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2nd MBRAS Lecture 2017

Turun Takhta Buang Negeri:  
The Exile of Tengku Musaeddin (1893–1955),  
Tengku Kelana Jaya Petra & Sultan Selangor Darul Ehsan VII (1942–1945)  
to the Cocos & Keeling Islands (1945–1946)

by Raimy Ché-Ross

Badan Warisan Malaysia, 2 Jalan Stonor, Kuala Lumpur  
Saturday, 25 March 2017, 4.45pm

**The Lecture**

The turmoil and confusion sweeping across the Malay Peninsula in the immediate aftermath of World War II (1939–1942), provided the perfect foil for bitter rivals to settle old scores. The extra-judicial treatment of collaborators during the 'Zaman Bintang Tiga' are well-documented. Less discussed are the dramatic political reprisals visited upon 'disloyal' Malay royals during the volatile nascent days of the British Military Administration (1945–1946). Preceding the fumbled attempt to foist the Malayan Union upon them 'whether the Sultans like it or not', Malay rulers regarded as irreconcilable security risks or 'Blacks', were aggressively targeted by a returning power intent on weeding out 'Puppet Sultans' of 'pro-Japanese sympathies and/or ill-repute'.

This unprecedented sweeping purge and its repercussions irrevocably changed the fortunes of three royal houses through the removal of their incumbent heads by both overt and tacit means. In Perlis, Raja Syed Hamzah Syed Safi Jamalullail (1895–1958), Raja Perlis V (1943–1945), renounced his rights to the throne upon hearing a new heir was being sought by the British, and withdrew into self-exile in Siam. Over in the East Coast, the Oxford-educated Sultan Ali Shah (1914–1996), Sultan Terengganu XIV (1942–1945), was forcibly deposed by a council of peers. He was later reduced to plying the roads of his former kingdom as an illegal taxi driver.

Perhaps the most vindictive retribution, however, was meted out to Sultan Musa Ghiathuddin Riayat Shah (1893–1955), better known as Tengku Musaeddin, Tengku Kelana Jaya Petra and Sultan Selangor Darul Ehsan VII (1942–1945). He was arrested and exiled to the Cocos & Keeling Islands, where he was held captive for over ten months before being reluctantly returned to Malaya after intense lobbying by his formidable consort, Sharifah Mastura Shahabuddin (1897–1959). No charges were laid against him and no formal reason was ever given for his detention.

Shortly before his death in 1955, Tengku Musaeddin set his memoirs on paper. The unpublished Malay-Jawi manuscript penned in his own hand has survived. It contains Tengku Musaeddin's recollections of the Japanese bombardment and invasion of Selangor, his capture and exile by the British to the Cocos & Keeling Islands, and his post-war journey to perform the Haj. All three parts are regrettably incomplete; a significant portion of the second part – evidently containing Tengku Musaeddin's most scathing and controversial revelations – was missing when the manuscript was acquired by its present custodian in the late 1960s.

Introducing and discussing the remaining contents of this highly important and significant work (the only known autobiography written by a Malay ruler) – against the background of Tengku Musaeddin's life and reign – formed the basis for this talk. It was supplemented by material gleaned from recently declassified secret British documents, plus contemporary private reports and editorial commentary from the Malay press. A visual presentation; illustrated with translated excerpts from the memoirs, archival material, and previously unseen photographs from private collections, accompanied the lecture.

Four key points were raised and discussed in the talk.

Previous studies have been selective in their approach towards evaluating Tengku Musaeddin and the complex issues surrounding his life and short reign. Most have opted to highlight and amplify the derogatory and pejorative terms in which Tengku Musaeddin's real and imagined flaws were transmitted in contemporary official colonial reports and correspondence. Reliance on these biased assessments have resulted in the overarching narrative that exists today, which represents Tengku Musaeddin as a prime example of the failed and despised colonial 'Other'. Conversely, Tengku Musaeddin has been re-cast by local revisionists as a heroic martyr to the nationalist cause, while side-stepping the wider controversial issues of his ascension to and deposition from the throne. Both approaches have produced distorted caricatures of the person that was Tengku Musaeddin and misrepresented the events in which he played a major role.

Secondly, it can be seen that the reductive nature of these summations stand in contradiction to the detailed assessments that were being voiced and written, both in public and private, when these events unfolded. Senior members of the colonial and Malay communities were vocal in their disagreement over Tengku Musaeddin's forced abdication as the Raja Muda of Selangor, and later, his exile to the Cocos & Keeling Islands. These establishment figures saw the situation for what it was - a wider game of court intrigue, one aided and abetted unwittingly or otherwise by vested interests in the colonial administration – in which criminal, scapegoat and enemy collaborator were all projected and exemplified in the person of Tengku Musaeddin. Tengku Musaeddin was no saint – his dubious real-estate dealings and ill-advised financial schemes are a matter of public record – and murky rumours about his personal life still persist today. But it may now be confirmed that he was deposed, detained and exiled without charge, purely as a matter of political expedience, by South East Asia Command (SEAC) (1943–1946), who was determined to see pro-British support being firmly re-established – at all costs – in Selangor.

Thirdly, there exists a reluctance within local academia to discuss Tengku Musaeddin and the circumstances surrounding his deposition and exile. This hesitation and self-censorship has resulted in a lack of reliable information on Tengku Musaeddin, which in turn have led to gross misinterpretations of his exile and inexplicable inaccuracies over the simplest facts of his life and reign. While it is expected, and indeed necessary, for this topic to be discussed sensitively with due restraint and objectivity, any concerns that it may bring into question certain issues are superfluous, needless and unwarranted, seeing that the line of succession in Selangor Darul Ehsan is explicitly stated, legally protected and permanently enshrined in its state constitution. Tengku Musaeddin left no legitimate heirs and held no ill-will towards the current status quo, and accorded full respect and support towards his younger brother who was reinstated as ruler and later became the Yang di-Pertuan Agong II.

Finally, it is clear that local primary sources in Malay / Jawi on Selangor's history, namely in the form of manuscripts, periodicals, archival records and private correspondence, are woefully under utilised and largely ignored. Previous assessments and summaries of details contained in colonial records relating to the subject have been found to be mostly defective both in their coverage and readings. The task of re-evaluating and re-analysing these sources is daunting but necessary. It is hoped that concerted efforts will be made not only to gather and preserve such documents, but also to romanise and re-package their publication and dissemination in more innovative ways.

This preliminary re-assessment of Tengku Musaeddin's tumultuous life and reign – in preparation for a monograph and full-length study on the topic – attempts to show how important and rewarding it can be to re-visit such primary sources. In the case of our subject, it has revealed a compelling tale of faith, dignity and survival in the face of betrayal, deceit and the might of an empire.

### **About the Speaker**

**Raimy Ché-Ross** is a post-graduate candidate at the Akademi Pengajian Melayu (Universiti Malaya), where he is working on manuscripts of the *Hikayat Pahang*. His latest book, 'Warkah di-Raja: The Royal Letters of Baginda Omar, Sultan Terengganu Darul Iman IX, Marhum Baginda (1806–1876), Volume I', was published by the Yayasan di-Raja Sultan Mizan (YDSM) in 2015. He is presently completing a paper on the scientific, technological and mathematical writings of Dato' Sri Amar di-Raja Dato' Abdul Rahman Andak (1859–1930), written in English and published – when Dato' Abdul Rahman was but 17 years old – in Great Britain towards the end of the 19th century.





