

## **THE PROBLEMS OF KADAZANDUSUN *BUMIPUTERAISM*: PROMISES, PRIVILEGES AND POLITICS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

There was a time in Kadazan history when association with the term *bumiputera* suggested an elevated status, a special position and even to some, a dignified rank. Such a time was the mid-sixties of newly-independent Sabah, where Kadazans enchanted by the privileges of *bumiputeraism* were appreciative of the appellation "sons of the soil".

The development of a *bumiputera* designation for the *Kadazandusun* of Sabah can in part be traced to 1960, when the concept of Malaysia was seriously examined by Malayan leaders and British officials. Singapore was to be a part of the envisaged nation, but before making the important decision of accepting Singapore into the Federation, Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had to think of a way in which Singapore could be incorporated without the island's large Chinese population upsetting the delicate racial balance in Malaya. Such an upset, were it to occur, would permit the Chinese to dominate Federation politics. This thought hindered the Tunku from initially favouring a merger between Malaya and Singapore. In short it was the fear of a communist take over in Singapore that alarmed the Tunku, thus motivating him to pursue the idea of a Greater Malaysia Federation which would include the Borneo states (Smith 1963: 23).

Increasingly in the early sixties, Malayan leaders were acknowledging that the indigenous people of the Borneo territories could be classified as Malays. Malayan ambassador to Indonesia, Senu Abdul Rahman had made a six-day visit to North Borneo in 1960. In his report, he classified the indigenous population of Borneo as Malays (Sopiee, 1976:137). The addition of the Borneo territories was therefore seen as not imperilling the position of the Malays in the Peninsula. The indigenous population

of Borneo would help to balance the Chinese majority in Singapore. Referring to the indigenous people of Borneo, Milne stated that although most of them were not Malays, or even Muslims, on the basis of Senu's report and other general impressions, the Malays in Malaya looked on the indigenous peoples as their "brothers" (Milne & Mauzy, 1978: 55-56). On this point Roff wrote: "Importantly also, Malay leaders from the Peninsula had from the beginning chosen to think of the Natives of Borneo as being essentially 'like us' (Roff, 1974:154)".

Thus, with the Malaysia proposal, the *Kadazans* were posed with a set of choices. They could reject Malaysia and continue to be regarded as natives of British North Borneo or they could join Malaysia and be considered *bumiputeras*. Towards the end of 1961 the majority of *Kadazan* leaders led by their *Huguan Siou* (Paramount Chief) Donald Stephens were convinced that Malaysia was the better option for Sabah.

## THE LEGAL DIMENSION

To work out in detail the arrangements under which the Borneo Territories would become constituent states of the Federation of Malaysia, an Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) was set up. In the Agreement by the British and Malayan Governments on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1962, the establishment and purpose of the IGC was outlined as follows: "An Inter-Governmental Committee will be established as soon as possible, on which the British, Malayan, North Borneo and Sarawak Governments will be represented. Its task will be to work out the future constitutional arrangements and the form of the necessary safeguards" (Boyce, 1968:15). The IGC, also known as the Landsdowne Committee was able to resolve most of the major issues involved in the final stages of Malaysia's formation by the end of 1962. An agreement reached on essential points included a list of matters drawn up by the North Borneo team. This list which came to be known as the Twenty Points spelled out the demands for safeguards when North Borneo joined Malaysia (Ongkili, 1972:102-103). Securing these safeguards meant that North Borneo and Sarawak were to have more say in the running of their governments compared to the states of Malaya.

Of the 20 conditions and safeguards in this list, it is to point number 12 that the discussion here focuses on. Point 12 states:

**Special Position of Indigenous Races:** In principle, the indigenous races of North Borneo should enjoy special rights analogous to those enjoyed by Malays in Malaya, but the present Malaya formula in this regard is not necessary applicable in North Borneo.

The special rights and position enjoyed by Malays in Malaya is enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution under article 153 which "charges the Yang di-Pertuan Agong with the responsibility of safeguarding the special position of the Malays" (Groves, 1964:203; see also Suffian, Lee and Trindade, 1987: 380). Article 153 directs the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to ensure the reservation for Malays of such proportions 'as he may deem reasonable' of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions, and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal government and, when any permit or license for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then subject to the provisions of that law and article 153, of such permits and licenses (Groves, 1964:203).

In its original context, before Malaysia was formed, the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya provided for the safeguarding of the special position of Malays only. The safeguard was extended to natives of Borneo when Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaysia (Mohd. Suffian Hashim, 1972: 275). This was done by adding a new article i.e., 161A to the constitution. However, as shall be discussed, the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1971, has since deleted clause (1) to (3) of Article 161A. One of the main effects of this deletion has been to equate the position of natives of Borneo with that of the Malays.

Hence in 1962 when the *Kadazans* of Sabah came to know that they would be given a position analogous to the position of the Malay, that they would be conferred *bumiputera* status, it was to be a deciding factor in their willingness to join Malaysia. Stephens and other native leaders were attracted to the special privileges that would be extended to their people. It was a time when positions in the public service, scholarships and facilities for trade and business were highly sought

after. On his return to Jesselton after the Malaysian Solidarity Consultative Committee (MSCC) meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Stephens stated:

As far as the *Kadazan* people were concerned, Malaysia would mean that they would be given special privileges to help raise their standard of living and their standard of education, to see that they are given every chance to take part in the business activities of the country.

(*North Borneo News & Sabah Times*, 11 January 1962)

Donald Stephens (later Tun Mohamed Fuad Stephens) and Tun Mustapha Harun went on to become the champions of *bumiputeraism* in Sabah. Both leaders of their respective communities, Mustapha representing the *Bajau-Suluk* Muslim natives and Stephens the *Kadazan-Dusun-Murut* non-Muslim peoples, had started the process of political mobilisation in Sabah. Stephens and Mustapha eventually became bitter rivals in the struggle for political power in Sabah. At the same time both would stress the need to maintain *bumiputera* unity for the sake of Sabah's progress and stability. But it was Stephens who eventually acquiesced in disbanding his party, United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO) urging its member to join Mustapha's ruling United Sabah National Organisation (USNO) "in order to preserve the unity of the *bumiputera* peoples of Sabah" (*Straits Times*, 11 December 1967).

Before discussing the further developments of *bumiputera* unity in Sabah, mention must be made of the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971. This Act came in the wake of the 13 May racial violence and had the effect of amending Article 10 of the Malaysian Constitution. (Freedom of Speech). With the amendment to Article 10, Parliament was empowered to pass laws to impose restrictions on the right to freedom of speech. The restrictions were aimed at circumscribing public discussion on four 'sensitive' issues – citizenship, the National Language and the language of other communities, the special position and privileges of the Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in Malaysia and the sovereignty of the Rulers (Suffian, Lee & Trindade: 379).

The Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1971 had important implications for the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. The amending Act also amended Article 153, whereby the words 'and natives of any of the Borneo States' were inserted immediately after the words 'Malays' wherever they are mentioned in Article 153. In essence, the amending Act "provided for parity of natives of any of the Borneo States with Malays in West Malaysia" (Suffian, Lee and Trindade: 380). In this context therefore, the natives of the Borneo States have been given the same status as the Malays. From 1971 onwards, it was thus possible, by legal definition, for a Sabah or Sarawak native to be referred to as Malay.

### **CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS BUMIPUTERA**

From 1968 to 1975, *bumiputera* unity was consolidated under the rule of Tun Mustapha's Sabah Alliance Party (SAP). In this period however, democracy went into hibernation in Sabah, as the SAP tolerated little opposition from the populace. For the majority *Kadazans*, the loss of power was followed by both racial and religious discrimination under Mustapha's rule (Loh, 1992:230). Mustapha's government placed great emphasis on fostering national unity through "*satu bangsa, satu kebudayaan dan satu agama*" (Hussain, 1976:95-96). What was primarily a policy of Malayisation and Islamisation, Mustapha employed it aggressively in his act of attrition against the *Kadazans* whom he regarded as being anti-national (Anak Sabah, 1989: 136). He wanted to ensure that the non-Muslim natives remained without a voice in politics indefinitely. Hunter in his brief history of the Mustapha dictatorship described in evocative terms the Muslim Chief Minister's animosity towards the *Kadazan*

That the dissolution of UPKO meant heartbreak for its thousands of supporters did not mean much to Tun Mustapha who was too euphoric to take any human consideration into account. It was not sufficient to have the party representing the largest the native majority wiped out from the political scene; it was necessary to teach the *Kadazans* a lesson they would never forget. Thus it was that at every opportunity Tun Mustapha ensured that the *Kadazans* suffered by having their districts or *kampongs* ignored and deprived of development funds. (Hunter, 1976: 8).

Between 1968–1975, little can be said of party politics in Sabah because the process was prevented from occurring by the authoritarian nature of Mustapha's rule. By the same token not much can be said of *kadazanism* in this period, for national consciousness among this group became dormant.

In Sabah, *kadazanism* is closely tied to cultural identity and it is this identity which defines what it means to be *bumiputera* for the non-Malay and Muslim native. The *kadazan* cultural identity had been severely tested after the departure of leaders like Donald Stephens and Peter Mojuntin. Without the guidance and presence of capable leaders to speak out for them, the *Kadazan* community was forced to compromise certain cultural practices under the repressive government of Mustapha. With regards to cultural identity, the indigenous non-Muslims had initially been asked to identify themselves as "*kadazans*" behind UNKO. Later, the non-Muslim and Malay natives were urged to discard their "distinctiveness" in the early days of UPKO's struggle for multiracialism. Thereafter, with the dissolution of UPKO, *Kadazans* were told to join USNO in which they were to identify themselves as *Bumiputera* (Loh, 1989:4). By the early 1970s very few *Kadazans* welcomed the idea of being *bumiputeraised*, especially if it meant sharing a common identity with the Malay and Muslims, their political rivals in Sabah.

Towards the end of his rule, Tun Mustapha began to show a tendency to suppress the cultural activities of other ethnic groups. For no reason other than to promote his design for national unity, he later turned on his own allies the Chinese and banned their lion dances, fire crackers and fireworks. Clearly, political developments under Mustapha contravened the freedom of speech and religion in a democratic nation. His policies, especially those which touched on the state's autonomy were regarded by the *Kadazan* elite as contrary to the Twenty Points. By 1975 Mustapha's authoritarian and erratic style of government and personal extravagances had become an embarrassment to the Federal Government. The Sabah Chief Minister was also beginning to insist on a more autonomous position in the Malaysia Federation. The Federal Government's toleration of Mustapha finally came to an end in July 1975. The return of parliamentary democracy to Sabah, ironically with the support of the Federal Government, also signified the reawakening

of *Kadazan* national consciousness as the *Kadazan* elite began ushering in a new political pattern in the state.

### **KADAZAN BUMIPUTERA IN THE BERJAYA ERA 1976 – 1985**

When the SAP was defeated in the Sabah State Elections of 1976 by the multiracial Berjaya Party, the *Kadazans* had regrouped under a well represented elite comprising leaders from both coastal and inland *Kadazan* communities. The *Kadazans* had decided to support Berjaya with the hope of reversing the culturally oppressive policies of Mustapha's regime. The political mobilisation of the *Kadazans* was once again taken up by its two main leaders Stephens and Mojuntin. Once more as in the early sixties, Stephens the *Huguan Siou* and Mojuntin were the main driving force behind the *Kadazan* political movement of the early to mid seventies. Leading Berjaya, Stephens won power in April 1976. In those elections, *Kadazan* tribal loyalties, as in the past, dominated the voting. *Kadazan* groups including the *Muruts*, tended to stand behind their tribal leader irrespective of the party he supported. Among more remote *Kadazan* tribes, there was a degree of political concern, but little political understanding and in such cases their unquestioned allegiance to village or tribal leaders prevailed. When Stephens had once again taken up the role as a politically active *Huguan Siou*, *Kadazan* tribal elders and village headmen found their sense of loyalty to the Paramount Chief revived. Once the tribal leaders had communicated their allegiance to the *Huguan Siou*, the people followed suit, trusting in the wisdom of their local chief.

The results of the 1976 election showed that the *Kadazan* vote was the decisive factor. Although unexpressed, there was a growing feeling among the *Kadazan* elite that the Berjaya victory afforded them the opportunity to rebuild the *Kadazan* base of political power.

### **THE PERIBUMI ISSUE**

In June 1976, the *Kadazan* Paramount Chief Fuad Stephens was killed in an airplane crash off Kota Kinabalu. He was succeeded as Chief Minister by Datuk Harris Salleh. A new *Kadazan Huguan Siou* was

appointed in Joseph Pairin Kitingan. Although a senior member of Berjaya, Pairin became critical of the policies of its leader Harris Salleh with regard to four specific issues:

1. The problem of illegal immigrants from the Philippines and Indonesia.
2. The granting of state land to foreigners.
3. The transferring of Labuan island to Federal Government ownership.
4. The introduction of the term *Peribumi* to reclassify all natives in Sabah.

These problems and a fifth issue, that of Harris Salleh's increasing authoritarianism, became the basis for growing dissatisfaction among Sabahans in general and among *Kadazans* in particular. However, it is to the fourth point which this paper directs its attention. The processes of Malayisation and Islamisation that continued under Berjaya eventually led to the formulation of cultural-ethnic policies which were in line with the strong integrationist objectives emanating from Kuala Lumpur (Loh, 1992). The most controversial policy of the Harris Salleh government which sought to emphasise Malay as the National Language and Malay-Muslim culture as the nucleus of national integration was the introduction of the ethnic category *Peribumi*. Designed to reclassify all Sabah's indigenous people, the term *Peribumi* was officially introduced in 1980 in conjunction with the State Census of that year. As an ethnic label, *Peribumi* encompassed all Sabahans of Malay stock which not only included the *Kadazans*, *Muruts* and *Bajaus* but also Filipinos, Indonesians, natives of Sarawak and the Cocos Islands. Ironically, in the 1970 State Census, Cocos Islanders, Sarawak *bumiputeras*, Indonesians and Filipinos had been placed under the category "Others".

By introducing the term *Peribumi* the Harris-led government deliberately abolished all indigenous tribal identification. Sabah social anthropologist Regis noted:

By the directive, all indigenous groups had to be identified by the collective term and not by their individual separate ethnic grouping on all official documents. The referent {sic} effectively ignores descent and removes the ethnic boundaries which separate the different groups. (Kitingan & Ongkili, 1989: 420).

The *Kadazans* saw this obscuration of indigenous cultures and tribal identities as an offence and injustice to the native people's heritage and rights. *Kadazans* had always considered themselves the "definitive people" of Sabah and therefore resented being subsumed under the new category *Peribumi*. Sensing their individuality as a race threatened by this wide-reaching racial tag, the *Kadazans* led by Pairin mounted an on-going political assault on the implementation of the new term.

In the State Elections of 1985, Pairin Kitingan's Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) centred its campaign on issues of race and religion. The party concentrated its attacks on Berjaya's *Peribumi* policy calling for a revocation of the term in favour of the original term *bumiputera*. The *Kadazans* were against the ethnic label *Peribumi* because they felt it tended to reduce the status of the predominantly Christian *Kadazans* to second class citizens. Under the *Peribumi* category, the *Kadazans* were made to feel that their position was below that of the Muslim-Malay population (Kalimuthu, 1986). Before the elections, the Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA) had also called on the Berjaya government to discard the use of the term *Peribumi*, and for the term *Kadazan* to be reinstated as the official name of the community concerned.

The PBS went on to win the elections of 1985 and 1986, and with Pairin as Chief Minister the *Kadazans* dominated state politics until 1994. As a result of massive defections to Barisan Nasional, Pairin and the PBS eventually lost their mandate in the Sabah Legislative Assembly and were forced to relinquish power on 17 March 1994.

## **KADAZAN BUMIPUTERA TODAY**

Not much can be said about the development of *kadazan bumiputeraism* today, except to note that *Kadazandusuns* are increasingly less

enamoured with the *bumiputera* status accorded them 40 years ago. There is growing disenchantment with the term as *Kadazans* no longer subscribe to the "privileges analogous to the Malays" policy. Many in the community treat it with indifference, others tend to joke about it, hence the terms third class *bumiputera*, pseudo-*bumiputera* and *bumiputera-celup*.

The term "minority *bumiputera*" has emerged over the past few years and has attracted considerable interest locally. *Kadazan* intellectuals have taken up the issue to try and find answers to the disillusionment among *Kadazans* with the 'bumiputera policy'. Some explanations point to the effects of the New Economic Policy (NEP). *Kadazans* claim that they have not shared in the so-called gains of the other *bumiputera* under the NEP and other recent development efforts. The implication here is that there are some biases in the system that would tend to favour the Malay (Personal communication Bruce Lindquist, 16 May 2002).

There are other possible reasons as to why the term *bumiputera* is perceived differently in Sabah. The lack of a unified "Sabahan" identity has presented its own set of problems, especially with the influx of illegal immigrants from the Philippines and Indonesia. Thousands of these aliens have been able to access the *bumiputera* category thus making *Kadazans* more cynical about this once-upon-a-time special category. When asked about his or her status of being *bumi*, the average *Kadazan* response would be: "that just means I'm native. I'm not Malay". This in its current form is the real disconnect on the view of *bumiputera* among *Kadazans* and the view of the Malay. In conclusion, if *bumiputeraism* for the *Kadazandusun* can no longer mean "analogous to the position of the Malay", then lingering disdain for the policy will continue, as *Kadazans* regard the policy as nothing less than a form of ethnic ornamentalism.

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