

PERAK Academy

Bulletin January – March 2004

Registration No. 599073-D

Strictly For Private Circulation

ROYAL PATRON

Duli Yang Teramat Mulia Raja Muda of Perak, Raja Dr Nazrin Shah Ibni Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah DK, SPCM, SPTS, SPMP (Perlis), PhD (Harvard)

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Dato' Dr Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan (*Chairman*)
Dato' Lim Keng Kay
Dato' Yap Lim Sen
Dato' Lee Oi Hian
Mr Lee Chee Ming
Mr Chan Kok Keong
Mr G. Sivapragasam

EDITORIAL BOARD

Adib Vincent Tung Abdullah (*Editor*)

PERAK ACADEMY MISSION

To promote Perak State as a centre of excellence in thought, culture and technology by organizing and supporting activities and projects related to intellectual discourse, research and writing, publishing and the fine arts, and whereby these can be progressively made complimentary for the betterment of the State and its citizens.

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

No. 1 Jalan Lasam, 30350 Ipoh,
Perak, Malaysia.
Tel: **05-242 5933**
Fax: **05-242 5931**
Email: perak_academy@yahoo.co.uk
Website: www.perakacademy.com

Authors are solely responsible for the contents of articles credited to them, and the views expressed are not necessarily those of the Perak Academy. The Academy takes no responsibility for the consequences of any action taken, based on any information published in this newsletter. No part of this bulletin can be reproduced without prior permission from the Academy and the authors concerned.

Editorial

Thank you for your continued support of Perak Academy's bulletin and its activities, especially your presence at our Perak Perils talks.

As we usher in 2004, it gives us great pleasure to bring you more articles on subjects pertaining to the state of Perak.

During the fourth quarter of 2003, Perak Academy hosted several events and amongst them was a dinner talk by the former group editor-in-chief of the New Straits Times, Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad. The talk was held on November 14th at the Perak State Secretariat banquet hall, and the Perak state government sponsored the dinner. A report on the talk appeared in the November 15th issue of the New Straits Times, and it is reproduced in this bulletin.

In this issue, we have Captain Philip Rivers' comments on the Gavin Menzies talk in Kuala Lumpur recently. Captain Rivers found that Menzies' book "1421" seems to contain a chuckle on every page. Amongst them were the Equator wobbling about like a hula-hoop and the North Pole shifting

so that Greenland was only 180 miles south of it instead of 500. Menzies, even claimed that the Vinland map was genuine by having the Chinese circumnavigate it when the ice cap melted! In the Star, October 26th, 2003, one Cheah Boon Kheng also pointed out that there were gaps in Menzies' theory.

Another interesting article, which appeared in the Singapore Straits Times on December 13th, 2003, described Ipoh as a gloom town. It is sad to learn that the capital of Perak, once a booming town, now has become a gloom city! The article is reproduced in this bulletin with some constructive comments from friends of the Perak Academy.

It is hoped that these articles will prove to be more exciting and of greater interest to you all.

We wish you a happy and prosperous 2004.

 **The Editor**

In this issue

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Editorial | 6 Some Notes and Comments On a Talk by Gavin Menzies (author of '1421 – The Year That China Discovered The World') – by Capt. Philip J. Rivers |
| 2 Activity News In Brief | |
| 2 Abdullah – Najib Team Unbeatable | 7 Agriculture: A Possible Prospect For Perak – by G. Sivapragasam |
| 3 Gloom Town | 8 The Mystery of Malaysia – by Richard Jaffe |

Activity News In Brief

On November 14th, 2003, there was a dinner talk by Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad on “Malaysia: Post Dr Mahathir” at the Perak State Secretariat banquet hall. The news report in the New Straits Times on the following day is reproduced in this bulletin.

Next, the Perak Academy held an interactive exhibition showcasing 50 years of British achievement in DNA science. The three-day exhibition was held at the Galleria Silveritage, Jalan Gopeng, Ipoh, from November 21 to 23 with the co-operation of the Perak State Economic Development Corporation. It contained a whole range of exciting and fun-filled activities such as Becky Boyle Murder Mystery, Dolly the Sheep Board Game and DNA simulation and extraction activities.

On December 8th, 2003, His Excellency Juergen A.R. Staks, the German Ambassador to Malaysia, was invited to speak at a luncheon at the Syuen Hotel. His talk was on “Cars, Music, Pencils, etc.” During the luncheon, the Ipoh Symphonic Band played a few musical pieces for the listening pleasure of the guests.

His Excellency’s stimulating and wide-ranging talk on his experience of contacts between Malaysia and Germany reflected his broad outlook and diplomatic experience on five continents. 🇲🇾

Articles

Abdullah – Najib Team Unbeatable

The above article was published in the New Straits Times on November 15th, 2003, reporting the talk delivered by Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad to the Perak Academy at the State Banquet Hall on November 14. On January 8, 2004, Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Abdul Razak was appointed the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Ipoh, Friday – Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad picked Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his deputy rather than Datuk Seri Najib Razak because he is the best man to lead UMNO against PAS.

New Straits Times Press Group Editor-in-Chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad, saying this today, added that only Abdullah had the political pedigree and personality to counter and contend with PAS’ brand of extremist religion.

“If he cannot, then nobody can. If he fails, then God help Malaysia,” he said in his speech “Malaysia – Post Dr Mahathir” at a dinner talk hosted by the Perak Academy here.

Abdullah said the 1999 general election clearly showed that UMNO can pose a bigger danger to itself than PAS ever can.

“Pahang can be lost if Najib is not made Deputy Prime Minister. Delay in naming the DPM can lead to unhealthy speculation by irresponsible people, not to mention plots and intrigues.”

Abdullah stressed that he did not wish to decide for the Prime Minister but said Najib would complement him at the head of UMNO and Government.

“Najib is modern, broad-minded, comfortable in the international arena and an experienced political thoroughbred.

“The duo would make an unbeatable combination.”

Abdullah said those in the know understand the Prime Minister to be meticulous in this as in everything else and will need some time of his own to make a choice after an appropriate period of what is perceived as consultation.

“Of course, at the end of the day, the choice is solely his prerogative.”

Abdullah also disagreed with the common

perception that the Prime Minister’s “Mr Nice Guy” image would work to his disadvantage.

He said that his conciliatory exterior concealed sterner stuff.

“But the image of a consensus-builder is important for Abdullah’s short and long-term tasks, which are to re-galvanise the Malays.”

“He may yet attain a most remarkable feat, enticing those estranged Malays to return to UMNO – solidify racial harmony, maintain economic justice, growth and prosperity and elevate education as the principal engine of national well-being.”

Abdullah said Malaysia was still in an interim and it would be a while with many things having to fall into place before the nation can define itself as Post-Dr Mahathir.

He said over the 16 months of extended transition, it has been tempting to believe that Dr Mahathir had established enough stability and continuity to make reasonably sure that not much would change.

“But, of course, there will be change. Malaysia needs to run faster to stay on its winning streak.”

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir will, indeed, be a very hard act to follow and his awesome political and administrative powers will not be broken for a long time, if at all.

He does not think that Abdullah “will be in a hurry” to make his mark so as not to invite invidious comparisons with his mentor.

“It would be too fanciful at this time to estimate how Abdullah will fare against these international precedents.”

“My honest opinion is that he will emerge, if at all, only after he has won his mandate in the next general election, which I expect will be held in the spring or summer of next year.”



Abdullah said that it is almost certain that the Prime Minister will improve on the 1999 election result, which went unusually badly for the Barisan National.

He expressed confidence that Abdullah would do well, adding that he must surround himself with talented and experienced people and blend a careful mix of old hands and new blood.

“He has done well as Number Two and if he keeps the party united, he will defeat PAS’ boast of winning Kedah, Pahang, Selangor and the Federal Territory.”

Abdullah does not think PAS will capture the centre, but said that any mishandling of policies affecting the Malays and Islam will increase its support.

“PAS thrives on discontent under the camouflage of religion. It has too little to stand on its own merits. Even so, PAS must never be underestimated and Abdullah’s biggest challenge will be in preventing and banishing an ASEAN version of Saudi Arabia or Iran.”

On PAS’ Islamic State document, Abdullah said non-Muslims do not know or comprehend the pressures the Malays are under.

“Many people would never have thought and are pretty shocked that the level of acceptance of the party among Malays could have reached the present benchmark.”

Abdullah warned that PAS’ appeal is not diminishing and the party is building wellsprings to nurture a culture ostensibly from outside Malaysia.

“If you don’t take PAS seriously and battle it earnestly and craftily, do not say you have not been forewarned.”

“If the non-Muslims do not or refuse to see these dangers, if they can’t sense what it is like to be an enlightened, liberal and forward-looking Malay nowadays, then I say PAS will manifest its brand of Islamic radicalism sooner than you realise it.”

About 350 people comprising the elite of Ipoh, led by the Raja Muda of Perak Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, who is the patron of Perak Academy, attended the talk. Others present were chairman of Perak Academy Board of Governors Datuk Dr Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan and Deputy State Secretary Datuk Ahmad Konchong. 🇲🇾



DYTM Raja Muda Perak, Raja Dr Nazrin Shah (r), presenting Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad with a gift from the Academy.



Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad addressing a riveted audience.

Gloom Town

This article was published in the Singapore Straits Times on December 13, 2003. The Perak Academy received two replies in response to the above article. These are reproduced here for the information of our readers.

Ipoh - In the 1960s, it seemed the parties in Ipoh would never end.

Wealthy tin miners in Mercedes-Benzes gulped down expensive brandy and danced the nights away at glittering clubs.

Tin prices went up and up, greasing the machinery of the state’s countless mines.

But the depression of the 1980s put a deep dent in tin mining. Everything the state government tried to revive the economy since then had failed.

“We are between Kuala Lumpur and Penang where development is much faster,” said state executive councillor Chang Ko Youn.

“Only when there is saturation there do we get some positive spillover.”

The state brought in a Seagate disk-drive manufacturing plant, touted as an important catalyst for attracting other electronics manufacturers which would in turn spur economic growth.

But the one-two punch of the September 11 terror attacks in the United States and the China factor closed the Seagate plant two years ago. More than 2,000 jobs were lost, dealing a major blow to Ipoh.

Last month, the Perak government announced that a RM9.8-billion (S\$4.4-billion) aluminium smelting plant which would have created 8,000 jobs would not materialise. Its American investors had decided to site it in Johor instead.

Another major investment to the south of the city, Proton City in Tanjung Malim, is set to take off. But concerns over the future of the national car company have cast doubts on its prospects.

With little money coming in, the population of Ipoh has not recorded any significant growth in 10 years.

The young find few bright prospects and are leaving behind a community that is greying, right along with the city.



In fact, very little of 1960s Ipoh has changed. The same colonial-era shophouses line the main streets, although many are shuttered and fronted by *For Sale* or *To Let* signs, or are falling apart.

Mr Arthur Yeong, a lawyer, elaborated on the city's dilemma.

"Ipoh is neither here nor there – not far enough from Kuala Lumpur yet not near enough," he said. "Its best days are gone unless something drastic is done."

As a popular saying among the city's bank managers goes, Ipoh has the nicest people and the best food but is not a good place to do business.

And it is not the only town suffering from the malaise. Many other former mining towns in the state need urgent revitalisation.

Nearby Kampar got a boost recently with the construction of a university there that spawned the building of an entirely new township.

But, besides its position as administrative capital, Ipoh has little else going for it.

Datuk Chang acknowledges the decline of the inner city but points to the outward expansion of Ipoh. Rows and rows of housing estates have been built on former tin mines.

Many of these houses are now owned and were financed by the thousands of Ipoh residents who left the country in the 1980s to work, mostly illegally, in sweatshops, restaurants and construction sites in the US, Japan, Taiwan and Singapore.

"It was very hard then in the 1980s," said Mr Terry Seet, 32.

"My father did not have a job anymore in the mines so I left for the US, where I worked three jobs every day for three years."

It was mainly the money brought back by the thousands of people like him that kept the town going through the hard times.

Where there were once wooden houses and mining ponds in the old neighbourhoods of Bercham, Gunung Rapat and Pasir Puteh, shops and houses now stand.

One real estate agent said: "If you look at

the kind of development these places have gone through, it looks like there is a boom, but the reality is very different."

A double-storey link house still commands less than RM100,000 in Ipoh, primarily because salaries are not as high as in Penang, Kuala Lumpur or even Johor Baru.

Much of Ipoh's economy now depends on small and medium enterprises and cottage industries.

"The state is no longer dynamic because we have very few young people," said Democratic Action Party leader M. Kulasegaran.

"Perak provides the human resources for factories and industries in Selangor and Penang."

He blamed the state government for the stagnant economy.

Most residents think of Ipoh as a town for retired folk.

Comments from Ms Chan See Foon (sfck@pc.jaring.my) via e-mail to the Perak Academy on December 18, 2003 as below.

Why flog a dead horse? It is a fact that Ipoh will never be the dynamic, up and coming attractive venue for big business and manufacturers and therefore it's time to face the "suchness" and "is ness" of life. But as a town where the retirees come... that's a whole different story. If any of you are familiar with Anthony Robbins who uses NLP techniques... its time to "Reframe" the image of Ipoh.

Retirees can bring in a host of income in the way of housing, restaurants, transport, leisure development, medical care, geriatric care, spa and rejuvenation. It's time for a public relations campaign to highlight the charms of Ipoh. Instead of crumbling, make it "old world". Instead of disused mining holes, make it "scenic ponds".

If Malacca and Penang have managed to salvage their heritage buildings why can't Ipoh? With its spectacular

limestone hills, make it the "Guilin" of Malaysia.

I, for one brag about Ipoh as the perfect retiree's haven. Every single one of my foreign friends who has come to visit me has fallen in love with its charms. The warmth of its people, the tranquility, the easy traffic, and best of all THE FOOD, at a fraction of the price that you'd have to pay elsewhere. I happen to be one of those people who have voluntarily chosen Ipoh as a place to retire. Having travelled and lived in many countries as I have done in my peripatetic life, I long to come home to Ipoh whenever I am on the road. There are many jaded people like myself in the world, tired of the stresses and strains and the artificiality of big city living, who are open to moving to a different environment. I wonder if the "Malaysia My Second Home" programme has been promoted adequately to the Western world to make an impact on the millions of "Baby Boomers" who are now facing imminent retirement and who have the security of a pension to make their living in Asia an attractive option?

Comments from Mr G. Sivapragasam (sivagov@pc.jaring.my), a member of the Board of Governors of the Perak Academy.

On December 13th, 2003, the Singapore Straits Times carried a news report entitled 'Gloom town'.

Gloom town is none other than our city of Ipoh.

Notwithstanding a measure of inaccuracies and some half-truths, we need to acknowledge that the report is how many perceive Ipoh today.

The bleak picture painted may not be quite the real story but in today's world, identity is not decided by truths but perceptions and perceptions have the uncanny habit of becoming self-fulfilling.



The article compares Ipoh in the 1960s, a boom town fuelled by a vigorous tin industry, with today a town of retired folks.

It portrays Ipoh of today as a place, abandoned by the young, its inner city decaying, its economy dependent on cottage industries and its outer city development financed by its residents working illegally in sweatshops in foreign lands.

The article asserts that since the demise of the tin industry everything the State government has tried doing to revive the economy has failed referring to the exit of Seagate, the withdrawal of the proposed aluminium plant and the unpromising prospects of Proton City in Tanjung Malim.

Claiming that Ipoh has little else going for it besides its position as the administrative capital, it quotes an executive state councillor as saying that Ipoh's economic growth is confined to only the spillover from saturation in Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

It also quotes an apparently popular saying amongst bankers that "Ipoh has the nicest people and the best food but is not a good place to do business".

Well, nice people, best food and inexpensive accommodation are not all that bad – indeed it sounds great. It may not measure up to popular values of success epitomised by the "wealthy in Mercedes Benzes downing expensive brandy and dancing nights away at glittering clubs" but it does provide residents a measure of quality life.

It is all a question of the values one cherishes.

If small, medium and cottage industries power Ipoh's economy, let it be. There is no shame in this. They breed entrepreneurs, induce indigenous technology, provoke creativity and generally engender a

race of independent, confident and bold people. There is pride in being self-employed as against a worker for the likes of Seagate and aluminium plants owned by MNIs who will relocate to other destinations at the drop of a hat for better profits. It must also be remembered that some of today's world's largest enterprises were cottage industries a short while ago.

As for the young abandoning Ipoh, well this occurs everywhere including Singapore, from where intellectuals continue to leave in some numbers.

Having said all that, whilst residents of Ipoh should be thankful for the quality of life that this provincial city delivers, it could be improved. However, there needs to be a realisation that there are no free lunches, only tradeoffs and we need to be cautious that in improving we do not lose out in the bargain.

For every attribute there is an equally effective opposite attribute. Since Ipoh is not the preferred platform for major industrial and commercial enterprises it is only sensible that we promote our town as the ideal locale for small and medium enterprises. Back room service industry is already large and is growing. Outsourcing of functions of many enterprises has become common place. And, what about higher education? Perhaps Ipoh should lobby for these activities.

To entice these businesses we need to emphasise the quality of life that this city offers and will continue to provide.

Why not resolve to make this the most environmentally friendly city in this region. The city already possesses most of the attributes to achieve this image – a manageable population, decent security, good infrastructure, a predominantly low-rise development, modest vehicular traffic, acceptable recreational and entertainment

facilities, abundant greens, rivers, mountains and hills, just to name a few.

All these features could be conserved, maintained and perhaps improved. Each and every citizen needs to be educated to be environmentally conscious. Recycling, water and power conservation, preserving our natural heritage, maintaining our historical built environment and commitment to environment protection should become our city's culture.

There are many companies in the world that make it a point to invest in communities that make conservation their priority concern. Invite them to invest here.

Success of this mission will require the effort of all the citizens of this city. The city council alone would not be able to achieve this. The council however must provide the leadership. In order to obtain the committed participation of the community the actions of the authority must appear transparent and it must involve the people in the decision-making process. Only then can the residents feel a sense of ownership and pride in their city motivating them to be responsible citizens. If the community exercises compliance, costs will be drastically reduced and the savings could be used for other meaningful purposes.

There are not many cities in the world, which has the opportunity to achieve this status. Ipoh is fortunate in this respect and the opportunity should not be wasted.

However, if we continue to pollute our rivers, contaminate our air, obliterate our limestone hills, throw rubbish everywhere, cut down our trees, transform our orchards into housing estates and convert our parks into Disneyland clones, we will only succeed in advancing Ipoh from gloom to doom! 🦉



Some Notes And Comments On Talk by Gavin Menzies (author of '1421 – The Year That China Discovered The World') – Capt. Philip J. Rivers

Herewith my conclusions on a recent talk in Kuala Lumpur by Commander Gavin Menzies, author of '1421 – The Year China Discovered The World' and some resultant researches.

Following the standard of "Chariots of the Gods", Menzies has compiled a compendium of mainly assumed Chinese contacts beyond their borders complete with UFOs – Unidentified Found Objects. For reasons too many to enumerate here, I for one am not convinced about his series of hypothetical voyages by which China allegedly discovered the world in 1421.

However, I spent an enjoyable afternoon at a hotel, appropriately named Shangri-La, listening to the Commander. A soft-spoken enthusiast, he is a good speaker with a very likeable unassuming manner. As a former naval officer he spun a good yarn with great good humour to an attentive audience who often responded with laughter.

He propounded how the Chinese were in his words the first to 'discover' North America during a number of imagined voyages circumnavigating the world. To prove his point he highjacked (or should it be Shanghaied) the already acknowledged probable Asian contacts with the Pacific coast of America. To these Commander Menzies added a mass of material, which may or may not be of Chinese origin. In his talk, he even mentioned a junk or two said to have been found on a river near Dodge City or some such in the middle of the Wild West!

Away from the prepared script, flaws appeared in the too short question period that followed. The Commander soon revealed that he hadn't checked his sources

and gladly clutched at straws. Asked how rubber was tapped at Malacca in 1421 when the tree was only introduced in the late 19th century he could only say that these were the words of a companion of Cheng Ho. Fortunately for him, Mr (now Dato') Henry Barlow of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was able to suggest that it was possibly *getah percha*. With noticeable relief Menzies asked for Mr Barlow's name.

There was some distortion when the Commander stated that journals of some 38 early explorers described Chinese tribes across the width of America. It is likely that these men reported on light skinned Amerindians – others have identified some as being Welsh or other Celts or even the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. But his pronouncement brought the obvious question how did those hardy pioneers know that they were Chinese? Commander Menzies' facile solution was that the Europeans must have all read 'The Travels of Marco Polo' and noted similar funerary habits.

The Commander responded to three questions that I put to him but really didn't answer them – he would make a good politician.

Apparently he misunderstood my question on the length of time to circumnavigate the Tasman Sea to New Zealand and back to the Australian coast. There was a digression on alleged Chinese wrecks, ruined settlements and abandoned mines in New Zealand. The fact that these were dated two centuries after Cheng Ho didn't bother Commander Menzies. Relying on legend of forerunners and the DNA of the Maoris he glibly explained that there had been Chinese colonialists left behind but

the Maoris killed all the men and raped all the women.

I was curious why when they were within a thousand miles or so of home, the fleet took off once more to loop-the-loop across the North Pacific from the Philippines to the American coast. The answer was a simple "I don't know".

A stunning explanation was given for how the Chinese fleet managed to so adroitly miss Europe. They had indeed called at Europe but during an entirely different voyage in 1408 when they sailed up the Red Sea, passed through what he called the first Suez Canal, then traversed the Mediterranean onwards to some Atlantic island or other and returned.

I checked for an European account of this celestial visitation in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. There was no mention of Chinese cruises and found that since about 1850 BCE there had indeed been canals from the Nile to the Red Sea. However, the last of these 'was deliberately filled in by the Abbasid caliphs for military reasons in AD 775.

Was there deception or just sloppy research on the part of the Commander? I therefore proceeded to check more closely some of his extravagant propositions. On closer reading of '1421' it was apparent that most of the so-called conclusive connections existed only in his mind.

The UFO element is particularly strong in Chapter 12 'The Treasure Fleet Runs Aground'. A number of unidentified wrecks, not uncommon in the West Indies, were labelled by him as Chinese. His grounds were not a cargo of porcelain but some controversial apparently stone foundations found submerged off the islands of Bimini. Suitably this is where Ponce de Leon heard fables of the Fountain of Youth.

With the title 'Expedition to the North Pole', Chapter 14 depends almost entirely on the circumnavigation of Greenland and reads more like Jules Verne's 'Journey to the



Centre of the Earth', which started in the same area. Incredible Arctic cruises are credited to the Chinese without one shred of reliable relevant evidence.

'Solving the Riddle' of determining longitude without chronometers took some 20 pages in Chapter 15 supported by an appendix of another dozen or so pages of padding. It is all the product of a fertile imagination which he persisted in although quite early on he stated 'To date there is no connection between the Chinese and the calculation of longitude'.

Chapter 18 'On the Shoulders of Giants' contains a rousing denouncement of the Columbus brothers as forgers. His charge included, quite rightly, the statement "The true measurement is 141° from the Canaries to Shanghai". This stuck in my mind because Shanghai as a port was a rather later development. Subsequently from a scholarly article by Arthur Davies in the Geographical Journal, I noted similar words "It is actually 141° from the Canaries to Shanghai". Both got it wrong – the difference in longitude is about 137.5°.

With some minor alterations and slight paraphrasing much of the Commander's proof of what he calls a forgery by the Columbus brothers is lifted almost word for word from the Professor. From the two texts I collected on three sheets a number of sentences that read practically the same. There was no acknowledgement of these portions. This was surprising for although Commander Menzies was selective and not at all critical in his material he was sincere in his beliefs.

I had suggested that Commander Menzies be invited to defend his thesis but considering his research more closely he has nothing to defend. His circumnavigations are, to borrow a phrase 'hypothetical (i.e. invented)' and not worthy of debate. His best selling '1421' is written like an historical romance and should be transferred to the list of the 10 Best Selling Fiction. 🦋

Agriculture: A Possible Prospect For Perak

– G. Sivapragasam

Undeniably, next to water, food is the most important essential for continued existence. The production and distribution of food should by all accounts be the primary concern of all nations. Self-sufficiency in this fundamental necessity has reemerge as a preminent condition for a nation's sovereignty in today's world.

The events leading up to the invasion of Iraq, the war itself and the aftermath that still continues are a rude awakening to the New World reality. No denying that Iraq, an old civilization, rich in resources, literate, with not a too uncommon political structure, is now a subject nation. A campaign over a period of ten years denuded it of even the ability to offer a semblance of resistance to the invasion.

Divorced from the world by a closely monitored trade embargo, it was reduced to exchange its oil for food. As even this barter was not based on free market order, Iraq was forced to run up a huge credit position with the United Nations authority, which amount was subsequently sequestered by the invading forces to defray the costs of the conquest.

If Iraq had been self-sufficient at least in food it may not have been in the dire straits it was and endure the consequent indignity.

In today's world in spite of all the hype

of globalization, each nation has become susceptible to being held hostage if a brand of internationalism is not admitted.

In these trying times the first order for a nation that desires to exercise a meaningful measure of sovereignty is the ability to survive independently. The network of alliances, some political but in main economic is so sophisticated that on any pretence a nation can be isolated. In these circumstances basic necessities of food, shelter, clothing and communication takes primary significance.

Malaysia with a population of 20 odd million with all the necessary resources has the opportunity to be the provider of these necessities to the nation. Its water resources, landmass and a varied terrain make it especially capable to achieve this. All that is needed to bring it to this level is a measure of planning and the will to implement.

The strategy that contributed substantially in setting Malaysia on the path to progress was the FELDA schemes. It was a somewhat similar strategy, though not as sophisticated as the FELDA schemes, that catalyzed people progress in the United States a hundred years earlier.

To achieve food sufficiency there is no necessity to invent anything new but follow the land development mechanics devised and implemented by FELDA.



The Mystery Of Malaysia

– Richard Jaffe

The rationale for the scheme was that subsistence farming had become unproductive in that with each generation land being passed to heirs had become too tiny to support all owners, a malady that prevails in all old civilized countries. The FELDA scheme system, which prevents partitioning of the agricultural plots, broke the vicious cycle.

The scheme, which was a fusion of large scale farming techniques with small holding structure, resulted in the advantage of economies of scale without the loss of entrepreneur enterprise.

But most significantly, it was a pro-active strategy where the authority consciously planned, structured and implemented a system that not only uplifted the quality of life of the masses but delivered an opportunity to be self reliant and to progress by industry, the essential quality of pioneers.

It is disturbing that there is now the attempt to corporatise FELDA. We complain about the inefficiency of the settlers. But this is generalization bordering on simplicity. There must be some settlers who are efficient. But more important every one of the settlers increased their ability to some degree, an incalculable enlargement in human resource value for the nation.

I believe Perak is well positioned to contribute meaningfully in the field of agriculture. It has the essential natural resources, water and land. But to achieve this it needs to become pro-active. A scheme somewhat similar in strategy to the FELDA scheme has to be devised and implemented. 🦋

Malaysia is a mystery
Across the distant sea
Where the people are magnificent
And greatness beckons destiny.

Her soul burns with quiet passion
While her belly bursts with tin,
Her children reach out to be loved
All their hope and dreams within.

The soil is Malaysia's breast
From whence the Nation feeds,
Like a mother providing nourishment
For all her children's needs.

With rubber, palm oil and timber
Growing proudly from the earth,
She searches for stability
Like young children after birth.

With Malays, Indians and Chinese
All shouting to be heard,
The leaders face new challenges
Each day, on every word.

Yet somehow they have lived in peace
As decades sculpt and mould her,
By building character and maturity
Her roots grow deep and older.

Yet of all her natural treasures
People remain her greatest song,
Embodied with centuries of tradition
With names like Ali, Samy and Chong.

Now one day in the future
All the world will come to see,
Just how strong and independent
The people of Malaysia soon will be.

But for now she must keep harvesting
The pride within her heart,
Planting jobs and opportunity
Where seeds of hope and dreams must start.

May 17th, 1988