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## Alor Star a historical city

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COME Sunday, a new page in Alor Star's illustrious history will be written. The Sultan of Kedah will officially proclaim Alor Star as a city amid much fanfare at Dataran Tunku, opposite Che Det Mall. The State capital was declared a city on Nov 28.

City Hall has prepared a series of events to mark this proud and historic moment. The programme includes 11 floats from various organisations which would carry the proclamation from Balai Besar to Dataran Tunku, school bands and traditional and cultural shows relating Alor Star's history.

The night will be capped by a magnificent display of fireworks. To facilitate the float procession, Jalan Tuanku Ibrahim, Jalan Kolam Air, Jalan Sultan Badlishah and Jalan Istana Lama will be closed to all traffic from 6pm.

The new Alor Star City Hall and its mayor Datuk Mohd Yusuf Nayan invite all members of the public to come and celebrate the momentous occasion. Alor Star has a colourful history. It started when Sultan Muhammad Jiwa, the 19th Sultan of Kedah, shifted his administration from Kota Bukit Pinang to Kota Star on Dec 31, 1735. The new palace grounds included the Balai Nobat, Balai Besar and the Masjid Zahir.

As the new place had many star or 'Stak' trees (*Bouea macrophylla*), he decided to name it Kota Star. The name Alor Star, according to local historians, was given by traders and merchants, who upon returning to their homes, told their families about the new place they had been. They described it as Alor Star as it was the 'Alor' or river where the Kedah and Anak Bukit rivers converged.

Alor Star thrived with merchants, mainly from India and China, trading at its port. Its main port, now located in front of Medan Raja, attracted many foreign ships and perahu from all over Kedah.

Trade grew and soon it became necessary to have a shipyard. One was built in 1862 to the east of Sungai Raja in Alor Star, but it has long been abandoned.

Alor Star has seen its fair share of wars. In 1771, Alor Star and the Kuala Kedah Fort succumbed to the constant attacks by the Bugis, led by Raja Haji. The Alor Star Palace and the Balai Besar were razed to the ground, but the Sultan escaped to Perlis.

In 1821, the Lingor/Siamese armada attacked and overran the Kuala Kedah Fort and Alor Star. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin, escaped to Penang and was sheltered by the British. (Kedah had ceded Penang to the British in 1786 as a result of the deception of Francis Light to offer protection, that never materialised, against Siamese attack.)

Alor Star was abandoned for 20 years as the invaders moved the administration to the Kuala Kedah Fort. It was only in 1842 that the Sultan was allowed to return to Alor Star, a capital which, by then, had all been but consumed by the jungle.

Making matters worse, Kedah's territory had been carved by the Siamese as punishment, giving Kubang Pasu district to Tunku Anum, Perlis to Syed Husin and Setul to Tunku Bisnu. Kubang Pasu was returned to Kedah in 1864 but Perlis became a separate State and Setul part of modern day Thailand.

After the long period of strife came peace. Alor Star began to prosper again.

Understanding that education was of paramount importance, many schools were built. The first Malay school in Alor Star, Sekolah Jawi Padang Lepai, was opened on May 12, 1861. Its students consisted mainly of royalty and nobles.

Another Malay school, Sekolah Melayu Kampong Baharu, was also built at

Jalan Putra. Among its students was Sultan Badlishah.

Other Malay schools were started later - Sekolah Melayu Simpang Empat (1906), Sekolah Melayu Perempuan Seberang Perak (1907), Sekolah Melayu Alor Merah and Sekolah Melayu Langgar (1907).

An English teacher, Frank Powell, was engaged to teach the Kedah princes in 1890. Subsequently, the first government English school was set up in 1908 and it was to become the Sultan Abdul Hamid College. Among its famous students were two Malaysian Prime Ministers, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The first Arabic school in Alor Star was built in 1916. The Madrasah Hamidiah was named after Sultan Abdul Hamid.

The Balai Besar has seen Alor Star through much of its development. Most royal and state functions have been held here, the most prominent being the five simultaneous weddings of Kedah's princes and princesses in 1904.

This joyous occasion was celebrated with much pomp and splendour. Among the dignitaries who were present were the Siamese King Chulalongkorn and the Governor of the Straits Settlements. The celebration lasted three months.

The Merdeka Gardens, located near the new state stadium, Stadium Darulaman, was built to commemorate the Independence of the Federation of Malaya in 1957.

In this garden is found the Emergency Memorial, reminding visitors to the park of the nation's difficult and precarious struggle against the communist insurgency in the 1940s to 1960s.