

Include role of Labuan Chinese if museum built

Sohan Das

LABUAN: A Sabah Chinese history museum, if it materialises, should include the contributions of the community in Labuan as well since the island was an integral part of Sabah until its handover in 1984 to become a Federal Territory.

Former Chairman of Labuan Kwan Wei Siew Association Datuk Chin Chee Kee said he fully supported the idea as otherwise the blood, sweat and tears the community shed in the development of Sabah and Labuan would only be footnotes in the history books, if at all.

Chin said this in reference to a recent eulogy delivered by *Daily Express* Editor-in-Chief, James Sarda, at the wake of former Chief Minister Tan Sri Peter Lo who died at age 96 on New Year's Day.

Chin said with the inclusion of Labuan,

the museum would be complete without any missing links as there would be ample materials here that could be useful to the museum.

"Our association was established in 1852 and could be among the earliest in Sabah.

"Though the early settlers were illiterate by Western standards, they kept records that are useful to show how the Cantonese arrived in Labuan whereby some subsequently moved to Sabah," he said.

He said the records show that the Cantonese were imported here from Guangdong province and Hong Kong to work in the Labuan coal mining industry (1847-1911).

Later the population swelled with more arrivals from Kwang-Zhau and Weizhau. They saw opportunities in business and

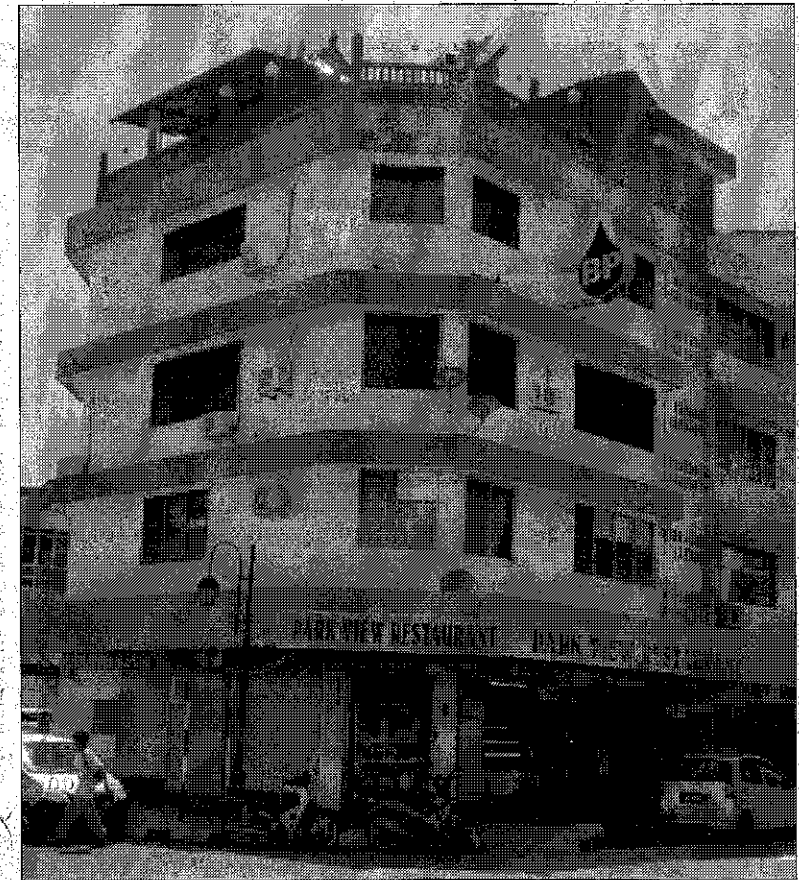
jobs and settled in Labuan.

When the association was established, it also served as a "private court" to settle disputes and other matters arising within the Cantonese clan.

Due to in-fighting for posts the British Government deregistered the association. But the elders circumvented the order by establishing a roof-top temple known as "Heap Tien Kong" and carried out the functions of an association. The temple still stands today.

Chin said there are several Chinese clan associations on the island and each has its own story to tell with materials of interest.

Chin was hopeful that a Sabah Chinese Museum would emerge as a strong new tourism icon given the fact that Chinese tourists have great interest in the history of overseas Chinese.



The rooftop Chinese temple that was built during Colonial rule to outsmart the British who deregistered the association.