A RUSSIAN IN KELANTAN!

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A fascinating addition to the international field of Southeast Asian scholarship has recently come from an enthusiastic group of pioneers in Russia.¹ In the historical field the most notable is Elizaveta Ivanovna Gnevusheva, lecturer in Indonesian history at the University of Moscow. Her article last year in the learned Dutch journal De Bijdragen² marks the recognition that her work is not of significance to Russians only.

Her Bijdragen article is primarily concerned with the dramatic part played by a Russian adventurer, Vasily Mamatyga, in assisting the defence of Lombok against the Netherlands colonial army in 1922-4. She also sheds an interesting light on a little known aspect of Malaysian history, however. This is the Anglo-Siamese contest for Kelantan in 1897-1902, which has usually been dismissed casually by British writers in a manner which suggests the people of Kelantan had little part in deciding their own fate. Miss Gnevusheva, on the other hand, has depicted a gallant fight on the part of Kelantan, aided by the Russian hero of her story, for independence from both powers.

Miss Gnevusheva's story, as far as it affects Malaysia, is as follows.

After four years in a Dutch prison, Mamatyga had been allowed to return to his native Maldavia in 1899. Two years later he returned to the East as cook on board a Russian steamer, and disembarked in Singapore in June, 1901. He had apparently intended to continue to Java, but was naturally forbidden to do so by the Dutch. Remaining in Singapore, he was the subject of two despatches (August, 1901 and October, 1902) from the Imperial Russian Consul in Singapore, Baron Kister, which provide the basis of Miss Gnevusheva's material for this part of her account.

According to Miss Gnevusheva's information, Kelantan was at that time an independent state, being subjected to strong pressure from Siam. The ruler of Kelantan looked to Britain for help against the Siamese. In the words of Baron Kister, "The Governor (Swettenham) was prepared to cooperate with Kelantan, but sought in exchange that Kelantan should join the Federated Malay States, in

¹ This work only became generally known outside Russia at the International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow in 1960. One of the papers presented was a Maritza transcription of the main characters of the famous film "Jawat" by the Russian B. Popovitch, Lov. In 1962, E.I. Gnevusheva published a collection of biographies of Russian men of letters, mainly biographers, who had written on Indonesia before 1875. Published in: St. Petersburg (Malygin). "Bijdragen" in "Nederlandsch-Indische Bergen, L.E.L. Stammel" Bijdragen uit de Fakel, Zend., en Polenbeek, 121 (1962), Part 3, pp. 325-349.
other words should completely submit to England.13 Raja Ismail of Selangor (wrongly portrayed by Miss Goveva as Sultan of Selangor) warned the Raja of Kelantan against accepting British help. In 1902, he sent Mamalyga to Kelantan at the head of 100 men, to organise its defences on an independent basis. Mamalyga carried a letter of recommendation from Raja Ismail, "in the name of a man who intended to obtain concessions for the exploration of mineral deposits, etc."14 Baron Kister warned Raja Ismail against employing a man like Mamalyga, but received the reply that all Malays knew "Malayupus" and placed full confidence in him.

Here the narrative breaks off. Miss Goveva was unable to trace any records as to Mamalyga's further moves, though she still has hopes that something may turn up in Russian archives at those of the Tsarist Embassy in Britain, to which Kister reported.

Those more familiar with Malaysian history do not need to be reminded that Baron Kister's picture was not an entirely accurate one, though it reflected the popular view in Singapore at that time. Siamese influence in Kelantan was of long standing, symbolised by the controversial 'banana man' sent to Bangkok as early as 1010.15 The Kelantan ruler, himself a Siamese officer, was made the virtual governor of the area during the late eighteenth century, and his name was Kister.

In general the British Government respected the special position of Siam in Kelantan and Terengganu. The frequent attempts of local officials to reverse this policy were resisted on the grounds that the integrity of Siam, as a state in France, in particular, was of vital British interest. Specific recognition of Kelantan and Terengganu as 'dependency' of Siam was finally granted by Britain in 1899 as part of the settlement of the Perak-Ranau boundary.

With the appointment of the energetic and able Phya Sukhum as governor of the Neighb's region in 1901, the occasional Siamese interventions of the past were replaced by a much more modern, systematic and pervasive presence. A resident commissioner, a post office, a garrison and a permanent garrison under a Datum officer were all introduced into Kelantan by Phya Sukhum in the period 1897-1901.16 This naturally gave rise to some Malay resentment. Raja Sulk,

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1. Ibid. p. 246.
2. Ibid. p. 236.
3. Ibid. p. 244.
4. Ibid. p. 246.
later known as Sultan Muhammad IV (1899-1926), became increasingly fearful for his own traditional position in the state. His fears were compounded in February, 1902, when the Siamese imprisoned Raja Abdul Karir of Patani, whose wife was Smith’s own aunt, and whose state was bound to Kelantan by very close cultural, historic and personal ties.

On the British side there were those too eager to encourage Kelantan to assert its complete independence of Siam and to rely on Britain to defend it. First among these was R.W. Duff, who had obtained from the Raja exclusive commercial rights over half of Kelantan and wished to retain them free of any Siamese control. The Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Frank Swettenham, also aimed to restrict Siamese influence to the absolute minimum in Kelantan, as well as in Terengganu and Perak. Swettenham was too well aware of his government’s policy to have made any such suggestion as described by Miss Gnevusheva. It is true, however, that he did all possible to change the British policy for a stronger one by dwelling in his despatches on the past independence of Kelantan and the present danger of revolution and foreign intervention. He eventually succeeded to the extent that Britain forced Siam to appoint an Englishman as Siamese Resident to Kelantan under the terms of a new Siam-Kelantan treaty of October 1902.5

British records give a very clear picture of Raja Smith’s desperate fear of the Siamese after the arrest of the Raja of Patani. In May, 1902, Smith visited Singapore and appealed to Swettenham for a British Protectorate against Siam.6 This was declined, although Swettenham probably encouraged the Raja privately. To foil Long Brink’s fears of a Siamese coup, Swettenham even sent him back to Kelantan in a British gunboat. Before leaving Singapore the Raja recruited a small number of Sikh policemen to protect him personally and strengthen his position against the Siamese.7 On August 20th, a hundred more Sikhs left Singapore on the S.S. Pita to serve the Raja of Kelantan. According to the newspaper account these had been brought together by “the Singapore agent for the Sultan of Kelantan”8 — possibly a reference to Raja Ismail. On arrival in Kelantan, the Sikhs apparently succeeded in inducing a more cautious attitude on the part of the Siamese.

Swettenham’s despatches support the notion that the Raja of Kelantan was prepared to fight for his independence against the Siamese. He was clearly not prepared to do so, however, in the face of a united Anglo-Siamese front, such

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as came about in October, 1932. Indeed when Swettenham visited Kelantan in that month, the Raja proved very willing to accept the new form of treaty relationship with Britain, under which he was bound to follow the advice of the Siamese-appointed English Resident in all matters not affecting Malay religion and custom. His major anxiety was that the Siamese officials and soldiers should leave, that only the Kelantan flag should be flown in the state, and that he and his successors should be secure in their tenure of the throne. 12

If, therefore, the intervention of Raja Ismail and Mamaliggi was really of the nature described by Miss Gnevushe, it appears to have been a failure. Mamaliggi presumably went to Kelantan on the Floor in August, 1932, but he cannot have stayed there for long or played any very significant role. He is not men-tioned by Swettenham, who visited the state in September and October; nor by Graham, who assumed office as Siamese resident in Kelantan in 1933; nor by the various Kelantan chronicles. Were it not for Miss Gnevushe's insistence that Mamaliggi was never influenced by mercenary considerations, 13 we would be inclined to wonder whether he was a concession-hunter in the guise of a Malay patriot rather than the other way around.

From a Malaysian viewpoint, the most valuable information provided by Miss Gnevushe's indiscreet relations to Raja Ismail. In her article he emerges as something of a Malay nationalist avant la lettre.

Raja Ismail bin Raja Abdullah is known to historians of Malaya for his part in the Selangor civil war of 1866-74. His father, Abdullah, had been ejected from Klang by Raja Mahli; and as a result Raja Ismail had thrown in his lot with Tongk-ku Kudin in an attempt to expel the intruder. This attempt was successful. In the 1874 treaty between Selangor and the British, Tongku Kudin was compensated as viceroys (mulik) of the Sultan of Selangor, with direct倒霉ness over Klang. Ismaili, on the one hand, dropped out of the limelight after 1870, and was given an office in the new Selangor administration after 1874. 14 He and his brother apportioned fairly to the British and to the Sultan for compensation, claiming that it was they and their father who had originally opened up the Klang valley to modern development. 15

After this refill, Raja Ismail appears to have drifted into the relatively sophis-ticated Muslim circle of Singapore, which was dominated by Syed Muhammad Ali (Abdurrah) and Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor. In 1892 he was employed by these

15. Proclamation of the Second Meeting of the Selangor State Council, 12 June 1874. I am indebted to Dr. J. Kambitz for this reference.
two men as an emissary to the embattled court of Acheh, having already succeeded in making a private visit to the regent of Acheh in 1887.

In the period 1885-93 the Dutch had been following a very cautious policy in Acheh, motivated by economic crisis and popular disgust with the war. They limited themselves to the occupation of a few square miles of territory around Kota Raja and three small ports in the territories of their usual allies. Meanwhile they made various attempts to induce the Sultan's party at Kuala to place themselves under Dutch sovereignty in a compromise settlement of the war. To this end the intervention of influential Muslimes from Malaysia with the Achenese was tolerated by the Dutch authorities. The Achenese leaders welcomed all such missions of peace, which tended to raise the status of the Sultanate among Achenese and to increase hopes of outside help. They always avoided giving a definite reply to the Dutch terms, however.

Sultan Abu Bakar's association with the Achenese party in the Straits Settlements dated from the early years of the war. In 1889 the young Sultan of Acheh again appealed to him for advice and assistance. Various missions of either Aliagoff or Abu Bakar appeal to the Sultan of Turkey to deliver the Achenese from their plight. Finally in April 1892, Aliagoff sent Raja Ismail to explain to Abu Bakar the result of his talks with both Dutch and Turkish leaders in Europe, and the position which he thought the Achenese ought to adopt. After some delay, during which Abu Bakar also associated himself with the mission and gave his support to the Achenese, Raja Ismail spent five days in discussion with Sultan Daed and his influential regent, Tuanku Hashim. He may fairly be considered the last foreign envoy to visit the proud court of Acheh, which had received the compliments of so many sovereigns over the previous three and a half centuries.

Just what advice Raja Ismail gave to the Achenese can only be guessed. Maxwell, the British Colonial Secretary, and Living, Dutch Consul-General in Singapore, who were both consulted before the mission, believed it was motivated by a genuine desire for peace. Ismail reported fully to both these men on his return in terms which suggested that he had tried to persuade the Achenese leaders that their best hope was in coming to some compromise with the Dutch. On the other hand the Dutch military in Acheh were very suspicious of Ismail, believing that he had done more to raise Achenese hopes of outside help than to lessen

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16. Interestingly, the bearer of this appeal was Syed Dato, born in Acheh of a Kedah Arab father and a Kedah mother, and very well known in Malaysia and the Straits Settlements. Kedah was one of the two states of Malaysia under Malay influence. The other was Perlis, and it was known as the Malay province of the Malay Peninsula. Also, Dato who fought on the same side as Ismail during the Subangese civil war (Tahlit, p. 267).

them. The following year an Achenese mission reached Penang on its way to appeal for Turkish intervention.

The material provided by Miss Gnevusheva, therefore, helps us to form a shadowy picture of one of the most interesting Malays of his time. He was obviously intelligent and sufficiently adaptable to win the trust of Europeans and Malays of very different persuasions. It seems likely that he had a genuine concern to preserve as much as possible of the pride and independence of the Malay people, not by a futile attempt to return to the past, but by facing up to the realities of power during this heyday of imperialism.

Miss Gnevusheva is to be congratulated for having made a start. We must be grateful that her work is stimulating a scholarly interest in Southeast Asian history in the Soviet Union. Let us hope that one consequence is the gradual opening of Russian archival material on a wider range of subjects.