

Ques - What problems were germane to the decolonization process on the Malay Peninsula? (150 words, UPSC 2017)

Ans- In the 1940s almost all of the colonies of western powers in South East Asia came to face two challenges. The first challenge was that of Japanese conquest and the second one was the growing influence of communism. Britain came to confront the same challenges on Malaya.

This region had fallen under Japanese occupation in 1942 and was regained by Britain in 1945 again when Japan surrendered after the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then Malay's nationalists including Malays, Chinese, and Indians, three different ethnic groups, started to demand liberation from British rule.

But even after that, the British decided to stay there due to two reasons. Firstly, Britain suffered an economic hardship after the war. Therefore exploitation of national resources in colonies had taken on new importance in the light of Britain's depleted exchequer and a largely crippled economy at home. In particular, rubber and tin exports necessitated the maintenance of British control of Malaya.

Secondly, Chinese communists had expanded their power in course of the fight against the Japanese between 1942 and 1945. Then after 1945, they emerged to be a powerful political force in Malaya. It was a matter of concern for the British as to put a check over communism was a part of the German policy of western powers.

So, the British fought against guerillas with determination while making a joint front with non-communist elements of Malaysia. Consequently, communist guerillas were defeated. Then the British made a peaceful exit from Malaya in 1957. In this way, the British experience in Malaya was different from the French experience in Indio-China.

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