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SARAWAK

A GENTLEMAN'S
VICTORY
FOR
TAIB MAHMUD

JAMES RITCHIE



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Perpustakaan Negara
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FOREWORD

The recent crisis in Sarawak in which a small majority of the State Assemblymen decided to oppose the leadership of Datuk Patinggi Taib Mahmud by 28 out of 48 members, had led to a State election, the results of which had already been known. Datuk Taib was returned as Chief Minister and he has now resumed leadership of the party. Let us wish him luck.

James Ritchie decided to write a book on Sarawak politics following the event of 15 April 1987, and it is obvious that he has taken a lot of trouble to give the historical and political background of Sarawak.

Sarawak has a mixed population of one and a half million people, the majority of whom are the Dayaks, and next come the Chinese and Malays. Each community is divided not so much on racial background as on their inert interests in their own welfare.

The Dayaks are the indigenous people but they lead a simple tribal existence with hardly any political or business interests, but a few are English-educated and aware of their right and are trying to assert it with the backing of their people who form the racial majority. The Chinese are holding on to their business dominance in the State through politics, while the Malays, on the other hand, are honestly conscious of their political right. They were the first to demonstrate their absolute confidence in the Independence of Sarawak through Malaysia.

The growth of their political consciousness started way back in 1946 when the last member of the Brooke dynasty, Rajah Sir Charles Vyner-Brooke, announced in a proclamation his decision to cede Sarawak to the British Crown.

Hitherto the Sarawak Malays looked up to Brooke as their Rajah, and this renunciation of Sarawak's rights

without consulting them hurt their pride very deeply. The young patriots made a vow to stop this take-over of Sarawak by the British Crown. They refused to cooperate with the new Government under Whitehall and for three years their anti-cessionist activities seethed and festered.

The Sibu-based Gerakan Pemuda Melayu decided to fight an open rebellion and started off by assassinating the Governor, Mr Duncan Stewart. When he visited Sibu on 3 December 1949, a youth, 19 years of age, Rosli bin Dhoby, drew his *kris* and, lunging forward with a sudden movement, killed the Governor outright. Several men were charged with Rosli, among whom were Morsidi bin Sidek, Bujang bin Suntong and Awan Ramli bin Haji Matsaruddin, and they had to pay the penalty with their lives.

That was the first sacrifice made in the name and cause of Sarawak's freedom. Since that time it has always been the Malays who have taken a leading part in the political movement in Sarawak. They are a minority, nevertheless their activity has been in the forefront of the political struggle of Sarawak.

As I have said the Chinese were interested from an economic and business angle and the Dayaks on their right as the indigenous people of Sarawak, but on the whole, if they were to combine forces it would be a sure guarantee for peace, well-being and stability of Sarawak for all time. So it was that when they joined Malaysia they did so as a combined force.

Out of consideration for the Dayaks, a man of their community was appointed the first Chief Minister, but he was expelled by the Assembly. Another Dayak was appointed to take his place. He was found incapable of grappling with the political situation, and so a qualified Malay was appointed who became the Chief Minister for eleven years. He was Datuk Haji Abdul Rahman Ya'kub who was later made Yang Dipertua Negeri, Sarawak. His nephew Datuk Taib Mahmud took his place as Chief Minister.

This is the sixth year of Datuk Taib's appointment as Chief Minister of Sarawak. There was to be a big celebration to mark the occasion on 28 March 1987, but instead, a crisis broke out which led to the election of new members of the Assembly.

Sarawak is rich in minerals, timber and other jungle products and there is a lot of hidden wealth in the State which one day will surface for the benefit of Malaysia. Datuk Taib is well-equipped and well-qualified to give the leadership to the State. He is an ardent believer in a joint political front for Sarawak. He has worked hard, visiting places and working his way into the hearts of the people. The time will come when he will have to give way to another successor, and he is aware of it; but such time has not yet arrived.

In addition to his political interests, he has been a great help to me in my Muslim welfare work, of which he is the Vice-President of PERKIM and the leader of BINA, an affiliate of PERKIM in Sarawak. He is also the Vice-President of the Regional Islamic Organisation of South-East Asia and the Pacific (RISEAP) which helps to bolster the morale of Muslim minority in the region of Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Like every political leader, Datuk Taib is not free from political jealousies within the party. Young James Ritchie has much to tell his readers about the Chief Minister's problems, and he took pains to relate what he knew of the trouble from within with unbiased frankness.

It would take much time for me to comment on what the author has said, but the reader is free to exercise his judgment as to what is right and what is wrong. But it was young James who is courageous enough to come forward and give his impartial version of the situation.

James Ritchie grew up in Kedah and was educated at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College. His father Datuk John Ritchie was the Chief Police Officer of Kedah and Perlis. During Datuk Kalong Ningkan's time when the political situation in Sarawak was rather disturbing, the government decided to send Datuk John Ritchie as C.P.O. of