Tracing the origins of Malaysia

By Prof D.S. RANJIT SINGH

The famous announcement on May 27, 1957 by Tunku Abdul Rahman, then the Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya, calling for forging closer political and economic cooperation between Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak, was generally taken as the starting point for the formation of Malaysia on Sept 16, 1963. The roots of the Malaysia scheme, however, go further back in time and were embedded in British plans hatched in 1942 for the decolonisation of South-East Asia in the post-World War II period. In fact, such an idea was first suggested in 1939 by Lord Brasseys, director of the British North Borneo Company, who proposed the amalgamation of all British possessions in South-East Asia into “one large colony”, Brasseys’ proposal, however, did not find favour with the British Government.

The outbreak of the Second World War and the subsequent capture of all British colonial possessions in South-East Asia by the Japanese changed everything. The British felt humiliated and partly blamed the� for their defeat on the disunited nature of their territorial possessions in South-East Asia which made it difficult to organise a coordinated defence. In 1942, the Colonial Office led by its Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir John G. Edward Gento began to lay plans for a more coordinated post-war policy in South-East Asia. This policy was founded on two principles: preparing dependent territories for the goal of self-rule, and integrating smaller units into larger political blocs.

The justification given for the second objective was administrative efficiency, economic development, political stability and defence viability. Anchoring their policy on these two principles, the Colonial Office laid plans for a “Grand Design” or a British “time-table” and a “Grand Design” or a British “time-table” in South-East Asia after the Second World War. This called for the creation of a “grand federation” (or a “confederation” or a “dominion”) of all British territories in the Malayan-Borneo region.

This large union or federation was to include the Malay states, Straits Settlements, North Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei. This “Grand Design” for the creation of a “grand federation” (or a “dominion”), hatched in 1942, was essentially the so-called “Malayan-Straits” or “Malaysian” Scheme idea in 1949. Towards this end, the British Government created the post of the Colonial Commissioner-General for South-East Asia to act as a co-ordinating body in the region. The man chosen for the job was Malcolm MacDonald.

Although he tried very hard, MacDonald achieved little success. From 1949 to 1951, however, in 1951, he began to introduce new innovations, the most important being the setting up of branches of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in the British territories in the Malayan-Borneo region.

By this move, MacDonald was able to foster much regional solidarity and goodwill among the local leaders through the mechanisms of CPA meetings. In 1954 and 1955 advocating merger with the Federation of Malaya, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.

As far as the Colonial Malaysia Scheme was concerned, Tunku and Ummo strongly opposed such a union. They feared being outnumbered by the addition of over a million Chinese; that the Malays would lose political dominance; and that Malaysia’s security would be seriously threatened. The British, taking stock of the situation, could not contemplate merger in the face of Ummo’s rejection.