

Sultan's descendant in bid to set record straight



Raja Azam (above), a great-grandson of Sultan Abdullah (left), said he was bringing up the matter to fulfil the wishes of his late father (Raja Kamaralzaman) and grandfather (Raja Mansor), who had wanted him to present their side of the story. His family, he said, was only interested "in setting the record straight". — NST pictures.

KUALA LUMPUR — The Pangkor Engagement of 1874, which paved the way for British intervention in the Malay states, has always been a dark blot on Malayan history.

Besides leading indirectly to the assassination of the first British Resident, J.W.W. Birch, it raised several questions: why did the Malays agree to terms so disadvantageous to them; why did they virtually give their country away; and why they were so naive to sign it in the first place.

The treaty between the British government and Malay chiefs in Perak settled a succession dispute in favour of Sultan Abdullah. But in return for British backing, he apparently agreed to accept a British Resident with broad powers at his court.

To the Britons, the subsequent Malay opposition to the Pangkor Engagement has been depicted as a failure to honour an agreement they had signed willingly.

Now, 122 years later, a descendant of Sultan Abdullah — who was exiled to the Seychelles following the murder of Birch — has given the Perak royal family's version of the story.

In yesterday's New Straits Times, Raja Datuk Seri Azam Raja Kamaralzaman, a great-grandson of Sultan Abdullah, said the controversy hinged on differences between the Malay and English version of Item 6 of the Engagement, a clause he claimed the British had

interpreted in their favour.

The English interpreted it as: "That the Sultan receive and provide a suitable residence for a British officer to be called Resident, who shall be accredited to his Court, and whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom."

This differs substantially from the Malay version which when translated states: "The Sultan should accept and build a suitable residential house for one officer who is under the British Government whose title shall be British Resident of Perak State and who is to be trusted by the British government. The Sultan of Perak shall have to consult with him on all matters and the working of Perak State except that he cannot interfere with Muslim religious affairs and Malay customs."

That the English interpretation differs so markedly from the Malay one is reason enough for the opposition of the Malays, the paper said.

How the words "have to consult" can turn into "must be asked and acted upon" is a considerable feat of English translation, said Raja Azam.

He said he was bringing up the matter to fulfil the wishes of his late father (Raja Kamaralzaman) and grandfather (Raja Mansor) who had wanted him to present their side of the story. His family, he said, was only interested "in setting the record straight". — NST.