

CHAPTER 5

THE STATE OF PERLIS

The Chinese name of “Perlis” is derived from the Malay name, read like the homonym of the Malay name. This state is also known as “the little gem of the north”.



Kangar, the capital of Perlis



Golden paddy field

PERLIS – HEAVENLY PARADISE

Perlis Indera Kayangan (Heavenly Paradise) is located at the northwestern corner of Peninsular Malaysia. While its western coastline faces the Straits of Malacca, it shares a border with Kedah in the south and an international boundary separates it from neighboring Thailand in the north. With an area of about 800 sq. km., Perlis is the smallest state in Malaysia and hence is not divided into districts.

Kangar is the capital of Perlis. Located in the heart of the country's "rice bowl" region, it is surrounded by large green paddy fields. Its main landmark is Masjid Syed Alwi, an attractive black-domed mosque. Schools, stadiums, hospitals and government offices are all within walking distance of this landmark.

The other key towns are Kuala Perlis and Padang Besar. Kuala Perlis is the main port of Perlis as well as one of the ferry departure points to Pulau Langkawi (Langkawi Island), a popular tourist destination. Padang Besar is located on the border between Malaysia and Thailand, and is a major stopover for road and rail traffic between Malaysia and Thailand.

Kaki Bukit was developed due to the thriving tin-mining industry in bygone days. Other small towns are Pauh, Maya Ayer, Sanglang, Simpang Empat, Sungai Baru, Beseri, Wang Kelian, Bukit

Keteri and Chuping.

POPULATION

Perlis has a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious society, with the majority being Malays. Due to its proximity with Thailand, people of Siamese descent can be found living within its borders. They usually stay in the same community as the Chinese. The probable reason for this is that they share a common faith (Buddhism). The descendants of inter-racial marriages between the Chinese and the Siamese are known as “Tang Xian”(Chinese-Siamese). Such marriages are very common in the state.

HISTORY

At one time, Perlis was part of the Kedah Sultanate. However, in 1821, Kedah came under Siamese rule. After many years of unsuccessful fighting, the exiled Sultan of Kedah finally agreed to accept Siamese terms in 1842 and was restored to his throne. But he was forced to give up Perlis, which became a separate principality and vassal of the Kingdom of Siam. The grandson of the Kedah Sultan was appointed the first Raja of Perlis.

By the Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1909, Siam relinquished Perlis to Great Britain. During World War II, Japan returned Perlis to Siam as a reward for Siam's alliance. But after the war, with the defeat of Japan, Perlis returned to the protection of the British Colonial Government. It became part of the Malayan Union in 1946 (which was then dissolved in 1948), the Federation of Malaya in 1957 and, finally, Malaysia in 1963.

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

Perlis' picturesque landscape, with its vast plains of agricultural land, scenic mountains and limestone hills, is a tourist attraction. A popular destination is Gua Kelam ("Dark Cave"), a 370-meter limestone cave in Kaki Bukit filled with interesting stalactite and stalagmite formations, and an underground stream.

The "Rice Bowl of Malaysia", one of Malaysia's main regions for the cultivation of paddy, is spread over part of Perlis and four districts of Kedah. Although it covers only a quarter of the total paddy-planting land area in Malaysia, it supplies more than half of the total paddy produced in the country. Paddy fields 10 km in length line the perimeter of Perlis in the west and the south. During the growing season, the area looks like an endless sea of lush verdant land. Come harvest time, it transforms into a glorious vista of golden brown fields.

Complementing the paddy fields are massive plantations of sugar cane, which provide another seemingly never-ending expanse of green fields. Production of sugar cane in Malaysia is mainly in Perlis and Kedah. Chuping is the main sugar cane plantation region in Perlis. It also has a sugar refining factory. In 1998, as reported by the Food & Agriculture Organization of The United Nations, Malaysia produced 1.5 million tons of sugar cane, but that was still insufficient to meet the



Sugar cane -
main local consumptions



Famous "harumanis"
mangoes in Perlis

local demand for cane sugar.

Farmers are gradually replacing sugar cane with oil palm and other higher-return agriculture crops for better returns. Furthermore, plantation workers are moving into the manufacturing industry. These trends result in a shortage of sugar cane harvesters which in turn affects production. Hence, Malaysia imports raw sugar to meet local demand. Raw sugar is refined in the states of Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Selangor. Refined sugar is then distributed to meet local needs, and is also exported overseas.

Perlis also produces other crops, such as mangoes and watermelon. "Harumanis" is the most well-known mango variety, and is only found in Perlis.

Besides agriculture, Perlis is also expanding into light industry. At Bukit Keteri, there is a cement factory. Other light industries are spread out in the industrial areas of Jejawi, Kuala Perlis and Padang Besar. Fishing remains an important economic activity in the state.

MISSIONS IN PERLIS

In 1955, Rev. Chin Peng of Hong Kong visited Kangar and saw the need to start Bible Study classes. This became the foundation for the establishment of the Perlis Baptist Church in 1958. Its name was changed to Kangar Baptist Church when an English section was started in 1965. Subsequently, in 1978, the Tamil Baptist Church was initiated for the Tamil ministry. Today, Kangar Baptist Church has two outreaches: Kaki Bukit Praise Centre and Kayang Praise Centre (Kuala Perlis).

In the late 1970s, the Assemblies of God established many churches throughout Malaysia. Churches in central and northern Malaysia focused more on the Orang Asli ministry. Presently, Perlis Grace Centre conducts both English and Bahasa Malaysia services.

Since 1993, the Methodist Church has been setting up churches in Kedah and Perlis. With steady sharing of the Gospel, stable and consistent growth of believers has been achieved. On 9th April 1993, Kangar Chinese Methodist Chapel was established in Arau with a children's ministry. To further evangelism in Kangar, another chapel was established in Jejawi. When University Malaysia Perlis was built, the church also started a ministry for the university students.

Currently, there are only about eight small churches in Perlis. Due to financial constraints and talent outflow, most churches have old congregations and lack local pastors. Most of the pastors multi-task as drivers, do visitation and assume different ministry roles. This state may be seen as a large field of spiritual desolation, waiting for the seeds of the Gospel to be sown for a harvest of souls to be reaped. May churches and believers see the mission opportunities in Perlis!



Profile of Perlis

Area: about 800 square kilometers

Capital: Kangar

Total population: more than 200,000
Malays (84%), Chinese (10%),
others (3%) and non-citizens (2%)

Religions: Islam (85%), Buddhism or Taoism (13%),
Hinduism (1%), Christianity and Catholicism
(<1,000) plus Sikhism.

Prayer for Perlis

1. May our Father in heaven bless the leaders with wisdom to govern and administer state affairs effectively and fairly, without prejudice against race or religion.
2. May investment funds pour in and spur development, so that the living standard of farmers and the poor can be improved. And may the outflow of talent be minimized.
3. Pray that more believers will respond to God's call to serve full time locally.

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