

**GOVERNMENTS OF MALAYA**  
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1. The Malay states were all absolute monarchies before the coming of the British. All taxes collected belong to the rulers. They then allocate funds for the various institutions of Government.

2. Quite naturally the ruler would spend most of the money on himself. There was not much left to finance the institutions of Government.

3. Frequently the ruler would borrow money for his own use. The classic case was the five million dollars borrowed from Siam by the Sultan of Kedah for the marriage of five of his sons.

4. Unable to pay the debt, Kedah had to accept a financial adviser appointed by Siam to ensure Government revenue would be used to pay the debt. The adviser was British.

5. Naturally the development of the state was neglected. Additionally, the tax collectors pocketed some of the taxes. It was in order to prevent this corruption that the ruler accepted the offer of the Kapitan China to collect the taxes and guarantee a much bigger amount would reach the ruler.

6. In Johor, the ruler was more astute. Seeing how the Chinese business people were able to enrich Singapore, the ruler invited them to open up land for agriculture along the rivers of Johor. Although all the revenue went to the ruler, there was enough for financing the different institutions of Government.

7. Other West Coast states benefited from their tin-rich land leased to Chinese miners.

8. The rulers of Kedah and Johor saw the development of Penang and Singapore and wanted their states to develop in the same way. They tried to copy the British administrative system. But it was Perak which first decided to bring in British advisers to improve the administrations.

9. Perak was rich in tin and had leased a lot of tin-mining land to Chinese Kongsis. Fighting broke out between the different Chinese mining companies. The ruler of Perak was unable to deal with this. He decided to get help from the British in Penang. The Sikh police force was brought from Penang to put a stop to the fights between the Chinese kongsis.

10. Subsequent to the incident the ruler decided to have the advice of the British in the administration of the state. Quickly Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang followed suit. Under the British these four states were federated.

11. As far as the people were concerned British rule was no different from the Governments of the rulers. There was more security and administration were better organised. The survey department marked the boundaries between the states and also the boundary between Siam and Malaya. Land holdings were also surveyed and marked with boundary stones.

12. The rakyat and the migrants from India and China were not allowed to be involved in politics. This was reserved for the rulers and senior members of the administration. When it came to dealing with the British, the rulers had the final say.

13. The Chinese migrants followed the politics of China. They were supportive of the uprising against the Emperor by Sun Yat-Sen. They regarded themselves as citizens of China and they put up the Chinese flag during certain Chinese national days.

14. There was no citizenship in the Malay states but the Malays were regarded as the subjects (rakyat) of their Malay Rulers. Although all of them regard themselves as Malays but their loyalty was to their different Sultans. There were no political parties. They seem quite happy to be ruled by the British. In fact, they looked up to the British as superior people, able to govern their country well.

15. The British promoted the idea that Malaya was peaceful and stable because it had no history. This was of course nonsense. But in the schools the history of the country was not taught. In the English schools the students were taught the history of the British Empire and of Great Britain.

16. In the Federated Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, the administration was headed by British officers. The few Malays in the administration held junior posts. But in the Non-Federated Malay States of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor, Malay officers were understudies to the British heads of departments. The district officers were all Malays whereas in the Federated states even district officers or Residents were British.

17. The stable and orderly societies during the time of the British were much liked by the Malays. The Chinese and Indians too found British rule to their liking.

18. In the Malay States of the Peninsula there was no talk of getting rid of the British. In fact, the rulers and the Malays felt that only the British could rule the country. That was why when the British came back after the defeat of the Japanese, the rulers, their subjects and the Indian and Chinese migrants welcomed them. They looked towards the reestablishment of the status quo ante. Only very few Malays who had gone to Indonesia to fight against the Dutch had any idea about terminating colonialism.

19. Unfortunately, the British had other ideas about relations with the Malay States. They felt that the system of Governments to be cumbersome and costly. There were actually seven different governmental systems in the Peninsula.

20. There were firstly the colonies of Singapore, Malacca and Penang ruled directly by the British.

21. Then there were the Federated Malay States ruled as a federation with Kuala Lumpur as the capital. Finally, there were the Non-Federated states of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor, each having their own Governments, where the British had to work with Malay administrators. They were less willing to accept British officers.

22. The British felt that there should be only one Government formed by a Union of all the states as well as the colonies. Singapore was excluded from

this union. It was to be retained as a British colony, as it was principal base for British military in Southeast Asia.

23. The plan was drawn up in London by the Colonial Office. No consultation was made with the Malay States. It was assumed that the Malay rulers would give their consent. If they did not than the British would simply refuse to recognise them as the rulers of their states. Another prince would be found who would be recognised as Sultan when he signed the surrender of the state to the British.

24. Although there could be a titular Sultan but he would have no role to play in the administration. He would confine himself to matters pertaining to the religious (Islamic) affairs and Malay custom.

25. The Malayan Union plan was kept a secret, but Malaysians began to hear about it through leakages. At once the Malays became agitated. They believed their rulers would not be able to counter the British proposal especially when there was to be a threat of non-recognition.

26. The Malay subjects of the rulers were not allowed to be involved in politics. But the threat was so great that they decided to register their disagreement some how.

27. The Malay newspapers played up the issue. The Majlis of Kuala Lumpur suggested that the Malays should hold a congress and discuss the issue.

28. Some prominent Malays in Kuala Lumpur took the initiative to organise a gathering of Malay organisations to discuss the Malayan Union. There was enthusiastic response. More than a hundred Malay organisations, all non-political attended.

29. The meeting was held in a shabby club in Kampung Baru, the Malay Agricultural Settlement in Kuala Lumpur. This meeting succeeded in identifying some of the unknown Malay leaders. Very quickly they became prominent as for the first time they were accepted as leaders of peninsular Malays. Before that the Malays only knew their Sultan and the prominent personalities in their own states.

30. Of these leaders, Dato Onn Jaafar of Johor was immediately recognised as a national leader. He was well known for his willingness to stand up against his Sultan and to resign from the Johor civil service. He preferred to become a journalist in Singapore. No other Malay had dared to disobey his Sultan. It was considered to be a treason.

31. Dato Onn was successful in the opposition to the Malayan Union. Considering that the Malays at that time were very poor, had little education and had never indulged in politics, the success of Dato Onn and the Malay activists was remarkable.

32. But Dato Onn himself, in a speech at an UMNO Assembly in Kedah, made it clear that the Malays were not capable of ruling their own country. Onn was not campaigning for independence. He merely wanted to prevent the British from turning the Malay states, which were British protectorates from becoming British colonies.

33. After defeating the Malayan Union, Onn was willing to work with the British on plans for unifying the multiracial population. He accepted membership of the Communities Liaison Committee set up by Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner for Southeast Asia. Such was Onn's acceptance of the ideas of MacDonald that he proposed the Malay based UMNO should accept other races and become multiracial. His idea was rejected by UMNO leaders and he resigned.

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