

Who, really, are the 'Malays'?
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The news from Sarawak that pagan and Christian Dayak schoolchildren have been re-classified, whether deliberately or inadvertently, as Malays in their school report cards comes as no surprise in peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and even in Sarawak itself.

sabah natives bajau community 180509 01The practice has probably been going on for quite a long time in Sarawak as elsewhere. Being classified as Malay is nothing new in our history.

If one turns up at the Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB) counter at any bank in Kota Kinabalu, invariably there will be the odd Indian or two - Pakistanis and Bangladeshis included - standing in the queue to either purchase or sell their unit trusts.

They are Muslims, generally from the Indian sub-continent, classified as Malays - no doubt constitutional Malays - in their Malaysian personal documents. It's so glaring.

How can foreigners become Malays and natives overnight in Malaysia when Malaysians of Indian and Chinese origin continue to be labelled pendatang (outsiders), despite being in the country longer than most "Malays"?

Those from the Indian sub-continent are not the big story in Sabah, although given their prominent facial features, they stick out like sore thumbs among the largely semi-Mongolian-looking Malay category.

No 'Malay' classification in Sabah in 1960

The big story in Sabah is that there was no "Malay" classification in the census records of the state back in 1960. Today, there's a Malay classification, with more than 400,000 people under that category. These people are not local Muslims classified as Malays.

In 1970, 18,362 were classified as Malays in Sabah. There was no figure available for 1980, but there were 123,810 Malays in 1991 and 303,500 in 2000.

How could the "Malay" population in Sabah have more than doubled between 1991 and 2000? Demographers tell us that given natural rates of growth and modern medical care, a population can only double every 25 years.

Local Muslims - Bajau, Suluk, Iranun, Barunai (Brunei Malay), Cocos-Keeling (Malay), Banjar and the Dusun Muslim groups such as the Ranau Dusun, Bisaya and Orang Sungai - are all properly classified under their various ethnic categories in their personal documents.

So, this brings us to the question of who constitute the large number of Malays in Sabah, besides those from the Indian sub-continent.

Anti-illegal immigration activist Dr Chong Eng Leong provides the answers in his July 2009 book, *Lest We Forget - Security and Sovereignty of Sabah*.

Chong's revelation, complete with MyKad numbers issued in running order, with not even one Chinese applicant breaking the monotony, is that these new "Malays" in Sabah are illegal immigrants - largely Muslims from the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as Christians fleeing the conflict in southern Philippines - have been issued with MyKad via the backdoor and placed on the electoral roll.

Kuala Terengganu by election 080109 crowds
The new twist in Sarawak is that the Dayak children involved were classified under "of Malay origin" (keturunan Melayu) and not Malay per se.

Obviously, this is a continuation of the official line - reiterated by Prime Minister Mohd Najib Abdul Razak recently - that the Dusun and Dayak are part of the Malay stock which, according to Umno, also includes everybody in Indonesia, the Philippines, eastern Sri Lanka and Madagascar.

If only that didn't have a ring of politics.

DNA studies have since established that the entire population of Southeast Asia is descended from Dravidians who made their way from South India to the South China coast and Taiwan and mated with the Mongolian tribes living there.

From a dialect in Cambodia

The Malay language itself began as a dialect in Cambodia, which was taken to the islands of Southeast Asia and refined over the years into a trading and missionary language, first with the infusion of Sanskrit as Hinduism entered the region and later Pali, a dialect of Sanskrit used by the Buddhists.

In colonial Malaya, the British placed all immigrants from the neighbouring islands under the umbrella term of Malay, more for reasons of administrative convenience, besides reflecting the fact that they spoke Malay when outside their homes.

Professor William Roff in his book *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, published by the Australian National University, estimated that as many as 85 percent of the so-called Malay population of Peninsular Malaysia in the late 1800s were immigrants from neighbouring islands.

These "new" Malays, based on DNA studies conducted in mid-2006 - by the Health Science Studies Centre, Universiti Sains Malaysia, are in fact the Minang in Negri Sembilan, Yunanese in Terengganu, Acehese in Perak, Riau in Johor, Champa in Perak, Kedah and Kelantan; Mandailing in Perak, Javanese in Johor and Selangor; Bugis in Johor and Selangor; Rawa in Perak, Jambi in Johor, Selangor and Perak; Banjarese in Selangor and Johor; and Kurinchi in Selangor.

The only Malays discovered were in Kelantan. This is according to a report in *Dimensi*, *Berita Minggu*, which was published on Sunday, July 23, 2006.

In Sarawak, the White Rajahs followed the colonial British administrative practice in Malaya and categorised the coastal-dwelling Muslims, generally Bidayuh and Iban, as Malays as they spoke the Sarawak dialect of the language. Only the Melanau Muslims continued to remain non-Malay as they kept their language.

There is a case for Malaysians of Indian and Chinese origin to be called Malay as well by nationality, if the Federal Constitution can be amended, besides being Indian or Chinese by race.

In China, Malaysians of Chinese origin are correctly called Malay Chinese.

In Tamilnadu in South India, Malaysians of Indian origin used to be called Malayakaran (Malaya people). These days, they are called Malaysiakaran (Malaysian people).

The people of Tamilnadu refer to male Malays as Malaikaran (people of the hill), - a female being Malaikari - the word malai being Tamil for hill and denoting the origin of the Malay speakers from somewhere in the hill country of Cambodia.

Tamils in Malaysia refer to the Malays as both malaikaran and natekaran (people of the country), nate being the same as the word nad or nadu (meaning country).

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