

CHAPTER 3

THE STATE OF KELANTAN

Kelantan originated from the Siamese word “Klantan”, which later was changed to “Kelantan”. The Chinese name for “Kelantan” is transliterated from the Malay and the name “Ho-lo-tan” was recorded in historical documents. The name “Chih-Tu” and “Tan-Tan” were given by the then Chinese people living in Kelantan.



Kota Bharu, the Islamic City



Main entrance to the royal museum

Kelantan – The Beautiful Abode

Kelantan, the northern most state of the Peninsular Malaysia, borders Thailand in the north, Perak in the west, Terengganu in the east and Pahang in the south. She carries the title of “The Beautiful Abode” because of her unspoiled palm beaches, scenic fishing villages as well as her handicraft heritage, traditional customs and lifestyle which date back to hundreds of years. Kelantan is a state with the highest number of Malay Muslims and the strongest Malay cultural influences. Today, a huge bill board bearing the 99 names of Allah stands by the roadside, with a tagline that reads, “Kota Bharu, Our Islamic City”.

History

Kelantan adjoins Thailand in the north and faces the sea in the east. Her unique geography made her the loading point for trading vessels coming from Siam (Thailand), Chola (Cambodia), China, India, Saudi Arabia and Persia in the past. Hence, the development of Kelantan as a state began much earlier than the other Malay states; she was the first Malay state to appear in the historical records of Han Dynasty. Kelantan was also where the earliest Chinese migrants first settled.

The Malays of Kelantan, other than those migrated from other states, are the descendants of South Thailand's ancient Malay tribes. Their cultural system originated from the Malays of South Thailand, which has a strong Indian Buddhist influence. In 1400, Islam was introduced into Kelantan; those who embraced the Muslim religion underwent a complete change in their way of life. However, they still retained their ancient language.

The historical connection between the Chinese and Kelantan can be traced back to the dynasties of Tang and Sung. There was already mention of Chinese traders' presence in Kelantan in ancient Chinese literature such as *The book of Liang* in the Southern Tang Dynasty and the *New Book of Tang Dynasty*. The *New History of Yuan Dynasty* which was published 700 years after that has a description resembling modern Kelantan. The latest historical findings show that the Hokkien-speaking Chinese in Kelantan migrated from Sungai Petani about 400 years ago or even earlier.

As for the early Indian settlers there, they had assimilated into the Malay Muslim culture after embracing Islam. Records of these Indian pioneers' contributions toward the building of the ancient kingdom had long been lost in history. Most of the Indians in Kelantan today migrated there about the time of the Second World War.

The artifacts unearthed in the two caves of Kelantan, Gua

Musang and Gua Chua, provided evidence of human habitation there in prehistoric times. Historical records showed that the state was once under the influence of Funan Kingdom (an ancient Cambodian kingdom). At that time, Kelantan was quite a powerful kingdom but she became a Siamese tribute state later. In the 15th century, Kelantan lost her sovereignty to the Malaccan Empire. Subsequently she was ruled by the Johor and Terengganu Empires at different times. In the 18th century, Long Yunus succeeded in defeating the governing power of Kelantan and the royal family of Kelantan today is one of his descendants. In 1900, Kelantan was forced to pay tribute to Siam again. With the signing of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty in 1909, Kelantan was ceded to the British. The state became a part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 and achieved independence in 1957.

Kelantan had been governed by the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) since 1959. In 1978, the state came under the control of the National Front Party (Barisan Nasional) but PAS won back political control of the state in 1990. It is still the ruling party of the state today.

Under the leadership of the Islamic Party, the state government actively promotes a policy of Islamisation. For example, women must conduct themselves in ways that are consistent with Islamic teaching. Women working in the supermarket sales counters and restaurants must wear a headscarf to cover their



Wayang Kulit (Shadow Puppet Show)



Silat – traditional martial arts

hair and their attire must keep their bodies suitably covered; otherwise they will be given summons. Muslims couples caught holding hands in public can be fined up to RM700. In addition, men and women must queue in separate lines at the payment counters of supermarkets.

In 1991, the state government of Kelantan banned the traditional Malay puppet show because it features myths and legends that are against Islamic doctrines. The dance performance called Makyong was also banned because male and female dancers performed together in this dance. However, the Kota Bharu Art Gallery does not come under this ruling since the performances there are open to tourists only. Likewise puppet shows and Makyong dances that are performed by non-Muslims for non-Muslim audience are permitted.

Economy and Society

As Kelantan faces the South China Sea in the northeast, her inhabitants are mostly fishermen and farmers. Her forest area is vast, while the Kelantan River and its tributaries flow from south to north traversing the whole state, providing ample waterpower resources. The state can be divided into north and south with Kuala Krai in



Siti Khadijah Market



Traditional wax-resist dyeing technique

central Kelantan serving as a meeting point. The north is more developed economically; its delta plains are major rice producing areas while rubber plantations abound. The coastal region is lined with coconut trees and rich in marine products. Tumpak and Bachok are two important fishing industry bases. The south is less developed, with primeval forests occupying 88% of the area. While Kelantan produces iron, tin, magnesium, uranium and other minerals, she is also famed for her handicrafts such as batik and straw mats. The state offers many unique attractions for tourists as well. Although Kelantan is rich in natural resources, she is the fourth poorest state in Malaysia. Apart from the uneven distribution of political resources, geography and history are both contributing factors. Hidden on the other side of the Titiwangsa Ranges, she is behind the west coast states in terms of social, educational and economic development.

Kelantan started producing oil in 2005. Statistically speaking, the oil produced in the state between 2005 and 2008 was about 5.4% of national oil production, higher than that of Sabah. The discovery of oil has created growth in the oil and related industries. This, in turn, is gradually changing the economic facet of the state.

Yet the fact that lawless elements from neighbouring Thailand have easy access to the state through the Malaysian-Thai border has caused serious social problems. There are numerous cases



Fishing is influenced by
the inter-monsoonal wind

of smuggling and drug-trafficking, thus opening up more avenues for people to obtain illegal goods. National statistical reports showed that Kelantan has a big share of drug-related problems among her youth. Substance abuse cases involving drugs like amphetamines, cannabis, heroin, morphine, opium and tranquilisers are on the rise. Whether caused by anti-social behaviour or peer pressure, drug abuse has started to spread in schools.

During the inter-monsoon season from November to January, the low-lying areas of Kelantan are prone to flooding. This problem has yet to be solved. Whenever this happens, the churches there will try their level best to provide assistance. However, the resources of the churches are limited and their access to outside aid is inadequate, this has greatly hampered their effectiveness in providing the much needed flood relief. Conversely, the relief efforts of other religious bodies are timely and ample. This is something we need to consider seriously.

The problem of brain drain is a very severe one for Kelantan. The slow economic growth of the state means that young people lack employment opportunities. Many of them have chosen to seek their fortune elsewhere. During festive seasons, they will return to visit their family members and relatives. The streets of Kelantan would then be filled with vehicles bearing number plates of other states. It is no wonder the church pastors there

are calling the children of Kelantan to come home.

Missions in Kelantan

Kelantan is a state dominated by Islamic and Malay cultures. Mosques can be seen everywhere. Yet, the Kelantan Chinese are deeply entrenched in Buddhism and ancestral worship. A mosque incorporating the architectural features of Chinese temple was built in 2009 in Rantau Panjang, near the Thai border, ostensibly to attract more Chinese to embrace Islam. Nevertheless, there are more than 100 Siamese, Hindu and Chinese temples in the state, not counting family altars and shrines in the homes. The statue of a sleeping Buddha, the largest in Southeast Asia, is located in Kampung Jambu, about 12 kilometers north of Kota Bharu. Since its opening in 1980, it has drawn numerous Buddhists and tourists to Kampung Jambu. Faced with these spiritual challenges, we need to be bold in overcoming all obstacles in sharing the gospel.

Catholicism entered Kelantan when the Portuguese came to Malaya in the 16th century. Later, the Presbyterians and Anglicans arrived to set up churches here. However, Christians comprise a mere 0.2% of the population in Kelantan today. According to the

statistics provided by the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) in 2008, there were about 14 churches in Kelantan, mostly located in Kota Bharu where most Chinese are concentrated. Church growth is slow due to a severe shortage of leaders. Some churches are without their own pastors, they are dependent on pastors from other states to shepherd them. The attrition rate of full-time pastors in Kelantan is quite high; this could be the result of the brain drain of young people, which has affected the growth of church ministries. Many pastors simply gave up and left. On the whole, believers here are not keen on outreach and evangelism mainly because their pastors lack training in this area. Those who dwell in the remote areas of the state remain unreached. As the churches confront the challenge of inadequate resources, they hope to network and collaborate with those of other denominations and churches to turn the situation around spiritually.



Profile of Kelantan

Area: around 4,920 square kilometers

Capital: Kota Bharu

Total population: over 1.43 million
Malays (93%), Chinese (3.8%),
indigenous people (0.9%), Indians (0.3%),
Siamese and others (2%)

Religions: Islam (94%), Buddhism or Taoism (4%),
traditional tribal religions (0.5%), Hinduism (0.2%),
Christianity and Catholicism (0.2%).

Prayer for Kelantan

1. Pray for God's wisdom and grace to be upon the state government and leaders so that they will prioritise the people's welfare.
2. Pray for the safety and order for the community in the Malaysian-Thai border, that the authorities will be able to combat crimes such as smuggling and drug trafficking more effectively.
3. Pray that God will refresh and revive Malaysian churches, and enable more believers to respond to God's call to be full-time workers. Pray that the churches will contribute generously and consolidate their resources to care for the flood victims.

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