

## From New Regency to Claims of the New Sultan: Legacy of Identity of Siak Sultanate

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*Received 3 September 2025; Received in revised form 6 September 2025; Accepted 11 September 2025*

### Abstrak

Otonomi daerah setelah Reformasi telah memunculkan persoalan identitas daerah, termasuk upaya restorasi kesultanan-kesultanan historis di Indonesia. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan pemanfaatan warisan Kesultanan Siak, mulai dari identitas Kabupaten hingga klaim sultan baru. Dengan mengkaji literatur dan berita, penelitian ini dilakukan berdasarkan metode sejarah melalui heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi dan historiografi. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pemerintah Kabupaten Siak memanfaatkan sebagian warisan kesultanan Siak untuk identitas serta pengembangan pariwisata, sementara situasi menjadi kompleks dalam kasus klaim 'Sultan' Siak. Keckerabatan Resam sebagai "perwakilan resmi" Kesultanan Siak tidak pernah mendeklarasikan penegakan kembali kesultanan, sementara klaim terhadap sultan baru tetap bermunculan. Kontroversi tersebut berpusat pada tidak jelasnya silsilah, kekuatan dari Keckerabatan Resam, pengetahuan mengenai kesultanan beserta tradisinya, serta motif-motif tertentu yang mendorong restorasi.

**Kata kunci:** identitas daerah, kesultanan siak, kerajaan melayu.

### Abstract

*The regional autonomy of Reformasi has given rise to regional identity issues, including restorations of historical sultanates. This paper aims to explain the use of Siak Sultanate legacy, from identity of Siak Regency to claims of new sultan of Siak. Through literature and news exploration, this research was conducted based on historical methods that are heuristic source criticism, interpretation and historiography. We found that the regency government of Siak has successfully utilized some of the sultanate legacy for identity and tourism, while the situation is more complex for the 'Sultan' of Siak. Keckerabatan Resam as 'official representative' of Siak sultanate has not declared restoration, while claims to a new sultan have emerged. The controversy centres on the ambiguity of lineage, power of Keckerabatan Resam, knowledge of traditions, and certain motives driving the restoration.*

**Keywords:** regional identity, siak sultanate, malay kingdom.

### INTRODUCTION

The "return of sultans" in contemporary Indonesia, many of which had lost their existence since independence, has become a widespread phenomenon since the Reformasi era (Klinken, 2010). Such cases are particularly prevalent in Kalimantan. The Sultanate of Kutai Kartanegara was re-established in 2001 with Aji Muhammad Salehuddin II as the

new sultan. The newly expanded Regency Government of Kutai Kartanegara in 2002 collaborated with the sultan to shape the region's cultural identity, for instance through the construction of the Kedaton Kutai Kartanegara and the organisation of the annual Erau Festival (Afriandi & Ariyadi, 2020). Meanwhile, Syarif Abubakar Alkadrie was enthroned as the new Sultan of Pontianak in 2004,

inheriting the historic Alkadrie Palace, and Kesuma Negara V, inaugurated as Sultan of Sintang in 2006, regained the Al-Mukarramah Palace, which had previously been converted into a museum by the government (Sellato, 2015). The existence of these sultans in West Kalimantan, rooted in both Malay and Dayak ethnic backgrounds, was supported by the government in the preservation of their palaces. The presence of these sultans often served to reinforce regional identity, a crucial element for newly established administrative regions.

In Riau, the revival of several Malay monarchies also occurred after Reformasi. On 7 August 2008, Tengku Kamaruddin Harun was enthroned as Sultan of Pelalawan, succeeding Syarif Harun, who had relinquished his authority in 1946. The sultan became actively involved in local cultural events such as *Balimau Kasai* and the conferment of traditional titles (Hardyanti & Rosaliza, 2019). In Siak, meanwhile, the romanticism of the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura has been used as a foundation for tourism development in Siak Regency, particularly through the iconic Asserayah Al-Hasyimiyah Palace and other cultural heritage sites (Ritonga & Fatimah, 2020). However, attempts to re-establish the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura have been fraught with controversy, most notably with Syarif Nazir, who in 2022 claimed to be the new sultan (Yonela, 2022a).

The controversy surrounding the enthronement of the Sultan of Siak, in contrast to the successful enthronement of Syarif Kamaruddin as Sultan of Pelalawan, is an intriguing issue for study. In terms of scholarship, there has been little research on the re-emergence of monarchies in Indonesia after Reformasi. Van Klinken views this phenomenon as an example of regional identity movements in the Reformasi era and as a consequence of regional autonomy. He divides the “return of the sultans” into three categories. First are monarchs who have survived into the modern era and sought to raise their profile (*profile raising*), such as the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, which retains political authority, or Deli, which lacks political power but promotes regional culture. Second is the symbolic *resurrection* of monarchies that dissolved after Indonesian independence, as seen in Kalimantan and the Sultanate of Pelalawan. Third is the *reinvention* of monarchies that disappeared for centuries, as in the cases of the Sultanate of Banten and the Pagaruyung Kingdom. The emergence of the Sultan of Pelalawan and the self-proclaimed sultans of Siak falls into the category of *resurrection*, as these monarchies had dissolved during the Indonesian Revolution and were revived only decades later (Klinken, 2010). For these reasons above, we propose some questions: How has the identity of the Siak Sultanate developed in the context of the

Regency of Siak? How has the *Kekerabatan Resam* evolved as a representation of the Siak Sri Indrapura Sultanate? Who are the new claimants to the Siak sultanate, and why have these claims emerged and generated controversy?

## **METHODS**

This article is structured using the historical method, passing through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Nina Herlina). The author traces historical sources related to the Sultanates of Siak Sri Inderapura. Documentary sources such as archives, royal genealogies, royal correspondence, newspapers, and electronic media were obtained from the Library and Archives Offices of Siak Regency and Riau Province, as well as various relevant news websites. Literary sources consist of scholarly writings and other historical works concerning the sultanates, accessible in the Provincial Library of Riau, of Pekanbaru City, and of Siak Regency.

These sources were subjected to external (authenticity) and internal (credibility) criticism, which also served to select the materials most relevant to this study. This stage was undertaken with greater caution regarding internet sources, the majority of which represent supporters of the respective sultans' claims. The interpretation stage clarifies the context and meaning of the sources, which are

then arranged chronologically and critically. The results are presented as follows: aspects of the Siak Sultanate that shaped the identity of Siak Regency, the establishment of *Kekerabatan Resam* as a sultanate institution, new claims to the Siak sultanate, and an analysis of the controversies surrounding these claims.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Regency of Siak and identity of the sultanate**

During the conducive New Order era, each region in Indonesia began to compile its own local history, including Riau. The formation of the identity of the Sultanate of Siak during this period is evident in efforts to compile the History of the Sultanate of Siak as part of the Province of Riau, to explore events and figures whose heroic values could be incorporated into the broader narrative of the Indonesian national struggle, and to identify the customary traditions of the former territories of the Sultanate of Siak.

At the Second National History Seminar held in Yogyakarta, 26-29 August 1970, the history-writing team from Riau presented several papers for discussion, including one on the Sultanate of Siak. The paper presented on Siak, "The Role of the 'Siak' Kingdom in Indonesian History", was prepared by a team from the Universitas Riau based largely on interviews with living eyewitnesses, a number of literary sources, and the

team's own analyses. For instance, the institutions of the Sultanate of Siak were considered comparable to those of a modern state: the Sultan as the executive authority, Dewan Kerajaan as the legislative body, and the Kerapatan Tinggi as the judiciary. This effort may be seen as a means by which Riau's historians sought to enhance the prestige of the Sultanate of Siak. In terms of etymology, the authors put forward several views: that it derived from the siak-siak grass (*Dianella ensifolia*), from the term suak (meaning a small river bay), from the word lasiak, or from the term siak (pious man) (Samin, 1970).

The authors provided a rather extensive explanation of the last two proposed etymologies. From the word lasiak, "Siak" was linked to "the character of its inhabitants, who are quick-tempered and sharp-spoken," which was then associated with its equivalent in the language of South Tapanuli (Toba/Mandailing) as an explanatory basis. According to its proponents, lasiak means "spicy," although its actual meaning in the Toba and Angkola Batak languages is "chilli." This argument was further developed: the banks of the Siak River were once abundant with pepper trees, and when the Batak people conducted expeditions there, they referred to these trees as lasiak.

The use of Siak as a term for a pious man has long been common in Malay

and Minangkabau society; however, the origin of the name Siak in this context remains unclear, as the name had already existed since the Majapahit era (Mulyana, 2006). The article's authors and its subsequent adaptations tended to favour the view that the name Siak derived from siak meaning a pious person (Samin, 1970). This argument was later further developed in the writings of Amir Luthfi, who extensively examined the law and authority of the Sultanate of Siak. He combined the history of Gasib with the account of the King of Siak in the Sulalatus Salatin. In his interpretation, Megat Kudu, the ruler of Gasib, converted to Islam under the name Sultan Ibrahim, and, following the Islamisation pattern found in the Sulalatus Salatin, the sultan propagated Islam in the Siak region (Luthfi, 1991).

Research on the Sultanate of Siak has received considerable attention from both domestic and foreign scholars. Although the history of the Sultanate of Siak had previously been written by several authors—such as O.K. Nizami Jamil in *Sedjarah Ringkas Keradjaan Siak*—studies on the sultanate were conducted comprehensively and published at the national level, serving as references for the compilation of regional histories, both for Riau and Siak. Foreign scholars also made significant contributions to the study of the Sultanate of Siak, among them Donald J. Goudie, who analysed the

Syair Perang Siak (1976), and Mohd. Yusoff Hashim, who examined the Hikayat Siak (1992). Tenas Effendy, “with considerable boldness,” recompiled the Syair Perang Siak on the basis of interviews with various individuals who had witnessed, remembered, or memorised the text (Effendy, 1969).

There were two prevailing approaches to constructing the identity of the Sultanate of Siak during this period. The first was a historical narrative imbued with nationalism. This aligned with the prevailing demands of Indonesia-centric historiography, thereby emphasising events that could be linked to Indonesian nationalism. For instance, in 1988, Keluarga Besar Masyarakat Riau se-Sumatera Utara collaborated with the Faculty of Literature at the Universitas Sumatera Utara to organise a Seminar on the History of National Heroism in Riau (Luthfi, 1988).

The figures discussed included Raja Ali Haji, Tuanku Tambusai, and Syarif Kasim II. Within the seminar, three papers addressed the life of Syarif Kasim II: “Sultan Syarif Qasim’s Migration to Aceh Due to His Refusal to Serve as a Puppet Sultan in Siak Indrapura” by Ali Hasjmy; “Sultan Syarif Qasim II Willingly Relinquished the Crown of the Siak Kingdom for the Struggle of the Indonesian Nation” by O.K. Nizami Jamil; and “Some Heroic Aspects of Sultan Syarif Qasim II of Siak Indrapura” by Amir Luthfi (1988).

The 1931 Si Koyan case was interpreted as a resistance against the Dutch colonialism, who had imposed forced labour in Siak, allegedly with the laten support of Syarif Kasim II. The sentence of twenty years’ imprisonment—rather than the death penalty—handed down to Si Koyan by the High Assembly was seen as the sultan’s attempt to mitigate his punishment (Luthfi, 1988). In 1986, Si Koyan himself gave testimony to Amir Luthfi concerning this event. For Si Koyan, all his actions were undertaken in defiance of the Dutch, and he acknowledged no authority other than that of the sultan. His story adds a political dimension to the narrative of Syarif Kasim II’s resistance to the Dutch.

The second approach concerned the explanation of the ethnic character of the Sultanate of Siak. Historians of Riau, coming from diverse backgrounds, naturally produced differing interpretations. For instance, Amir Luthfi, a historian from Kuantan, examined in depth the legal and political systems in his work *Hukum dan Perubahan Struktur Kekuasaan: Pelaksanaan Hukum Islam dalam Kesultanan Melayu Siak* (1991). According to Luthfi, in order to understand Siak Malay traditions, one must also consider Minangkabau one, as there is a historical connection between the two.

Nonetheless, he combined the concepts of Adat Perpatih and Adat

Temenggung in his analysis of Siak's social and cultural systems. The customs practised by the people of Siak were explained within the classification of Adat Perpatih and Adat Temenggung, a framework borrowed from Malaysia. Amir Luthfi attributed the persistence of Adat Perpatih and Adat Temenggong in Siak to the presence of clans whose traditional rights were recognised and preserved by sultans of Siak during the colonial period, while the sultans themselves upheld Adat Temenggong through the Malay royal traditions. This Minangkabau-leaning perspective would shift in the post-Reformasi era.

Tourism had yet to develop in the period prior to the establishment of Siak Regency. In the 1970s, the Siak Palace was not open to the public, and its keys were kept by the Siak subdistrict head; it was reported to have been left in a neglected state, with its documents scattered (*Tempo*, 1971). However, in the 1980s, Siak's tourism potential began to be explored. The palace began to be opened as a tourist attraction and drew foreign interest, including a delegation of Johor historians in 1984. The *Berita Harian* of Singapore even sought to reignite discussion on the legacy of Datuk Laksamana—one of Siak royal officials, equal to the Datuk Empat Suku—noting that while the Siak Palace, located in a relatively remote area, received full attention, the house of Datuk Laksamana

situated in an even more secluded location and was largely neglected, despite the historical significance of the relationship between the two (*Berita Harian*, 1992). Alongside other attractions in Riau, the province's tourism industry was described as “akin to reaping a windfall (ibarat memetik durian runtuh).” (*Harian Neraca*, 1989)

On 6 November 1998, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia conferred upon Syarif Kasim II the title of National Hero along with the Bintang Mahaputra Adipradana. The conferment ceremony took place on 9 November at Istana Negara in Jakarta, where President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie presented the title and decoration to Tengku Makmun al-Rasyid, a former secretary to the sultan, accompanied by Fadlan Sulaiman, the Regent of Bengkalis, and O.K. Nizami Jamil, son of a secretary to Syarif Hasyim II and a prominent figure of Siak. The following day, these honours were brought to Siak, where the local community welcomed them enthusiastically by holding a Tepung Tawar ceremony—a Malay tradition for receiving guests—before they were permanently enshrined in the Siak Palace (Saily, 2011).

With the spirit of regional autonomy in the Reformasi era, efforts to establish Siak Regency began in 1999. The planned territory and boundaries of Siak Regency were to encompass the area of the former Siak Kewedanaan, slightly

smaller than the planned autonomous region of the Siak Regency and the former territory of the Sultanate of Siak. Discussions had commenced on 5 May, when several Siak figures met in Pekanbaru. On 23 May, Khairuddin Yunus, one of these figures, convened the Siak and Surrounding Area Association, which he chaired, to prepare for and establish a committee for the formation of Siak Regency (Saily, 2011).

Musyawahar Besar Masyarakat wilayah Eks Kewedanaan Siak was held in Siak, 11 June 1999. Following the Friday prayer and a visit to mausoleum of Syarif Kasim II, 300 participants gathered at the Mahratu Hall, near the Siak Palace, with Wan Ghalib as the chairman. Syarwan Hamid, the Minister of Home Affairs and a native of Siak, arrived an hour later by helicopter, which landed on the field in front of the Siak Palace. The meeting continued until eight o'clock in the evening. The assembly resulted in a resolution urging the National Parliament to establish Siak Regency with the subdistricts of Siak, Mandau, Minas, and Sungai Apit within its territory. Siak Regency was officially established on 12 September 1999, with Tengku Rafian appointed as the acting regent. In the interim, various buildings from the Sultanate of Siak (except the Siak Palace) were used for the regency's administration, such as Balai Kerapatan Tinggi as the regional parliament building

and Tangsi Belanda as a school or a district office (Saily, 2011).

The development of Siak Regency advanced significantly with the discovery of oil and gas resources across various locations, accompanied by major infrastructure projects such as the Tengku Agung Syarifah Latifah Bridge—named after the first wife of Sultan Syarif Kasim II—which was inaugurated by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on 11 August 2007. Public spaces and landmarks were increasingly associated with royal figures, as reflected in names such as Tengku Mahratu Park and Sri Bijuangsa Park, while riverbank revitalisation culminated in the construction of the Tepian Bandar Sungai Jantan (2013-2016), featuring a monumental copper emblem of the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura aligned with the Siak Palace. The local government further embedded royal symbolism into urban planning by naming parks, mosques, and public buildings after sultans, offering royal-themed banquets in front of the Palace of Peraduan, and even adopting the Sultanate's emblem for the Public Service Mall instead of the regency's own insignia. These initiatives suggest that the regency government positions itself as the custodian—and, symbolically, the successor—of the Sultanate, reinforcing its role as the principal agent of heritage preservation.

Meanwhile, the tourism sector of Siak Regency began to be developed in

earnest in 2006. During the first five years, the local government focused on preserving the heritage of the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura. In the following period (2011-2016), the government undertook large-scale revitalisation of these legacies, formally designating them as cultural heritage sites, enhancing supporting facilities for tourism, and designing tourist attractions around them. These heritage sites were subsequently established as the Cultural Heritage Area of the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura. The foundation of tourism development in this area rests upon the history of the Sultanate of Siak and Malay culture, with the Siak Palace serving as the central attraction of the regency's tourism landscape (Ritonga & Fatimah, 2020).

## **2. Kekerabatan Resam as Siak royal representations**

In line with the revival of regional identity was the phenomenon of the re-emergence of the monarchies of the Indonesian archipelago, or, in Gerry van Klinken's words, "the return of sultans." These sultanates reappeared not as definitive rulers or "dictators," but as representatives of culture and the identity of local communities (Klinken, 2010). The restoration of sultanates has revived and developed the identities of various regions. In Kalimantan, many palaces have been renovated into museums, while a smaller number continue to be inhabited

by surviving royal families (Sellato, 2015). In West Kalimantan, various sultanates became important symbols for the Malay community amidst interethnic conflicts in 1999 and the years that followed. The most notable case is that of the Sultanate of Kutai Kartanegara, which, together with the Kutai Regency government, built a new royal palace and elevated the Erau tradition into the regency's main event (Afriandi & Ariyadi, 2020). Since 2007, the government has formally recognised monarchical institutions in Indonesia as a means of preserving regional culture.

In Sumatra, a number of sultanates have also been revived. The Sultanate of Serdang was re-established through the restoration of the Wazir Berempat institution, followed by the installation of Tengku Abunawar Sinar as the new sultan (Sinar, 2016). Although several symbols of the Pagaruyung Kingdom, such as the Istan Basa, had been constructed since the New Order period, the Raja of Pagaruyung was not restored until 2002, when the Lembaga Pucuk Adat Alam Minangkabau inaugurated Taufiq Thaib as the new Rajo Alam of Pagaruyung (Nopriyasman, 2018). Several other restorations followed thereafter, including those of the Jambi and Palembang sultanates.

Kekerabatan Resam Kesultanan Siak Sri Indrapura was initiated by several royal descendants (Tengku) of Syarif Kasim I. Discussions on this initiative began in

2001. A year later, the Kekerabatan Resam was formally established, with Tengku Muhammad Toha as its principal proponent. To lead the institution, Tengku Muchtar bin Tengku Anum was chosen. He was a descendant of Syarif Ismail with his first wife. Although a distant descendant of Syarif Ismail, he was regarded as an established and respected figure. Tengku Muchtar Anum represented the Sultanate of Siak in various cultural activities, both those organised by the regional government and national events involving royal institutions from across Nusantara. However, he never claimed Sultan of Siak, instead bearing the title Mangkubumi Mangkudiraja.

The official history of the Sultanate of Siak was published in 2011 under the title *Sejarah Kerajaan Siak*. The book was compiled by a team of writers led by Nizami Jamil, involving various backgrounds as well as members of the Kekerabatan Resam. In the last chapter, they reiterated that the properties of Syarif Kasim II was transferred to Tengku Long Putih, his younger brother and the most likely candidate to succeed him, who in turn handed over the keys of the palace to the subdistrict head of Siak, signifying the transfer of the Sultanate's legacy from the royal family to the government (Jamil et al., 2011). This probably was intended to safeguard the ownership of the Siak Palace Complex from potential claims by certain individuals, as occurred in the case

of the Istana Peraduan, which will be explained later.

It is also worth noting the portrayal of Syarif Hasyim as presented by members of the Siak royal kin. In particular, the account of his accession is narrated from the perspective of descendants of Tengku Bagus, the brother of Tengku Muda, who had been the designated heir to Syarif Kasim I. In this version, Syarif Hasyim is depicted as having conspired with the Dutch to annul Tengku Muda's position as crown prince, thereby banishing both Tengku Muda and Tengku Bagus from the Siak territory. This portrayal is based on a text written by Tengku Bagus himself, preserved by his descendants, whereas no descendants of Syarif Hasyim remain—or at least were involved—in the compilation of this book.

Concerning the Istana Peraduan, the residence had been occupied by the family of Syarifah Fadlun, the wife of Syarif Kasim II, since the sultan's passing. In 2010, the district government sought to mediate with her descendants—namely her children and grandchildren—in order to transfer ownership to the state. When the family refused, the government brought the matter before the Siak District Court, which ruled in favour of the government's claim over the palace. The dispute was later taken to the Supreme Court in 2017, which upheld the government's ownership while requiring it to pay compensation of

Rp 2.5 billion to the heirs of Syarifah Fadlun.

On 24 August 2019, the Kekerabatan Resam and the LAMR Siak formally inaugurated the Kekerabatan Resam with the presence of the Governor of Malacca, Mohammad Khalil Yaakob, as the honoured guest. Tengku Muchtar Anum was appointed as the chairman, with Tengku Muhammad Toha and Syed Mohammad Yusuf bin Syed Nasir serving as deputies. On this occasion, the Governor of Malacca was also conferred the title Orang Kaya Maharaja Siak by Kekerabatan Resam, alongside several other notable figures of Siak (*Infosiak*, 2019).

### **3. Claimants of the new Siak sultan**

The author has identified three individuals who have each claimed the title of the thirteenth Sultan of Siak: Tengku Syatir (Syarif Syatir Abdul Jalil Syaifuddin), Tengku Ridwan (Syarif Ridwan Abdul Jalil Syaifuddin), and Tengku Nazir (Syarif Nazir Abdul Jalil Syaifuddin). Kekerabatan Resam, as the royal institution acknowledged by the Siak Regency government, does not advance such a claim for its chairman, Tengku Muchtar Anum, even though he frequently represents the Siak Sultanate in events involving Riau Malay figures and royal institutions across the Nusantara.

Tengku Syatir, with the regnal name Syarif Muhammad Syatir Abdul Jalil Syaifuddin, is one of many descendants of

Tengku Bagus bin Syarif Kasim I. He himself claimed that on 30 December 2010 several relatives of the Siak sultans convened a meeting to re-establish the sultanate and, step by step, restoring the whole institution while ensuring the collective welfare of its royal descendants. In that meeting, he was asked to become a candidate for the throne. Although he initially stated his reluctance on the grounds that there were others older than him, they nevertheless insisted that he assume the leadership of the sultanate.

Tengku Syatir planned to “install” himself as the official Sultan of Siak in 2017 at the “Royal Palace of Siak,” inviting sultans and kings from across the Nusantara. However, before this was carried out, he held an investiture ceremony on 5 November 2016 at Istana Hinggap, a heritage of the sultanate in Pekanbaru. Wearing full royal uniform resembling that of Syarif Kasim II, he conferred Syarif Kamaruddin Yusof Sani, another descendant of Siak sultan in Malaysia, with the title Raja Tua Agung Siak Sri Indrapura (Majelis Kesultanan Siak Sri Indrapura, 2016). The ceremony briefly provoked controversy, as government officials in Pekanbaru and Riau claimed to have no knowledge of this person and denounced his claim as illegal (*Bertuahpos.com*, 2016). No further activities were recorded thereafter, and it

was subsequently reported that he had suffered a stroke.

Tengku Ridwan claimed to be a descendant of a sultan of Siak and, 30 October 2018, founded Kekerabatan Kesultanan Siak Sri Indrapura (KKSSI). On 31 March 2019, he declared himself the Pemangku Kesultanan (sultanate's regent) at Istana Hinggap, with the title Sri Pduka Yang Maha Mulia yang Dipertuan Besar dan Agung Asy-Syarif Ridwan Abdul Jalil Abdurrahman. The ceremony consists of a Quranic recitation, and the reading of a formal decree by his own Datuk Empat Suku, Tepung Tawar ceremony, and the presentation of a ceremonial kris as the regalia (*Medialokal.co.*, 2019; *Berazam.com*, 2019). The presence of the Senapelan subdistrict head at this event contributed to a framing that positioned his claim as being supported by the government.

Syarif Ridwan has been relatively active in developing activities through his organisation. The provincial board of KKSSI in Riau was "installed" (ditabalkan) on 12 January 2020, with the presence of the Pekanbaru District Military Commander 0301, and the organisation has since been quite consistent in "installing" its branches across various regencies. Several documented activities of KKSSI include visits to the Chair of the Riau Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) (*Transriau.com*, 2019), gatherings among branch leaders, exploration of an old

grave-site, as well as the distribution of free iftar meals and masks.

His ideas concerning the Sultanate of Siak have not been extensive nor ambitious. On 26 April 2021, he issued several declarations, among them that he and his organisation would refrain from engaging in disputes over the inheritance of the Siak sultans and would support the enforcement of law against those responsible for the destruction of Siak's cultural heritage. He also commented during the 'inspection' of the restoration of Istana Peraduan, regretting over the lack of interior protection and that various relevant parties, including the 'royal descendants', were not involved (*Lintas10.com*, 2019).

The third and rather controversial claim is put forward by Tengku Nazir. He is the younger brother of Syarif Syatir and registered as a settler of Kepulauan Meranti. Earlier in 2019, Tengku Nazir had voiced objections to the establishment of Kekerabatan Resam with Tengku Muchtar Anum as its chairman, as well as to the enthronement of Syarif Ridwan, whom he regarded both as illegitimate claimants. He asserted himself as the rightful heir, stating that he had obtained a decree from Pengadilan Agama Kabupaten Siak concerning the descendants of Tengku Bagus. He further claimed that he had been striving to become sultan since 2000 and that, on 17 January 2017, he had in

fact been installed as the thirteenth Sultan of Siak (Yonela, 2022a).

On 14 May 2022, Syarif Nazir proclaimed himself the new Sultan of Siak. In contrast to the other claimants, his installation took place at Pondok Patin H.M. Yunus, a traditional restaurant in Pekanbaru. Dressed in the style of Syarif Kasim II, Syarif Nazir took an oath before his own Datuk Empat Suku, after which he sat upon a “throne” while the other guests sat on the floor. A recording of the Nobat Terengganu, played during installation of Sultan Abdullah of Pahang as Yang Dipertuan Agong, accompanied the ceremony. Thereafter, he delivered a brief address concerning the event, which concluded with a prayer and communal meal (*Bukan Main Gagahnya Sultan Siak Ke 13, Inilah Acara Prosesi Penabalan Sultan Siak Yg Ke-13*, 2022).

On 13 June, Syarif Nazir visited Selatpanjang, capital of Regency of Kepulauan Meranti and was warmly received by its regent, Muhammad Adil. Following a procession in which the sultan rode a rickshaw, the regent welcomed him in front of his office, which was followed by an address and Tepung Tawar. On this occasion, Syarif Nazir conferred upon the regent the title Datuk Tuah Amanah Jasa Negeri along with a kris. Muhammad Adil declared, “As a native of Meranti, we must be grateful that a son of Meranti has been designated as the thirteenth Sultan of Siak, enthroned in Pekanbaru”

(*Riaupos*, 2022). Syarif Nazir was even invited to attend the Plenary Session commemorating the Anniversary of Kepulauan Meranti Regency on 19 December (Prokopim Pemerintah Kabupaten Meranti, 2022).

Syarif Nazir later joined Lembaga Komunikasi Perangkat Adat Seluruh Indonesia (LKPASI), one among several rival organisations to the Forum Silaturahmi Keraton Nusantara (FSKN). At present, LKPASI advocates for customary lands (tanah ulayat) to be managed by “traditional authorities,” which they define as including sultans, kings, datuk, penglingsir, and others. Each year, LKPASI organises a kind of “workshop” to deliberate upon this issue. In 2023, Syarif Nazir participated in a “workshop” held in Jakarta. He also voiced support for the reinstatement of the Swapraja Siak and for the return of Siak Palace to its rightful heirs, namely the descendants of the Siak sultanate (*HUT LKPASI Ketiga Di Jakarta ,Tengku Nazir Tampil Sebagai Narasumber Seminar*, 2023).

Many objections emerged in response. Kekerabatan Resam, represented by Tengku Muhammad Toha, declared that although Syarif Nazir claimed descent from Tengku Daud, son of Syarif Kasim I, he had never engaged in consultation with the institution. He further stated that Nazir had previously been convicted of a criminal offence related to narcotics use (Yonela, 2022b).

Representatives of the sultan's relatives who are descendants of Syed Sagoff, the grandson of Syarif Kasim I, likewise rejected the legitimacy of Syarif Nazir's claim (The Siak Royal Family, 2022).

#### 4. Factors of the controversy

First, a clear successor can no longer be determined. Had Syarif Kasim II left a biological son, or had Tengku Long Putih and his descendants were accepted as heirs to the throne, this situation might not have occurred. On the other hand, the number of potential descendants (from Tengku Bagus or others) is too many and scattered across various places in Riau. The LAMR (Riau Province and Siak Regency) and Kekerabatan Resam have stated that all Tengku descended from Syarif Kasim I possess the potential (in other words, the right) to become Sultan of Siak. However, in the case of Kekerabatan Resam, the election of Tengku Muchtar Anum, a descendant of Syarif Ismail, further expanded the potential to other lines of the sultan's descendants, although this choice could also be seen as more neutral compared to selecting from the line of Tengku Bagus or others.

Second, institutions that could have been responsible for restoring the Siak Sultanate are not strong. Syarif Nazir did not establish any institution until 2025. Even when he managed to organise an event with a regent—appearing as if this constituted governmental support—

this collapsed when Muhammad Adil was later arrested for corruption. The KKSSI founded by Syarif Ridwan has so far remained merely an institution with few visible programmes and weak lobbying power. Although they were able to invite officials such as military commanders and members of provincial parliament, no further actions followed. Kekerabatan Resam, the royal institution recognised by the Siak Regency government representing Siak Sultanate, has likewise shown little lobbying capacity. The last time Kekerabatan Resam demonstrated its “strength” was when the central government planned to take over the Rokan Block oil field previously operated by Chevron. Claiming that the area was granted by Syarif Kasim II, they conducted a hearing with the House of Representatives in Jakarta on 9 February 2021. No follow-up ensued thereafter.

Third, neither the Kekerabatan Resam nor the claimants to the Siak sultanate possess a thorough understanding of the Sultanate of Siak, either in general or in detail. Many point out that the Bab al-Qawaid provides procedures for the appointment of a sultan, although not a single word in the text addresses the matter of succession to the throne. Indeed, the history of Siak reveals diverse forms of succession, ranging from peaceful transfers through the appointment of a Raja Muda to conflicts among princes supported by

court elites. Nevertheless, most successions in Siak were ultimately resolved by the consensus of the Datuk Empat Suku. This precedent is recalled by contemporary claimants to the throne, each of whom has their own group of Datuk Empat Suku. These datuk also claim descent from the original Datuk Empat Suku, but such assertions are difficult to verify without official genealogies or established procedures for determining membership. No such procedures are recorded in Siak's history, nor has any organization ever been formed to gather the descendants of the Datuk Empat Suku.

The claimants to the Siak throne often neglect the historical aspects of the sultanate itself. In terms of symbolism and custom, for instance, they either draw upon well-known traditions or introduce innovations. In the enthronement of Syarif Ridwan, the distinctive custom employed was *Tepung Tawar*, a ritual usually performed to welcome guests or during weddings. Instead of involving the Datuk Empat Suku who once played a central role in determining succession, he invited various datuk from different regions under the umbrella of the KKSSI. The installation of Syarif Nazir was even more problematic: although he may have known that *Nobat* music legitimises a ruler's enthronement, he used a recording of *Nobat Terengganu* as performed in the installation of the Yang Dipertuan Agong in 2019; moreover, his enthronement took

place in a restaurant, a setting wholly unrelated to the heritage of the Siak Sultanate.

Fourth, there were other motives behind the restoration of the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura. Syarif Nazir's ambition to revive the *Swapraja* of Siak—despite his limited understanding of its essence—indicates his pursuit of a certain form of power by invoking history for personal advantage. The actions of *Kekerabatan Resam* regarding the *Rokan Block* also reflect such ulterior motives. For some, individuals of this kind are merely seeking projects that might bring financial backing. Certain members of *Kekerabatan Resam* have likewise used their positions to elevate the popularity of particular figures, as seen in the 2024 Siak regional elections.

## CONCLUSION

A new phenomenon emerged in the form of claims related to the Siak Sultanate, coinciding with the Regency of Siak's efforts to develop historical and cultural tourism and to construct a regional identity rooted in the legacy of the Sultanate of Siak Sri Indrapura. Although the *Kekerabatan Resam* was informally established in 2003, it never sought to revive the sultanate itself, but rather attempted to lend legitimacy to Siak Regency's use of the Sultanate's heritage. At the same time, several individuals identifying themselves as descendants of

the Siak sultans began asserting claims to this legacy. What initially centred on inheritance matters gradually expanded into disputes over the right to bear the sultan's title. Ambiguities in the line of succession, divisions among the various branches of descendants, and certain individual motivations contributed to the controversies surrounding attempts to re-establish the Sultanate.

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