

# Enthralled by history of Johor-Riau empire

By Syed Abdullah Syed Mohamed

A THREE-DAY international seminar on the history and heritage of the Johor-Riau empire was held at the Persada Johor International Convention Centre (Persada) in Batu Pahat last Tuesday.

The seminar was jointly organised by the state government through its agency, the Johor Heritage Foundation (YWH), and Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM).

The glittering event was officially opened by Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

The 500 attendees included state executive council members Datuk Maulizan Bujang, Datuk Ahmad Zahari Jamil, YWH director Jama Johan and UTHM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Mohd Noh Dalimin.

Assisted by the Science, Arts and Heritage faculty of UTHM, and the Literary and Historical division of YWH, the seminar attracted participants from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei.

Thirty academicians from local and international varieties were invited to present their working papers on the history and heritage of the Johor-Riau empire.

The YWH also made available resources like photographs, reference documents and miniature artifacts to complement their work.

The foundation's 30-odd support staff helped supervise the seminar. Video clips and films depicting the historical locations in Indonesia were also aired.

Among the highlights during the opening ceremony was a traditional dance by members of the Sanggar Pengembangan troupe, comprising pupils from Johor Baru district trained by the YWH development division.

Another theatre play called Johor 1718, depicting the glory years of the Johor-Riau empire, and a musical performance by YWH musicians led by Mohd Shah Othman also took centre stage at the opening ceremony.

The 40-minute theatre play was directed by Md Shukor Mohd Noor, who is

YWH theatrical officer.

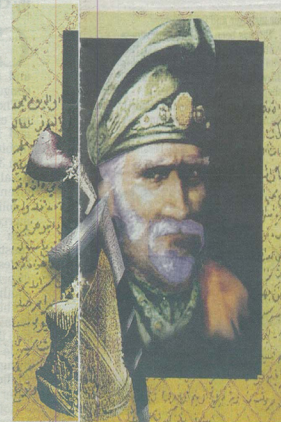
Among the eminent presenters and coordinators invited for the occasion were Prof Dr Susanto Zuhdi M. Hum of Universitas Indonesia and Prof Dr Nordin Hussin of UKM.

Other presenters were prominent academicians such as Datuk Jumaat Mohd Noor (former Johor Education department director and current treasurer of Malaysian Historical Society), Zam Ismail (YWH deputy director) and Kamdi Kamil (Johor Historical Society president).

YWH working committee secretary Dzul Karnain Asmawi said one of the seminar's main objectives was to produce reference materials such as documents and books related to the history and heritage of the Johor-Riau empire.

The empire, which lasted more than two-and-a-half centuries (1528-1824), was then a prosperous region consisting of the Johor empire and islands of Riau in Indonesia.

However, the area was partitioned and separated *ad infinitum* through the An-



An artist's illustration of Tun Sri Lanang, a leading writer of Malay history.

glo-Dutch treaty signed by the British and the Dutch in 1824.

The treaty was a win-win deal for both colonial powers

as the British added Johor to its territories whereas the Dutch took over the ruins of the Indonesian islands in 1824.



The guests and participants in rapt attention as they follow the proceedings of the seminar.

Enthralling commentaries, discussions and ideas were aptly between panelists and participants during the seminar.

Panelists highlighted literary figures and warriors of the former empire such as Tun Sri Lanang, Bokhari Al-Jauhari and Raja Ali Haji. Assoc Prof Talib Samat

from the Sultan Idris Normal University even proposed that instead of featuring controversial ghost series in the local electronic media, TV stations should screen a life history of Tun Sri Lanang.

Many viewers were ignorant of the leading writer who was born in Johor but died and buried in Aceh, In-

donesia. A participant, Dr Mehmet Ozar, a lecturer from the UTM education faculty in Skudai here, commended the organisers for helming such a praiseworthy venture.

"I signed up as a participant in this event because I have a keen interest in the

history of Johor-Riau empire," said Mehmet, a sociology specialist from Turkey who is lecturing at UTM.

Another participant, Norashikin Salleh from Kuala Lumpur, concurred with Mehmet and praised the organiser for featuring some interesting working papers.

Norashikin, who was accompanied by her two sons, followed all the presentations throughout the seminar.

Ibrahim Yaakub, a history teacher from Kota Tinggi who was also a participant, was all smiles as he sipped a cup of tea during recess time.

"The whole event was a fantastic and excellent experience for me. However, it would be better if more of our non-Malay colleagues participated so as to enhance the Malaysia spirit and learn about the state's history," said the 46-year-old educator.

During his opening speech, Ghani pledged that the state government would give its full support to ensure that Johor's history was documented in a clear and compact manner.

He also commended the YWH for its commitment and dedication to showcase the history of Johor.

Vocalist Abu Bakar Mahmood accompanied by YWH musicians entertaining the guests. — Pictures by Syed Abdullah Syed Mohamed



The Sanggar Pengembangan dancers in action during the opening ceremony.



The cast of the musical theatre putting up an interesting show that made audience glued to their seats.



Many participants find the seminar intellectually engaging and an eye-opener.



Mohd Shah Othman (left) leading members of the YWH combo during a musical performance at the official opening of the seminar.

