



PERDANA LIBRARY
PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION
NEWSPAPER CLIPPING

Newspaper	New Straits Times
Date	24/8/2013

BATU UBAN

Kampung Batu Uban is Penang's oldest settlement

NST - 24/8/2013

TANJONG Tokong is not Penang's oldest Malay village. The oldest Malay settlement — Batu Uban — is a town and port that is 279 years old.

I refer to the article "Tg Tokong may be heritage site" (NST, Aug 19). The summary states "174 years: Push to save Penang's oldest Malay village". The article quoted Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz as saying that there was a need for heritage status to be accorded to the village instead of a gallery.

I have seen this error and anomaly over names, dates and events from interested parties and as reported by the press about the early history of the Malays in Penang.

Batu Uban was opened in the early 1700s. Now, the village is squeezed by land reclamation and the coastal highway, and the construction of apartments and condominiums. No one cares about history and heritage unless it has commercial value.

Even Masjid Jamek Batu Uban and the burial ground next to it hang in the balance. Built in 1734, it signifies a civilised cosmopolitan

place that Batu Uban was.

Built by Muhammad Salleh@Nakhoda nan Intan bin Tunku Patis nan Sabatang from Kampung Bodi in Payakumbuh, West Sumatra, the mosque was the earliest centre of education on the island.

Kampung Bodi, Pagaruyung and Sungai Tarab in the Minangkabau province are places associated with early Penang and Batu Uban. These, together with the names Datuk Jenaton and Datuk Setia, were mentioned in the book, *Mencari Bako* (1983), by Abdul Aziz Ishak. Aziz was the cooperatives and agriculture minister in Tunku Abdul Rahman's cabinet.

Datuk Jenaton from Minangkabau and his 90-odd followers from Batu Bara, now located in North Sumatra, cultivated land in what was mentioned by Aziz as Bukit Batu Uban. That area, sometimes called Bukit Tok Jenaton by the locals, is now Minden where Universiti Sains Malaysia is situated.

Nazri should visit and see Batu Uban for himself. It is Batu Uban that should take priority over the

rest of Malay areas. We must remember that things Malay in Penang and other parts of the country need not necessarily be a "kampung" or a "fishing village".

Early Malay places in the peninsula before the coming of the westerners have always been depicted, as such conjuring a rural and backward disposition.

Batu Uban was vibrant. It was a port-town. Early written accounts that portray Malays in Penang as fishermen and pirates are false and erroneous. They "became" pirates in the eyes of Europeans, and where Penang is concerned, because of the creation of the first modern border in Southeast Asia. That was in 1786.

But we are not talking about pirates here. We are talking about a settlement in the early 1700s that was populated by missionaries and traders plying through the routes normally taken along and across the Straits of Malacca.

I suggest the authorities revisit the early Penang Malay heritage with a view of reconstructing Kampung Batu Uban and the mosque.

Among the local Malays,



Batu Uban, opened in the early 1700s, is now squeezed by land reclamation, the coastal highway and the construction of apartments and condominiums.

Muhammad Salleh, Datuk Jenaton, Nakhoda Kechil and Nakhoda Bayan are etched in their consciousness and oral tradition. They are not myths.

The Penang Malay oral tradition must be recognised by all parties.

Recently, I visited Kampung Bodi in Payakumbuh. Some of my relatives and I have been there several times over the years to trace the genealogy and journey of Muhammad Salleh, the pioneer of Batu Uban. He was both a trader and missionary who travelled all over the Straits of Malacca and established families in both Malacca and Batu Uban.

In recent times, I encountered expressions on the status of Batu Uban. Kampung Batu Uban should be preserved. Concerted efforts should be initiated by all parties. All must come together on a single platform — governments (both

federal and state), agencies such as the Penang Island Municipal Council, Islamic Religious Council, the Kedah government and the heritage non-governmental organisations as well as researchers and historians — to reassess policies and actions, especially on early Penang Malay heritage.

Most local sources on Batu Uban and the early Malay pioneers were taken from Aziz' *Mencari Bako*. He had cited names like Batu Uban, Gelugor, Batu Bara and Payakumbuh. Is oral history and local traditions not proof enough? What about Muhammad Salleh's descendants residing in what little is left of the place pioneered by their ancestors 279 years ago?

A. Murad Merican, professor and deputy president, Penang Malay Heritage and Historical Society, Penang