

**Potpourri story of Malaysian independence**  
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The nation has launched into another orgy of National Day celebrations, as the country celebrates the 54th anniversary of Merdeka. That, of course, is the story of the country's independence, from the point of view of the Malaysian national narrative.

This interpretation of our national story always runs counter to my personal memory of the formation of the country. In my personal recollection, Malaysia is only 48 years old, as Malaysia was declared an independent nation only on September 16, 1963.

But according to the received wisdom of our written history, Malaysia was a mere continuation of the great Malayan project, starting out with the birth of the Malay nation in 1957.

Still, no matter how often the newspapers or history textbooks repeat this, nobody can erase from my consciousness, or our collective memory, how the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya to form the federation of Malaysia under unique circumstances.

I cannot accept the purely racial narrative of the Orang Malaya's sense of history. In my lived experience, Malaysia came into being as a result of combining the western territory of the Malayan states, together with the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak and briefly, Singapore.

No amount of official history in Malaysia will erase the crucial importance played by Sabah and Sarawak in this tale of national sovereignty.

In most history books, Sabah and Sarawak were made out to play the supporting cast, and that is how the official narrative is replayed year after year.

But in the annals of real life, Sabah and Sarawak are always the main actors in my history book of national deliverance, occupying a central role in the new nation state of Malaysia.

From my personal standpoint, without Sabah and Sarawak, the story of Malaysia would never be complete.

**Squeezing out other stories**

In a sense, the story of Malayan independence is largely irrelevant to the people of Sabah and Sarawak.

As far as I know, independence to the Malayan is merely celebrated in conjunction with the birth of the new Malay Nation State of the Federation of Malaya.

The Independence of Malayan people ought to be celebrated for the birth of a new state is always a major historical event.

But the celebration of this new nation state is now on the brink of squeezing out the crucial importance of the story of Sabahans and Sarawakians.

The inclusion of Sarawak and Sabah in the great Malaysian project has altered the political colour of our national tale.

Originally, politics in Malaya had always been determinedly racial, but the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak has diluted the ethnic nature of this historical record.

Unlike in Malaya, no single race forms a majority among the people of Sabah and Sarawak. There are some 70 different ethnic tribes collectively classified as "bumiputra" in these two states.

### **Easy mingling of ethnic groups**

The integration and mutual respect that exist among the native populations, and the Chinese and others, in these two states is a living example of racial harmony, unlike the case in the Malayan peninsula.

Socio-economically, Sabah and Sarawak are vast states, with a NONEstaggering wealth of mineral and land resources.

While the urban development potential in Malaya has been exploited to the full, the potential for economic development in Sabah and Sarawak has barely been touched, except for the timber, oil and mineral resources.

In terms of real economic development, Sabah and Sarawak hold the key to greater flowering in future decades.

Half a century after Merdeka, we are witnessing dramatic developments in the story of independence.

The political scenario in the country has changed drastically, as the race narrative is now losing its power and grip on the population, though a clear alternative has yet to flourish.

That revolutionary change will come only when the long-ruling BN coalition loses power and is replaced by the alternative alliance of Pakatan Rakyat. That will tip the fulcrum of the national equation of power.

For the first time in Malaysian history, the voters of Sarawak and Sabah suddenly find themselves in the unusual position of kingmakers in the Federation.

This is a great chance to renegotiate their social contract to regain their political self-determination in the eastern territories.

Politics is all about the art of the possible. All we are certain of is that the BN cannot hold on to power forever. We look forward to future decades with confidence and hope in our hearts.

Our task, on our long and arduous journey, is to reinstate the prominence of Sabah and Sarawak in national politics.