preface	9
Introduction	17
Chapter 1	
The Malay College 1905–1941: English Education for the Traditional Malay Leaders	29
Chapter 2	
The Golden Years 1947–1975: Changing Aspirations and Maintaining Old Traditions	65
Chapter 3	
Learning to Lead in an Unsurpassed Environment	106
Chapter 4	
College Bonds: Bonding Within and Without the Malay College	156
Chapter 5	
What Old Boys Left Behind	190
Chapter 6	
Retrospect and Prospect	230
Epilogue	
Who's Next After Tun Razak? Here's the Roadmap to the Top	240
Index	244



## Introduction



The importance of the Malay College – to the social and educational history of Malaysia – lies in the fact that it has been a successful nurturing ground for Malay leaders, more so than any other educational institution in the country. It has educated many political leaders including Malay sultans and territorial chiefs, governors of Malacca and Penang, a prime minister, a deputy prime minister and many members of cabinet, civil servants, menteri besar, senior administrative officials and prominent members of the Malaysian diplomatic corps, the judiciary, the military and the police force. This was achieved because its traditional role was educating Malay boys for careers in government. In the post-World War II period, it added to this role the responsibility of providing opportunities for its boys to further their education in wider fields. In so doing, it has enabled them to make significant inroads into almost every avenue in the political, economic and social life of the country. Today, College boys can also be found among the corporate giants, prominent medical and health professionals, respected academics, wealthy businessmen, successful engineers, scientists and leading journalists and editors in the

country. What is more, some have become forerunners and trend-setters, determining the state of play in their chosen field and profession, rather than being mere participants.

When the Malay College reopened in 1947, after its abrupt closure in 1941 following the Japanese invasion of Malaya, it was some eight years short of celebrating its first half-century. It was therefore into its middle decades, a period that has proved to be an important stage in its history. In those years, far-reaching changes occurred as World War II brought to a close the 'old world' and heralded a new world of shattered empires replaced by new states and outmoded social orders challenged by new ideas and realities. Far from escaping these momentous changes, it absorbed and mirrored them and went on to carve for itself a path-finding role that has ensured it an enduring place in the social history of the country.

Indeed, the Malay College is a very different institution from its pre-war self. At the time it was set up, the rationale was that a new and separate school was necessary to provide a controlled environment in which to successfully educate Malays of the ruling classes. Of particular importance was the need to dispel doubts in the minds of Malay parents, in general, that an English education would taint their boys with Christian ideas; ensure that discipline could be taught to improve their moral fibre, as it was believed that Malays were lacking in discipline; and provide the right type of education, namely that of an English public school, long regarded by the English upper classes as particularly suited for shaping boys into leadership material. Out of these aims and directions emerged the traditions and practices which distinguished and differentiated the Malay College from other schools in the country.

Central to the scheme of introducing the boys to the English public-school ethos was the presence of a British headmaster aided by British teachers who were specially appointed to influence the tone of the institution. Thus, throughout the period before World War II the Malay College was never without this element in its environment. William Hargreaves, the first headmaster, was educated in Dublin where he received his master of arts degree. He was succeeded by L A S Jermyn,

an Oxford graduate who came towards the end of 1919 to take over from the acting head, John O'May, a teacher there since 1908. In 1923, Charles Bazell, also from Oxford, was appointed headmaster; he remained in that position until he retired in 1938. The last headmaster before the war was H R Carey, with a master of arts degree from Cambridge.

The essence of a public-school system was an all-round approach which aimed at giving the boys a general scholastic education, a love of sports and games and other character building extra-curricular activities – such as participation in the boy scouts movement and the cadet corps – and a moral upbringing by giving religion a place in the scheme of things. While the English public-school system taught a robust Christian morality, the Malay College, of necessity, provided the boys with some Islamic education and made it a school regulation that Friday prayers at the Kuala Kangsar mosque were part and parcel of their life at the institution, while a *surau* (chapel) has long been a fixture in the school grounds. Another important aspect of the public-school education was the running of a school with the aid of prefects and house captains. The prefect system and captaincy of a house were a training process in leadership. Although only a few were made prefects or house captains at any one time, the system was central to the learning process both by example as well as participation. So important was the system that it was introduced very early in the development of the College. This can be contrasted with another premier school in Perak – Anderson School, Ipoh – which was founded in 1909 but only appointed prefects in the second half of the 1930s. The system of houses, although only introduced in the early 1920s, became central to the idea of encouraging Collegians to excel in all their school activities; houses competed against each other for the top house award on the basis of points accumulated for the achievements of their members.

By the time the Japanese invaded the Malay Peninsula in 1941, the Malay College had already been recognised as having justified its existence. Old boys were to be found reigning as Malay rulers of all four Federated Malay States. They could be said to represent a new breed of Malay rulers, who had not only been formally schooled, but were also