

A BRIEF telegram from the now historical Straits of Malacca, which figured so prominently in the literature of the last general election, informed us, on Friday, of the sacrifice of another British official to Eastern lawlessness and treachery; but we were scarcely prepared for the grave political significance with which later intelligence invests the outrage. The original despatch was simply to the effect that Mr. BIRCH, the British Resident at Perak, had been murdered in Malayan territory, and that troops had started for Perak to punish the guilty parties. This brief announcement was amplified on the following day by a despatch to the Colonial Office from the Governor of the Straits settlements, indicating the locality and circumstances of the assassination. Mr. BIRCH, it seems, was at Passu Sala, a place between Rhotu and Durum, on the Perak river, and appears to have been attacked while in his bath. His Malay interpreter is said to have been killed; four of his suite were wounded, and two are reported "missing." Energetic measures, it was added, were being taken to bring to justice the perpetrators of the outrage; and detachments of troops, as well as a force of armed police, had already been despatched with this object from Singapore. Up to this date, however, neither the Colonial Office nor the Straits authorities appear to have recognised the real gravity of the circumstances, as indicated by the additional details telegraphed to-day. According to these advices the murder of Mr. BIRCH was no chance affair or private act of treachery, as we were at first disposed to think, but a deliberately planned political crime, like the assassination of Mr. MARGARY, at Manwyne, for which the ruler of Perak is officially if not personally responsible. All the native Rajahs, however, are suspected of complicity in the murder, and the Sultan ISMAIL himself is reported to be collecting large forces to expel the British from his territory. Already the Malays are besieging the British residency at Perak; but, fortunately, the troops despatched thither from Penang on the 4th instant have reached the place, and Mr. SWETTENHAM, the associate of Mr. BIRCH, is so far safe. The protected state of Perak, which is the scene of these disturbances, must not be confounded with the neighbouring island of Penang, one of the three British settlements in the Straits — the two others being Malacca and Singapore. It is one of the largest of the minor native States which border the West Coast of the Malay peninsula, but is very thinly populated, numbering only from 35,000 to 50,000 inhabitants over an area of nearly 5,000 square miles, whilst the British settlement of Malacca, further south, with about one-fifth that area, boasts a population nearly twice as large. Perak lies directly south of the former British province of Wellesley and the territory of Quedah. On the east it is divided by the lofty chain of the Rumbou Mountains from the south-eastern provinces of Lower Siam, and on the south is bounded by the native State of Salangore. Perak, the capital, is a small town situated on the river of the same name, at a considerable distance from the sea, where the principal port is Dinding. There can be no doubt, from the intelligence now telegraphed, that the assassination of Mr. BIRCH and his attendants is part of a deep-laid scheme for the expulsion of the British from Perak, and it may prove to have wider ramifications than are at present apparent. Burmese influence is all powerful at Perak, and it is by no means improbable that the KING of AVA, who has lately experienced so much difficulty in explaining his own conduct in reference to the Yunnan affair, is at the bottom of this new rising against British authority. The SULTAN of PERAK, however, is not a very formidable opponent; and if the 750 men who compose our little garrison in the Straits settlements, are unequal to the task of bringing him to book, a contingent from British Burmah will promptly and easily accomplish the work. The report of Sir WILLIAM DRUMMOND JERVIS, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, who has gone to Perak to investigate the circumstances, will be awaited by the public both in India and this country with much eagerness.