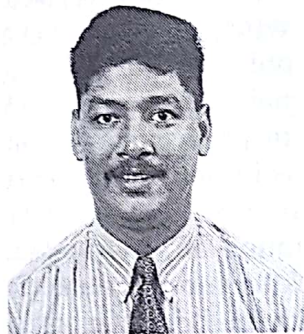


Managing the Challenges of the Local Government Administration in Malaysia

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Main publications

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I. Introduction

Malaysia is a parliamentary federation comprising eleven states in the Malay Peninsula, the federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan, and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia. The administrative head of state is a chief minister or *menteri besar*¹ who is responsible to an elected unicameral legislative assembly. However, in Sabah, the legislative assembly has a limited number of nominated members. The powers of the states are limited, confined primarily to land, natural resources, religion and the administration of local governments. The state governments of Sabah and Sarawak, however, enjoy some powers not available to the states of West Malaysia (Dawson, 1987) and are less rigid. Because of the asymmetric powers between the federal and state governments, the term *federation* was deemed quite inappropriate for West Malaysia (Holzhausen, 1974).

This paper attempts to look at the development of local authorities in Malaysia as well as the historical background during the colonial period and the Japanese Occupation. Since the establishment of local authorities in Malaysia, attempts have been made to study the development of relations between the local, state and federal governments. The current challenges faced by the local authorities reveal that the local governments are the main agents of development at the district level.

II. Development of Federal, State and Local Governments in Malaysia

The system of local governance in Malaysia today had its roots in the British occupancy of Malaya. Although Penang was acquired by Captain Francis Light in 1786, the first British intervention in a state government in Malaya was formalised with the signing of the Pangkor Treaty with the