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Cover: *An orang utan at Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre*

Photo by : **Albert C. K. Teo**

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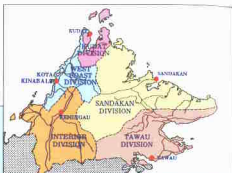
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NASKAH PEMULIHARAAN
PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA

INTRODUCTION

Situated on the east coast of Sabah, the town and district of Sandakan are nearly 1,900 kilometres from Malaysia's capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Apart from much smaller Lahad Datu and Semporna, Sandakan is the eastern-most town in



Sandakan Division



Aerial view of Sandakan

Malaysia, situated only 28 kilometres from the border with the Philippines. As we shall see later, Sandakan has strong historical connections with that country. Having been the capital of Sabah from 1884 until the Japanese invasion in 1942, and having been through a heady timber boom period through the 1960's and 70's when the town was said to have contained the greatest concentration of millionaires in the world, Sandakan has settled into a more mellow period, primarily as a market town for a growing agricultural hinterland.

1879 to 3,771 in 1884 - an astounding 40% increase every year for five years. History proved Pryer wrong, but peace and a higher average standard of living in Sandakan than in the lands further east more than make up for smallness of size.

Sandakan has a colourful history, although some aspects of the earlier days would perhaps be better described as shady. In the 1880's, William Pryer, the English founder of modern Sandakan town, envisaged a great city fringing Sandakan Bay. In one of his frequent bursts of confident enthusiasm, he predicted that one hundred years hence Sandakan would be larger than Manila in the Philippines. Perhaps this was because the number of residents leapt from 698 in



International airlinks to Sabah



Logs awaiting export at Sandakan

HISTORY



W. B. Pryer

History books say that Sandakan was founded in 1879 by an Englishman named William Pryer. In fact, the story of Sandakan started more than a century earlier. During the eighteenth century, there was an increasing demand in England for tea, which was replacing ale and gin as the national beverage. Most of this tea was coming from China, but English traders could offer little that was in demand by the Chinese. Seeking ways to diversify their activities as middlemen, the English turned to those parts of South-East Asia which were still free of rivals from other European countries. One man - Alexander Dalrymple of the East India Company - found the Sulu region, a scattered array of islands in what is now the southern Philippines. Spain had tried but failed to conquer this region, mainly because of its strong Moslem population. The Sulu region was ruled by a

complicated family network, under the authority of a Sultan who lived on the island of Jolo, about 340 kilometres from modern Sandakan. The Sulu region provided an abundance of natural products, from the sea and the forests, that was of interest to China. That trade between Sulu and China already existed bothered neither Dalrymple nor later British traders. They found that the rulers of Sulu were interested in goods that they could supply - most importantly, arms and gunpowder to fight their rivals as well as the Spanish. Thus, the power and wealth of the Sultanate of Sulu grew during the late eighteenth century - in part as a result of the English addiction to tea.

The precise origins of Sandakan are a mystery, but we know that it has its beginnings as a trading outpost of the Sulu Sultanate. For the Sulu traders, the eastern part of what is now Sabah was an important source of beeswax (used mainly for making candles), rattan canes (used for many purposes) and edible birds' nests (relished by Chinese communities throughout Asia). The district, centred on Sandakan Bay but including the Kinabatangan River, acquired the Sulu name of Mangindora. By the late eighteenth century, there were several settlements around the Bay, at Terusan Duyong, Pulau Lubokan, Domendung, Segaliud - and Sandakan itself. The exact site of that early settlement is unknown - all that we know is that the name Sandakan means "to be pawned" in the Sulu language and that the settlement was based on a river with that name. So important was Sandakan that Sultan Sharaf ud-Din appointed his own son to govern the settlement from 1791 to 1808. Around 1812, Sandakan was visited by a Captain John Hunt, who

recorded that *"the chief is named tuan Abandool with a hundred Islams and there are many orang idan (natives) in the interior parts. There is a small mud fort mounting 3 large guns, 5 smaller of brass, 30 rantiakas, and 60 muskets. Its annual products, when the Sulo people come over in numbers and chuse to exert themselves are 50 piculs (over 3,000 kilograms) of white birds' nest, 200 piculs of black, of different qualities, ... 3 piculs of camphor first sort ... 3 piculs of wax, capis pearls in abundance, 5 catties (3 kilograms) yearly if looked for, and 50 piculs of tripang"* (sea cucumbers). The rise in power of the Sulu sultanate continued during the early decades of the nineteenth century, by expansion of trade and through slavery. Many of the slaves were used to power trading and raiding boats, the largest boats being over 80 feet long, with a crew of more than 100 men plus over 60 oarsmen. Slave-catching

communities emerged outside the Sulu region, terrorising the entire coastline of Borneo and most of what is now Indonesia. In the eighteenth century, slavers had obtained their victims simply for sale to Sulu, but the system degenerated through the nineteenth century into piracy and bloodthirsty anarchy. The European powers in the region, in competition in every other way, were unanimous in wanting to eliminate the slavery and piracy which damaged their trading interests. The power of the Sulu sultanate declined rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century and with it the existence of many trading posts, including Sandakan.

In the early 1870's, however, a mixed group of German and British adventurers and traders formed a small settlement on Pulau Timbang in Sandakan Bay as a base for their activities in the Sulu Sea. The only



The settlement of Elopura established by William Pryer in 1879