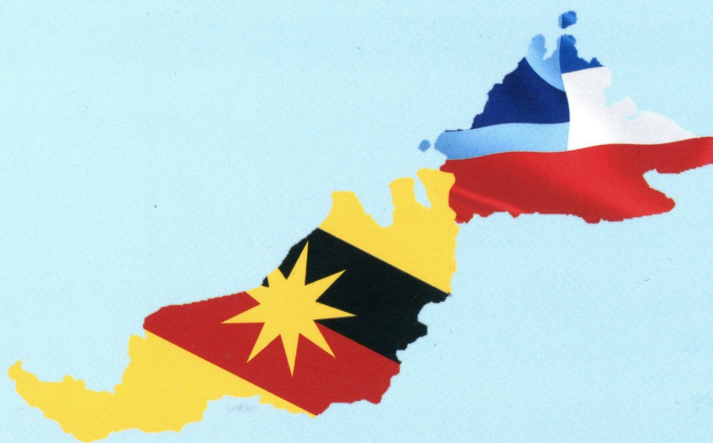




UNEQUAL PARTNERS

RACE, RELIGION, DOMINATION
AND INEQUALITY IN EAST MALAYSIA



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JOE SAMAD



PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA



Dr Johan was born on the island of Labuan. He was formerly the CEO of Institute for Development Studies; the Sabah government think tank. Currently, Dr Johan is the Chairman of SABAR Trustees (Sabah Action Body Advocating Rights).

Under the pen name Joe Samad, Dr Johan is a well-known columnist, contributing opinion articles to Free Malaysia Today, Malaysian Insight, Newswav.com, and Daily Express, Kota Kinabalu. He writes mostly on current affairs, and issues of the day.



‘There are strong views from civil society and political groups that the two states should have greater autonomy over legislative, financial and administrative matters so that they can have more powers in raising their social and economic development as equal partners within the federation. The book gives deep insights into the feelings in East Malaysia that while the people in the two states celebrate the growing strength of the 60-year-old federation, they hope that there will be greater progress towards giving them control over their own affairs, in line with promises made in past negotiations with federal authorities. It is a useful book to read because Joe Samad writes it from his heart to capture the mood in East Malaysia.’

Mohd Sheriff

Founder of G25

‘For anyone who cares about Malaysia, this book is a must. Joe Samad courageously tackles all the sensitive subjects in a country that has divided us and between East and West Malaysia. This book will provoke the much-needed conversation for a harmonious, prosperous Malaysia.’

Andrew Sheng

Chairman, George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies

‘Joe Samad’s articles bring together all the three elements that has plagued Sabah since independence: Malay hegemony, Sabah’s domestic political mess, and the unhappiness and historical grievances relating to the Malaysia Agreement 1963. I highly recommend this volume.’

James Chin

Professor of Asian Studies, University of Tasmania

‘Joe Samad has a gift for narrating the Malaysian and Sabah situation well, on how things should be or shouldn’t be. A voice of reason, shining a torch on the many potholes to avoid on the road to nation-building. Perhaps, where he stands out more is speaking his mind on ‘Malay issues’ at the risk of disappointing his own kind. Focusing on the Malaysia we all aspire but is continuously at risk of being hijacked by an extreme-leaning few.’

James Sarda

Chief Editor, Daily Express Kota Kinabalu



‘This book will take readers from the original Malaysia to Mahathir’s Malay nationalist ‘Melayusia’ and through a possible Dar-al-Malazi of Islamic convertive dominance. Joe Samad is definitely a Malaysian born from the original idea of a three-nation partnership that would help us reset this country from the dangers of extremism and unchecked bigotry of one of the three-partner nation.’

Dr Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi

Professor, UCSI University

‘What you get are erudite, measured and insightful views of a Malaysian and a Sabahan as he unravels and analyses the various threads that make up the Malaysian tapestry that stretches from the two Borneo states to the Malay peninsula. In effect, you get a bigger and deeper picture of the picture.’

Jahabar Sadiq

CEO/Editor of Malaysian Insight

‘Joe Samad has always been an articulate, courageous and passionate voice in defence of the unique values of justice, respective for diversity and democracy that hold our nation together. He is also an ardent advocate for the rights of his native Sabah. Thanks to the untiring efforts of Joe and others, there is now a greater awareness of Sabah’s quest for equality and justice within the context of MA63. All Malaysians would do well to hear his heart cry—expressed through these series of articles—if we want Malaysia to succeed.’

Dennis Ignatius

Former diplomat and author

‘For many Malaysians who are accustomed to think from a Malaya-centric perspective facing only the Straits of Malacca, Joe Samad’s writings provide a Borneo perspective facing the South China Sea. You need not agree with him always but it is important for you to be aware of his viewpoints and consider them before you disagree.’

Professor Wong Chin Huat

Sunway University

‘To understand Sabah’s wild wild east political intrigue, read Joe Samad’s passionate take on his state. He gives a Sabahan insight into games Sabah politicians play. His writings will help the readers to navigate - to quote a section in his book - “the complicated landscape of Sabah politics and Peninsula parties’ dominance”. With Sabah in his heart, he writes that it is time for Sabah politicians to stand up to federal bullying. One of Joe Samad’s passions is the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63). He provides a voice for Sabahans, who some think their state got the short end of the stick - through his writing on the subject. He is brutally honest when he dissects the Federal and state relationships in a section titled “The broken promises of MA63. His writing titled “In Borneo, a yearning to break free” articulates what some Sabahans have considered privately.’

Philip Golingai
Journalist

‘Joe Samad has been a consistent champion of Borneo rights within the context of nation building. He has intelligently highlighted the confusion over the formation of Malaysia, and in doing so, has advocated for a more inclusive and fair reflection on the nation’s history. Many of the themes in this book address the unequal relations between Peninsular Malaysia and the Borneo states of East Malaysia. Joe Samad also focuses on the divisive socio-political narratives which have set the nation on a regressive and destructive trajectory since 1963. Furthermore, his insights into the critical polarising trends in post- colonial Malaysia are refreshing. His perspective on ethno-centrism, corruption, economic exploitation, secession, and religious extremism are highlighted in simple and convincing language. This is an interesting and necessary book that everyone should read.’

Sharifah Munirah Alatas
Visiting Professor, Indonesian International Islamic University

‘Among analysts of the nation’s politics viewed with perspectives from the East Malaysia side, there are few as consistent, critical, and constructive as Joe Samad. This collection provides a vantage point to view past mistakes, aberrations and follies in the nation building process. It also lays out the necessary steps required for any new Malaysia to emerge.’

Dr Lim Teck Ghee
*Author of “Challenging Malaysia’s Status Quo” and
“Dark Forces Changing Malaysia”*

‘Joe Samad’s writings has always been incisive and thought provoking. Without a doubt, his values and views have inspired the creation of a whole new generation of critical thinkers in Sabah, who will not settle for second best in the political and socio-economic future of Sabah and the Malaysian federation.’

Colin Swee

Co-founder Project 57

‘Joe Samad provides his insightful, no-holds-barred opinions on a wide range of topics affecting Malaysia, particularly Sabah in this collection of writings. This is a timely book written by a Sabahan who clearly has a deep interest in Sabah’s future and an uncanny ability to zero in on the most significant obstacles to the state’s development. It’s required reading for anybody who wants to see the country freed from the shackles of corrupt and incompetent leadership, religious zealotry, and partisan fervour.’

Arnold Puyok

Senior Lecturer, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

‘Joe Samad’s writings provide a much-needed voice to the long-neglected views and aspirations of the people of Sabah. His incisive commentary on politics and society is relevant not only to that state but all Malaysia. This book must be read by anyone seeking a fiercely independent, critical take on the country’s present as well as future.’

Karim Raslan

Southeast Asian writer

‘I have read Joe Samad articles for some years now and enjoyed his refreshing viewpoints. We must also be constantly prepared to repel the divisive racial and religious madness going on in the West Malaysia, lest it should take nest In the Borneo states. Joe Samad has made a start down this road with this collection of articles highlighting these issues. May many more follow in his footsteps to put Malaysia on the right path.’

Faridah Tun Mohd Fuad Stephens

Unequal Partners



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Unequal Partners

Race, Religion, Domination
and Inequality in East Malaysia

Joe Samad

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Petaling Jaya



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This book is dedicated to my parents Samad and Eishah who believed in education as the key to success. To my wife Fazar, and my two children Nadira and Adryz, for their activism, their care for people, and the fragile environment that we live in.



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Foreword

Joe Samad's articles and opinions forcefully articulates Sabahans' desire for fairness and equity in the Malaysian Federation. He and I share a common vision of greater integration and understanding between the diversity that is Malaysia, and we both are aware that the journey in perspective, is just the beginning. What binds us is the challenge of putting together a coherent narrative that explains and can chart a way forward, based on our dual but separate histories starting from 1963, when we were both impressed by the idealism of our fathers.

Joe's experience and perspectives are deeper and more practical given his years of corporate service, and his writings have given depth in discussions within G25, where National Integration is a core concern. It is for these reasons that any informed discussion on the State of the relationship within the nation must take Joe's views into consideration. In exploring Joe's thoughts, we need to empathize with the problems he places before us in order that we can work solutions together. In this regard his contribution to Malaysia First is invaluable and gives greater reason for us to read his thoughts and strive for a better Malaysia.

The starting point for Joe's struggle is consistently his insistence that the compact which formed the nation be respected and upheld. Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) is the touchstone from which the nation springs, and much needs to be done to redress the imbalance East Malaysians feel that alienates them from nation building. MA63 should be respected as founding document that needs to be realized to the satisfaction of all the signatories.

His writings and his thoughts are very much a Work in Progress and require reflection and action as we both try to achieve the goals of Malaysia First.

It is my ardent hope that the issues Joe Samad discusses in his opinion columns will be an intellectual discourse for nation building as we approach Malaysia's 60 years anniversary of its founding.

Tawfik Tun Dr Ismail, *initiator of Malaysia First and former MP*



Preface

Malaysia will be celebrating 60 years of its founding on September 16, 2023. This is a significant milestone for a very young nation. It is an opportune moment to reflect the status of our nation and see how far we have progressed politically and economically and in living together as a multireligious and multicultural society.

The South China Sea divides East and West Malaysia; both have different histories, are in different stages of socioeconomic and political development, and complicated by the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and heritage. These 60 years have been an agonising journey for the Borneo states¹ on issues of race, religion, political domination by West Malaysian parties, and economic inequality as partners of Malaysia. AJ Stockwell captured the essence of the early struggles in the formation of Malaysia:

Indeed, the Malaysia that was inaugurated on 16 September 1963 failed wholly to satisfy any of the parties to it. It was neither forged through nationalist struggle, nor did it reflect a homogeneous national identity. Rather it was a product of grudging compromise and underpinned by any fragile guarantees; its formation was peppered with resistance and that it came into being at all was regarded by many at that time as a close-run thing.²

Sabah is one of the richest oil producing states, yet it has the highest poverty rate in Malaysia.³ The fragile guarantees of equal partners,

¹ The 2022 amendments to Article 1(2) of the Federal Constitution put Sabah and Sarawak into a separate category—as equal partners, not together with the 11 states of the former Malaya.

² AJ Stockwell, 'Malaysia,' *British Documents on the End of Empire*, Series B Vol. 8 (London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies 2004).

³ Avila Geraldine, 'Sabah Ranks as Malaysia's Poorest State, Again,' *New Straits Times*, September 19, 2020. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/09/625711/sabah-ranks-malysias-poorest-state-again>

state autonomy and sharing of revenue is still work in progress to the detriment of the people of Borneo states who have been left far behind in the national development agenda.

Many Malaysians are still ignorant that the country was formed on September 16, 1963, and not on Merdeka Day, August 31, 1957. Malaysia's birth was through an international agreement called the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) signed between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Federation of Malaya, North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak, and Singapore. The federation of Malaya no longer exists as an entity.

MA63 is an international treaty, registered in the United Nations on September 21, 1970, with the registration number 10760. Under international law, MA63 enjoys the status of a treaty between sovereign nations. It thus receives recognition and protection under the domestic laws and under public international law.⁴

Singapore separated from Malaysia on August 9, 1965 due to raising racial tensions, to become an independent and successful sovereign state. Had the Borneo states followed Singapore's exit, Sabah and Sarawak could have progressed economically and become as prosperous as Singapore.

Recognition is important. To the disappointment of Borneo states, Malaysia Day was only declared a public holiday in 2010,⁵ 47 years after its founding, ignoring its significance. Until today, Merdeka Day overshadows Malaysia day celebrations.

The Borneo states has always regarded themselves as a nation state, equal partners of Malaysia, and not one the 13 states of Malaysia. The amendment to Article 1(2) of the Federal Constitution in July 1976, for whatever reason, downgraded the status of Sarawak and Sabah from regions within Malaysia to states. As Lord Cameron Cobbold commented: "Malaysia should be regarded by all concerned as an association of partners, combining in the common interest to create a

⁴ Tommy Thomas, *My Story: Justice in the Wilderness* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2021).

⁵ 'Malaysia Day Now a Public Holiday, Says PM,' *New Straits Times*, October 19, 2009. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2009/10/19/malaysia-day-now-a-public-holiday-says-pm/>

new nation but retaining their own individualities.”⁶

The Constitution (Amendment) Act 2022 passed by Parliament on December 14, 2021 restored Sabah and Sarawak status as equal partners.⁷ Since then, the Borneo states have been flexing their muscles as a ‘Borneo bloc’ to demand more autonomy and sharing of revenue for its development agenda.

Interference by the central government has changed the landscape of local politics.⁸ Many Sabahans have accused former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad of meddling in state affairs and exporting toxic Umno politics to Sabah. Umno entered Sabah in 1991, and continued to dominate Sabah political scene up to the fall of the Barisan Nasional coalition in the 14th general election.

In 1994, Mahathir introduced the rotation of Sabah’s chief minister among ethnic groups on the pretext of power sharing and to stabilise communal politics. The rotation of seven chief ministers by Mahathir, from 1994 to 2004, eventually gave the central government more control over Sabah politics. The rotation resulted in mixed success and hampered Sabah’s development.⁹ Sabah was the only state to undergo Mahathir’s experiment of chief minister rotation.

Mahathir and other federal leaders were accused of issuing blue identity cards to undocumented migrants and giving them citizenship status to change the demographics of Sabah and make it a more Muslim-majority voting population.¹⁰ The influx of refugees and subsequent generations that have now fully assimilated into Sabah’s

⁶ Stockwell, ‘Malaysia.’

⁷ ‘Sarawak, Sabah Regain Equal Partners Status Within Malaysia with Enforcement of Amendments Federal Constitution,’ *The Borneo Post*, February 11, 2022. <https://www.theborneopost.com/2022/02/11/sarawak-sabah-regain-equal-partners-status-within-malaysia-with-enforcement-of-amendments-federal-constitution/>

⁸ ‘Sabah Political Disturbances Due to Power Hungry Politicians—Ongkili,’ *The Borneo Post*, January 31, 2023. <https://www.theborneopost.com/2023/01/31/sabah-political-disturbances-due-to-power-hungry-politicians-ongkili/>

⁹ Herman Luping, ‘Rotation of CM a Big Mistake,’ *Daily Express*, September 19, 2010. <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/read/418/rotation-of-cm-a-big-mistake/>

¹⁰ Frank Sina, ‘Project Mahathir: ‘Extraordinary’ Population Growth in Sabah,’ *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 5 (2006): 71-80.

general population have caused all kinds of generational socioeconomic problems and a strain public resources.

Sabahans are weary of the security risks posed by the immigrant population with dubious papers. Manila has not dropped their claim over Sabah.¹¹ From time to time, our security forces have captured sleeper cells of terrorist groups that threaten the peace and security of the state.¹²

Sabah is claimed by Philippines and was invaded by the Sulu army in 2013. The descendants of the sultan of Sulu are also claiming Sabah and are actively pursuing their Malaysia's assets in the international court of arbitration.¹³

A royal commission of inquiry on undocumented migrants in Sabah was formed on August 11, 2012. To date, many of the recommendations from the RCI have not been implemented.¹⁴ Anwar Ibrahim called it “the biggest illegal immigrant scandal in our history since independence,” and said that the RCI report accused errant civil servants, but failed to take the “mastermind” and “real culprits” to task.¹⁵

Borneo sentiments have been ignored by Malaysia's strong central government over the years, and the lack of autonomy and economic disparity has led political leaders and activists to call for secession from Malaysia.¹⁶

¹¹ Francesca Regalado, ‘Malaysia's Spat with Philippines Over Sabah: Five Things to Know,’ *Nikkei Asia*, September 29, 2020. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Malaysia-s-spat-with-Philippines-over-Sabah-Five-things-to-know>

¹² ‘8 Abu Sayyaf Suspects Arrested in Sabah,’ *Rappler*, May 10, 2020. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/abu-sayyaf-suspects-arrested-sabah-may-8-2021/>

¹³ Tommy Thomas, ‘Explaining the Sulu Claim,’ *Free Malaysia Today*, July 27, 2022. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2022/07/27/tommy-thomas-explaining-the-sulu-claim/>

¹⁴ ‘RCI Report a Starting Point of Resolving Issue of Illegal Immigrants in Sabah,’ *The Malaysian Reserve*, March 31, 2017. <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2017/03/31/rci-report-a-starting-point-of-resolving-issue-of-illegal-immigrants-in-sabah/>

¹⁵ ‘Anwar Slams RCI Report on Illegals in Sabah,’ *The Sun Daily*, December 6, 2014. <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/1260129-NRARCH284542>

¹⁶ Robert Bociaga, ‘BorneoExit: Independence for East Malaysia?’ *The Diplomat*,

William Goode, the British governor who represented North Borneo in the Malaysia negotiations, said that he “wholly supports Malaysia,” but warned that then-prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman “must avoid ‘taking over’ Borneo territories as colonies. Any impression of being transferred as colonies from Britain to Malaya will provoke a Merdeka [independence] movement against Kuala Lumpur.”¹⁷

In 1991, Maximus Ongkili and Jeffrey Kitingan,¹⁸ two prominent Kadazandusun leaders, were accused of plotting to take Sabah out of Malaysia and were placed in detention under the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA).

The geopolitics of Borneo has brought new realities. The moving of the Indonesian capital¹⁹ to Kalimantan will forge a new Borneo identity²⁰ with Indonesia and Brunei. Neighbouring the Borneo states are the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the Aceh Autonomous Region, both fighting for greater autonomy and share of revenue. China is flexing its muscles claiming the South China Sea and is already in conflict with the United States. Borneo, the third biggest island in the world, will see a defence and economic pull by various nations with strategic interests in the region.

Malaysia Borneo will eventually be the new focus of regional development and will forge new economic alliances; with this trajectory, the Borneo states will likely distance themselves from Putrajaya if it continues to ignore the sentiments of its residents.

This collection of opinion articles published in *Free Malaysia Today* and *The Malaysian Insight* describes the growing pains of Malaysia from

December 11, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/borneoexit-independence-for-east-malaysia/>

¹⁷ Stockwell, ‘Malaysia.’

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, ‘Malaysia: Detainees in Sabah,’ October 18, 1991. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/m/malaysia/malaysia91o.pdf>

¹⁹ ‘CM: Sabah to Benefit From Relocation of Indonesian Capital to Kalimantan,’ *The Star*, August 11, 2019. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/08/11/cm-sabah-to-benefit-from-relocation-of-indonesian-capital-to-kalimantan>

²⁰ ‘Dayaks of Borneo Must Project Oneness: Jeffrey,’ *Daily Express*, December 23, 2016. <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?newsid=114856>

the Borneo perspective. The opinion articles pieced together gives a snapshot of the issues of the day and the Borneo states' desire to become prosperous like Singapore, amid the supremacy of *ketuanan Melayu*, daily racial and religious baiting, destructive politics, and rampant corruption.

Perhaps over next several decades, we can learn from our past mistakes of the last 60 years and change the Malaysian narrative in a positive way to become a prosperous and united nation as envisaged by our founding fathers.

Introduction

Malaysia desperately needs a new perspective and a new narrative to rid itself of the 60-year yoke of regressive policies and politicking that has stifled the nation's advancement. Race, religion and identity politics still dominate the national narrative.

The solution to these destructive politics will not come from the peninsula. It is Sabah and Sarawak, with its history of racial harmony and religious tolerance that we must look to for that new perspectives, direction, and leadership.

Sabah is a good example of the acceptance of religious differences and unity in diversity. This has always been the way of life here, with 33 ethnic groups in a population of three million that communicates in many dialects. The different races in Sabah are more diverse compared to Peninsular Malaysia, which consists largely of three main ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians.

The Northern Borneo state is really a melting pot of cultures and people. Since the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963, the peace and harmony of the people in Sabah has been threatened by the 'imported' narratives brought over by religious teachers from the peninsula and the identity politics of Umno and PAS.

It is incredible that today in Malaysia, we still have politicians and so-called religious 'leaders' like Abdul Hadi Awang of PAS talking about the concept of Malay supremacy,¹ as if they have been bestowed the God given right to rule Malaysia, with all the rest being '*pendatang*'.

Talk of *ketuanan Melayu* and the supremacy of one race or religion is anathema to the people of Borneo states. These West Malaysian narratives have presented a real threat to the racial and religious harmony we have enjoyed in East Malaysia. This kind of rhetoric and

¹ Murray Hunter, '*Ketuanan Melayu: A Barrier to the Spirit of Nationhood—Analysis*', *Eurasia Reiew*, March 1, 2022. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/01032022-ketuanan-melayu-a-barrier-to-the-spirit-of-nationhood-analysis/>

ideology must be suppressed, banned, and even made illegal as hate speech.

Sarawak and Sabah are the largest and second largest states in Malaysia, at 124,450 and 73,620 square kilometres respectively, compared to Peninsular Malaysia's 130,590 square kilometres, just 40 percent of Malaysia's total land mass.

The Borneo states do not share the same history as the states on the peninsula. Malaysia as a nation today consists of people from Sabah and Sarawak, with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as the symbolic head of our nation. In Sabah and Sarawak, there is no concept of a single dominant race like *ketuanan Melayu*, as we are all citizens of the nation called Malaysia with equal rights.

In the early days of the formation of Malaysia, the native chiefs of Sabah had great foresight in what was to come. The promises made by the then-Malayan government when Malaysia was formed in 1963 were literally cast in stone. The etchings of the historical boulder plate in Keningau promised Sabah religious freedom, control of land, and the respect for local culture and customs.

When the North Borneo Legislative Council finally agreed to accede to the Malaysia Agreement in September 1962, there was still considerable apprehension and reservation among the native chiefs of Sabah regarding the rights of the state within the new federation. A series of discussions and consultations took place, and proposals were made by native chiefs to erect an oath stone² summarising the guarantees given by the Malaysian government to Sabah. In return, the native chiefs pledged their loyalty to the federal government.

A carefully selected boulder was taken from Sungai Pegalan by elder statesmen and the promises of both parties—state and federal—were literally cast in stone. After a ceremonial ritual, including animal sacrifice by a *bobolian* (high priestess), three promises were etched on a metal plate: freedom of religion in Sabah; the government of Sabah

² 'The Story Behind Keningau Oath Stone', *The Borneo Post*, November 30, 2012. <https://www.theborneopost.com/2010/11/30/the-story-behind-keningau%E2%80%99s-oath-stone/>

to hold authority over land; and native customs and traditions to be respected and upheld by the government. In return, the people of Sabah's interior pledged loyalty to the government of Malaysia. This is part of our rich Malaysian history that is neither told nor celebrated.

The Federal government was represented by Federal minister of Labour, Tan Sri Manickavasagam at the unveiling ceremony of the oath stone on August 31, 1964.³

Beyond the subtle purging of the true history of Malaysia in schools and universities, there were attempts by unscrupulous 'politicians' or persons to erase this part of history and its significance. Several years ago, the plaque went missing and when found, the words 'Kerajaan Malaysia jamin' (*Malaysian government guarantees*) had been erased.⁴

Seeing the significance of the oath stone for the people of Sabah and its historical place in the history of Malaysia, then-tourism and culture minister Nazri Abdul Aziz allocated RM1.025 million to restore the stone, conduct the relocation ritual according to native customs, and secure a permanent place for it.⁵ The Keningau Oath Stone is important not only to Sabahans, but also to all Malaysians. It serves to remind us of our rights to religious freedom, land and culture, and customs, among others.

In Borneo, freedom of religion has been trampled on with the banning of the use of the word 'Allah'⁶ in the Malay language Bible and seizure of imported Christian materials. This has caused anger and anxiety among the Christian population in Borneo.

In September 2018, then-deputy prime minister Wan Azizah

³ Richard A Lind, 'My Sabah, Reminiscences of a former state secretary', *Natural History Publications (Borneo)*, July 14, 2003.

⁴ Desmond Davidson, 'Charge With Treason Those Who Changed Sabah's Oath Stone, Says Bumburing,' *The Edge Markets*, September 23, 2014. <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/charge-treason-those-who-changed-sabah%E2%80%99s-oath-stone-says-bumburing>

⁵ 'Govt Allocates RM1.025m for Oath Stone Relocation,' *The Sun Daily*, May 3, 2017. <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/govt-allocates-rm1025m-oath-stone-relocation-YTARCH443035>

⁶ 'Malaysia High Court Rules Christians Can Use 'Allah,' *BBC*, March 11, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56356212>

Wan Ismail visited Keningau, and said the government would uphold the principles of the Malaysian Agreement 1963, some of which are inscribed on the Keningau Oath Stone. “The Oath Stone is a historical artefact which contains the summary of the agreement and guarantees given by the Malaysian government to Sabah,” she said.⁷ Some Sabahans noted that Wan Azizah should be reminded there is a price to pay for broken promises, and that Malaysia will not find peace until the federal government honours the words written on the Keningau Oath Stone.

The Pakatan Harapan government that came into power in 2018 did not keep their promise to give more autonomy to Sabah, including the 20 percent oil royalty.⁸ Freedom of religion is under threat from peninsular political parties like Umno, which claims Malay supremacy over others, and PAS, with its extremist brand of politics, drowning out moderate Islamic voices and liberal values that have contributed to the nation’s peaceful dialogue. Race and religion dominate Malaysia’s daily narrative, causing anger and disrupting communities. These two factors are not just a threat to Sabah and Sarawak, but to the whole country.

For Malaysia to progress, we need to explore a different kind of leadership based on higher religious and racial tolerance and equality for all. We need leaders who accept unity in diversity as our nation’s strength and create an inclusive society. For the first time in history, we now have a deputy prime minister from East Malaysia. It is a start of a new Malaysian narrative. Someday a prime minister will come from one of the Borneo states.

Sabah and Sarawak did not join Malaysia. The two states were equal partners in the formation of Malaysia.⁹ Malaysia did not exist before

⁷ ‘Govt Will Uphold Principles of MA63 Inscribed on Keningau Oath Stone—Wan Azizah,’ *New Straits Times*, September 17, 2018. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2018/09/412261/govt-will-uphold-principles-ma63-inscribed-keningau-oath-stone-wan>

⁸ Chester Tay and Sangeetha Amarthalingam, ‘Dr M: Oil Producing States to Get 20 Percent Royalty,’ *The Edge Markets*, July 20, 2018. <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/dr-m-oil-producing-states-get-20-royalty>

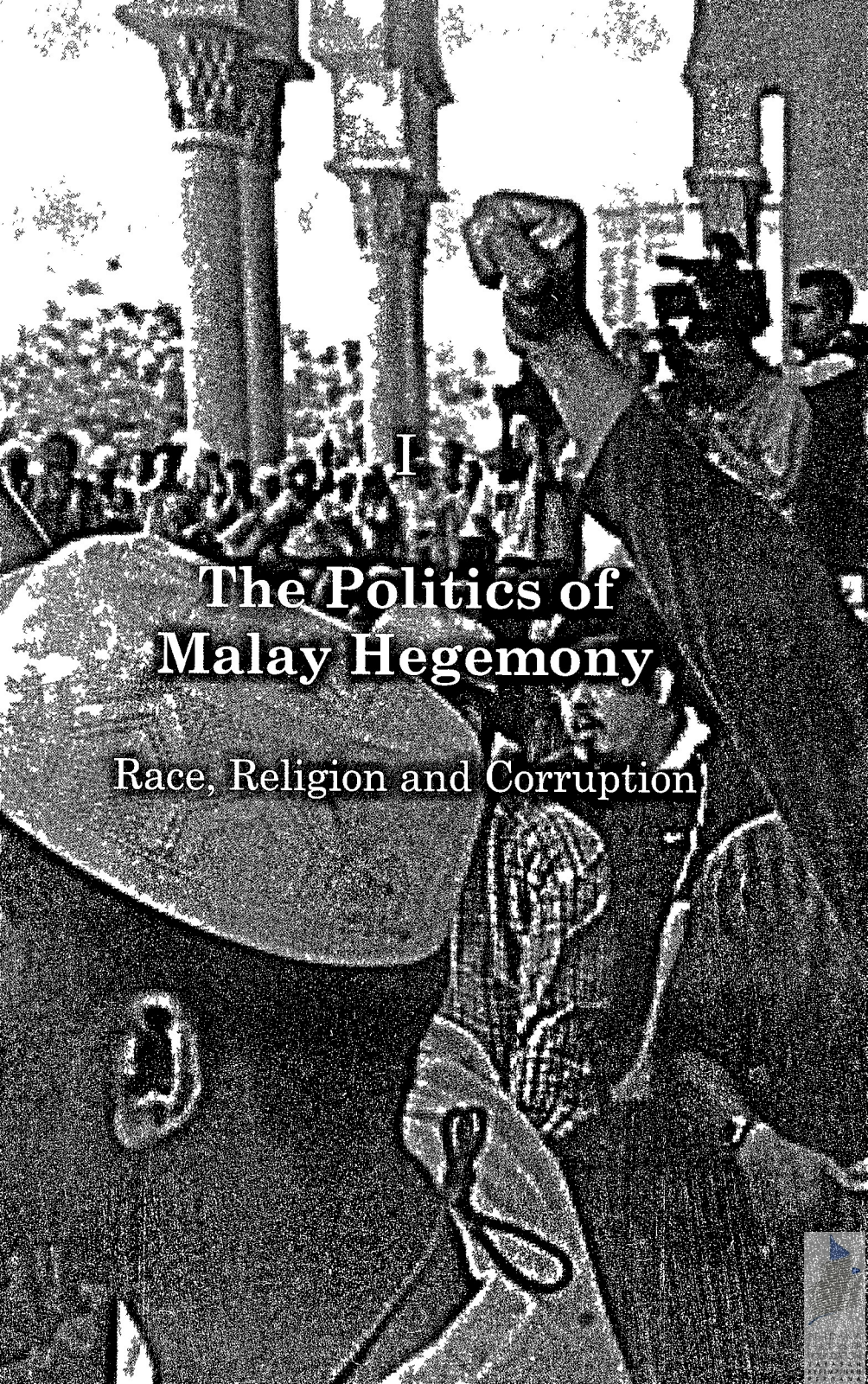
⁹ Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan, ‘Dr M: Restore Sabah, Sarawak as Equal Partners Through MA63,’ *New Straits Times*, September 16, 2020. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/>

September 16, 1963. Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak gave birth to this nation together; without Sabah and Sarawak, there is no Malaysia. It is time the federal government acknowledges the massive contribution of Sabah and Sarawak to the wealth of the nation through its oil resources.

We should return to the vision and values of our founding fathers. An acceptance of unity in diversity and where none is superior to the other. The narrative for a progressive Malaysia begun in Sabah and Sarawak since Malaysia's inception, but has yet to gain traction in West Malaysia.

The native chiefs have honored their promise, now it is time for the Federal government to do the same.

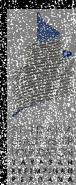




I

The Politics of Malay Hegemony

Race, Religion and Corruption





Anwar Must Now Step up and Prove His Worth

Congratulations to Anwar Ibrahim on being appointed prime minister. As the English saying goes, every dog has its day, meaning everyone will be successful or lucky at some point in their life. It is fitting that former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, who put Anwar through his trial and tribulations, ended up losing his deposit when contesting the Langkawi seat. It signifies the closing of one era of mixed legacies and the opening of something new—an era of spiritual renewal and *reformasi*.

Malaysia would not be that hard to govern or find it so hard to progress if politicians would discard their penchant for using race and religion to consolidate their power and satisfy their greed through corruption.

Pakatan Harapan was given a chance to clean up Malaysia in 2018. It has now been given an opportunity for a second bite of the cherry through a unity government. For far too long, Malaysia has succumbed to Umno warlords, political Islam and identity politics, hampering progress and driving away foreign investors.

Some leaders, like former prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin, are still defiant, despite the king's advice to form a unity government. Muhyiddin's selfishness reflects his immaturity and what is wrong with Malaysian politics today—the feeling of self-entitlement. The 'I' has to stop and 'we the people' must be in every phrase and discussion going forward.

The people who gave politicians their mandate did not give the leaders of the various blocs the right to carve up Malaysia for their own

personal benefit. The king was right to follow the democratic convention that the party with the most seats should be given the first bite of the cherry. Perikatan Nasional should acknowledge the Westminster model wherein the prime minister's support should only be tested in the Dewan Rakyat.

Our politicians need to grow up and stop running to the king to resolve their disputes, and then later complain about interference from Istana Negara. Even my late mother had always told me to resolve matters among us when I quarrelled with my siblings. Bless her soul.

Looking at it another way, it is the warring political leaders who forced the king to perhaps go beyond the call of duty to break the impasse in order to preserve Malaysia's economy and racial harmony. For that, Malaysians have to be thankful to the Agong and our security forces for keeping us safe from the negative elements that threatened the country during the political struggle between the various blocs.

Voters should now be asking every elected representative whether they are representing their constituents or themselves. This is to make sure that MPs and assemblypersons understand that they are there to serve the people and not themselves, with the hope of getting ministerial posts or plum positions in government-linked companies.

One can argue that a two-party system like in the United Kingdom or United States will be more viable compared to Malaysia's current situation, where parties form blocs or factions within parties. The anti-hopping law has come at the right time, preventing horse trading, or buying up rival candidates to some extent. Money politics is still evident based on video recordings on social media platforms.

Anwar has been prime minister-in-waiting for so long. It is time for him to step up and prove his worth. The unity goodwill has already been initiated by DAP leaders, who apologised to Sarawak leaders for degrading remarks made in the past.¹

Perhaps Abdul Hadi Awang can also apologise for his bigoted views

¹ 'Loke Apologises to Sarawak State Govt and People,' *The Star*, November 25, 2022. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/11/25/loke-apologises-to-sarawak-state-govt-and-people>

about people of other races and religions, and assure Malaysians that PAS will not push for an Islamic state, and preserve Malaysia as a secular nation with Islam as the official religion. Failure to do so will alienate Sabah and Sarawak. Being the party with the most parliamentary seats means nothing if you start to impose mundane things like dress codes, separating men from women in public spaces, banning concerts and alcohol, and limiting the freedom of the people to make personal choices. This is the time for PAS to show benevolent Islam and revive the Islamic civilisation through tolerance and respecting other races and religions.

The 60th anniversary of Malaysia's founding comes next year. Malaysia was formed not for the people of one particular race or religion, but for all who love and believe in the founding vision of a united Malaysia under one flag.

Nelson Mandela, after having been jailed for 27 years, managed to put aside all his emotions and anger at the apartheid regime when he became the president of South Africa. Anwar spent nearly a decade in prison. To build a more harmonious Malaysia, he can similarly set up a committee of truth and reconciliation as South Africa did.

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Malaysia desperately needs a new perspective and a new narrative to rid itself of the 60-year yoke of regressive policies and politicking that has stifled its advancement. Race, religion and identity politics still dominate the national narrative. The solution to these destructive politics will not come from the peninsula. It is Sabah and Sarawak, with its history of racial harmony and religious tolerance that we must look to for that new perspectives, direction, and leadership. Talk of *ketuanan Melayu* and the supremacy of one race or religion is anathema to the people of Borneo states. These West Malaysian narratives have presented a real threat to the racial and religious harmony we have enjoyed in East Malaysia. In Sabah and Sarawak, there is no concept of a single dominant race, as we are all citizens of the nation called Malaysia with equal rights. Sabah and Sarawak did not join Malaysia, the two states were equal partners in its formation. Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak gave birth to this nation together; without Sabah and Sarawak, there is no Malaysia. It is time the federal government acknowledges the massive contribution of Sabah and Sarawak, especially its oil resources, to the wealth of the nation.

The book gives insight into the feelings of East Malaysians who hope that there will be greater progress towards giving them control over their own affairs.

Mohd Sheriff Mohd Kassim

Founder of G25

Joe Samad courageously tackles all the sensitive subjects in that have divided East and West Malaysia...This book will provoke the much-needed conversation for a harmonious, prosperous nation.'

Andrew Sheng

George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies

The erudite, measured and insightful views of a Malaysian and a Sabahan as he unravels and analyses the various threads that make up the Malaysian tapestry.

Jahabar Sadiq

The Malaysian Insight

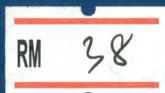
All Malaysians would do well to hear Joe Samad's cry if we want Malaysia to succeed.

Dennis Ignatius

Former diplomat and author



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