

Sarawak, Sabah - Beautiful states wrecked by bad politics
Malaysianmirror.com
16 August 2010

Forty-six years ago on 16 September, Sarawak and Sabah declared themselves a part of the new Federation of Malaysia.

I should know; I was a scrappy 15-year-old young lad roaming the streets of Kuching.

Together with a bunch of equally scrappy boys in the neighbourhood, we sauntered down to the fort at the river side opposite the famous clock tower in the town centre on that fateful day near midnight.

We watched in silence as the Union Jack was lowered for the last time, and the new Malaysian flag was raised for the first time.

We walked home through the deserted streets of Kuching, as Stephen Kalong Ningkan, an Iban and the first Chief Minister of Sarawak, spoke about independence on the radio.

Television was still a distant reality then.

Looking back 46 years later, I am quite amazed at how Sarawak has indeed progressed.

Kuching has grown from a small town to a large city of half a million, with all the modern amenities that a city can offer.

Only an old timer like me can make that comparison and say how much we have gone forward materially since the time of colonial rule.

Only Sabahans and Sarawakians know the secret, that these two eastern states of Malaysia are the most liveable places on this good earth.

These two states are huge, and sparsely populated. They are covered by one of the world's oldest primary forests which are reputed to be 100 million years old.

Half of the world's living species are to be found in them.coastline

God's gift, man's greed

Unfortunately, decades of indiscriminate logging has destroyed much of this most precious natural heritage handed by God to Sabahans and Sarawakians.

Socially and culturally, Sarawak and Sabah feel like a whole universe apart from the rest of Malaysia.

The Malays are slightly over 20 percent in both these state and they live mainly along the coastal areas.

They are worlds apart from the Malays in Malaya in their language, in their relationship with their ethnic neighbours, and in their political outlook.

Though very devout in their Islamic faith too, they have never embraced the kind of radical fundamentalism so rampant in West Malaysian states.

Most Sarawakians speak more than two or three languages. (I can speak four and a bunch of Chinese dialects.)

Daily social interaction between the races is the norm, in the market place, in the office, and in the homes. Thirty percent of the marriages every year are inter-racial marriages.

Many friends of mine have mixed blood, and that improves their stock I think, because I still think Sarawak ladies are the most attractive Malayan ladies (Ipoh perhaps has the potential to match) in our land.

But then, I am hardly impartial!

This has remained a deep secret in Malaysia.

Most of my friends in West Malaysia have never visited Sarawak or Sabah. Those who make brief visits on business cannot understand the subtle way of life of the locals.

The Malayan Chinese who visit Kuching will always look and sound like sore thumbs among the local Chinese. Cantonese are the rare breed there.

Worlds' apart in everything

I have known of many government officers posted from West Malaysia to Sarawak. More than a few of them fall in love with the land, get married there, and stay on forever.

Sarawak_laksa

Even the food is very distinctive there in Sarawak. The local hawker favourite is the Sarawak version of laksa, which is a world away from the laksa you find in Penang or elsewhere.

I think they put some kind of addictive drug inside, because some Sarawakians eat it everyday for breakfast. I would. Then there is their version of kolo mee, which I can also eat everyday.

I have been a permanent resident of KL for nine years, and I still have not gotten used to the Cantonese version of wanton mee.

Of course, the Foochoseafodw in Sibu will claim that their kampau mee is the best hawker fare in the world. Be warned. Once you have eaten a plate of kampau mee, it will feel like a blob of mud sitting in your stomach.

The last I had one plate of this Foochow mee, it cost me only RM1.20!

Seafood is cheap and aplenty in those eastern states with very long coastlines and continental shelves.

Naturally, fishermen are suffering there because of bad government policies. But economically depressed Sarawakians and Sabahans can still enjoy cheap bountiful and fresh seafood the rich in the Klang valley can only dream of.

Abundance of diversity and variety

There are local food items in Sarawak that I cannot find in Kuala Lumpur.

midin_fern01There is a wild fern there called midin (right picture)

Sarawakian housewives will just walk into the surrounding jungle after a heavy rainy season, and these ferns will grow wild in abundance on rotting tree trunks.

Fried with sambal belacan or just salt, it makes a heavenly dish.

wonder why there has not been a Sarawakian entrepreneur in Sarawak who will start exporting this fern to the posh restaurants in Kuala Lumpur?

Sarawak and Sabah have a thriving eco-tourism industry that has attracted many film makers ranging from travel TV magazines and food channels.

Ian Wright was in an ISarawak-treeban longhouse and he looked like a complete alien there.

Sadly, Malaysian TV stations have given the Sarawakian and Sabahan natural beauty a wide berth and so tourists from West Malaysia prefer to visit China and Europe rather than the most beautiful places on earth in East Malaysia.

Perhaps West Malaysian tourists are more interested in shopping than in nature.

I have grown old with Malaysia.

The bluest sky ever

I do not have many dreams left. One of my last few dreams is to live in the Sarawak jungle somewhere, with friendly native neighbours, with trees, birds and sprawling vegetation all around me.

It will be nice to keep some pets, rear some chicken and ducks, and grow some vegetables and flowers.

If there is enough land, then I can plant some teak trees for profit.

But like hundreds of thousands of Sarawakians, I have to come to KL to 'cari makan', because Sarawak has been robbed of its wealth! So I just dream about reMountainviewturning to the land of my birth, the Bumi Kenyalang that nourished me, and the land dearest to my heart. I am returning for a visit at the end of this month. I shall see many old friends, especially the 8-year old Tua Kampung Ahmad Sahari at Kampung Pandan near Lundu.

I cannot wait to see him in his small wooden house by the Pandan Beach, facing the rolling salty South China Sea.

The sky over his house must be the most beautiful corner of the entire universe.

Sarawak and Sabah are the most beautiful countries (meaning landscapes, not political entities) in the world that have been ravaged by bad primitive and corrupt politics.

That is why I stay away from talking about politics today so as not to spoil my good mood for the personal memory of 46 years ago.

Copyright © 2009 www.malaysiamirror.com

Source :

<http://www.malaysianmirror.com/featuredetail/180-sabahsarawak/48781-sarawak-sabah-beautiful-states-wrecked-by-bad-politics>