

## STRAITS OF MALACCA AND SINGAPORE: PRIDE OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO, PRICELESS MARITIME HERITAGE OF THE WORLD

(Selat Melaka dan Singapura: Kebanggaan Alam Melayu,  
Khazanah Kelautan Dunia yang Berharga)

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### ABSTRACT

*Historical records reveal that port-kingdoms began to flourish along the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as early as the third century AD. These realms survived by regulating and exploiting trade flows between China and India and within the Malay Archipelago itself. After the fall of the Malacca Sultanate in 1511, the competition for supremacy in the Strait of Malacca continued between the regional Empires and their Western rivals until eventually, the latter were victorious. The Malay World then fell into centuries of Western colonization before the region gradually gained independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now, the Straits of Malacca is considerably bordered by Malaysia and Indonesia while the Straits of Singapore is jointly shared by Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. These Straits serve not only as two of the most important sea lines of communication in the world, but also are important economic lifelines for the coastal population. For centuries, these waterways have remained intact with their reputation as critical trading route and due to their remarkable significance, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are undoubtedly priceless heritage of the maritime world.*

**Keywords:** *history; tourism; Straits of Malacca and Singapore*

### ABSTRAK

*Rekod-rekod sejarah menunjukkan bandar-bandar pelabuhan mula berkembang di sepanjang Selat Melaka dan Singapura seawal abad ketiga. Kawasan ini berkembang dengan cara mengatur dan mengeksploitasi aliran perdagangan*

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*antara China dan India di alam Melayu. Selepas jatuhnya Kesultanan Melaka pada tahun 1511, persaingan untuk menguasai Selat Melaka berterusan dalam kalangan Empayar-empayar Serantau dan Barat sehinggalah Melaka jatuh ke tangan kuasa Barat. Alam Melayu kemudiannya jatuh ke bawah jajahan Barat berabad-abad lamanya sebelum perlahan-lahan mencapai kemerdekaan pada abad ke 20. Hari ini, Selat Melaka disempadani oleh Malaysia dan Indonesia sementara Selat Singapura dikongsi oleh Malaysia, Indonesia dan Singapura. Kedua-dua Selat ini bukan sahaja penting sebagai jalan komunikasi laut tetapi juga penting sebagai sumber kehidupan populasi pinggir pantai. Berabad-abad lamanya, laluan-laluan air ini kekal dengan reputasinya sebagai jalan perdagangan yang kritikal. Oleh kerana kepentingannya yang besar, Selat Melaka dan Singapura tanpa disangkal lagi adalah pusaka dunia kelautan.*

**Kata Kunci:** *sejarah; pelancongan; Selat Melaka dan Singapura*

## **THE STRAITS OF MALACCA AND SINGAPORE: AN INTRODUCTION**

The entrance to the Straits of Malacca is located between Ujung Baka at the northernmost tip of Sumatra to Lem Voalan in Phuket Island in Thailand (Executive Summary 2008). The Strait is very wide at its gateway to the Andaman Sea, which is about 200 nautical miles in breadth (Emran 2007). It separates mainland Malay Peninsular and the Indonesian island of Sumatra, forming a funnel-shaped waterway as it narrows to the south. From One Fathom Bank (Permatang Sedepa) the breadth of the Strait of Malacca on either shore is less than 50 nautical miles and it narrows to only 8.4 nautical miles where it ends in areas between Malaysia's Tanjung Piai and Indonesia's Pulau Karimun Kecil and subsequently joins the Straits of Singapore, which is located between Singapore, south coast of Eastern Johor and the Riau Islands in Indonesia (Roach 2005). The Straits of Singapore is about 70 miles long, approximately 60.8 in length in nautical miles and it opens up to the larger South China Sea that acts as a connector to the Pacific Ocean (Bird, Pang & Lambeck 2006).

The region around the Straits of Malacca and Singapore is steeped in a long and continuous history of trade, shipping, colonization and the race towards attaining political and economic supremacy, both before and during the age of European dominion. The Straits of Malacca was initially known as the 'Sea of Malayu'. The first reference to the 'Sea of Malayu' was from an Arabic document which dated back to the ninth Century AD, noting the Malay influence in the region and this assertion was also supported by Godinho De Eredia, a prominent historian who believed that the 'Sea of Malayu' referred to that of the Straits of Malacca (Leonard Y. Andaya 2008). Both the Straits

of Malacca and Singapore were largely responsible for the emergence and downfall of various kingdoms along their length, some of which did develop into regional maritime Empires and important trading centers (Hussin 2008).

## **THE STRAIT OF MALACCA – CRADLE OF CIVILISATION**

The geographical characteristics of the Malay Peninsula, which acts as a natural barrier separating the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, and is well served by the Strait of Malacca, encouraged early ports to flourish along its coasts. These early ports provided convenient transit havens for those vessels waiting for the change of the monsoon current to navigate through the Strait of Malacca to continue their voyage to the other side of the ocean or wishing to connect with the overland passage route through the Malay Peninsula (Manguin 2004).

Based on archaeological findings, the earliest Malay port that existed within the region of the Strait of Malacca was Takuapa, or Langkasuka, which emerged sometime in the third century AD. Langkasuka was centred on the modern day Pattani-Yarang in Thailand (Southworth 2004). According to Chinese records, there were other kingdoms that appeared in the third century AD, such as Panpan and Tun-Sun. Tun-Sun was said to be short-lived, around the third century AD. By the fifth century AD, the Jiecha Kingdom, otherwise known as the Old Kedah was established in areas south of the modern day Malaysian State of Kedah (Manguin 2004). The capital of Jiecha was initially centred on Sungai Mas, but later shifted to Lembah Bujang. Jiecha was once a prosperous transit port for ships from Arabia, Persia and India, before continuing their voyage to the East. Archaeological findings such as ancient candis and temples suggest that Jiechan King and its subjects adopted the Hindu-Buddha way of life (Christie 1995). The people of Jiecha were actively engaged in trade with these foreign merchants. By the seventh century AD, however, Pan-Pan, Langkasuka and Jiecha were subjugated to the dominance of the powerful Malay kingdom of Srivijaya (O'Reilly 2007). Given that these ports were located in the crossroads between China and India, which were two of the world's greatest civilisations at that time, these kingdoms were heavily swayed by Chinese and Indian influences.

The Kingdom of Srivijaya was established by Dapunta Hyang Sri Jayanasa in 683AD, and it was the first known large scale State in Southeast Asia (Tarling 1992). Chinese traveller, I-Tsing who visited Srivijaya in the seventh century AD reported that this Malay Kingdom was predominantly a Buddhist realm. This Kingdom managed to expand its territory to become a mighty regional empire by subjugating other small port-kingdoms in modern day South Thailand,

Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and West Java such as Langkasuka, Jiecha, and Malayu Jambi (Cleary & Chuan 2000). With Palembang as its capital, situated almost equidistant from the Straits of Malacca and the Straits of Sunda, this was the first empire that managed to control these two maritime choke points in Southeast Asia and the trade activities that took place along the length of these waterways, by compelling passing vessels to call at Srivijayan ports and levying port dues and taxes upon them (Pearn 1965). Srivijaya, benefiting from its role as the 'Master of the Straits of Malacca' participated actively in a growing world economy at that time and prospered well by engaging in extensive commerce in camphor, cloves, sandalwood, nutmegs and other valuable commodities with traders and merchants from different parts of Asia (Hall 1960). To further strengthen its economic position, Srivijaya established strong economic ties with its giant neighbours, China and India (Manguin 2004). The Kingdom of Srivijaya fall in the 1025 AD.

Subsequent to the fall of Srivijaya, the core power in maritime Southeast Asia shifted from Sumatra to the island of Java (Hall 1960). In 1293 AD, Majapahit was established by Raden Wijaya and erected its capital in the modern day Indonesian town of Trowulan. This Javanese Kingdom started off as a small realm in East Java and its influence grew significantly in the middle of the fourteenth century AD under the governance of Hayam Wuruk (Ricklefs, 2001). Majapahit territories expanded through various conquering expeditions carried out by the charismatic Prime Minister, Gajah Mada (Pearn 1965). Historical accounts recorded in the book 'Nagarakertagama' narrated by the Majapahit Buddhist monk, Prapanca, mentioned that during its golden epoch, Majapahit ruled much of the Malay World which includes several States in Sumatra, the Malay Peninsular, Borneo, Celebes, Moluccas and some part of the Philippine archipelago (Hall 1960). Thus, it became the next political power after Srivijaya that managed to take command of the Straits of Malacca and Sunda. Majapahit was once a kingdom of great prosperity (Ricklefs 2001). It generated wealth through agricultural produce, particularly rice production and also through maritime trade that went through the Straits of Malacca and Sunda. With such large territories, Majapahit traders accumulated raw materials from its hinterland to be traded in its port (Pearn 1965). These included pepper, salt and coconut oil from Java, spices from the Moluccas, ivory from Sumatra, tin and lead from the Malay Peninsula to be exchanged with textiles from India and porcelain products from China. Between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, Majapahit replaced Srivijaya and became a major centre of commerce in the Strait of Malacca region.

Malacca was the next kingdom to take command of the Straits of Malacca after the fall of Majapahit. This kingdom had a profound influence on the Straits of Malacca, so much so that the name of this once powerful Sultanate

is immortalised in the waterway that the Sultanate dominated for more than a century (The History of Malacca 2007). Malacca was founded by a Malay Hindu Prince by the name of Parameswara, sometime at the end of the fourteenth century (Hoyt 1993). Parameswara was from Palembang, which was at that time, was under the suzerainty of Majapahit. Due to political unrest in Palembang, Parameswara fled to Temasik (now Singapore), which was a vassal state of Ayutthaya (Siam). He was warmly welcomed by the King of Temasik, before he murdered him and seized the town. This disgusted the Ruler of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya and a military envoy was sent to drive him out of Temasik. He retreated to the west coast of Malaya and settled in a small fishing village, that he later named 'Malacca' (Hall 1960).

With Islam as a faith replacing Hinduism, Malacca became a favourite harbour for Muslim traders to call at, and consequently Malacca continued to flourish. Malacca was also responsible for the Islamisation of Southeast Asia, and this region has remained predominantly Muslim until today (Tarling 1992). Malacca prospered until 1511 as a crucial link in world trade. It was said that the population of the port of Malacca before the fall of the Sultanate was probably around 100,000, and thus was as large as other European cities at that time such as Naples and Paris, however, Malacca's glorious moments were short-lived with the arrival of the Portuguese in the region in the early sixteenth century (Lockard 2008).

## **STRAIT OF MALACCA IN THE COLONIAL AGE**

The Portuguese were the first European power ever to set foot in Southeast Asia. In the fifteenth century, they made voyages to the Indian Ocean via the Cape of Good Hope not only with the intention of crushing the economic monopoly of Muslim traders, but also to expand Christianity (Marsden 1966). It was said that the Portuguese standard of living at that time was probably inferior to many Southeast Asian nations such as Siam, Malacca or Java (Lockard 2008). They came to the region with deadly weapons and aspirations of empire-building. They were initially well-received by the Sultan, and were granted permission to land and trade (Harrison 1966). However, the Muslim traders of Gujarat were suspicious of the Portuguese and persuaded the Malay authorities to launch a surprise attack on the Portuguese. This angered the Portuguese authorities and war was waged against Malacca. The Malacca Empire itself was weakening at that time as there were quarrels within the royal family and corruption was rampant in its administration (Leonard Y Andaya 1975). After two attacks on Malacca, the sultanate was sacked and the Portuguese established a fort in the new Portuguese-Malacca (Williams 1976). The Portuguese had high hopes that with this new colony, they could establish a stronghold on the Straits of

Malacca. By means of their naval power, they managed to gain significant control over the Straits of Malacca and compelled ships to call at Malacca and pay taxes, however, the taking of Malacca by the Portuguese did not mean that the Portuguese were free from any opposition from other Malay powers in that region (Alves 2007). In 1640-1641, the Portuguese were driven away from the Straits of Malacca region permanently by the Dutch with the help of Johor Sultanate.

Before the taking of Malacca, the Dutch had established their foothold in Southeast Asia in 1600 by establishing a trading post in Bantam, East Java (Harrison 1966). With the capture of Malacca, the Dutch gained control of both the Straits of Malacca and Sunda (Cleary & Chuan 2000). This put them in a good position to monopolise the trade of the archipelago with the West. The Dutch did not interfere with Johor in exercising its powers to expand its territory over other Malay Centres in the Peninsular as they were too pre-occupied with trade (Leonard Y Andaya 1975). Most parts of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra in the seventeenth century were either under the sphere of influence of the Johor Kingdom or the Acehnese Sultanate (Ricklefs 2001). The Dutch maintained good ties with the Johor Kingdom and engaged in trade with them.

During the Dutch era, most trading activities were carried out via the Sunda Strait as it was nearer to their Asian headquarters of Batavia in Java (Pearn 1965). As a result, Malacca and the Straits of Malacca declined in their importance in the maritime trade industry in Southeast Asia at this time. Malacca in the eighteenth century was overshadowed in importance by Batavia (Harrison 1966). In Java to the south, the Dutch, administering Batavia through the Dutch East Indies Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* [VOC]) were focused principally on monopolising the export of pepper, spices and sugar, and the import of cloth and opium. At the same time, the VOC was expanding its influence, which was initially restricted only to the island of Java to other parts of the East Indies (Harrison 1966).

The British were the next European power to expand their influence over the Straits of Malacca region. One of the earliest British trading posts was in Bengkulu, formerly called Bencoolen, but it was not generating profits for the British (Eng 2004). In 1786, the British settled on the island of Penang (*Pulau Pinang*), an island that straddles the northern part of the Straits of Malacca (Marsden 1966). In 1819, they occupied the island of Singapore (*Singapura*), an island that is located near the southern end of the Malay Peninsular, with the permission of the Sultan of Johor (Cady 1964). The Strait of Singapore was

named after this island. The presence of the British in the Malay Peninsular was considered by the British authorities to be detrimental to the British policy of maintaining good relations with the Dutch government in Europe (Liow 2005). Consequently, the British and the Dutch entered into the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London in 1824 (Treaty of Commerce and Exchange between Great Britain and the Netherlands, signed at London, 17 March 1824 1969). Under which the Dutch gave up all their territories in mainland Asia to the British, which included Malacca, and in return the British agreed not to spread its dominions into the Malay Archipelago, south of Singapore. With this treaty, the Dutch were free to exercise their authority in Sumatra and other Indonesian islands and it also enabled the British to expand their influence over Malaya. This treaty thus divided the Straits of Malacca region into two spheres which have lasted even until the present (Harrison 1966).

The efforts of the British to establish trading posts in Penang in 1786, Malacca in 1824 and Singapore in 1819 were timely, as the Suez Canal was opened quite soon after that (Canal History 1975). Vessels from the Far Eastern nations could sail to Europe through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore towards the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea and may then gain access to the Mediterranean Sea via Suez Canal without having to sail around the African continent (Saving in distance via SC 2008). The opening of the Suez Canal in 17 November 1869 meant that the Straits of Malacca and Singapore route again became the shortest route connecting Europe and the Far East. Hence, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore were revived and regained their position as important waterways for international trade and shipping.

During World War II, the Japanese forces occupied the Straits of Malacca region for a brief period of 3 years from 1942 to 1945, when Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular were consolidated under a single administration (Cady 1964). For the first time since the fifteenth Century, the Straits of Malacca region was again dominated by one colonial power. Siam also had its share over a segment of the northern part of the Strait as the suzerainty over the northern Malay States of Kedah and Perlis that border the Strait of Malacca was transferred by the Japanese to Siam by virtue of a treaty signed by both nations in Bangkok on 20 August 1943 (Kratoska 1998). After the end of World War II, de-colonisation of this region began gradually, beginning with consolidation of the island of Sumatra into Indonesia (formerly Dutch East Indies) which gained independence in 1945 (Grant 1964). Indonesia as a nation was officially established on 27 December 1949 (Schuller 1955). Malaya followed suit in 1957 (Ryan 1967). Upon independence, both Malaya and Indonesia resumed the rights and obligations that Britain and the Netherlands held respectively

over the Straits of Malacca and Singapore during the colonial era (Jae-hyung 2003). Malaya then merged with Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak to form the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. On 9 August 1965, Singapore became an independent island republic, subsequent to its separation from the Malaysian Federation (Tregonning 1966).

This historical background shows that the Strait of Malacca played a significant role in shaping the character of this region. The political will to seize dominion over the Strait of Malacca, has always been motivated by the desire to control and monopolise the trade that goes through it. The rich cultures brought to both Penang and Malacca's shores by innumerable travelers and traders over the centuries have intermingled and created a beautiful harmonious society of different races, each with its own distinct and unique features (Hussin, 2008). Hence, the historical significance of the Strait of Malacca has resulted in Malacca and Georgetown in Penang, two former British Strait Settlements to be designated as World Heritage Sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2008 (Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca 2011). In the modern setting, the imperial ambitions of distant States have receded to be replaced by the nationalist aspirations of the littoral States. The Straits of Malacca and Singapore belong to the three main littoral States of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

## **ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STRAITS OF MALACCA AND SINGAPORE**

The marine fisheries industry in Malaysia contributes considerably to the national economy in terms of income, foreign exchange and employment (Ishak & Hooi, 2008). Fish represents the main source of animal protein and supplies up to 60% of total protein being consumed in Malaysia (Mohammad Isa, Ahmad & Yusof 1999). In 2007, the fisheries industries contributed about 1,381,424 metric tonnes which was valued at RM6.298 billion or roughly translated to form 1.0 percent of Malaysia's GDP in 2007 (Kasmin 2010). In the same year, the total number of fish landings in Peninsular Malaysia's West Coast States was around 692,985 tonnes valued at RM2.263 billion.

Fisheries industries are also booming on the other side of the Strait. The three main Indonesian provinces bordering the Strait of Malacca, namely Riau, Aceh and North Sumatra depend heavily on this vital waterway to support their fisheries economy (Gunadi 2006). Due to its large maritime area, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore form just a fraction of Indonesia's huge potential for



fisheries. The fishery potential for all the waters under Indonesian jurisdiction has been estimated at 6,409, 200 tonne per year. As far as the Indonesian Strait of Malacca is concerned, it is approximately 276, 030 tonne per year (Nontji 2004). Indonesia has the reputation of being the ninth largest producer of fish in the world and exports fisheries products to more than 210 countries (National Aquaculture Sector Overview: Indonesia 2011). In 2003, fisheries and aquaculture generated foreign exchange earnings of over US\$1,653,542.00 for the local economy. These facts and figures clearly show that both Malaysia and Indonesia rely on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore to support their fisheries industries.

Singapore is also a nation that relies on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore to supply its populations with their protein needs. Possessing a coastline of only 268 kms, limited territorial sea and lacking an EEZ, Singapore does not participate in the fisheries industries as actively as its neighbours (Coastal and Marine Ecosystems - Singapore 2003). The Jurong Fishery Port (JFP) is the main fish landing and distribution point in Singapore and it has handled about 64, 209 tonnes of fish in 2009, most of which are imported fish. In the Southeast Asian region, Singapore has always been perceived as a major consumer state and relies heavily on fish imported from Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand for local consumption (Emran 2007), i.e., between 1999 to 2009 Singapore has imported between 135,408 to 154,602 tonnes of fish from its neighbors, respectively (Emran 2007). Based on these facts, it is clear that both Straits of Malacca and Singapore are important fishing grounds for its coastal population. The thriving fisheries industries in this region generate considerable returns to the economies of the littoral States.

The coastal beaches and islands along the length of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore have considerable natural beauty; possessing pristine white sandy beaches, coral reefs teeming with marine life and vast mangrove forest, mudflats and other natural attractions, on the Sumatra side of the Strait, on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia and on islands in the Strait of Singapore (Rusli 2009). Collectively, Malaysian waters including the Strait of Malacca, South China Sea, Sulu Sea and Celebes Sea are located within the coral triangle with high levels of coral and other marine biodiversity (Basiron 2009).

The Malaysian coastline is about 4,809 km long with mud coast dominating the western shoreline and sandy beaches on the east (K. Abdullah, Seng & Ghazali 2007). Islands such as Langkawi, Payar, Penang, Pangkor and Besar which are distributed evenly along the length of the waterway have been significant in nurturing the tourism industry in Malaysia (Chua Thia-Eng, S. Adrian Ross

& Yu 1997). Despite the limited distribution of coral reef in the Strait, Pulau Payar, which is located in the northern part of the Strait, is nevertheless rich in coral reef concentration (Hooi 2008). Designated as a Marine Park in 1994, Pulau Payar has attracted local and foreign tourists increasing from only 1,373 visitors in 1988 to 112, 648 visitors in 2006. The environmental attributes of coastal beaches along the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia are also considerable. Coastal beaches like those in Port Dickson, Tanjung Tuan, Tanjung Bidara and Lumut have many natural features and possess sensitive marine environments (Thia-Eng et al. 2000). Pulau Langkawi is one of the islands on the Strait of Malacca that is rich in biodiversity, as it has numerous sandy beaches, mangrove forests, tropical rainforests and natural caves which are habitats for many species of flora and fauna. Due to this, UNESCO has, in 2007 included Pulau Langkawi as one of its Global GEOPARKS as three areas within the island possess geological significance that are Gunung Mat Chincang, Kilim and Pulau Dayang Bunting (Langkawi Geopark: 99 Magical Islands in the Sun 2011). As a result of this designation, Langkawi continues to be one of the main tourist destinations in Malaysia, i.e., between 2007 to 2010, 2,334,362 to 2,450,000 tourists have visited Langkawi (Langkawi Geopark: 99 Magical Islands in the Sun 2011).

The coastal areas of the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia are rich in mangrove vegetation, peat swamp forest and mudflats. Malaysia's mangroves are among the richest, rarest and most diverse in the world (Basiron, Hooi, & Zakariah, 2007). The mangrove areas distributed in the Malaysian States, namely Johor (23,000 ha), Kedah (8,200 ha), Malacca (100 ha), Negeri Sembilan (800 ha), Perak (43,000 ha), Perlis (30 ha), Pulau Pinang (1,400 ha) and Selangor (17,000 ha) bordering the Strait of Malacca (Basiron, Hooi & Zakariah 2007).

Areas such as Matang, Kukup Island, Tanjung Piai and Sungai Pulai are rich in the concentration of mangrove forest. In fact, Tanjung Piai, Kukup Island and Sungai Pulai have been designated as RAMSAR sites. Mangrove ecosystems provide habitats for many rare and endangered animal species such as migratory birds, monkeys, fruit bats, estuarine crocodiles and many others (Hooi, 2008). This unique flora and fauna has contributed to the tourism economy of Malaysia (Destinations: Langkawi Mangroves 2010).

Some areas of the Malaysian coast facing the Strait of Malacca are bestowed with extensive areas of mudflats. These mudflats form natural habitats for shellfishes, residential and migratory waterbirds and also act as important cockle breeding grounds (Ishak & Hooi 2008). The prominent mudflat sites

along the Peninsula are Kuala Gula, Kuala Merbok, Kuala Selangor, Pontian and Tanjung Piai (Hooi 2008). These natural features have been attracting local as well as international tourists and nature lovers from all around the world, supporting the local eco-tourism industry.

The tourism industry is a lucrative business. In 2007, the tourism industry, as a whole, contributed considerably to the Malaysian economy amounting to US\$14.37 billion (“Summary: Malaysia Tourism Report Q2 2008 2008). It was the second highest contributor to the Malaysian economy in that year. Tourist arrivals in Malaysia increased from 20 million in 2007 to 22 million in 2008 (Editor 2009). Based on data collected in 2010, Malaysia is reputed as the ninth most visited country on the planet and the most visited country in Southeast Asia (UNTWO World Tourism Barometer: Committed to Tourism, Travel and the Millenium Development Goals 2010).

The Indonesian provinces that border the Straits of Malacca and Singapore also depend on these waterways for the wellbeing of their tourism industry. The eastern coast of Sumatra is rich in concentrations of sandy beaches, mangrove swamps and tropical rainforests, therefore offering visitors one of the most diverse examples of flora and fauna in the world (Whitten, Damanik, Anwar & Hisyam 1987). The islands of Batam and Bintan in the Strait of Singapore are Indonesia’s tourist hotspot in this region, attracting international tourists, mostly from Singapore, i.e., the number of tourists escalating to more than a million between 2003 to 2005 (Whitten, Damanik, Anwar & Hisyam 1987).

There are also many tourist attractions in the other Strait of Malacca provinces of Indonesia. For example, the province of Riau has beautiful beaches in Dumai (Potensi Daerah Riau Dalam Bidang Pariwisata 2009) and Aceh has pristine islands and scenic beaches in the Sabang district, at the northern tip of Sumatra (Selamat Datang di Pariwisata Provinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam 2008). As with Malaysia, tourism is an important activity in Indonesia contributing around Rp 80 trillion (US\$7.1 billion) to the nation’s economy in 2008 (Erviani 2009).

Singapore’s coastal areas have diverse features, including cliffs, steep coasts, sandy beaches, stony coasts, mangrove swamps, coral and artificial coasts. Sentosa Island, an islet off the Strait of Singapore, is renowned for various attractions, including natural environmental attributes (Sentosa-Singapore: Everything you Need to Know about Sentosa Island 2010). Records released by Singapore Tourism Board revealed that Singapore had received 1,095,000 visitors mainly from Indonesia, Australia, China, India and Malaysia in July

2010, and this is the first time that visitor arrivals have exceeded over 1 million in a single month (*Fact Sheet Tourism Sector Performance for July 2010*, 2010). The tourism industry contributes three percent of Singapore's GDP. By the year 2015, it is anticipated that Singapore's tourism receipts will be around S\$30 billion, generating an additional 100, 000 employment opportunities in the services sector (Singaporemirror: Singapore at your fingertips 2009).

From waterways that ferried traditional commodities like spices, champor and nutmegs in its bygone eras to the current modern shipments of crude oil, petroleum products, electronic goods and motor vehicles, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore still are intact with their reputation not only as two of the most crucial shipping lanes on Earth, but also as the longest straits used for international navigation in the world (Richardson 2008). In 1987, the number of transiting traffic stood at 30, 377 per annum (A. R. Abdullah, Tahir, Loong, Hoque & Sulaiman 1999), and it increased gradually up to approximately 76,000 vessel movements in 2008.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News reported in 2010 that yearly, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore accommodate almost six times the volume of navigational traffic that goes through the Suez Canal (Singapore Warns of Threat to Tankers in Malacca Strait 2010). In terms of navigational traffic, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore came second only to the Dover Strait, a crucial European chokepoint bordered by the United Kingdom, France and Belgium (Graham 2006). An estimated 11 million barrels of oil pass the Straits of Malacca and Singapore daily (*Energy and Maritime Security* 2006). Tankers and bulk carriers ferry vast quantities of oil, coal, iron ore and minerals to the economic centres of Southeast and Northeast Asia while on the other direction, millions of containers flow to feed consumer markets from all over the globe (Ho 2009). As a result, there has been a steady increase in shipping traffic in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore in the years 2000-2007, i.e., up to 76,381 vessels in 2008, and in light of the East Asian growing trade volumes, traffic is predicted to double by 2020, i.e., up to 141,000 vessels (Sakhuja 2007).

Hence, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are indispensable to shipping activities with a wide range of commodities being shipped through these routes. Traffic in the Straits is reported to have grown at an average rate of 9 per cent annually (Ahmad 1997). With the rise of China as the world's new economic power, the Straits are expected to receive more transiting ships in the future. The East Asian economies of Japan, China and South Korea rely heavily on

the Straits of Malacca and Singapore to transport their oil needs from their Middle Eastern suppliers (Hamauzu 2005). According to an international study, in about 13 years' time from 2007, nearly 20 million barrels of oil are expected to pass through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (Ramesh 2007). Statistical data have shown that most of the world's busiest ports are located in East Asian countries including China and South Korea, with Singapore ranked as the second busiest.

## **CONCLUSION**

Historical records reveal that port-kingdoms began to flourish along the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as early as the third century AD. Before the era of Western colonisation, the Straits used to be dominated by one powerful Empire after another, beginning with Srivijaya, followed by Majapahit and Malacca. These realms survived by regulating and exploiting trade flows between the East and the West and within the Malay Archipelago itself. After the fall of the Malacca Sultanate in 1511, the Western colonisers gradually exerted influence in this part of the world. Even though the port of Malacca is no longer a significant entrepôt, both Straits of Malacca and Singapore continue their rich legacy as critical sea lines of communication until the present day.

Now, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are jointly shared considerably by Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. These waterways are not only important economic lifelines of the coastal population, but also of greatest significance in fostering the well-being of the global economy as crucial sea lines of communication. Furthermore, the Straits are also rich in biodiversity concentration and possess invaluable historical legacy, which are globally recognised by various international organisations. The fact that some parts of the Straits are now RAMSAR Sites, a UNESCO World GEOPARK as well as UNESCO World Heritage Sites manifests that both the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are more than just an important shipping route. They are indeed the pride of the Malay Archipelago and a priceless maritime heritage of the world.

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