

Hisham Rais defends the Sang Saka Malaya flag

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If you ever wondered why the flag of Singapore, Indonesia, Umno and PAS circa-1950 shared the same red and white motif, it is likely because they adopted an ancient flag which represented 'Nusantara' - the Malay archipelago.

According to social activist Hishamuddin Rais, who has written extensively about the subject over the past decade, the red and white motif was dubbed the Sang Saka, which incidentally was what Umno called its flag.

NONEIn an interview with Malaysiakini last week, Hishamuddin explained that this was why he believes that the Sang Saka should have been adopted as the national flag, instead of the Jalur Gemilang.

"The present flag has no historical foundation. It is a result of a competition where the person modelled it after the American Star Spangled Banner," said Hishamuddin.

The flag was designed in 1950 by civil servant Mohamad Hamzah and chosen as the Malayan flag through a public poll by The Malay Mail. It was renamed Jalur Gemilang in 1997.

Although some sources have claimed that Mohamad borrowed ideas from the East India Company flag, renowned scholar Farish A Noor once theorised that the designer could have been influenced by the glamour of the USA, which had just emerged triumphant from World War II.

NONEHishamuddin, student activist Adam Adli and national laureate A Samad Said are currently under police investigation after displaying and speaking about a flag known as the Sang Saka Malaya or Bendera Rakyat on the eve of Merdeka Day at Dataran Merdeka.

The Sang Saka Malaya had a similar motif as Indonesia's Sang Saka Merah Putih, but with 12 yellow stars on the upper left corner.

It was designed by Malayan leftist independence fighters in a coalition called the Putera-AMCJA (All-Malaya Council of Joint Action), which in turn was inspired by left-leaning Sukarno, whose administration introduced the Sang Saka Merah Putih when the country gained independence from the Dutch in 1945.

However, the Sang Saka Malaya became a footnote in history after the British colonialists forcibly disbanded the coalition following the 1948 Emergency.

The 'three big lies'

In view of the contributions and sacrifice of Putera-AMCJA, Hishamuddin said the group had paid a much heavier price than Umno, which has continuously claimed full credit for a bloodless independence of Malaya.

The claim that the the road to independence was bloodless and the taking of full credit for independence was what Hishamuddin described as one of "three big lies" about independence perpetuated by Umno.

Hishamuddin explained that during the British occupation, thousands had lost their lives trying to fight off the occupiers.

umno 65th anniversary 110511 leaders waving flags"However, can you name any Umno member who was arrested and killed by the British? (Can) you tell me of any one member who has been detained or killed? There is none! Zilch!"

According to the social activist, the second lie was about the date of independence and the last was about the national anthem.

"For the record, I would (also like to) ask what is the significance of Aug 31 as the date of our independence was decided by a 'pak nujum' (astrologer). Our national anthem is taken from the French song 'La Rosalie' and also 'Terang Bulan' (which originates from Indonesia).

"Hence, the flag is built on lies, the major institutions the pillars are built on lies," he said.

No movement to replace flag

Although Hishamuddin personally wants the flag to be replaced with something of more historical value, he denied that there was an active movement to replace the present national flag.

"No, there is no movement, but I have been writing and highlighting ... that something needs to be done to continuously highlight (the past)," he said.

NONEAs a result, he said that there appeared to be some awareness about the significance of the Sang Saka Malaya when it resurfaced last year.

He said that, when the Jalur Gemilang was launched, many Malaysians purchased the flag and hoisted it.

This year there were not as many, as almost 52 percent who had voted for the opposition have recognised they had been cheated, he said.

When told that people say history is written by the victorious, Hishamuddin theorised that this can only be applied to the first and second worlds.

"In third world countries like Asia, Africa and Latin America, that concept cannot be used. I hoist the Sang Saka, and the authorities consider this is a threat to the nation. That is why I consider them weak.

"This is a continuous battle to correct history as light will eclipse the darkness. We cannot ignore this portion of the country's history."

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