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Looking to reclaim eastern Sabah as theirs

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THE Sultanate of Sulu was a traditional Islamic monarchy of the Tausug people that covered the Philippine provinces of Basilan, Palawan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the eastern part of Sabah.

It was founded in 1457 by religious scholar and explorer Sharif Abu Bakar, who assumed the title Sultan Shariful Hashim after his marriage to Paramisuli, a local princess.

He promulgated the first Sulu Code of Laws (Diwan) that were based on the Quran, and introduced an Islamic political institution and the consolidation of Islam as a state religion.

In 1675, the throne of what is now Brunei was disputed and the Sultan of Sulu was asked to settle the conflict, after which he was rewarded with North Borneo (now eastern Sabah).

In 1878, the Sulu Sultan leased North Borneo to the Europeans. The agreement stated that the lease was of their own free will and was valid until the end of time.

The sultanate received an annual cession payment that was equivalent to 5,000 Malayan dollars, which was increased to 5,300 Malayan dollars in 1903.

North Borneo was a British protectorate from the late 19th century until it became a crown colony.

It gained a brief period of independence before becoming part of Malaysia in 1963. From then, Malaysia paid RM5,300 as cession payment each year to the sultanate.

The former Sultan's descendants did not retake the territory, instead, agreeing to accept the cession payment under the previous arrangement. This lasted until a few

weeks ago.

The Sulu sultanate was also under the control of Spain, but the Spaniards in 1885 signed the Madrid Protocol with Britain and Germany, relinquishing any claim to North Borneo.

The sultanate ended when Sultan Jamalul Kiram II signed the Carpenter Agreement on March 22, 1915, in which he ceded all politi-

cal power to the United States.

The Philippines, however, continued to recognise the sultanate as a sovereign entity until the demise of Sultan Mohd Mahakuttah A. Kiram in 1986.

There are now at least 11 claimants to the title Sultan of Sulu, including Sultan Jamalul Kiram III.