CHAPTER 5: INVOLVEMENT OF THE HADHRAMI ARABS IN ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICS

Introduction

19th and 20th century Malaya witnessed the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the administration and politics of the Malay states. Their involvement was noticeable in the late 19th century with the rise of prominent Hadhrami Arabs who held important responsibilities as state rulers and government officials. Before the British intervention in Malaya in the 19th century, the Malay states were ruled by respective sultans or rajas. The states’ administration, economy, religion and political affairs were governed by the sultans with the help of Malay chiefs and officials. These aspects of life were interrelated with each other with Islam acting as a catalyst that guides mankind to a better living. However, since the British invasion to Malaya, many changes had been done by the British in the name of development and modernity, transforming the nature of the Malay states’ administration and affairs to be under a centralized government. The British placed their advisers and residents in almost every state to oversee and control the economy, politics and administrative aspects of the Malays. The Sultans and Malay rulers no longer had absolute authority. As such, every order and decision’s final say came from the British advisers.

The Hadhrami Arabs who migrated earlier and married into the ruling class and Malay noble families were considered by Malays as equal to their rulers. The local Muslims gave due respect to the Hadhrami Arabs who claimed themselves as descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. Being accepted by the Malay community and aristocracy helped the Hadhrami Arabs to consolidate their social and political networking in Malaya. Through marital bonds, the Hadhramis enjoyed prestige and special privilege in the Malay society. Some of them were involved in the Malay States’
administration and were appointed head of state, government officials, bureaucrats or chieftains.

The Arabs, according to J.A.E Morley, made use of their diplomatic skills. They possessed the ability to exploit the weak sides of the natives’ character. The dignity and respect they received as esteemed ‘ulama’ or religious men as well as successful traders enabled them to gain certain degrees of social status in the Malay World. The Arabs, either through marital bonds or influence managed to establish themselves as rulers or having connection with the ruling classes in several places, for example Perlis in Malaya, Siak, Kampar and Jambi in Sumatra, and Pontianak and Kubu in Borneo. However, the involvement of Hadhrami Arab figures in the Malay states’ politics and administration was seen as a threat by the British who were afraid that they would inspire anti-British sentiments among the Malays. In the Malay society, it was common that Hadhrami Arab religious scholars or the ‘ulama’ and those who have close relations with the royal family would be given priority in holding religious positions in states’ administration and politics.

Being descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W earned the Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent respect and privilege in the Malay society. In addition, the early Hadhrami Arab immigrants to Malaya were known for their religious knowledge. Some of them were not only involved in states’ religious administration, but also held important positions in the states’ administration, ranging from the lowest ranks to the highest positions. This chapter explores the involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in politics and administration of the Malay states in Malaya. It will observe how the Hadhrami Arabs managed to secure such important positions, played their role and contributed to Malay politics and administration.
Kedah
Among the earliest Hadhrami Arab families who settled down in Kedah were the Jamalullails, Shahabudins, al-Qadris and al-Aidids. The Jamalullail family had significant influence on the politics of the state. Sayyid Ahmad bin Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail was among the earliest family members of the Jamalullail family who came to Kedah from Hadhramaut in 1148AH/1735AD. Sayyid Ahmad married Sharifah Aminah al-Qadri who gave birth to Sayyid Harun Jamalullail. Sayyid Harun Jamalullail grew up to be an important figure in Kedah. Sayyid Harun’s close contact with Kedah royals was strengthened through his marriage to Tengku Safiah, the daughter of Tunku Dhia‘uddin. Through this marriage, Sayyid Harun was awarded the district of Arau in 1797 (1212 H). He was also appointed as a penghulu or the chieftain of Arau.\textsuperscript{1} Through this appointment Sayyid Harun managed to wield his influence in the politics of Kedah.

The Jamalullail’s family involvement in the state administration of Kedah prevailed since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail was appointed the new ruler of Perlis in 1843.\textsuperscript{2} The Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the politics of Kedah was significant, particularly during the critical period when Kedah was invaded by Siam (1821-1842). When Siam occupied Kedah in 1821, they divided the state into four territories; Setul, Perlis, Kubang Pasu and Kedah which were placed under different rulers. The Sultan of Kedah, however, sought protection by escaping to the Province of Wellesley in 1821 and then took refuge in Melaka.\textsuperscript{3} The Hadhrami Arabs together with the Malay chiefs and Sultan fought against the Siamese invasion. In the effort of gaining support and commitment from the society to free Kedah from Siam, the Arabs were said to have used their political and religious influence to call for jihad.\textsuperscript{4} They considered the Siamese as an infidel enemy that must be opposed. The strategy of the religious militancy resurgence succeeded in drawing support from the Malays as well as Arab

\textsuperscript{2} After a long war of dispute and struggle between Kedah and Siam, finally Kedah regain independence. This was duly to the effort of several people among others were Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail. See Hussain Baba, “Sejarah Negeri dan Raja-Raja Perlis”, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{3} British Adviser Office Files (Perlis), Arkib Negara Malaysia, (KL), M78/95.
merchants of the Straits Settlement. At the same time, underground support was also received from some Europeans.\(^5\)

The two decades of continuous wars indeed witnessed a top down effort from the inhabitants of Kedah as well as the Hadhrami Arabs in their efforts to get rid of the Siamese invasion. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin II, together with the Malay chiefs, the people of Kedah and the Hadhrami Arabs worked hand in hand in this struggle. The role of the Hadhrami Arabs thus was significant. Sayyid Zainal Abidin, better known as Tunku Kudin led the military campaign against Siam and succeeded to re-conquer Kuala Kedah from the enemy. However, he did not manage to defend Kuala Kedah from Siamese attack that eventually saw the fall of Kuala Kedah into the hands of Siam which had also claimed his life. Another attack was also planned in 1828, but it was also a failure for the Malays. The Hadhrami Arabs had proven that they were willing to fight for Malays even when it costed them their own lives. Another prominent Arab, Shaykh Abdul Samad participated in the decisive battle of 1828 and lost his life in the battlefield.\(^6\)

Finally, after two decades of war and political distress, Kedah bargained a peace deal with Siam. Both powers agreed to cease fire and put the military conflict to an end. Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail\(^7\) was among those responsible for the peace pact between Siam and Kedah. He played a significant role in bringing peace and order to Kedah through negotiations with Siam. Thus, it is evident that the Hadhrami Arabs also contributed to the peace-making process by restoring political order and assisting Kedah’s road to independence. In order to sustain peace and political order in the state, Kedah had to maintain its good terms with Siam through political alliances.\(^8\) Sayyid

\(^5\) Mohammad Redzuan Othman, The Arabs Migration and Its Importance in the Historical Development of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Malaya, paper presented at the 15th Annual World History Association Conference held on 22-25 June 2006 in California, USA, p. 15.


\(^7\) Sayyid Hussain was the first son of Sayyid Harun Jamalullail. He was born on 10 January 1805.

\(^8\) This political alliance enabled Kedah to maintain its sovereignty and sustainability. ‘System of political alliance … These alliances enabled smaller states to pay tribute to the largest in exchange for their relative independence and a degree of protection when attacked by other states’. Meaning that Kedah and Perlis are now independence but subject to Siam’s sovereignty and
Hussain Jamalullail’s effort was worthwhile when he was appointed the new ruler of Perlis in 1843. With this appointment, the Jamalullail family’s political interest was strengthened. Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail became the legal ruler of the newly established state of Perlis.⁹

Starting from 1909, Kedah was put under the British protectorate. The Bangkok Treaty, also known as the Anglo-Siam Treaty or Perjanjian Inggeris-Siam was signed between the British and Siam. In this treaty, the states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu were put under the British protectorate. Kedah was to accept a British adviser along with the other states.¹⁰ The involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in the state administration of Kedah was obvious with the appointment of several Hadhramis in the state’s administration. There was a notion of anak emas that refers to Hadhrami Arabs in Kedah. This notion is referred to the sultans’ tendency and preference in giving the Hadhrami Arabs positions in Kedah’s state administration. It was a common practice in the state of Kedah for the Sultan to take Arabs as their son-in-laws. It gave the Hadhrami Arabs opportunities to become part of Kedah’s royal family. They also received the same respect as the royals and the elites of Kedah. Many of them assumed high positions in the state’s administration.¹¹

In the Salasilah or the Tarikh Kerajaan Kedah for instance, it is recorded that the Sultan of Kedah granted the District of Yan to Sayyid Osman al-Qadri in 1906/07 (1324 AH). With this award, Sayyid Osman al-Qadri was responsible to supervise the District of Yan as well as collect revenue.¹² Based on the Letter ‘Salinan Surat Kepada

---

¹¹ Faridah Romly, Orang Arab di Kedah, B.A. Academic Exercise, History Department, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 1983/84, p. 223.
Raja-Raja, TH 1312-TM 1895, No. 2’, that was written on 24 Jamadil Akhir 1313, it is learnt that Sayyid Osman was the head of the district or *Ketua Mukim* of Yan, Kedah, one of the districts in Kedah that produces rice until today. Besides that, Sayyid Mohamed and Sayyid Zainal Abidin were also appointed heads of district of Sala Besar. The appointment as *ketua mukim* or head of the district is a special recognition of the Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the politics and administration of Kedah. This position is a special reward by the Sultan of Kedah. It gives the recipient rights over the revenues of the districts. In addition, the *Ketua Mukim* also had the authority to appoint the *penghulu* or chieftain in his districts.

The Hadhrami Arabs also became members of the State Council Meeting. Several other high ranking and important positions were held by Hadhrami Arabs too, such as Sayyid Barakbah who was appointed the Chief Judge and Sayyid Hassan Shahabudin as the State General Auditor. Sayyid Abu Bakar Kidit or Aidit was given the post as acting District Officer in Sungai Petani and Tuan Sayyid Mohd Aidit was appointed as Chief Magistrate. There were also a number of Hadhrami Arabs who were employed in the state’s civil service as clerks and office boys. In 1918, record shows that nine Hadhrami Arabs worked as clerks in various offices in the districts of Kedah. For example, Sayyid Mohamed A. Bakar in the Land Office in Jitra, Sayyid Mashur Alwi in the Land Office in Langkawi, Sayyid Abdullah Yahya in Mahkamah Besar, Alor Setar, Sayyid Omar Shabudin in Mahkamah Kecil, Alor Setar, Sayyid Mashar Mohd. Shahabudin in the Adviser’s office, Sayyid Omar Sayyid Mohammad Shahbudin in Mahkamah Kecil, Alor Setar, Sayyid Abdullah bin Yahya in Mahkamah

---

13 SMSAH, 6 Rabiulawal 1324, 29 April 1906.
14 KAR 1909-1910, Kedah Annual Report, p. 11.
16 Minutes of State Council Meeting, Kedah, 30 September 1919/5 Muharram 1338, Minutes of State Council Meeting Kedah, 9 August 1920/24 Zulkaedah 1338.
Besar, Alor Setar and Sayyid Idros in the education sector. Sayyid Alwi bin Sayyid Abdullah Barakbah was a grade III English Clerk in the Survey Office, Kulim which was then transferred to the Audit Office in Alor Setar. Sayyid Ismail bin Sayyid Alwi was a Superintendent of Survey from the Survey Department in Kulim. Sayyid Mohamed bin Sayyid Zin was a financial assistant in the Monopolies and Customs Department, Alor Setar. And finally, Sayyid Ahmad bin Sayyid Mahmud was a grade III English Clerk, and Tuan Sayyid Abdullah al-Mahdali was in the treasury office (21 Safar 1323).

According to Mohd Isa Othman who studies the administration of districts in Kedah during the Japanese Occupation, he found that several Hadhrami Arabs were appointed as district officers and assistant district officers. The post of district officer was known as Guncho while the assistant district officer known as Fuku Guncho. Sayyid A. Rahman Sayyid Abdullah was appointed as the district officer of Bandar Bharu, Sayyid Abu Bakar Sayyid Osman, district officer of Baling and Sayyid Hassan Sayyid Jan, the district officer of Sik. Meanwhile, Sayyid Idrus Sayyid Mansur was appointed assistant district officer of Kuala Muda and Sayyid Osman Idid as the assistant district officer of Yan.

Information about the Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the state administration of Kedah can also be traced from the collection of letters belonging to Sultan Abdul Hamid. Several Hadhrami Arab names were mentioned in these letters. They had specific roles in the state administration of Kedah. Among the names were Sayyid Abdullah, Syed Abdullah Tuan Teh, Sayyid Abdullah Shihabuddin, Sayyid Mansor Al-

17 Surat Menyurat Sultan Abdul Hamid (SMAH) TH 1337/TM 1918, No.12, Circular No. 25/37, Pekerjaan Government Negeri Kedah. This is regarding a test sat by clerks in the government of Kedah for the year 1337/1918. Nine of them were Hadhrami Arabs who held the post of clerks in various offices in the state of Kedah.
18 SUK, A (N) Kedah, 3543-1351, Syed Alwi b. Syed Abdullah Barakbah, ANM(KL). Sayyid Alwi applied for transfer. He was transferred to Alor Star under Audit Department while his former position was replaced by Ramli Mohamad Said.
19 SUK, A (N), Kedah, 440-1351, ANM (KL) Retirement of Syed Ismail b. Syed Alwi superintendent of Survey (daily paid employee), from Survey Department, Kulim resigned from his post due to health problem. He suffered from Pulmonary Tuberculosis. He received compensation amounted to $180.00.
20 SUK, A (N), Kedah, 650-1351, Syed Mohamed bin Syed Zin, ANM(KL).
21 SUK Kedah 72/1948; Kedah Government Servants.
Jefri, Sayyid Hassan and Sayyid Osman, a Guard Captain. In these letters they were addressed as *Tuan Sayyid*. The following are several samples of letters from Sultan Abdul Halim’s correspondence.23

A letter addressed to Tuan Syed Muhammad Shahbudin in the state of Singgora regarding his Mother Tunku Rasyidah who passed away on 11 Rejab 1313.24

“Kepada Tuan Syed Muhammad al-Jefri Pasal yang tapak jerap Duli Yang Maha mulai hendak berangkat pergi main di Jenderai itu belum tentu lagi mana mana hari.”25

“Tuan Syed Husin, Kuala Muda... Paduka Ayahanda Tuan Syed Husin. Surat daripada Raja Muda kepada Tuan Syed Husin, Kuala Muda. 9 Shaaban 1314.”26

“Syed Mansur, Surat daripada Duli Tuanku Raja Muda beri kepada Syed Mansur Pasal suruh bubuh atap Rumah Guru School di Penang itu dan buat bangsal kuda adanya. 23 Shaaban 1314”. 27

“Syed Mansur, Surat Duli Tuanku Raja Muda beri kepada Syed Mansur Pasal Syed Mohd Haddad minta jangan pedulikan Syed Mohd Haddad kerana kurang baik tabiatnya. Datang ke Penang dari Singapore tapi tidak bayar tambang. 28 Zulkaedah 1314.”28

The Hadhrami Arabs who served in the local authorities enjoyed pensions just like the locals. From the record of SUK A on the issue of pension, it is found that seven pension receivers were Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent. They were in the civil service as office boys, Malay clerks, English clerks and Secret Police. What is interesting is that the record stated their races as Malay instead of Arab as shown in the following table.29

---

23 SUK Kedah, 72/1948. p. 228.
24 Ibid., p. 46.
25 Ibid., p. 59.
26 Ibid., p. 256.
27 Ibid., p. 273.
28 Ibid., p. 333.
29 SUK A. File on pension, Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Kedah. This information is copied as it is from the file record.
### Table 5.1  SUK (A) File on Pension, Kedah.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Syed Omar b. Syed Mohamed</td>
<td>31 October 1923</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malay Clerk-employment- 3.2.1948 – 23.3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Syed Mohamed b. Syed Abdul Rahman Al-Idrus (passed away)</td>
<td>1330</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>English Clerk- Grade II,10-1087 - 14-1-1963</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the administration of Kedah, the post of chief minister or *menteri besar* was also being held by a Hadhrami Arab when Sayyid Ahmad Shahabuddin was appointed as the chief minister of Kedah from 1967 till 1978. He also held the positions of Deputy Minister and Ministry of Home Affairs (1978-1982). Sayyid Ahmad Shahabuddin also held various positions in the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) branch in Kedah.30 Other than participation in administration, the 20th century also witnessed the involvement of the Hadhrami Arabs in the politics of Kedah. Among the administration officials in Kedah who were also involved in the politics of the state after the Second World War were Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tunku Kassim, Sayyid Ahmad Shahabuddin and Sayyid Omar Shahabuddin.31

Political awareness among the Malays in particular the administrative officers in Kedah started to surge due to the impact of the Second World War. The British

---

administration did not encourage Malay participation in politics. They had monitored and curbed any outside influence that were geared towards supporting Malay participation. Meanwhile, the reverse was true for the Japanese administration policy in Malaya, where they spurred anti-Western colonialism sentiments among the Malays to rally support from the people against the British. Nevertheless, there were also government officers who were anti-Japanese. However, the Malays realised that it is important for them to participate in politics to fight for their rights. Left-wing political parties emerged, spearheaded by the Kesatuan Melayu Muda that had a branch in Kedah. By the end of 1945, a committee consisted of several ‘ulama and youths of Kedah formed a party known as Kesatuan Melayu Kedah (KMK). Among the committee members of KMK were Mahathir Mohamad (former Malaysian Prime Minister) and Sayyid Ahmad Shahabuddin (former Governor of Malacca). KMK was against the British’s proposal of Malayan Union.32

Perlis

Perlis is a state that is purely ruled and governed by the descendants of Jamalullail, the Hadhrami Arabs originating from Hadhramaut, Yemen. The Jamalullail’s family has ruled the state since it was a small district and part of the Kedah Sultanate until today. Perlis separated from Kedah when Siam invaded Kedah in 1821, thus splitting Perlis and Setul from Kedah’s territory. Sayyid Harun was appointed the local chief of Arau, Perlis. His son Sayyid Hussain became the sole ruler of Perlis in 1841.33 Ever since, Perlis has become an independent state. However, Perlis was subjected to Siam suzerainty until the Bangkok Treaty was signed in 1909. Siam had some control over Perlis’ internal affairs until 1905 when the state had a financial crisis. The problem

persisted, thus urging the ruler of Perlis to seek assistance from Siam through a loan which resulted in the appointment of a British adviser in the state.\textsuperscript{34}

Sayyid Hussain was said to be the person responsible of separating Perlis from Kedah’s sovereignty in order to build a new government. Before Perlis became a separate political entity from Kedah, it was just a small district under the governorship of the Kedah Sultanate. According to Julie Tang, Sayyid Hussain revolted against the government of Kedah to form a new state of Perlis. Julie considers this revolution as a subtle rebellion or \textit{pemberontakan halus} since it did not involve war or bloodshed. Sayyid Hussain waited for a suitable time before taking action to realize his mission, which was when the Kedah-Siam War was at its peak.\textsuperscript{35} Sayyid Hussain’s tendency to have a coalition pact with Siam was therefore seen as his effort to bring peace and to free Kedah from Siam’s dominion.\textsuperscript{36}

However, there were various ideas proposed by researchers and scholars related to the factors that contributed to the appointment of Sayyid Hussain Jamalullail as the ruler of Perlis. Hussain Baba and Haji Buyong Adil believe that Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin awarded Perlis to Sayyid Hussain as a sign of appreciation for his efforts to free Kedah from Siam’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{37} The close relations between Sayyid Hussain and the royal family of Kedah also contributed to his appointment as the ruler of Perlis. Even during the reign of Sultan Dhiauddin, Arau was awarded by the sultan to Sayyid Harun, his son in law (the father of Sayyid Hussain) as a marriage gift and the area was to be inherited by his offspring forever.\textsuperscript{38}

The appointment of Sayyid Hussain as the governor of Perlis in 1939 was a golden opportunity for him to consolidate his influence in Perlis. Julie discusses other

\textsuperscript{34} Mr. Duke was appointed from Bangkok as adviser to the Ruler of Perlis assisting him in the financial affairs of the state until 15 July 1909. When a treaty was signed between Siam and the Great Britain in 1909 that transferred the suzerainty of Siam over the Malay States to the Great Britain and this include Perlis. See Annual Report of the Adviser to the Perlis Government for the Year A.H. 1327 (23rd January, 1909 – 12th January, 1910), The National Archive of Malaysia, Kedah and Perlis Branch.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 15.


possibilities that have contributed to the appointment of Sayyid Hussain as a ruler of Perlis in 1843 by the Maharaja Siam as well as the reason behind Perlis’ split from Kedah. British’s intervention in the Siam-Kedah War also contributed to the ceasefire between the two countries. Due to the truce, Siam (Rama III) split the state of Kedah into three provinces which are Kedah, Kubang Pasu and Perlis. Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin returned to rule Kedah, while Perlis was put under the governorship of Sayyid Hussain. It is said that Sayyid Hussain was quick to take action to fill the vacuum in the politics of Kedah when there was no ruler in power during the war.39

Sayyid Hussain used the opportunity to gain support from the local Malay dignitaries or pembesar-pembesar Melayu such as Muhammad Arshad bin Muhammad Yunus, the father in law of Sayyid Hussain, one of the Malay dignitaries who played an important role in the establishment of Perlis. Muhammad Arshad and Sayyid Hussain allied with Tunku Anum and Tunku Bisnu, members of the Kedah royalty in their struggle for power to overthrow Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin’s rule in Kedah. Julie considers this action as a rebel from within the royal family itself and Sayyid Hussain who was an opportunist benefited from the skirmishes and power struggle between the royal dignitaries and the ruling sultan (Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin). At the same time, he showed his loyalty to Siam as well. When the truce was achieved and Siam was about to consider restructuring its rule over the colonies on the northern part of Peninsular, Sayyid Hussain offered himself to rule Perlis under Siam’s patronage.40

“In 1839 he ordered the state of Kedah to be divided into three states – Kedah, Kabangpasu, dan Polit... (A) trusted Malay, Tonku Setusen, (was) appointed Sultan of Polit”.41

Therefore, the appointment of Sayyid Hussein as the new ruler of Perlis received strong support from Malay dignitaries that led to his appointment as the ruler of the

40 Ibid., pp. 67-76.
state. The Hadhrami Arabs’ struggle for power was not easy as it involved careful planning and cunning action from many parties. Records from the Government Gazette of Perlis show that the Hadhrami Arabs were also employed in the state administration of Perlis. Tuan Syed Omar b. Syed Hussain and Tuan Syed Hassan b. Syed Mohammad were appointed members of the Council of Religion and Malay Custom of Perlis in the 1960s together with other Malays. While in 1961, Tuan Syed Bahaldin b. Syed Noh, the Justice of Peace was appointed president for the Council of Religion and Malay Customs of Perlis. Tuan Syed Hussain b. Syed Zain, the Justice of Peace of Perlis and Tuan Syed Ali b. Syed Hassan were appointed as members of Perlis’ State Pardons Board in 1960. This appointment was for a period of three years. Sayyid Alwi b. Syed Hassan and Tuan Syed Bakar b. Syed Hussain Al-Jafri were appointed as Justice of Peace within and for the State of Perlis.

The Hadhrami Arabs were also appointed as members of the Council of Succession in Perlis. Those appointed were Tuan Syed Hussain b. Syed Zain Jamalullail, J.P., Tuan Syed Mahmood b. Syed Alwee b. Syed Idrus Jamalullail, Tuan Syed Bakar b. Syed Hussain Al-Jafri, J.P., Tuan Syed Alwee b. Syed Idrus Jamalullail, and Tuan Syed Alwi b. Syed Hassan Jamalullail. Other candidates appointed to be the members of the Council of Succession in Perlis were such as the Mufti of Perlis, Tuan Shaykh Mahmud b. Haji Mat Saman, Dato’ Wan Ahmad b. Wan Daud, D.P.M.P., J.M.N., P.J.K, J.P., Che Mat b. Haji Kassim, J.P., and Tuan Haji Abdullah b. Ahmad (J.P.).

The Hadhrami Arabs were also in the service of other sectors such as in Public Health, Juvenile Courts, Town Board Councils, the State Development Board of Perlis,

---

Land Revenue Office, and also the Legislative Assembly of the State of Perlis. Apart from that, the SUK Perlis for year 1946 shows that the Hadhrami Arabs were also employed in the state administration of Perlis such as Sayyid Ahmed bin Sayyid Hussain, a class III clerk who served in the Land Office and Sayyid Mohamad bin Sayyid Hussain, a Class III clerk who was also in the same office.

**Pulau Pinang @ Penang**

Pulau Pinang or Penang also witnessed the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the administration of the island. The Hadhrami Arabs were among the state’s citizens of whom the majority were Chinese. The Hadhrami Arabs were employed as the government servants and had also joined the Municipality of George Town, Penang as members of the Rent Assessment Board, Rural Board, and Muslim Advisory Board. Among the Hadhrami Arabs in the service was Sayyid or Syed Salleh Alsagoff b. Syed Hashim Alsagoff, M.B.E., J.P. Sayyid Salleh was appointed as one of the members of the Rent Assessment Board for the Municipality of George Town, Penang and the rural areas on Penang Island.

Apart from that, Sayyid Salleh was also an appointed qadi for the North-East district of the Island of Penang, including Pulau Jerejak @ Jerjak. He was also appointed as a member of the Mohammedan Advisory Board, Penang for the year 1948 together with Sayyid Ahmad Al-Mashoor. Sayyid Salleh was again reappointed to become a member of the Muslim Advisory Board for the Settlement of Penang for the year 1949. He was also addressed as Captain Sayyid Salleh.

Besides, Tuan Sayyid Murthada Aidid b. Sayyid Mohdar Aidid, J.P., was appointed as an unofficial member of the Penang Settlement Council. He was among

---

48 SUK Perlis, 120/1946.
other 14 members of whom majority of them were Chinese (seven), with three Indians and three Malays, while the official members were all English. At the same time, Sayyid Murthada Aidid became the Justice of the Peace for the Settlement of Penang in the year 1948.\(^{51}\) In 1949, Sayyid Murthada Aidid was appointed member of the Rural Board, Penang. However, he resigned in August 1949. Apart from that, Sayyid was also appointed as the member of the Board of Visiting Justice for the Settlement of Penang in the same year.\(^{52}\) Several Hadhrami Arabs were appointed to serve as jurors too in the year 1949 in the Settlement of Penang. They were Sayyid Abdul Rahman b. Sayyid Abdullah, a clerk from Municipal Engineer Office, Sayyid Ahmad Al-Junied, a clerk from District Office Butterworth and Sayyid Mohamed S., an Assistant Manager from R. E. Mohd Kassim & Co.\(^{53}\)

**Kelantan**

In Kelantan, the Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the state administration was more prominent in the 19\(^{th}\) century compared to the 20\(^{th}\) century. They were in charge of matters related to judicial or Islamic Laws. Sayyid Muhammad bin Sayyid Alwi was appointed as a judge with the title Toh Hakim of Kelantan. Besides that, his kin Sayyid Jaafar was also in the service as judge to the former Sultan Muhammad II (1835-1886).\(^{54}\) Saad bin Ngah, the Datuk Maha Menteri, Nik Yusuf bin Nik Abdul Majid, the Datuk Sri Paduka and Sayyid Muhammad bin Sayyid Alwi were among the most influential figures in Kelantan. They were also responsible for the appointment of Sultan Mansor to the throne after the death of Sultan Muhammad III. These three chiefs and their followers strongly backed the chosen candidate to the throne in 1890 and

---


1891.\textsuperscript{55} Sayyid Jaafar was a follower of Sultan Muhammad II. He was also the loyal commander of the Sultan in the Kelantan Civil War\textsuperscript{56} along with Long Jinal, the ruler of Kelantan and the uncle of Sultan Muhammad II in 1839.\textsuperscript{57}

**Perak**

In Perak, the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the administration and politics of the state was significant ever since the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The Hadhrami Arabs had close contact with the ruling class of Perak, earning themselves good social reputation. They were addressed as *Tengku* and became part of Perak’s royal family. The post of *Orang Kaya Besar* in the state of Perak was also held consecutively by the Arabs. The last official who held this post was Sayyid Jaafar. Meanwhile, the post of *Orang Kaya Menteri Sri Paduka Tuan* Besar was also held by the Arabs.\textsuperscript{58}

During the reign of Sultan Muzaffar Shah (1728-1754) in the previous century, two Hadhrami Arabs appointed to the post of *Orang Kaya Menteri Sri Paduka Tuan* were Sharif Hussain and Sharif Abu Bakar. Sayyid Abu Bakar was given the post of *Bendahara*, one of the main posts in the state of Perak during the reign of Sultan Iskandar (1752-1765). Among other duties of *Bendahara* was to oversee the state’s home affairs. He acted as the chief minister and commander in chief of the state. Most of his income was collected from the tax charged on the imports and exports of the Kinta River.\textsuperscript{59}

Apart from that, the Hadhrami Arabs were also responsible for enacting the Ninety-Nine laws of Perak pertaining to local rules and regulations according to Islamic Laws. The Laws was composed by Sayyid Ja‘afar bin Sayyid Unus. He was an influential leader in the Malay society and was appointed to a leading position as the

---

\textsuperscript{55} Shahril Talib, “History of Kelantan 1890-1940”, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp. 140-143.
chieftain or penghulu of Kuala Teja in the District of Kinta. Based on this record, the Laws of Perak was brought into the state by Sayyid Hassan during the reign of Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin, Marhum Tanah Abang. Tuan Sayyid Abdul Majid was the chief officer or menteri. The Laws was composed based on Shara'; the Islamic legal system discussing issues related to Muslim practices in life such as marriages, criminal offences, divorces, slaves and loans. The Ninety-nine Laws of Perak is proof showing that the Hadhrami Arabs had played a significant role in Perak and were entrusted with important tasks and positions in the state.

**Johor**

In Johor, the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the state’s affairs and politics can be traced back to the 17th century during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1685-1699) when Tun Habib Abdul Majid (d. 1697) was appointed as the Bendahara of Johor with the title Sri Maharaja. Bendahara Tun Habib Abdul Majid was an Arab from Hadhramaut, Yemen descended through the Hashimite lineage of Sayyid Aidarus who migrated to Aceh. During his service as Bendahara of Johor, the state managed to maintain its political influence in the Malay Archipelago as well as its economic stability. When Tun Habib Abdul Majid retired, he was replaced by his son Bendahara Tun Abdul Jalil with the title Bendahara Paduka Raja. Bendahara Tun Abdul Jalil was then appointed as the Sultan of Johor on 3rd September 1699 when Sultan Mahmud II passed away, leaving no heir to the throne. The Bendahara family managed to rule Johor for about 178 years (1699 – 1877). Bendahara Habib Tun Abdul Majid’s father Habib Ali Zainal Abidin al-Aidarus was a...
trader in Hijaz. He had another son named Sharif Muhammad Kebungsuwan. According to Najeeb M. Saleeby, Sharif Muhammad Kebungsuwan was responsible for the formation of the Islamic Sultanate in Mindanao in the 16th century. He left Johor and arrived in Magindanao around late 15th or early 16th century. His father, Sharif ‘Ali Zainal Abidin married Jusul-Ashikin or Jawzul ‘Ashikin from the Sultan of Johor’s royal family. It is recorded that Jusul-Asiqin or Jawzul ‘Ashiqin was the granddaughter of Tun Sri Lanang by his son, Tun Jinal.

When the last ruler of Malacca, Sultan Mahmud II, the al-Marhum Mangkat di Julang died in 1699 and left no heir to the throne, the rule of Malacca-Johor Sultanate did not come to an end. It was indeed continued by a noble family from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. The Bendahara of Johor, Seri Maharaja Tun Habib Abdul Majid’s descendants took this big responsibility governing the state of Johor and its territories. In 1699, Bendahara Paduka Raja Tun Habib Abdul Jalil, the son of Bendahara Tun Habib Abdul Majid was appointed the new ruler of Old Johor with the title Sultan Abdul Jalil Ri’ayat Shah IV (1699-1718). His brother Tun Zainal Abidin was then made the first Sultan of Terengganu with the title Sultan Zainal Abidin I (1702-1726).

Bendahara Maharaja Tun Habib Abdul Majid descended from the offspring of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, the ahlu al-bayt. Tun Suzana and Muzaffar believe that Tun Habib Abdul Majid was an ahlu al-bayt based on the title habib attached to his name that is used only by Sayyid descendents. According to Daniel Perret and

---


Kamaruddin Abdul Razak who conducted a research on the royalty’s funeral area in Kota Tinggi, Johor, it is believed that there was a Hadhrami Arab community in the area around the 17th century and Bendahara Tun Habib Abdul Majid was Sayyid Aidarus’ great grandchild.67 This mausoleum does not only contain the graves of Malacca royal family members and dignitaries but also a grave of Sayyid Salim al-Aidarus, the religious teacher of Sultan Mahmud. The mausoleum itself is known as Makam Sayyid or Makam TAUhid. This could possibly refer to the family members of the Sayyids who were buried there.

The rule of Bendahara family ended in the 19th century, when the Temenggung family overthrew the Bendahara family and succeeded the throne. Sultan Abu Bakar was one of the Temenggung family members who came to throne in 1885. In the 19th and 20th century, a number of Hadhrami Arabs served in the state administration of Johor such as in the religious administration. Besides that, the Hadhrami Arab elites in Johor and Singapore were in close contact with the Sultan of Johor. Sayyid Mohammad al-Saqqaf was one of the leading Hadhrami Arab entrepreneurs in Johor and Singapore. He was a close friend to Sultan Abu Bakar. He accompanied the Sultan on his overseas trips on several occasions. Sayyid Mohammad al-Saqqaf was honoured with a medal Pingat Darjah Kerabat. He was the first non-royal individual rewarded with such a title that signifies his close contact with the royal family of Johor. With this title he was regarded as a part of the royal family of Johor. Through good contact maintained with the ruling family of Johor, Sayyid Mohammad Al-Saqqaf was awarded 60,000 acres of concession land at Kukob, Johor. The concession land was later on named The Constantinople Estate which was meant to be used for cultivation purposes except opium.68


Sayyid Hassan al-Attas was another Hadhrami Arab who had connections with the royal family of Johor. He was also awarded with Pingat Darjah Kerabat in 1926 by Sultan Ibrahim. Sayyid Hassan Al-Attas became the sultan’s representative when dealing with matters related to diplomatic and political relations of Johor. For example, Sayyid Hassan attended the Caliphate Conference in Cairo in May 1926 representing the Sultan of Johor. The conference discussed issues of future leadership of the Muslim Ummah. Sayyid Hassan Sayyid Hassan was also awarded land concession of 2000 acres near Johor Bahru by the Sultan of Johor. This concession came to be known as the Estate of Habib Hassan. The concession was planted with rubber, coconut and pineapple. Today, the former Sayyid Hassan Estate covers the thriving Century Garden, Wadi Hassan, Kampung Ngee Heng, Hulu Air Molek, Saujana, Kampung Tarum and part of Kampung Kubur.

When the British started to interfere in state administration of Johor in 1914, an agreement was signed between the government of Johor and the British on 12 May 1914. The agreement among others touched on the rights of the people of Johor or Malays of Johor to work in the government service. In this respect, the Hadhrami Arabs were also given privileges like the Malays. Many of the Hadhrami Arabs in Johor born of Malay mothers and Arab fathers enjoyed the same benefits with the Malays of Johor.

It is recorded that the arrival of Arabs to the state had increased every year since 1911. Many of them came to settle down and trade in Johor as well as in other states in Malaya. They also received good treatment from the royal family of Johor. Many of

70 Pejabat Agama 180/241, The National Archive, Malaysia, (Johor branch). A letter from Sultan Ibrahim to the president of the Universal Caliphate Congress of Cairo, Egypt, 17 April 1926; and letter from the sultan private secretary to the president of the congress, 21 March 1926.
them were employed in the administration of the state. They were employed in the police department, high court, the land office and mines and the registrar of marriages and divorces. Sayyid Muhammad and Ungku Ahmad Sayyid Abdullah were appointed as members of the Johor State Council Meeting for the year 1873. Ungku Ahmad Sayyid Abdullah was also appointed as the resident of Pengerang.\textsuperscript{74}

Several Hadhrami Arabs were employed in the religious administration in Johor. In 1873, Sayyid Ahmad al-Attas was appointed as \textit{mufti} of Johor whilst Sayyid Salim al-Attas was appointed as a member of the State Assembly or \textit{Ahli Dewan Negeri}.\textsuperscript{75} Sayyid Salim then was promoted to the position of \textit{mufti} of Johor in 1893 while the post of \textit{Shaykh al-Islam} was held by Sayyid Salim Ahmad Al-Attas.\textsuperscript{76} Sayyid Alwi Tahir al-Haddad was the famous and longest \textit{mufti} in service since the retirement of Sayyid Abdul Kadir Mohsin Al-Attas in 1934.\textsuperscript{77} Sayyid Alwi bin Tahir Al-Haddad became the leading ‘ulama’ and was renowned for his intellectuality. He was well versed in Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamic education. He also played a critical role in promoting Islamic literacy and history in Johor. His Islamic reformist ideas were channelled through his involvements in religious works, education and journalistic writings.\textsuperscript{78}

\section*{Pahang}

The political situation in Pahang was also interesting with the presence of Hadhrami Arabs’ influence in the state. The rulers of Pahang himself were from \textit{Bendahara} Tun Habib Abdul Majid of Johor’s lineage. The Hadhrami Arabs’ influence in the state affairs of Pahang started when Tun Abbas, the \textit{Bendahara} of Johor was appointed as

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{75} The Straits Calendar and Directory, 1873, p. 12.
\bibitem{77} Pejabat Agama Johor, 68/34, National Archive, Malaysia (Johor Bahru Branch), 8 Mac 1934. Sayyid Alwi Tahir al-Haddad took over the position of \textit{mufti} of Johore on 8 March 1934.
\end{thebibliography}
the *Bendahara* of Pahang. Tun Abbas was the offspring of the late *Bendahara* of Johor. Sultan Mahmud Shah III of Johor awarded the state of Pahang to *Bendahara* Tun Abdul Majid as a family hereditary. *Bendahara* Tun Abdul Majid was also known as *Bendahara* Pahang. Since then, Pahang has been ruled by the *Bendahara* family until today. Among the successors of Tun Abbas who ruled Pahang were Tun Abdul Majid, Tun Muhammad, Tun Koris, Tun Ali, Tun Mutahir, and Tun Ahmad who was also known as Wan Ahmad.\(^79\)

The Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the state affairs of Pahang was significant during the reign of *Bendahara* Tun Ali (1806-1857) when he appointed his son-in-law Sayyid Umar as the chief minister. Sayyid Umar was styled *Engku Sayyid*. Engku Sayyid Umar has two sons Tuan Embong and Tuan Ngah.\(^80\) When *Bendahara* Tun Ali passed away in 1857, the position of *Bendahara* was taken over by Tun Mutahir. Tun Mutahir’s appointment as the *Bendahara* of Pahang received strong support from Arab leaders such as Sayyid Umar al-Attas and Sayyid Deraman Abdul Rahman.\(^81\)

Tun Ahmad or Wan Ahmad, the brother of *Bendahara* Tun Mutahir contested and claimed the throne of Pahang for the post *Bendahara*. Eventually Tun Ahmad succeeded in defeating his brother *Bendahara* Tun Mutahir in a long disputed civil war or *perang saudara* that lasted for almost six years from 1857 till 1863. Tun Ahmad also received support from the Hadhrami Arab chief Sayyid Al-Idrus.\(^82\) Besides, there were also other Hadhrami Arab families who supported Tun Ahmad’s claim to the throne such as Al-Khirid, Al-Habsyi and Al-Yahya.\(^83\) After succeeding in the civil war, Tun Ahmad was appointed as the *Bendahara* of Pahang in 1863 with the title *Bendahara Sewa Raja* (Seri Wa Raja). Tun Ahmad then was declared the Sultan of Pahang on 5 December 1884 with the title Sultan Ahmad Al-Muʿazam Shah. He was recognised as

\(^{80}\) Ibid.  
\(^{83}\) Mahayudin Haji Yahaya, *Sejarah orang Syed di Pahang*, pp. 96-97.
the Sultan of Pahang by the British in 1887. Sultan Ahmad al-Mu’azam Shah ruled Pahang until 1914 when he passed away at the age of 78.\(^{84}\)

Apart from that, the Hadhrami Arabs from Sayyid descent were also employed in the state administration of Pahang. For example, Sayyid Sohor Sayyid Ahmad was appointed as chieftain or *penghulu* of Semantan, Temerloh; Sayyid Abdul Rahman who was also known as Tuan Chik was made *penghulu* of Jenderak, Temerloh; Sayyid Hamzah bin Tuan Sayyid Dabal, the headman or *penghulu* of Sungai Karang, Kuantan; and Sayyid Muhammad Sidek bin Hamzah, the chieftain or *penghulu* of Pahang Tua.\(^{85}\)

**Negeri Sembilan**

Negeri Sembilan is another state in Malaya that witnessed significant roles played by Hadhrami Arabs in administration and politics of the state in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) century Malaya. These Hadhrami Arabs were said to be responsible for bringing in the British to meddle in the state’s internal affairs which eventually led to British’s intervention in 1874. Sayyid Sha’aban bin Sayyid Ibrahim al-Qadri (d.1873) was one of the prominent Arab leaders in Negeri Sembilan in the 19\(^{th}\) century. Born into a religious family of an Arab religious teacher in Rembau earned him respect and social status in the society. His mother however, was a local woman from Melaka. Sayyid Sha’aban married the daughter of Raja Ali, one of the ruling families of Negeri Sembilan. Raja Ali was the great grandchild of Raja Adil, the second Raja from Sumatra who became the *Yam Tuan Besar* of Negeri Sembilan.\(^{86}\)

When Raja Ali became *Yam Tuan Besar* of Negeri Sembilan in 1832, he appointed Sayyid Sha’aban, his son in-law to become the *Yam Tuan Muda*. Sayyid

---

Sha’aban became prominent and acted as the adviser to the *Yam Tuan Besar*, Raja Ali.\(^\text{87}\) Unfortunately, his appointment to the position of *Yam Tuan Muda* was not agreed by other Negeri Sembilan Malay chiefs. A “dispute over a building of a stockade to collect tolls at Simpang” between the joint of Sungai Rembau and Sungai Linggi caused a war. In this incident, Sayyid Sha’aban was forced to withdraw his military forces to Melaka. Despite his failure to regain his position even after several attempts, he was crowned as the ruler of Tampin with the title *Tengku Besar Tampin*. Sayyid Sha’aban held the post until he passed away in 1873.\(^\text{88}\) One of his sons, Sayyid Hamid was appointed as the *Yam Tuan Muda* of Negeri Sembilan in the 1870s.\(^\text{89}\) Although Sayyid Sha’aban was a commoner with no royal blood, his children from his marriage to the daughter of Raja Ali, the *Yam Tuan Besar* of Negeri Sembilan had the rights to inherit the throne. His appointment as *Tengku Besar Tampin* was based on his relationship with Raja Ali, the *Yam Tuan Besar* of Negeri Sembilan. Since then, the post of *Tengku Besar Tampin* was taken over by his descendant hereditarily until today.

Sayyid Abdul Rahman bin Sayyid Ahmad al-Qadri, the *Dato’ Klana* of Sungai Ujong was another prominent Arab leader in the history of Negeri Sembilan (1873-1880). He was the nephew of Sayyid Sha’aban. Sayyid Abdul Rahman held the post of *Laksamana* of Sungei Ujong in 1850 while Sending assumes the post of *Datuk Klana* of Sungei Ujong replacing *Datuk Klana* Kawal. When *Datuk Klana* Sending passed away in 1873, Sayyid Abdul Rahman replaced him as new *Datuk Klana* of Sungei Ujong.\(^\text{90}\) He played a significant role in the politics and administration of Negeri Sembilan. Sayyid Abdul Rahman together with Dato’ Muda of Linggi made a deal with Andrew Clarke, the Governor of the Straits Settlement over a friendship pact that indirectly ceded their territories under the British protection. Sayyid Abdul Rahman could have


done that as a precaution step taken to protect himself and his territory from the attack of other districts in Negeri Sembilan. His action was not likened and envied by other Malay chiefs of Negeri Sembilan. The chiefs were afraid that they would lose their power and authority in Negeri Sembilan. So, they planned an attack over Sungai Ujong.\footnote{R.O. Winstedt, ‘History of Negeri Sembilan,’ pp. 69-71, Khoo Kay Kim, ‘Syed Shaaban bin Syed Ibrahim al-Kadri’, p. 46.}

The British assisted Dato’ Klana Sungai Ujong by providing him with armed forces in the later struggle against Yam Tuan Antah. The British also openly backed Dato’ Klana over the claim of Terachi. The war broke out in December 1875. During this war, Yam Tuan Antah and his army were not able to fight against the allied forces of Dato’ Klana. Eventually, Yam Tuan Antah was forced to withdraw from the battle and retreat to Johor. After some time, he returned to Negeri Sembilan but became less powerful. Yam Tuan Antah was appointed as the Yam Tuan of Sri Menanti.\footnote{J. M. Gullick, ‘The War with Yam Tuan Antah,’ \textit{JMBRAS}, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1954, pp. 5-10; Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, ‘Kebangkitan-Kebangkitan Anti-British di Semenanjung Tanah Melayu’ in Khoo Kay Kim, (ed.) \textit{Sejarah Masyarakat Melayu Modern}, KualaLumpur: Persatuan Muzium Malaysia, 1984, p. 5.}

Gradually, the British managed to increase their political dominance and influence in Negeri Sembilan. Sayyid Ali bin Zain al-Jufri was another Hadhrami Arab leader in Negeri Sembilan who also had a direct contact with the British. He also signed a political deal with the British in September 1886 that made his territory, Jelebu under British protection. Sayyid Ali was the chieftain or \textit{penghulu} of Jelebu.\footnote{R.O. Winstedt, ‘History of Negeri Sembilan,’ p. 74.} Since then, leaders of the districts in Negeri Sembilan took a drastic step by signing political deals with the British in order to seek protection in 1895. The districts include Sri Menanti, Sungai Ujong, Jelebu, Rembau, and Tampin.\footnote{Ibid., p. 74.}

\section*{Selangor}

In Selangor, the Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent also actively involved themselves in the politics and administration of the state, particularly in the Klang Civil War in the
1870s. Sayyid Mashhor or Masahor bin Muhammad al-Shahab was among those who participated in this civil war. He was a Malay warrior with Arab blood who came from Pontianak. In the beginning, he was on the side of Tunku Kudin. Tunku Kudin sent him to the fortress at Kuala Selangor. Not long after his departure, his brother Sayyid Abdullah was killed in Langat. Sayyid Mashhor was very angry with the incident and he believed that the murder was planned by Raja Yaakub. Since then, Sayyid Mashhor was not in good terms with Tunku Kudin. He became allies with Raja Mahadi, Tunku Kudin’s opponent. On the side of Tunku Kudin was also a Hadhrami Sayyid named Sayyid Zain or Zin. Sayyid Zain or Zin was a Malay of Arab blood from Penang. When the war ended, Sayyid Mashhor was appointed as a chieftain or penghulu at Kerling. Sayyid Zin was appointed chief subordinate to Tengku Kudin, the ruler of Klang and Kuala Selangor from 1870-1874.

Terengganu

In Terengganu, the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the state’s administration was significant in the 19th and 20th century, especially during the reign of Baginda Omar (1839-1876) and Sultan Zainal Abidin III (1881-1918). In fact, the genealogy of the Terengganu Sultanate was also from Tun Habib Abdul Majid, the Bendahara of Johor. Tun Zainal Abidin, the son of Bendahara Tun Habib Abdul Majid was appointed as the first Sultan of Terengganu with the title Sultan Zainal Abidin I (1702-1726). His appointment to the throne of Terengganu was supported by religious leaders of Terengganu, such as Syarif Abdul Malik b. Abdullah who was popularly known as Tok Ku Pulau Manis. The present Sultan of Terengganu, Tunku Mizan also has Arab

100 Emily Sadka, The Protected Malay States 1874-1895, Kuala Lumpur: University Press, 1968, p. 27.
blood from Sayyid descent. The Sultan is a descent of Sayyid Omar Al-Junied, one of the Arab pioneers of modern Singapore.¹⁰¹

The administration of the state of Terengganu was divided into several districts. Each district was governed by immediate royal family and dignitaries. They also had the rights to collect tax revenues in each of their controlled areas. Each district was constantly in touch with the administrative centre in Kuala Terengganu. The decision made by the Sultan in governing Terengganu by placing each district under the supervision of royal families and dignitaries could be considered as a wise action because the responsibility to protect Terengganu was fairly distributed among them and became everyone’s concern. The respective chiefs were responsible to look after their districts. This practice could also help to avoid a power struggle between the royal families. In 1882, Terengganu was divided into eight districts.¹⁰²

During the rule of Sultan Zainal Abidin III, the state administration of Terengganu was divided into 12 districts. Norizan Mustafa touches on the ‘patrimonial’ pattern of rule practiced in the state in which the royal families and chiefs were appointed as representatives of the sultan for a region or district.¹⁰³ But in certain conditions, these representatives were not selected based on blood relations or were among the dignitaries, but rather from religious scholars or leading figures in the society. This practice is known as ’extra-patrimonial’.¹⁰⁴

In order to govern the various districts in Terengganu, Sultan Zainal Abidin III had appointed his close family members and the state’s officials to run the administration of every district. Among those officials were the Hadhrami Arabs. For example, Sayyid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin al-Idrus or Tokku Tuan Besar was

¹⁰¹ Al-Mahjar, “Terengganu’s Sultan’s mother is an Alsagoff,” in Points to Ponder Column, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1999.
¹⁰³ Patrimonial means the provision by the government of a province or district to someone based on blood tie among the kin or relatives. See Norizan Binti Mustafa, Sejarah Kuala Terengganu 1900-1957, p. 41.
¹⁰⁴ Extra-patrimonial means the award of a province or territory to those who do not have any family relationship with the government. Grants may occur on the basis of a close personal relationship between the government and the person. See Norizan Binti Mustafa, Sejarah Kuala Terengganu History 1900-1957, p. 41.
awarded Chabang Tiga and Sayyid Abu Bakar or Tuan Bong was awarded Ulu Trengganu. Sayyid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin al-Idrus, popularly known as Tokku Tuan Besar was given some sort of autonomy in managing the District of Chabang Tiga. He was assisted by his sons; Sayyid Mustaffa who was also known as Tuan Dalam, Sayyid Abdul Rahman popularly known as Engku Chik, Sayyid Abu Bakar also known as Tuan Embong and Sayyid Ahmad or Tuan Ngah. Each of them was helped by a budak raja. Tokku Tuan Besar made a mosque as his office and built up kind of lock-up house to detain the guilty.  

A pole was also erected to tie those who were charged of takzir for not fasting in Ramadhan and did not perform Friday congregational prayers. During the reign of Sultan Omar, Terengganu was popularly known as Darus Salam or the abode of peace where Islamic laws were strictly practised by the people. Sayyid Abu Bakar or Tuan Bong was awarded Ulu Trengganu. He also had marital bonds with the Sultan when he married the Sultan’s niece. Syed Abdullah was appointed as the minister of Terengganu. Sayyid Abdul Rahman, popularly known as Tok Ku Paloh or Engku Sayyid Paloh was awarded Sungai Nerus and the area was placed under his supervision.  

The Al-Idrus family was among the Hadhrami Arab families who played a significant role in the state of Terengganu. The family of Al-Idrus was also known as a family of scholars. They played an important role in the administration of religion and also in other state affairs, administratively and politically. The close relations built with the ruling class of Terengganu enabled them to play an important role in the state, thus

---

106 Ibid.  
108 Mohammad Redzuan Othman, *The Arab Migration and Its Importance in the Historical Development of the Late Nineteen and Early Twentieth Century Malaya*, pp. 18-19.  
succeeding in making Islamic Laws as the state’s legislature. This can be seen in the appointment of Sayyid Muhammad bin Zainal Abidin Al-Idrus (Tokku Tuan Besar), a prominent scholar in Terengganu during the reign of Baginda Omar as Shaykh al-‘Ulama’. Besides that, Tokku Tuan Besar was also appointed as the head to lead the Dewan ‘Ulama’ or Scholars’ Hall that functions as the highest government office that monitors and consults all matters related to state affairs.\textsuperscript{111}

The Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent were also given priority to hold important positions in the state administration of Terengganu. Apart from their close connection with the aristocrats through marital bonds, their credibility and authority in the field had earned them a social prestige in the society. When Tengku Ismail, the chief minister or Menteri Besar of Terengganu passed away, his position was taken over by Sayyid Muhammad Zain, one of the Tokku Tuan Besar’s sons with title Engku Sayyid Seri Perdana. The ‘Ulama’ of Terengganu had managed to implement Islamic Laws as the state’s constitution.\textsuperscript{112} In Terengganu, the ‘ulama’ had its own rank whereby they became part of ruling class in the society. In May 1941, Sayyid Muhammad bin Idrus was appointed Magistrate I for criminal law in the province or district of Kuala Terengganu, Ulu Terengganu, Marang, and Bukit Rakit during the emergency period (darurat). He was given the authority to hear and sentence criminal cases in the provinces.\textsuperscript{113}

Another family member of Al-Idrus who was also a prominent scholar in Terengganu during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin III (1881-1918) was Sayyid Abdul Rahman Al-Idrus, the son of Tok Ku Tuan Besar. Sayyid Abdul Rahman was popularly known as Tok Ku Paloh. Politically, Tok Ku Paloh played an important role in Terengganu when he was appointed shaykh al-‘ulama’ of Terengganu. He also became

\textsuperscript{111} Wan Husin Wan Embong, ‘Peranan dan Pengaruh Tok Ku Tuan Besar’, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Surat tauliah daripada Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah kepada Sayyid Muhammad bin Idrus sebagai Magistret I Jenayah Negeri Terengganu, Surat Tauliah bertarikh 5 Jamadil Awwal tahun 1361/ 21 Mei 1942 semasa pendudukan Jepun. Refer to Norizan Binti Mustafa, Sejarah Kuala Terengganu 1900-1957.
a member of the State Council Meeting. The authority and integrity of Tok Ku Paloh as a religious scholar earned him respect and trust from the Sultan Zainal Abidin III who made him his teacher. Sultan Zainal Abidin III always referred to Tok Ku Paloh who acted as his adviser to consult in matters related to the state’s political and administrative affairs. According to Mohamad Abu Bakar, Sultan Zainal Abidin III consulted Tok Ku Paloh to seek his opinion regarding the 1895 incident that involved the Pahang warriors.\textsuperscript{114} He further says that the close relation between the two gave them the opportunity to consult each other in the state’s as well as personal affairs.\textsuperscript{115} Apart from the Hadhrami Arabs of Sayyid descent, the non-Sayyid Hadhrami Arab who was also in the service of the state religious administration in Terengganu was Shaykh Hassan bin Said Yemeni. Shaykh Hassan was appointed to the post of the \textit{mufti} of Terengganu during the reign of Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah (1920-1942).\textsuperscript{116}

The Hadhrami Arabs played quite a considerable role in the administration of the state of Terengganu that involved both religious and political issues whereby they also acted as advisor to the Sultan. For example, Sayyid Abdul Rahman Al-Idrus, popularly known as Tok Ku Paloh with the consent of the Sultan was believed to have given protection and shelter to the Pahang warriors involved in the Pahang revolt in 1891. The British were suspicious and believed that Tok Ku Paloh was involved in the Pahang revolt. However, they could not prove his involvement in this plot. Tok Ku Paloh was a religious man who was also believed to possess \textit{karamah}. Tok Ku Paloh was said to be responsible for instilling the spirit of \textit{jihad} among the Pahang warriors while they were taking refuge in Terengganu.\textsuperscript{117}

In Pahang, the revolt that was led by Datuk Bahaman, Tok Gajah and Mat Kilau was almost defeated. For that reason, they withdrew to Terengganu and sought help

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 183-184.
\textsuperscript{116} Shaykh Hassan bin Said Yemeni’s appointment letter as mufti of Terengganu. SUK Tr. 97/1361, Surat Tauliah kepada Sheikh Hassan bin Said Al-Yamani, Pejabat Sultan Terengganu, 22 Rajab 1361 (4 August 1942).
from Tok Ku Paloh. Hence, they were given shelter in Paloh and taught with knowledge on how to fight their enemy (British) in Pahang.\textsuperscript{118} According to Mohamad Abu Bakar, Tok Ku Paloh had instilled in them the spirit of Islam, and urged them to launch jihad against the British. The refugees had a concrete reason to fight against British colonialism. They managed to recapture the fortress at Jeram Ampai. Clifford believed that the contact made between the Pahang people and Tok Ku Paloh had triggered the element of religion in the Pahang Revolt in 1894. 400 people from Pahang took shelter in Paloh where they were also allowed to explore and open new settlements there. However, the British officers were not able to trace down these people. Under the order of Tok Ku Paloh, the villagers of Paloh were asked to protect and cover the refugees from being found by the British agents.\textsuperscript{119}

Clifford then led an expedition to arrest the rebels from Pahang in Terengganu. He even asked Sultan Zainal Abidin III to issue a warrant or surat kuasa for him to arrest anyone who helped the rebels from Terengganu. However, the authority given to him was limited to ordinary people only. The royals, the Sayyid families and the dignitaries of Terengganu were excluded from any investigations. The British nevertheless were always suspicious of Tok Ku Paloh. They had even met him to investigate the rebels from Pahang. To Clifford, Tok Ku Paloh was the main obstacle to his efforts in searching for the rebels in Terengganu.\textsuperscript{120}

To achieve their aim, the British had bribed the people in order to know the whereabouts of the Pahang rebels who were hiding in Terengganu, especially at Sungai Kemia. The British also offered free pardon to the rebels.\textsuperscript{121} Unfortunately, the


\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., pp. 184-185.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 185.

\textsuperscript{121} Aruna Gopinath, “Pahang 1880-1938 A Political History”, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, (MBRAS), Monograph No. 18, 1991, p. 159. See also Duff to Clifford, 12 May 1895, enclosure in Mitchell to Ripon, Confidential, 27 May 1895, C.O. 273/104, f. 129; H. Clifford, ‘Report on the Expedition Recently led into Kelantan and Trengganu on the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula,’ JMBRAS, Vol. 34, Pt. 1, 1961, pp. 141-143. See also Clifford to Colonial Secretary, 5 September 1895, enclosure in Mitchell to Ripon, Confidential, 9 September 1895, C.O.273/206, f. 93; Clifford to Colonial secretary, 5 September 1895, enclosure no. 2 in R.H. Meade to Foreign Office., 10 October 1895, FOCP part 7, No. 76, p. 213. At the beginning many were refused to cooperate to disclose the information as they were afraid to be punished by mutilation of the nose.
continuous uprising and hardships experienced by the natives had forced them to surrender, betraying the dissidents. As a result of that, two Arab residents of Pahang, Sayyid Husain and Sayyid Seman (Uthman) finally informed Clifford of the refugees’ location at Sungai Kemia.122

According to Mohamad Abu Bakar, the British got an easy path to consolidate their influence in Terengganu, particularly when Tok Ku Paloh passed away in 1917 followed by Sultan Zainal Abidin in 1918. The death of these two influential figures who were strong opponents of the British rule in Terengganu, marked a beginning of colonial rule over Terengganu. Again, a new treaty was signed on 24 May 1919 with the British during the reign of Tengku Muhammad (1918-1920) that saw direct British interference in the state affairs of Terengganu. Through this treaty, the British had an excuse to assign its officer J.L. Humpreys as the first British adviser in Terengganu. Under the rule of Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Syah (1920-1942), Terengganu was administratively, politically and economically under the direct control of the British adviser.123

The British’s intervention in the state affairs of Terengganu had caused a series of riots among the Malays that saw the involvement of the Sadah clan. The implementation of new policies over the state administration had caused dissatisfaction among the Malays. For example, the people were ordered to obtain passes for cultivating, cutting trees, opening new land and collecting forest revenues. This new rule also covered ‘hasil tanah’ or land revenue and land registration where the people were forbidden from hunting wild animals unless they obtained licenses from the government for that purpose.124

Many of the Malays ignored this new rule and did not take the passes as ordered because they thought that the new rules were absurd and it was different from what they had been practicing all those times. Moreover, they were in the opinion that the new rules were only applicable for those who wanted to work and open new government land (tanah kerajaan) only. The misunderstanding continued and the government did nothing to solve this issue. Acting on behalf of the people, Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong thus wrote to the Pesuruhjaya Tanah Terengganu (Land Commissioner of Terengganu) asking for an investigation to be done regarding land ownership and to decide which land belonged to the government and which land were owned by the people or rakyat. In 1922, several people were caught and brought to the court in Kuala Trengganu. At the hearing, Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong became the advocate, defending those who were sued, but this case was closed without any decision.

In the Terengganu Uprising of 1928, Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong was said to be the chief leader of the revolt. Malay chiefs from other areas or districts referred to Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong to consult matters related to the revolt as well as to seek his opinion on the new rules introduced by the British adviser in Terengganu. Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong advised the people to just ignore the rules and keep doing their routines as before. He further stressed that the land belonged to Allah and the government could not simply impose taxes on it. Besides that, the ‘Ulama Council of Terengganu responded towards the new policy by saying that it was an infidel rule, and therefore, it must be opposed. Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong was also the prime mover.

---

125 See also SUK. Tr. 1269/1342. From Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid to Pesuruhjaya Kuala Brang, 21 Mei 1924, SUK Tr. 1269/1342, Pesuruhjaya Kuala Brang to Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Trengganu, 11 Jun 1924.
126 SUK. Tr. 599/1342, Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid to Pesuruhjaya Tanah Terengganu, 13 October 1923.
128 Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong real name was Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid. He was a respected ‘alim in Terengganu. He was also a trader and plied to Pahang, Kelantan, Patani, Siam, Kedah, Sambas, Sarawak, Brunei, and Rau. He was believed to possess supernatural power or karamah. See also Mohamed Endut, 1928: Penderhakaan di Terengganu’, B.A. Academic Exercise, History Department, University of Malaya, 1970, p. 32; Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, ‘Haji Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Hamid (Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong), pp. 13-15; Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, ‘Kekacauan dan Kebangkitan Trengganu 1921-1928’, pp. 119-120.
behind the revolt in Terengganu, fighting for the rights against the ridiculous policy of Terengganu that was seen to suppress the people.129

In this uprising, there was a Hadhrami Arab who joined the revolt; Sayyid Saggap (Saqqaf) bin Sayyid Abdul Rahman Al-Idrus. He was from a prominent religious family of Hadhrami Sayyids in Terengganu, the Al-Idrus. His father, Sayyid Abdul Rahman al-Idrus who was also known as Tokku Paloh was an influential ‘ulama in Terengganu who fought against the British intervention. After the uprising, Sayyid Saggaf was caught and brought to a hearing on 28 May 1928. He was accused of participating in the revolt. Based on available records, his name was listed in the surat kerahan to gather at Kuala Brang or Telemong. It was also stated that Sayyid Saqqaf was to attend and join the crowd where he would deliver a talk at Kampung Buluh, Kuala Brang.130

Sayyid Saqqaf denied all the accusations charged on him. Moreover, the British Resident of Perak, H.W. Thomson failed to prove the allegations. H.W. Thomson, the British Resident of Perak who was responsible to investigate the revolt however believed and had confidence that there were religious factors that led to the 1928 uprising in Terengganu which included the involvement of Sarekat Islam.131 Despite Sayyid Saqqaf’s denial, Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali too believed that Sayyid Saqqaf was involved in the uprising and was most probably part of the revolt.132

Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali further looked at religion as the triggering factor that caused a series of chaotic uprisings against the British which occurred in Terengganu.133

Usha Anyal also believes that the Islam and ‘ulama uprising was among the

130 SUK. Tr. 1295/1346, From Kuala Brang District Officer to Secretary, Government of Terengganu, 30 April 1928.
132 C.O. 717/61, A Report from British Resident of Perak, 30 June 1928. See also Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, Kekacauan dan Kebangkitan Trengganu 1921-1928, p. 328; See also SUK. Tr. 1296/1346, A Statement from Sayyid Saqqaf bin Abdul Rahman al-Idrus at Istana Maziah, 28 May 1928.
contributing factors to *Kebangkitan Tani* (Peasants’ Uprising) in Terengganu. In this sense, it could be said that religion (Islam) played a significant role in rallying support from fellow Muslims against the British in Terengganu. This is what the British was worried about most where certain parties would manipulate religion for political interests against their rule and administration in Malaya.

The transition period from the 19th to the 20th century witnessed significant changes in Malaya. This was the period where the Malays started to get exposed to international politics and ideology of reforms from the Middle East. Political developments in the Middle East countries, particularly Egypt had influenced the growth of local politics and it was observed through the spread of Pan-Islamism and reform or *islah* movements propagated by the young reformists or Kaum Muda in Malaya. The idea of reform and pan-Islamism promoted by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (d.1897) inspired Egyptian intellectuals such as Muhammad Abduh (d.1905) and Rashid Ridha (d.1935). They were among the Muslim reformists who fought against imperialism through ideas and thoughts. Their thoughts spread to the public through the publication of *al-Manar*. This magazine was widely circulated in West Asia and the Malay World.

Religious scholars from the Malay World such as Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabau (d. 1916), Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin, and intellectuals like Sayyid Shaykh Ahmad al-Hadi, Haji Abbas Taha and Shaykh Muhammad Salim al-Kalali were also influenced by these thoughts. Ahmad Adam asserts that these figures had close connections with religious scholars from West Sumatera such as Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, Shaykh Muhammad Jamil Jambek and Haji Abdullah Ahmad who had

---

considerable influence in propagating the idea of reform or *Islah* in Malaya pioneered by the young faction or *kaum muda*.\(^{137}\)

The reform was also aimed to improve the education system as a tool of progress towards modernism that resulted in the establishment of several *madrasahs* in Indonesia and Malaya. Several wealthy Hadhramis took the responsibility to establish *madrasahs* in Malaya. Ahmat Adam further adds that the awareness towards religious education among the Malays had encouraged the students to further studies in West Sumatera, India and Western Asia whereas Muhammad Abduh also believed that education was one of the best ways to encourage reforms in the society.\(^{138}\) Having experienced living under the British colonial rule ignited the feelings of anti-imperialism among the Hadhrami Arabs. Egypt was also colonised by the British since 1882. The reform movement pioneered by Shaykh Muhammad Jamaluddin Al-Afghani and his followers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha in Egypt had indirectly influenced the Malay students who studied there. Through these students, the ideas spread into Malaya and later on triggered the spirit of reformism, Pan-Islamism and nationalism in the country.

The emergence of *Kaum Muda* or the young faction in Malaya in the early 20\(^{th}\) century was aimed to carry out religious reforms in the country. They consisted of Malay graduates who received their religious educations from the Middle East. Several local figures who participated in the reform became leading figures in this struggle later on. Sayyid Shaykh Ahmad Al-Hadi (b. 1867) and his contemporaries such as Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin (b.1869) and Haji Abbas Taha (b.1885) were among the *Islah* figures who worked hard for religious reform in the Malay society to bring back the people to the right path of Islam from superstition, *taqlid* or blind obedience and deviant teachings.

\(^{137}\) Ibid, pp. 35-36.
\(^{138}\) Ibid, p. 36
that had overwhelmed the community. Sayyid Shaykh Ahmad Al-Hadi believed that this practise was the reason that hindered the people from progressing.\textsuperscript{139}

In order to spread the idea of reform in the society, they had started with the publication of the first reformed journal, \textit{Al-Imam} in 1906. After \textit{Al-Imam} ceased to publish in 1908, Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi took quite some time to start a new publication due to financial constraints. It was only in 1926 that he published \textit{Al-Ikhwan}, followed by \textit{Saudara} in 1928. He finally set up his own printing company, the Jelutong Press in 1927 that ran the publications of \textit{Al-Ikhwan} and \textit{Saudara}. The two journals were in nature anti-imperialist. Idea of nationalism, economy, social reforms and politics of the country were among the issues raised in these journals. In the interim (between 1908 till 1926), Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi got involved in administration work as a teacher and founder of \textit{Madrasah Al-Iqbal} (1908) in Singapore in 1908, \textit{Madrasah Al-Hadi} (1917) in Melaka and \textit{Madrasah Al-Masyhur} (1919) in Penang. He also worked as a Shariah Lawyer or \textit{Peguam Shariah} in Johor from 1911 until 1914. He quit practicing Shariah Law when the State of Johor started implementing English law in the state’s administration.\textsuperscript{140}

The Malays’ awareness towards nationalism was also due to the efforts made by Malay graduates from the Middle East countries, particularly Egypt. The reformist movement that took place in Egypt in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century had influenced the Malays who studied there.\textsuperscript{141} However, the number of Malay students who graduated from Egypt was too small to have a significant impact on Malay politics. However, they managed to introduce a new system of education adapted from Egypt’s education system known as \textit{madrasah}.\textsuperscript{142} Names like Mohd Salleh al-Masri, Sayyid

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
Shaykh al-Hadi, Shaykh Junid Tola and Sayyid Hassan al-Attas were among those who were involved in the madrasah education during the early decades of 20th century Malaya. Through education, students were exposed to basic ideas of reformism, nationalism, religious and social reforms in the society. Modern religious education was seen as a tool to improve the Malays’ social life and culture from religious dogma that were mixed with deviant teachings.143

The emergence of Malay literati who were English educated and had received modern and secular education as well as those who received religious education from the Middle East gave new momentum to the political struggle in the country. They voiced out problems faced by the Malays in terms of their social and economic backwardness compared to the other races in the society. Among the reformist leaders in Malaya at that time were Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi (b.1867), Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin (b.1869) and Haji Abbas Taha (b.1885). They were influenced by the Islamic reformist movement in Egypt in the late 19th century. In Malaya, the struggle towards Islamic reform in the society was done through the founding of reformed journals and madrasah education.144

Political development in Malaya in the early decades of the 20th century also owed much to the growth of the publishing industry in the country. The emergence of reformed journals such Al-Imam, Al-Ikhwan, Saudara, Neracha, Pengasoh, Majlis, Lembaga and Lembaga Malaya were anti-imperialist in nature. Among the objectives of these newspapers was to boost political consciousness among the Malays. Although the role played by newspapers was less significant, it had at least inspired the educated and conscious Malays and instil in them feelings of nationalism. The Malays as well as the Hadhrami Arabs were among those involved in the publishing industry in Malaya. At the meantime, there also emerged a new group of Malay elites who were English or

143 *Al-Imam* discusses this issue in which it calls the public to return to the true teachings of Islam. It also criticises the British administration in Malaya that was bias against the Malays and Muslims. See Abdul Aziz Mat Ton, “Al-Imam Sapintas Lalu”, *Jurnal Sejarah*, Vol. XI, 1972/73, Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, pp. 29-40.
144 Ibid.
Malay educated intellects during the early decades of the 20th century, particularly in the 1920s. They were among the vernacular-trained teachers who were involved in journalism in Malaya. They could not form a movement or organization since their number was relatively small, added with lack of confidence as well as organizational skills.\textsuperscript{145}

The spirit of nationalism grew slowly among the Malays. In fact, the struggle against colonialism in the 20th century was not as dramatic or as tough as in some other Asian countries that could have served as a bond or link to gather and unite the people against imperialism. Perhaps, there were unavoidable constraints that slow down their actions and restricted their movements from operating effectively. Since they knew their capacity in facing the British administration in the country, no such a radical movement led by the Malays were recorded. As Linda Tan suggests, most probably there was not one person who had enough courage, knowledge, and spirit of nationalism to guide and push the Malays for political change towards independence. Linda Tan describes the reform movement in Malaya as “The comparatively quiet and unorganised nature of the movement in Malaya may conceivably be attributed to the lack of a person combining Syed Shaykh’s personality and Shaykh Tahir’s knowledge”.\textsuperscript{146}

William R. Roff quoted what could have described the situation and mentality of the Malays towards Malay politics during such a period in 1928.

“The Malays are quite satisfied with present arrangements, as they know full well that if they get rid of the British, they will be worse off under some other power who would be sure to overrun the country and trample down the Malays the moment they are by themselves. It is dangerous for fatherless young chickens like ourselves, they would say, to move about alone where there are hawks and eagles hovering about ready to pounce upon them”.\textsuperscript{147}


\textsuperscript{146} Linda Tan, “Syed Shaykh: His Life and Times”, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{147} William R. Roff, \textit{The Origin of Malay Nationalism}, pp. 197.
Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi (b.1867) was one of the Muslim reformists of Arab origin from Sayyid descent in Malaya who advocated for social and religious reform in Malaya. Through writings he voiced out the Muslim dilemma, the problem that was faced by Malays who lagged behind compared to other races in Malaya. Al-Imam was the first reformist magazine published by a group of young reformists aimed at to do reforms in the Malay society. The Malays’ situation in the 1940s was not much different from the early decades of the 20th century. In the 1940s, particularly during the Japanese occupation as stressed by Abu Talib Ahmad from a speech by Lt. General S. Katayama, “...politeness and patience were two inherent traits of the Malay race, and he believed that it was possible that because of these intrinsic traits, the Malays were easily colonized by the Britain.” He further says that “... Malays must be more aggressive and more dedicated in all their endeavours”.148

Singapore

The political atmosphere in Singapore was not much different from the Malay states in Malaya. The Muslim community was a minority in the island, living amongst Chinese folks and other races under the British administration. Malays who were once the majority population in the island had become the minority group. Under British rule, the influx of Chinese immigrants had increased every year, while the number of Malays decreased ever since the British took over the island in 1824. Today, the population of Singapore is dominated by Chinese who mostly originated from China. Although the number of Muslims was small, they had a considerable influence in Singapore. The leading families of Hadhrami Arabs were among the most influential Muslims in the island, such as the Al-Saqqafs, Al-Kaffs and Al-Junieds. They were owners of

successful businesses and trading ventures in metropolitan Singapore. Apart from that, they also represented the Muslim community on the island and also in Malaya.

As time goes by, more and more Malays became educated. They became aware and realised their social, economic and religious situation that lagged behind compared to other ethnic groups in Malaya. They were the destitute and underprivileged group of all. Being conscious of their condition, the Malays started to distance themselves from other races, the non-Malays, including the Arabs, Indians, or Jawi Peranakan (local born Muslims of mixed Malay and Indian descent) and also Peranakan Arab; those of mixed Malay and Arab parents of Sayyid descent. The Malays realised that these people had had enough of Malaya’s wealth, and had left the Malays behind in destitution and poverty. All this while, the Malays had high hopes that the Arabs would assist them socially and economically. The Malays came to their senses and accused the Arabs that they were taking advantage of the Malays’ naivety. To some extent, the Malays regarded the Arabs as immigrants who tried to seize and take control of the wealth of the Malay states.

In his response towards the critics, Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi replied by advising the Malays against such emotions as the Malays still needed help from their Arab brothers. Linda Tan asserts that the response of the Malays in regards to their situation at that time could be considered as “an expression of nationalism in its formative stage” that was probably not realised by Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi. Mazlan Abdullah also opined that the Malays’ participation in politics at the national level was also due to their dissatisfaction with the Arabs (most probably the Hadhrami Arabs) and Chinese dominion and control over Malaya’s economy.

The 1940s until 1950s was a challenging period in Malaya. Many important events occurred and had significant impact on Malaya. The Japanese occupation which

149 Linda Tan, “Syed Shaykh: His Life and Times”, pp. 159-60.
152 Mazlan Abdullah, “Nationalism Tanah Melayu Sebelum Perang”, pp. 15-18
lasted for about three years from 1942-1945 affected the social, economic and political affairs of the Malay States. The British administration in Malaya was also affected by this war. The aftermath effects of the war left a huge impact on the British administration in Malaya. In order to consolidate their influence in the Malay States, the British then introduced a scheme known as the Malayan Union in 1946. However, the idea of introducing the Malayan Union was not accepted by the Malays. The Malays regarded this scheme as a plot to remove the institution of Malay Sultanates in Malaya as well as to diminish and eventually eliminate the Malays’ privileges and rights in Malaya.153

In response to the scheme, the Malays established an organisation known as the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) that was registered in 1946. The Malayan Union scheme proposed by the British was specially designed for the Malay States in the Malay Peninsula with the exception of Singapore, which was to be ruled separately. UMNO then had its branch in Singapore around 1948 known as Singapore United Malays National Organization (SUMNO) aimed to protect the rights of the Malay community in the island. SUMNO acted as an organization representing the minority Malays, particularly the Muslims in Singapore. Many Malays and Arabs were actively involved and participated in the politics of Singapore, struggling for their rights since a large percentage of the population of the island was Chinese. Living in a multiracial society demands a close social bond between the Muslim communities in the island to ensure that their rights were protected. Besides SUMNO, there were the Labour Front and the People’s Action Party (PAP). The latter party (PAP) was more organised and many SUMNO members had joined in later on.154

However, there was political fighting going on between SUMNO and PAP. The PAP’s success in getting votes from the people of Singapore had raised feelings of

dissatisfaction among the UMNO members. SUMNO tried to get back the support of the Malays in Singapore. *Utusan Melayu* served as an ideological tool to discredit the opposition party in Singapore. The racial based politics between UMNO and PAP finally reached its peak in July 1964 when riots broke out on the island involving the Malays and Chinese.155

Sayyid Alwi Al-Hadi, the son of Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi was also involved in the politics of Malaya. Apart from his interest in journalism and succeeding his father running the Jelutong Press which published *Saudara* that ran until 1941, he was also involved in Malay politics. He followed Onn b. Jaafar who started a Malay organization known as United Malays National Organization (UMNO). He became Onn b. Jaafar’s assistant since he knew many contacts among the Malays through his experience organizing *Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena* (Brotherhood of Pen Friends). Sayyid Alwi was made the UMNO Publicity Officer by Onn b. Jaafar from 1946-1951. He was responsible to promote and set up new branches of UMNO. Sayyid Alwi also had experience organizing *Sahabat Pena* (1934-1937) as its Secretary-General and also as the Secretary-General of *Pergerakan Melayu Semenanjung* from 1945-1946. However, Sayyid Alwi quit UMNO in 1951 when Onn b. Jaafar withdrew from UMNO.156

Sayyid Alwi Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi was also actively involved in the political movement in Johor. The *Pergerakan Melayu Semenanjung Johor* based in Batu Pahat was one of the active political movements in Malaya. This movement was led by Dato’ Onn Jaafar with the objective to show protest towards the establishment of the Malayan Union. Members of *Pergerakan Melayu Semenanjung Johor* contributed a lot to Derma Kebangsaan Melayu. Among the famous leading figures of this political movement were Onn Jaafar, Hussein Onn and Sayyid Alwi Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi.157

156 Ibid., p. 104.
Besides that, Sayyid Jaafar Albar was one of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) officials who was involved in the Malay political arena in the 1950s. He was then a Publicity Officer and was frequently on the move, giving lectures to the public as the party’s representative.\textsuperscript{158} He was then promoted as UMNO’s secretary-general and turned into a mass rally orator.\textsuperscript{159} In politics, religion has become one of the means to rally campaigns that proved to benefit the party in order to obtain public support. One of the approaches taken was by inviting religious leaders to give speeches in their efforts to attract crowds.\textsuperscript{160} In the Malayan political arena, the role of religion was significant to rally the people’s support towards a party. Religion also functioned as one of the means to approach the public as promoted by the pan–Islamic movement in rallying support from fellow Muslims, which was later on followed by UMNO in their political agenda in Malaya.\textsuperscript{161}

Sayyid Jaafar bin Hassan Albar was a Malay born Hadhrami Arab. He was also the UMNO’s Secretary General who supported the cause of the Malay community in Singapore. He opposed the separation of Singapore from Malaya. He suggested that Singapore should declare emergency and Lee Kuan Yew must be removed from being the Prime Minister of Singapore. The infighting and bickering that occurred between UMNO and PAP eventually caused the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman to decide that Singapore should withdraw from Malaysia. Sayyid Jaafar Albar’s service with UMNO did not last long when he resigned from the post of UMNO’s General Secretary after Singapore was announced to split from Malaysia in 1965.\textsuperscript{162}

Syed Jaafar Albar together with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia were involved in the issue of Malaysia–Singapore relations in the

\textsuperscript{158} See FCO 141/7343, Egyptian Influence in Colonies, Chief Secretary – Secret.
\textsuperscript{159} Lee Kuan Yew, The Singapore Story, p.477.
\textsuperscript{160} FCO 141/7343, Egyptian Influence in Colonies, Chief Secretary – Secret.
\textsuperscript{161} FCO 141/7343, Egyptian Influence in Colonies, Chief Secretary – Secret.
Sayyid Ja’afar Albar was known as a vocal politician, particularly when it involved the issue of Singapore. He even called Lee Kuan Yew and other Chinese as *kaum pendatang* or immigrants. Sayyid Jaafar considered Lee as an ungrateful citizen through his campaign ‘Malayan Malaysia’ from which the Malays saw it as a threat to the Malay sovereignty and *Ketuanan Melayu*. This issue could arouse racial instabilities and sentiments in the society, particularly among the Malays.

The Hadhrami Arab community in Singapore was also affected by the political changes in Malaya. Since the separation of Singapore from Malaya in 1965, the issues of identity, religion, culture, politics and language were highlighted and had become a polemic among the people of Malaya. The Hadhrami Arabs in Singapore were also affected by these issues. There were Hadhrami Arabs who were involved in the political parties in Malaya. Living under the British colony, Singapore forced the people to adhere to the new rules of the colony. The political changes that took place in Singapore also affected the Malays and Hadhrami Arab community on the island. In order to regain public support due to the Malayan Union issue, the British started to introduce policies to win the people’s hearts as well as to calm down the tensions, among which free education was provided to Malay children. They were also given free food. In order to enjoy such benefits, the Hadhrami Arabs had no choice but to change their nationality and race from Arab to Malay due to certain policies that were introduced by the Singaporean government. The PAP government had proposed free education at secondary and tertiary levels to all Malays who were Singaporean citizens only. A special funding was established to assist Malay students. The government of Singapore opened a Malay secondary school only in 1960.

---

In Singapore, Sayyid Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Saqqaf (b. 1896) was a Hadhrami Arab who was also involved in the politics of Malaya, particularly in Singapore representing the Muslims through Singapore United Malay National Organization (SUMNO). He was born in Singapore on 5 July 1896 into a well-known Hadhrami Arab family, the Al-Saqqafs. He received his early education in Makkah and then in Syria by joining the Syrian Protestant College which later on was known as the American University of Beirut. Sayyid Ahmad showed more interest in community service and joined the Boy Scouts and Red Crescent movements. He was made a Justice of Peace in 1930 by H.E. Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of Singapore. He also held the post of Deputy Commissioner of St. John’s Ambulance Brigade for Singapore.\footnote{Syed Mohsen Alsagoff, \textit{The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia}, p. 23.} In December 1951, he was elected as SUMNO’s first president. He was popular among the Malay people in Singapore, particularly in the eastern region of the island. SUMNO aimed to bring about social and economic changes to the Malays in Singapore. The Malays in Singapore were living in poverty. They deserved better education and economy uplift.\footnote{Ibid., p. 23.}

SUMNO also insisted for independence from the British colonial rule. SUMNO succeeded in getting support from the Malays, including those from the \textit{Kesatuan Melayu Singapura} (KMS). SUMNO managed to gather around 7,000 members by the early 1950s through 80 branches on the island.\footnote{Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, “The Role of Hadramis, p. 173.} Besides him, there was another Hadhrami Arab, Sayyid Esa Al-Menoar who also joined SUMNO and became the party’s Secretary General in 1961. SUMNO had direct contact with UMNO’s headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. In order to ensure the Malays involvement in the politics of Singapore, particularly their participation in the Legislative Council, SUMNO allied...
with the Singapore Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) to contend for seats in the Legislative Assembly elections. SUMNO won all three seats contested.\textsuperscript{170}

SUMNO also saw the participation of another young Hadhrami Arab from the Al-Saqqaf family that is Sayyid Ali Redha (1928). Sayyid Ali Redha was from a scholarly family whose father was a religious scholar, Sayyid Abu Bakar bin Taha Al-Saqqaf. Sayyid Abu Bakar ran an Islamic school, \textit{An-Nahda} in Seiyun, Hadhramaut. Sayyid Ali Redha joined SUMNO when he was 24 years old. He received his education at the Madrasah Al-Junied Al-Islamiyyah. He was in charge of the Telok Belangah branch in the early 1950s. Towards the end of 1950s, there was crisis between SUMNO members and UMNO’s headquarters which caused quite a number of SUMNO members leaving the party. Some of them joined the People’s Action Party (PAP) that contested against SUMNO in the following elections.\textsuperscript{171}

Sayyid Omar b. Abdul Rahman b. Taha Al-Saqqaf was another Al-Saqqaf who also joined politics of Singapore. He was elected the Vice-President of the Singapore Liberal Socialist Party in 1957 and 1958.\textsuperscript{172} Sayyid Mohsen Alsagoff (b.1914), the author of \textit{The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia} who by profession was a professor displayed interests in physical fitness, sports and body building. Sayyid Mohsen was also involved in politics in Singapore. He was elected Vice-President of the Labour Front Political Party in the Telok Ayer (Town) Division on 29\textsuperscript{th} July 1956. He was then appointed president of the Labour Front Political Party in September 1956.\textsuperscript{173}

In Singapore, Sayyid Ibrahim Omar Al-Saqqaf (1899-1975) was one of the Hadhrami Arab leaders who represented the Muslim community in the island. He was also known as Datuk S.I.O, a Hadhrami Arab. He played an important role in bringing

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., pp. 173-74, Syed Mohsen Alsagoff, \textit{The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia}, p. 7. (foreword).
\textsuperscript{172} Syed Mohsen Alsagoff, \textit{The Alsagoff Family in Malaysia}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., p. 37.
mutual understanding between the people and the British administration. He was appointed by the British in Singapore as a government leader representing the Muslim community. Sayyid Ibrahim was the Chairman of the Singapore Muslim Advisory Board since 1947. He was also the president of the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society since 1932. He also held office as a Municipal Commissioner from 1940 until he resigned from the post in 1954. He was nominated as a member of the Advisory Council for Civil Affairs during the British Military Administration of Singapore in 1946. In recognition of his public service, Sayyid Ibrahim was awarded the Singapore Certificate of Honour by the Singaporean Government in the name of Her Majesty the Queen. He was also awarded Darjah Kerabat (DK) by Sultan Ibrahim of Johor.174

Due to his service as a member of the Legislative Assembly in Makkah during the reign of King Hussein I, Sayyid Ibrahim was awarded the High Order of “The Rising of the Arab” Class II. He was also made a member of the Legislative Assembly in Makkah in 1926 during the reign of King Abdul Aziz b. Saud of Saudi Arabia.175 Based on the Political Intelligent Journal published by the British in 1948, Sayyid Ibrahim Omar Al-Saqqaf was also reported to be involved in the efforts of establishing an Islamic party in Malaya. It is said that a meeting was held at his house in Singapore on 29 February 1948. As a result, an Islamic political party known as Hizbu al-Muslimin was formed with the ultimate objective towards the effort of freeing Malaya from colonial rule and achieving independence. This meeting was also attended by leaders of the Masjumi party from Indonesia.176

Apart from that, the Hadhrami Arabs were also engaged in diplomatic relations with foreign countries. For example, Sayyid Mohammad b. Ahmed Al-Saqqaf had a good and strong relationship with the Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the leader of the Ottoman

175 Ibid., pp. 29-30.  
176 CO 537/3751, Political Intelligent Journal.
Empire in Constantinople. He was awarded the *Osmaniah Order* degree of honour from Sultan Abdul Hamid II due to his excellent service. His contribution and influence had also prevailed in the Malay World. He also received honours and appreciation from the royalties as well as rulers such as Sultan of Siak, Sultan Langkat, Sultan Pontianak, Governor of the Straits Settlement and the High Ambassador of the Malay states.\(^{177}\)

**Conclusion**

The Hadhrami Arabs played significant roles in the politics and administration of the Malay states. Although their number was small, their credibility earned them important positions and social prestige in the society. They were not only looked upon for religious advice and instructions but were also politically and administratively capable of assisting the Sultans and Malay chiefs in matters related to state affairs. Some of them become rulers of the Malay states such as in Perlis, Johor, Pahang and Terengganu. Together with the Malay rulers and chiefs, they tried to preserve the stability and peace in the country against negative and bad elements, in particular the British’s influence in the country.

In certain circumstances, the close link built between the Hadhrami Arabs and the Malay ruling class and chiefs through good contacts and marital bonds helped them in gaining trust and support from the royals and dignitaries. This connection strengthens the claim that the genealogies of the Malay rulers have direct contact with Arab blood through marital bonds, such as in the state of Johor (1699 – 1877), the rulers of Perlis, Pahang and Terengganu. The Hadhrami Arabs tried their best to be in good terms with the Malay courts which enabled them to strengthen their political and economic influence. Perlis is one of the states in Malaya that was led by the descendants of Sayyid Jamalullail who originated from Hadhramaut, Yemen. They managed to

\(^{177}\) Syed Mohsen AlSagoff, *The Al-Sagoff Family in Malaysia*, p. 11.
maintain the reign until today. However, the close relationship developed between the Hadhramis and the Malay royalty was not liked by the British.

Towards the end of the 19th and early 20th century, the role of the Hadhrami Arabs in the Malay States’ administration started to decline as the British colonials started to consolidate their control in Malaya. The residential system introduced in Malaya had indirectly and slowly reduced the involvement of Hadhrami Arabs in the Malay States’ administration. The concept of a centralised government introduced by the British with the appointment of residents to assist Malay Sultans was not only to block the Hadhramis’ participation in the Malay States’ administration and politics but also to indirectly control the Malay rulers’ authority. Gradually, the role and contribution of the Hadhrami Arabs started to decline. This situation refers to the British policy practiced in Malaya in order to impede the Hadhrami Arabs’ involvement in the Malay States’ administration as they were afraid that the Arabs would use political and religious propaganda to gain support from the Malays against the British administration in the country.

The early decades of 20th century Malaya were the crucial periods for the British when they were at war and the political issues became the main concern. However, this period (between 1930s towards the 1960s) had also witnessed an increase in the number of Hadhrami Arabs’ participation in Malay politics, especially towards the later stages of independence. Their participation was quite obvious in Singapore as they were among the biggest minority group of Muslims in the island. Singapore at that time was dominated by a Chinese population that was under the British administration. Later on, Singapore was administered by the Chinese. The Hadhrami Arab elites became representative of the Malay Muslim population. They held a big responsibility by representing Muslims to safeguard Muslims’ rights in order to ensure survival in the country.
The role played by the Hadhrami Arabs in the politics and administration in Malaya varied from one state to another. However, their roles started to gradually diminish as the British’s dominance in Malaya became increasingly powerful. The British implemented a residential system that indirectly enabled them to have control over the Malay States’ affairs. Before the British came to Malaya, the states’ political situation was totally different where there was no such division of political parties among the Malays. In general, the Malays also had their own groups and followers who belonged to certain chiefs of the ruling class. It was only in the late 19th century and early 20th century when people started to get exposed to the idea of nationalism and religious reform through the work of young reformists who studied in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt. This period also witnessed significant changes in the patterns of politics and administration of Malaya. However, the spirit of nationalism among the Malays grew slowly. It was only in the early decades of the 20th century that the growth of both Malay religious and non-religious political parties started to manifest. The focus of Malay politics then was to free Malaya from colonialism and to struggle for self-authority.

The struggle faced by the Malays and Muslim reformists became more challenging as they did not only have to face the British administration but to also remind and alert the Malays especially those in the rural areas of their social, political and economic conditions. Practically, the British succeeded in implementing their policy by dividing the population of Malaya according to their occupations and race. This policy was unfavourable to the Malays as many of them were lagging behind socially and economically compared to other ethnic groups such as the Chinese and Indians. At this point of time, the majority of Malays were in their comfort zone and were satisfied with their lives. They lived in the villages and worked as fishermen and farmers on small scale farms. They did not care and were not aware of the political issues that were taking place in the country. Undeniably, the struggle faced by the
reformists had involved intellectual strategies and negotiations. After the Second World War, several Hadhrami Arabs figures participated in the Malay political arena to struggle for Malaya’s independence, a country that finally became their homeland.