

*T*UN HAMDAN SHEIKH TAHIR



Tun Dato' Seri (Dr.) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir  
(as Head of State, Penang)



TYT Tun Dato' Seri (Dr.) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir with his wife, Toh Puan Dato' Seri Hajah Siti Zainab bt. Haji Baharuddin at Seri Mutiara, Penang.

# **TUN HAMDAN SHEIKH TAHIR**

## **His Life and Times as Seen by Himself and Others**

Based on the Original Version of Tun Hamdan's Biography

*Tun Hamdan: Guru Sepanjang Hayat*

by MOHD. NOR LONG

Translated and adapted with additional material

by D. J. MUZAFFAR TATE



PERSATUAN SEJARAH MALAYSIA  
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2001

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*Foreword*  
*by The Chief Minister of Penang*

“**E**ducator Extraordinaire” (*Pendidik Istimewa*) is the title aptly awarded to Tun Dato’ Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir in 1991 in recognition of his excellent and exceptional services in the field of education. However, Tun Hamdan’s contributions have gone beyond the formal system of education, impacting other related fields and even other sectors of the nation. He has demonstrated great statesmanship in influencing and implementing policies and in the conduct of the affairs of government.

Indeed, Tun Hamdan is a “Statesman Extraordinaire”. His place in history has been assured. Moreover, he is a great humanist, always concerned with promoting human development, community welfare and social justice. As a person he is very humble, warm and personable in demeanour, and very caring.

In fact, the name Hamdan Tahir first attracted my attention and curiosity when I received my secondary school certificate on which the signature of the Controller of Examinations from the Ministry of Education stood out so clearly and firmly. To me, it was a signature which reflected a very strong character and an immense sense of dedication and determination. At that very moment there emerged the wish in my young heart to meet this educator one day.

That opportunity came some twelve years later. Soon after I began my service at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) following the completion of my studies in the USA, Tan Sri Hamdan Sheikh Tahir was appointed as the new Vice-Chancellor after his retirement from the post of Director-General of Education of Malaysia. A fresh young lecturer then, I was able

to see him only a few times a year - during Convocation and at some official functions. However, after I was appointed Deputy Dean of Education in 1978, I had the opportunity of working directly under his leadership. My working relationship with him soon confirmed my first impression of him from his clear and firm signature.

In 1982, at the urging of some key political and community leaders, I took the plunge into politics, accepting an invitation to join the Gerakan party and stand as a candidate for the Tanjong parliamentary seat, then an Opposition stronghold, on the ticket of the Barisan Nasional (National Front) in the General Elections. This very sudden decision meant that I had to resign from my USM position by giving twenty-four hours notice. Although somewhat taken aback, Tan Sri Hamdan gave me every encouragement and support. I was very touched indeed when I found out later that he had stayed up watching the election returns on TV, and only retired to bed at three o'clock in the morning after the news of my slim victory was officially confirmed and announced.

Soon after, in October 1982, Tan Sri Hamdan retired from USM and was appointed as Malaysia's Permanent Representative to UNESCO in Paris. From that time until 1989 I was only able to meet Tan Sri Hamdan and Puan Sri Siti Zainab a few times at official State functions and sometimes at the airport. In May 1989, he was appointed the sixth Yang Di Pertua Negeri or Head of State of Penang. More frequent contacts were restored because by that time I was serving as the Political Secretary to the then Chief Minister, Dr. Lim Chong Eu (now Tun Dato' Seri).

Never did I expect that, in less than one and a half years, my former working relationship with Tun Hamdan would be resumed and elevated to another level. I was elected a member of the Penang State Legislative Assembly in the October 1990 General Elections. With the retirement of Tun Dr. Lim from his post, I was appointed and sworn in as the third Chief Minister of Penang on 25 October 1990 in front of Tun Hamdan as the Yang Di Pertua.

Tun Hamdan's career as an educator has been most unusual and unique indeed, because it encompasses nearly every position and level in the national education system. He started off as an ordinary teacher, was soon promoted to become a headmaster, and from there in successive progression, held the posts of the Controller of Examinations, the

Director-General of Education, the USM Vice-Chancellor, Malaysia's Permanent Representative to UNESCO and finally the Chancellor of Universiti Putra Malaysia.

During this process, he went into retirement three times before he was appointed the Head of State of Penang. Hitherto there had never been a single member of the teaching profession to have held such a range of posts and held them all with such distinction and success. Without doubt it will be extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, for anybody else in the future to equal such an extraordinary record. In fact, Tun Hamdan's career has been intertwined with the history of educational development in the post-Merdeka era of nation-building.

Needless to say, his appointment as the Head of State of Penang marked not only the personal achievement of a son of Penang who had achieved excellence, but it also represented a tribute to the many educators and teachers who have made contributions and sacrifices for educational development and for the nation.

As a true educator and humanist, Tun Hamdan's role has gone beyond the confines of teaching and educational administration. He has not only been a teacher all his life, but also a teacher for all people at all times. His enthusiasm and approach in education are very much in line with the teachings of the great Chinese sage, Confucius (Kong Fu Zi), expressed in his saying, *you jiao wu lei*, meaning 'Teach all comers, regardless of their background'.

This explains why Tun Hamdan, whilst holding official posts directly related to education, has not only devoted his energies to the formal educational system, but has also always shown concern for the education, welfare and happiness of every individual whom he has met and known. The impact of his devotion to education is stamped forever on the fabric of our system of education, and also on countless individuals who have benefited directly or indirectly from his guidance and assistance.

Also worthy of note is his leadership of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia (PSM) (previously known as the Malaysian Historical Society). Imbued with a deep sense of history and committed to the recording of history for future generations, he pioneered the compilation of the histories of several schools and the history of educational development in each state. The compilation gave rise to a comprehensive study of the



national system of education, as Tun Hamdan firmly believes that a nation's identity is moulded through its system of education.

At the pinnacle of his public service, Tun Hamdan has distinguished himself as the longest serving Head of State of Penang and the first *Anak Pulau Pinang* (Son of Penang) to have held this highest and most esteemed office of the State. Indeed, inclusive of his twelve year tenure as the Head of State from 1 May 1989 to 30 April 2001, Tun Hamdan has devoted more than fifty-five years in public service, a Malaysian record most unlikely to be broken. As the Head of State of Penang, Tun Hamdan has played a very important role in guiding the government and the people of Penang towards greater socio-economic progress.

His vast experience and humility enabled Tun Hamdan to perform his duties with excellence. He brought dignity and distinction to the institution of the Yang Di Pertua Negeri, the very symbol of integrity of the State and unity of the people. He often gave very wise advice to me and my colleagues in the government. He showed great compassion and concern for the disadvantaged, the disabled and the underprivileged. Every judgement he made reflected a great concern for human life and dignity on the personal level on the one hand, and equally serious concern for the societal need for stability, security and unity on the other. This was exemplified by his very careful, meticulous, and just consideration of each and every case brought forward to the Pardons Board of the State which was chaired by him.

True to his commitment as an educator, Tun Hamdan as the Head of State frequently attended various school, college and university functions as well as activities of welfare, charitable, socio-civic, youth and women's organizations, uniformed bodies such as the Red Crescent Society, St John's Ambulance Brigade and the Scout Movement. Everywhere he went, he was welcomed not just as the Head of State, but as a role model of commitment to excellence and a father figure, ever so kind and caring, ever so ready to give encouragement and inspiration.

Tun Hamdan's extremely strong sense of dedication to his responsibility and duties is unparalleled. He has often placed public duty above family matters and even above personal health and safety. One recent incident has demonstrated this very sterling quality of his. On 23 April 2001, seven days before his official retirement, he was scheduled to

deliver his opening address as the Yang Di Pertua Negeri in conjunction with the start of a new session of the Penang State Legislative Assembly. However, two nights before that, he collapsed in his own library due to heart failure, and was revived by his son-in-law, Dr. Mohamed Ali, and his daughter, Dr. Siti Khadijah, who fortunately happened to be around. This incident was kept a secret even from me as the Chief Minister, because he placed utmost importance on the performance of this last major official duty.

Tun Hamdan successfully delivered his speech at the Assembly before he was quickly taken to Kuala Lumpur and admitted to the National Heart Institute the next day for a series of procedures. As it turned out, his condition was much more serious than anticipated and it took him more than a month to recover. In fact, even the doctors marvelled at his will power and ability to overcome great odds. When I visited him in the Coronary Care Unit, he repeatedly told me that he was relieved that he had successfully performed his last important duty as the Yang Di Pertua Negeri. He was very concerned that his failure to do so would have disrupted the meeting of the Assembly and put the State in a predicament. I was deeply touched by such dedication and devotion, and I am sure all Penang citizens will have been as well.

Tun Hamdan has always been supported, encouraged and assisted by his life-long companion, Toh Puan Siti Zainab, in all his undertakings. Toh Puan has not only taken very good care of the family and household, but has also made Seri Mutiara, the Head of State's official residence, a pleasant place for courtesy calls and major official functions. Toh Puan has always been at Tun's side when he performed his duties. Moreover, as an educator herself, Toh Puan has played her own separate role in a variety of activities contributing to the development of education and social welfare activities in Penang.

What has made Tun Hamdan and Toh Puan Siti Zainab leaders par excellence in their field is their compassion and humility, which expresses itself in the care and concern that they show to everyone, regardless of religion, race or status. The esteemed positions as the Head of State and First Lady accorded to them have in no way eroded the great sense of humility with which they are both imbued.

I naturally take great pride in having been given the opportunity to serve under the leadership of this master educator and great leader in public affairs over the past twenty-five years. Therefore, I was very moved when, on behalf of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, Encik Mohd. Nor Long, together with Dato' Kum Boo, came to ask me to write the Foreword for Tun Hamdan's biography written by Encik Mohd. Nor in Malay.

The subsequent effort by Encik Muzaffar Tate to translate and expand upon the work of Encik Mohd. Nor has given me the chance to make further amendments and elaboration to my original Foreword in Malay. I regard this as a great honour and appreciate very much the opportunity to place on record my deepest respect and admiration for a mentor and a loving couple whom my wife, Kah Peng, and I look upon as our very own parents.

I wish to give my heartiest congratulations to Encik Mohd. Nor Long and Encik Muzaffar Tate for having brought to the readers in such vivid manner, the thoughts and actions of a prominent son of Malaysia, a dedicated educator and public figure of excellence held in the highest esteem by all. I am sure the brilliance of Tun Hamdan's career, his commitment and spirit of service, his intellectual integrity and moral courage, his philosophy and outlook on life, his warmth to other human beings and concern for human development as recorded in this book will be a source of inspiration not only to all those who serve the cause of education, but also to all Malaysians.

**Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon,**

Chief Minister, Penang

7 June 2001



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*A Word on Tun Hamdan  
and the Background to this Book*

I feel very honoured to have this opportunity to write a few words about this book which tells the story of the life and achievements of one of the great personalities of our nation who has carved out for himself an illustrious place in the history of the Public Services and more especially in the field of Education. I have known Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir from the time that I started to work at the Ministry of Education some forty years ago - a long time crowded with dramatic episodes and vicissitudes through to the present day. Indeed, I regard Tun as my elder brother while he and Toh Puan treat me and my family as members of their own.

Tun Hamdan is a very remarkable man in many ways and his achievements are difficult if not impossible for others to match. He has often hit the headlines in the past and reports about his activities have frequently appeared in newspapers and magazines or have been broadcast over radio and TV. Just after he had been appointed Chief Education Adviser in 1966 to replace the late Aminuddin Baki, I wrote (anonymously) an article about him in the *Dewan Masyarakat* describing his background and leadership qualities. However, a biography on the life of this unique man is long overdue. His family background, his workstyle, the way he handles problems and deals with people, and his philosophy of life which offers a prime example for us all to emulate - none of these things have up till now appeared in print. Tuan Haji Mohd. Nor Long's book, now in its English version, helps to fill this gap. It is

not written in the style of a popular best-seller, but as a serious study that provides a clear picture of how one individual, by dint of sheer grit, will-power and unrelenting effort, has risen from ordinary beginnings to hold a position at the apex of our national society, and recounts the stages that he passed through on the way. It is a story of great interest and relevance because it has as its background elements of the social history of the nation before the Second World War as well as after it. In particular, the account of the Japanese Occupation throws new light on the more positive side of that period, especially with regard to the valuable experiences gained by those young Malaysians who underwent various Japanese industrial and vocational training schemes. In the post-war period, the story covers all the significant aspects involved in the structuring of a national system of education after Independence, in which Tun and his 'soldiers' played such a major role. In fact, Tun's life and career should serve as a role model for the younger generation who are the inheritors and future leaders of our country as a consequence of the unremitting efforts, illustrious performance, and high level of personal conduct that he has consistently displayed.

The title of this book is fitting because much of its contents are direct reflections of Tun's own thoughts and viewpoints, supplemented by aspects of his personality, character and achievements as seen by others who have known him and worked with him. The dominating theme, however, is education in its broadest sense which Tun has lived and breathed throughout his whole life. Learning, guidance, discipline, the pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination are part of his flesh and blood. Every single action that he has carried out, every initiative that he has taken, and every decision that he has made are based on his innate gifts as a teacher and an educator. Whenever engaged in discussion on his favourite topic of Education, Tun is possessed of an irrepressible fervour which is patently manifest. Once when my wife and I called in at Seri Mutiara, the conversation was at first quite casual, but when something to do with education cropped up, Tun suddenly was transformed as he animatedly expressed his opinions on the matter in question and explained in detail the background to the particular action that had been taken. It is very obvious that till today Tun continues to pay very close

attention to all developments in the world of education and that his mind is still alert regarding anything to do with education, for education is his first love.

The most outstanding of Tun Hamdan's characteristics as a life-long educator is his humility. He reminds me of that great Malay intellectual, Pa' Za'ba, my lecturer at the University of Malaya in Singapore, who was always exceedingly humble even though his scholarship enjoyed world-wide recognition. Anyone who meets Tun cannot but see that he is a man of no pretensions, but at the same time that he is a man fired by a true spirit of patriotism, is possessed of great strength of purpose, and exudes the highest civility. He is also a person whose politeness of speech is quite without guile, for he would never willingly wish to hurt the feelings of others.

As a teacher, Tun Hamdan reveres and craves knowledge. Wherever he goes, he carries with him a fat notebook, which contains a list of addresses and telephone numbers, while the rest of its pages are devoted to notes that he takes down on the spot. He will carefully make a note of each minute and point of discussion when he attends a meeting or seminar – including making sure that he has got a person's full name spelt correctly. This is a most useful practice which I myself have adopted and one which could be profitably followed by those members of the up and coming generation who aspire to success. Tun is also an insatiable buyer of new books for his collection. In the past a large amount of his spare cash was spent on buying books – mostly on history, religion and biography. On visits overseas, he always makes a beeline for the bookshops. I understand that although he does not manage to read all the books that he has acquired, they are all stacked nicely in the library of his house waiting for the time that he will be free to go through them one by one.

Typical of a teacher, Tun is always anxious to share a good idea with others. A good teacher, of course, will never keep his knowledge or his expertise to himself. Tun Hamdan is no miser of knowledge. Any information or data that he receives he will pass on for others to make use of. Books which he treasures he will lend to his friends and acquaintances to help in their work. Herein lies the secret of the

development of all knowledge and science. Up till this very day I receive newspaper cuttings and articles taken from magazines which he sends to me whenever he is on a visit, so as to make sure that the fullest use will be made of them.

I still remember one particular incident that took place at a remote village called Bundu Tuhan at the foot of Gunung Kinabalu in Sabah. Present at the same gathering were Mohd. Nor Long and Dato' Kum Boo. The gathering which carried on until late at night was not held for a lecture but to celebrate the opening of a hostel built by the local villagers themselves. The occasion was enhanced by singing and the performance of the Sumazau, the traditional Kadazan dance that Tun loved to participate in. Before the dancing began, Tun, as Director-General of Education, spoke at length about UNESCO and its importance for the people of Sabah and of Malaysia as a whole. When he had finished, I whispered to him that many of the villagers were illiterate, and that many of them also were old and did not understand the National Language, but could only speak in their own peculiar dialect of Kadazan. Tun replied that he was well aware of all that, even though many of the villagers, with timely nods at the appropriate places, appeared to be following what he was saying. However, his focus was on the young, not on the old. As long as one or two of the younger members of the village had got the gist of what he was talking about, the effect of which would be to stimulate an awareness that the development of education in other countries had a relevance to their own situation, his talk could be considered a success!

Another of Tun Hamdan's outstanding characteristics is his fondness for the young, especially for schoolchildren. When Tun was Director-General of Education, he often visited schools, including those in remote areas. One of Tun's advantages is that although he tends to be long-winded, he is always interesting. He speaks in simple terms, and his booming voice both compels and convinces, reflecting his seriousness and sincerity of purpose. He was very popular amongst students, particularly those in the fully-residential schools. A recording of one of the speeches that he made at STAR, Ipoh, was played back continuously until the early hours of the morning by the students, who were anxious to listen to the words of wisdom given by their beloved former Principal

regarding important issues in life. Tun once advised me, saying: '...when-ever you are visiting a school or anywhere else where there are a number of people gathered together, don't let slip the opportunity to speak to them and to give them some advice, or tell them about the work we are doing in the Ministry or at the (Education) Office. This gives these teachers or youngsters under our charge the chance to hear and see us at close quarters so that they will know about developments in education first hand from those at the top. The impact will be great and lasting....'.

Tun Hamdan is a good and effective communicator. He has a facility for following up all correspondence with a telephone call or by personally contacting those who have been entrusted with carrying out a given task. He is not bothered about the niceties of protocol – be it high or low – relating to the particular official he contacts, but will go and see things for himself on the spot to make sure that his wishes are being properly put into effect. This personal touch, and the sincerity of purpose that lies behind it, induces those who are involved to give willingly of their best.

Tun is also a born instructor. His experiences as a teacher during the Japanese Occupation and also in the Ministry of Education honed his skills and also his awareness that only through constant training can the nation's youth be equipped to undertake the great tasks of nation-building. At the Examinations Syndicate he launched a large-scale training operation to prepare teachers and Syndicate officials for the forthcoming take-over of the examinations from Cambridge. He also gave high priority to human resource development, for wherever he served he was the initiator of active career development programmes. An officer who had been identified as having potential would be encouraged and given the confidence to strive hard in his post so as to become an efficient and successful administrator through courses and general exposure. In this respect, he was also a conscious succession planner, who identified promising young men, sent them for training, and had them groomed for the special tasks that he anticipated or planned for their futures. 'We must think big if we wish to achieve big things', Tun liked to say. He himself set a good example through his work ethic. If those who served under him worked hard, this was because they were inspired by their superior who worked yet harder than they did - arriving earlier at



the office in the morning and going back home later at the end of the day. Right from the very beginning he practised 'leadership by example'.

Amongst Tun's sterling virtues is his strict adherence to his word or promise. Tun Hamdan is a person who, as the Malay saying goes, makes 'deed meet word'. What he says, he stands by. Being totally straightforward himself, he will place his full trust in his subordinates; an admirable trait that has at times, however, led to disappointment, for there are those amongst his lieutenants who have taken advantage of this trust. He is always forthright, and never bears a grudge. Promises kept have won the hearts of his workers who consequently go all out to do their tasks with complete loyalty and dedication. This is because they know that behind the stern exterior there is a head who is caring and sympathetic and who takes pains to ensure the welfare of those under him. In fact, Tun never forgets those who are his friends or the services loyally given by those who have worked under him.

When I was Director of Studies at the Royal Military College, Sungai Besi, one day I steeled myself into writing to Tun to ask for a transfer back to the Ministry of Education, because I felt that at the Ministry of Defence I had been left for too long on the fringes of educational development. So I appealed to be given the chance to go back to the mainstream because I wanted to be in the heart of the changes that were so rapidly taking place. Tun replied, asking me to be patient because he had also been thinking along the same lines. Three months later, I received a letter from the Ministry of Education seconding me to Sabah as State Director of Education to replace the late Dato' Aziz Ismail. I was extremely grateful for his thoughtfulness on that particular occasion and, in general, for all his help and advice, encouragement and guidance that he has given me throughout my whole career ever since. I feel very privileged to have known this great man at close quarters.

This biography in its Malay and English versions is the biggest project that the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia has ever embarked upon. It represents a labour of love from us, the members of the Persatuan, for our pre-eminent Fellow, Tun Hamdan.

Tun Hamdan has made countless contributions towards the progress and expansion of the PSM over decades of service and has put his heart

and soul into the building up and enhancement of the PSM's name both at home and abroad. It was, for example on his initiative that the writing up of the histories of schools in every state of Malaysia was undertaken, which collectively now form an extremely important documentation and source of reference for future historians who wish to explore the history of education in this country. He is also responsible for having laid down the strong foundations on which the Persatuan rests today, and as his successor I feel both most fortunate and grateful to have been able to take over an organization which is so stable and which has won national recognition. More important still for the PSM's future, Tun succeeded in persuading the Government through Tun Hussein Onn, the PSM's President of the hour, to grant the Society a plot of land on which to build a History Museum. This land has now become an expensive piece of real estate, on which the PSM's headquarters will be built and which will contain a mini-museum of history. Once constructed, we hope that our revenue will be sufficient to meet the costs of the many important and ambitious programmes that the Persatuan has in mind without having to seek help from or be dependent on any quarter.

We felt that in recognition of his services and sacrifices to the PSM there was no other way more suitable and of greater value than to perpetuate Tun Hamdan's name in the form of a book which can be read down the ages. The PSM commissioned the writing of this volume to one of the members of its Executive Committee, who is also a veteran and seasoned writer and once my colleague in Sabah. Although his task was an onerous one, Tuan Haji Mohd. Nor Long succeeded in completing the writing of this book within the period of one year. He was assisted in his task by the cooperation of his fellow-members and in particular with the help and encouragement that he received from Tun Hamdan himself who has in his keeping a wealth of relevant documents and photographs, besides a host of materials procured by Tun from eager colleagues and well-wishers.

The Malay version – *Tun Hamdan: Guru Sepanjang Hayat* – has been a great success, our stock now being virtually exhausted. At the same time, it soon became apparent that there was also a crying need for

an English translation to reach the large number of non-Malay speaking readers who would be interested, especially those from overseas.

Muzaffar Tate, a well-known educator, writer and historian and a long-standing member of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia was commissioned by the Persatuan to undertake the translation project. However, what began as a straightforward exercise in translation from Malay into English ended up with the original version being further enriched by additional research and a rehashing of certain materials. The fruits of the additional research are seen in the proliferation of new footnotes and the greatly extended length of the book which now holds several additional chapters, carved out and extended from the original material.

This expansion (unanticipated as far as Tate was concerned) is largely the product of Tun himself. Tun continuously provided fresh episodes and anecdotes as his memory was jogged by re-reading about past events. Other new material came in as the result of putting Tate in touch with a number of people, including friends and those who had worked with him, to elaborate on what had already been written by Tuan Haji Mohd Nor Long. As a result a series of deadlines for the completion of the translated text receded from their original targets.

Over and above Tun's direct contribution as mentioned above, he also found a generous sponsor for the translation project for us in the person of Dato' Mohd Salim bin Fateh Din of Gapurna Sdn Bhd, for whose liberal donation the PSM is eternally grateful.

The English version represents an augmented, updated and value-added translation from the original Malay. However, I must hasten to add that although Tun's story happens to cover a very critical period in the development of education in this country, it cannot be taken as an attempt at producing a definitive history of Malaysian education. As the title given for the English version of the book – *Tun Hamdan: His Life and Times as Seen by Himself and Others* – indicates, it is the product of the reflections of one man, supplemented by those of others who were on the scene or who had the experience of working with him or in his service.

In fact, a definitive history of the development and achievements of modern education in Malaysia is still awaiting to be told. Apart from

official reports and other documents, the real primary materials penned by important players and decision-makers are scarce indeed. Few former education officers or other government servants write their memoirs or make literary contributions. For this book Mohd Nor Long and Muzaffar Tate have had to rely heavily on verbal recollections gleaned from conversations and interviews with an older generation in their greying years. These reminiscences, although valuable enough, represent memories tinged by time and the wisdom of hindsight and so cannot be taken as wholly reliable. Fortunately, Tun himself with his prodigious memory and extensive contacts was able to a large measure overcome the problems facing the writers. Indeed, I am convinced that without Tun's massive inputs, both Mohd Nor and Tate would have found it impossible to complete their work satisfactorily.

In the light of this manifest shortage of primary source material which poses a serious problem for our national historiography, I take this opportunity to call upon retired education officers and teachers to pen down their thoughts and feelings, and to put on record the contributions of their personal career. By so doing, they would be providing a great contribution towards the work of our historians (professional and amateur) in their efforts to compile or rewrite a more balanced and comprehensive history of our education system, which has played such a vital part in nation-building.

As it is, Mohd Nor Long and Muzaffar Tate have done some useful spadework, and on behalf of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia I would like to offer to them both my wholehearted congratulations on their efforts. As one who has played an active role in this project from beginning till end, akin to that of general adviser and editor, I am fully gratified by the outcome.

It is my hope that this book after all the toil and effort of the writers will be of lasting benefit to all its readers, especially those of the younger generation, because its contents provide ample materials that can fire their imaginations and spirit. This great success story of a commoner who rose up to hold one of the top positions in the land not only speaks well of the country's social mobility, but more importantly provides an inspirational lesson to the young for their own futures.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to all those who have helped and assisted in this project, especially the Chief Minister of Penang, Y.A.B. Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, who has written an inspiring and moving Foreword to this book; to Dato' Mohd Salim bin Fateh Din of Sapurna Sdn. Bhd. for his generosity in providing the funds that have made the publication of the English version possible; to the many others both among the PSM fraternity and my veteran colleagues from the Ministry of Education, who have willingly contributed in one way or another towards the successful completion of this book. To you all the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia records a big 'Thank You'.

**Dato' Haji Omar bin Mohd. Hashim**

Chairman, Executive Committee,

PERSATUAN SEJARAH MALAYSIA

1 June 2001



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*Preface to the Original Malay Version  
(translation)*

**T**hanks to the Grace and Mercy of Almighty God, I have been given the opportunity to complete the writing of this, the first in a series of biographies of outstanding individuals in our nation's history, on behalf of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia (Malaysian Historical Society). Many are those who have assisted me with this undertaking in their various ways so that it was possible to finish the task within a very short period of time. The most significant contributions have come from TYT Tun Hamdan and Toh Puan Zainab themselves, who opened the way for me to gain access to a great range of valuable sources such as private correspondence, personal notes, collections of speeches, old documents, certificates, souvenir publications, photographs, etc. which were of great help in the job of compiling, sifting, classifying and evaluating a whole host of invaluable data. Furthermore, through his good offices, Tun personally facilitated my meeting with a number of his former students and teachers, close friends and other distinguished individuals such as the Chief Minister of Penang, all of whom have served as primary sources of information. In the same manner the facilities of the Head of State's Office, Penang and its staff headed by Encik Shahul Hamid bin Abdul Kadir and, in particular, Major Jury bin Tasripan, His Excellency's Aide-de-Camp, were always made available to me to assist in any matter and in fact acted as the coordinator of the project.

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There is no greater happiness than that of a mission successfully achieved

There is no greater satisfaction than that of a triumph of the mind

The sacrifices made have been made in the name of the nation

The sweat and toil outpoured have enhanced the dignity of Man

May the Peace and Blessings of God be with you!

**Hj. Md. Noor Long**

Bukit Damansara

Kuala Lumpur

3 May 1998



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**A**s has already been explained by Dato' Haji Omar bin Mohd Hashim in his foregoing remarks, the task of translating Tuan Haji Mohd. Nor Long's original Malay version turned out to be something rather more than a straightforward translation. In fact, it involved the incorporation of quite a lot of new material as Tun Haji Hamdan recalled episodes that had not been mentioned before and directed me to consult with others for supplementary or corroborative detail. In consequence, I acquired quite a long list of my own of individuals to whom acknowledgement is due for the time and the trouble which they have taken to provide specific information, and/or provide comments on the extended text, as well as others who have helped in various other ways.

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**DJMT**

Gombak, 23 May 2001



## Contents

<i>Foreword by the Chief Minister of Penang</i>	vii
<i>A Word on Tun Hamdan and the Background to this Book by the Chairman, Executive Committee, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia</i>	xiii
<i>Preface to the Original Malay Version</i>	xxiii
<i>Acknowledgements for the English version</i>	xxv
<i>Illustrations</i>	
<i>The early years and family background</i>	between pages 100 and 101
<i>Hamdan's career with the Ministry</i>	between pages 196 and 197
<i>Hamdan in public and voluntary service</i>	between pages 324 and 325
1. Family Legacy	1
2. Growing Up	23
3. Culture Shock: The Experience of the Japanese Occupation	52
4. Raffles Graduate: 1946-1955	75
5. Education Officer: 1956-1960	107
6. Siti Zainab	136
7. Transitional: Ministry Man: 1960-1963	155
8. Controller of Examinations: 1963-1965	171
9. Professional Head - 1: Setting Priorities	190
10. Professional Head - 2: The Achievement	213
11. In the Service of Others	243
12. Vice-Chancellor: Minden, Penang: 1976-1982	262

13. On the World Stage: UNESCO, Paris: 1983-1985	278
14. Head of State, Penang: 1989-2001	295
Epilogue	329

*Appendices:*

1. <i>The Malaysian National Education Policy</i>	335
2. <i>Speech at the Official Opening of DISTED College, Penang</i>	345
3. <i>'Educator Extraordinary'</i>	351
4. <i>Education towards the Next Millenium</i>	357
5. <i>The Hijrah as Builder of Sound Values</i>	363
6. <i>Tun Razak as I Knew Him</i>	368
7. <i>The Malay Language, Education and Nation-Building     in Malaysia: A Brief Account</i>	374
8. <i>Farewell Address to the Penang Legislative Assembly</i>	388

<i>Bibliography</i>	401
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<i>Awards and Titles</i>	405
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<i>Index</i>	407
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*Except where otherwise indicated, all the illustrations provided in this book are taken from the private collection of Tun Dato' Seri Haji Hamdan bin Sheik Tahir*



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ONE  
*Family Legacy*

**Family Heritage**

**T**un (Dr) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir was born (without all those titles) on 27 April 1921 in Penang, ten minutes before Hamid, his twin, and so became styled *Abang* or elder brother.

This was distinction enough, but he was also born into an illustrious family of Minangkabau stock, several of whose members had made their mark in the annals of their country. One of these was his father who was destined to play a pioneer role in the awakening of his people, though more in the land of his adoption which was Malaya than in Sumatra, the land of his forefathers and of his own birth.

The father of Hamdan and Hamid was Tahir bin Muhammad – later to become known as Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin al-Falaki al-Azhari – who was born at Surau Kamba, Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek, Bukit Tinggi, a Minangkabau district in Sumatra, on 9 December 1869.

The titles that came to be attached before and after his name – ‘al-Azhari’ as a graduate of al-Azhar University in Cairo, and ‘al-Falaki’ for his proficiency in astronomy – were recognitions of his role as a Muslim scholar, religious and social reformer, and astronomer, while the title of ‘Sheikh’ came as the result of his close involvement, as will be seen below, in assisting pilgrims newly arrived at Mecca from the Malay world to manage their affairs and carry out their religious obligations proficiently’.

At the time of Tahir’s birth, the world was being convulsed by the upsurge of Western imperialism, reflected in the intense competition

between the European powers to acquire colonial possessions. In the Malay world this took the form of the rivalry for trade and influence that existed between the British and the Dutch. This was despite the fact that they had already supposedly reached a *modus vivendi* by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 which divided the Malay world into two spheres of influence between them, and in particular had given the Dutch a free hand to extend their influence and control in Sumatra<sup>2</sup>.

Needless to say, the peoples of Sumatra did not take kindly to the establishment of this colonial presence in their midst. The main centre of opposition came from Minangkabau, in the heartland of which lay Tahir's birthplace. This was mainly because the spread of Dutch control followed in the wake of the rise of the Padri<sup>3</sup>. The Padri Movement was started at the beginning of the century by three Minangkabau pilgrims on their return from Mecca where they had fallen under the influence of the Wahabi movement<sup>4</sup>. The Wahabi sought to purify Islam of all its unorthodox accretions. From this point of view the Padri had a rich harvest to reap in Minangkabau, for Minangkabau society abounded in beliefs and practices which were distinctly contrary to Islam. Belief in magic charms and amulets, and the practice of such indulgences as gambling, cock-fighting, drinking (alcohol) and opium-smoking were commonplace. However, the Padri mission to rid Minangkabau society of all these unIslamic traits brought them up against the traditional establishment, whose leaders opposed their campaign in the name of established local custom (*adat*).

The result was a virtual civil war, with the *Padri* reformers pitted against a conservative Minangkabau aristocracy. When the latter saw that they were on the losing side, they turned in desperation to the Dutch for help. The Dutch responded immediately to this opportunity to strengthen their own position. What followed was a series of Dutch military campaigns against the reformers, later known as the Padri Wars, which went on intermittently for almost twenty years until in 1837 the principal Padri leader, the *Tuanku Imam* of Bonjol, was defeated, captured and sent into exile. With the collapse of the organized armed resistance of the Padri, the Dutch were able to consolidate their grip over a wide area of Central Sumatra.

Nevertheless, a deep hatred of the colonialists coupled with the desire to purge Islam of all its impurities still excited the minds of Padri leaders and thinkers, who were by now all the more convinced of the retarding influences of tradition and custom. By the time that Tahir emerged as a religious leader and reformist in his own right, the significance of these historic events of the previous generation had become deeply engraved on his mind.

Their impact on Tahir was all the greater because several of the Padri leaders who had taken part in the struggle against the Dutch had been drawn from members of his own extended family circle. His father, Muhammad, better known as Tuanku Muhammad or Tuanku Changking<sup>5</sup>, the son of Tuanku Ahmad Jalaluddin *alias* Tuanku Same', had been the regent (*bupati*) of Luhak Agam at the time of the Padri defeat. Tahir was brought into still closer contact with the lore of their struggle as a result of being orphaned at the age of eight<sup>6</sup>. Following this, he was put under the care of Limbak Urai, an aunt on his mother's side who was married to Abdul Latif, the State *khatib*<sup>7</sup>, also of established and respected stock. One of Tahir's uncles was Muhammad Salleh Datuk Bagindo, an influential government official who held the title of Tuanku Larch Ampek Angkek.

On his mother's side, too, there were local chiefs who had been prominent in opposing the Dutch. Amongst these were Datok Bagindo Khatib, formerly an Assistant to the Regent of Luhak Agam, and Sheikh Alamuddin, whose official title was *Tuanku nan Tuo*. A zealous preacher and perennial foe of the Dutch, Sheikh Alamuddin had founded a religious village school (*pesantren/sekolah pondok*) which served both as a centre for religious activities and for opponents of the colonialists<sup>8</sup>.

The unswerving hostility of the Padri leaders, in particular that of Sheikh Alamuddin, towards them naturally aroused Dutch anger. This resulted in the Dutch attempts to split the movement by encouraging the aristocratic defenders of Minangkabau tradition (who, as we have seen, hardly required much encouragement) to oppose all Padri attempts to promote religious reform. Finally, the Dutch gave orders for Sheikh Alamuddin's arrest. After his capture, he was tried, found guilty of disloyalty, and sentenced to death at Bukit Tinggi where his severed head was displayed for all to see<sup>9</sup>. Yet another leader, but of a later generation,

from the line of *Tuanku nan Tuo* was Agus Salim, a cousin of Tahir's who was born at Bukit Tinggi. The major contribution of Agus to the Indonesian nationalist movement was the founding of Sarekat Islam in 1915<sup>10</sup>.

In other words, the families of both of Tahir's parents contained figures who had made an ongoing and substantial contribution to Minangkabau society as pioneers of Islamic reform and of Minangkabau independence. They not only produced eminent leaders of Islam but also, at a later stage, served as standard-bearers of Indonesian nationalism who were to leave their imprint on the image of their motherland.

In particular, Sheikh Alamuddin's fate at the hands of the Dutch became a constant source of inspiration during the later struggles of his descendants against colonial rule. It impressed indelibly on their minds that the cause of religious reform could never be divorced from the struggle for political freedom.

### **Early Education and Sojourn in Mecca**

Under Limbak Urai's guardianship, Tahir received a sound education in religion. Limbak Urai, who was sufficiently competent as a Quran reader to have attained the status of a *qariah*<sup>11</sup>, made herself directly responsible for Tahir's religious instruction. While he was still small, she taught him herself, and when he was older she did all that she could to ensure that he would grow up to be a religious leader of piety and learning. So, although she pampered and cosseted him as is the Minangkabau way with children, when Tahir reached the age of six the time had come for him to learn to stand on his own feet. A start was made by getting him to spend the nights with boys of his own age at the *surau*<sup>12</sup>, a place where they gained a fuller knowledge of the Quran. He only returned home in the mornings for his breakfast and a change of clothes<sup>13</sup>.

This deliberate encouragement of self-reliance stood these Minangkabau youths in good stead later on in their lives. At around the age of puberty the nights at the *surau* usually gave way to the second stage, at which the young adolescent was sent away from home and family to foreign parts, so as learn to fend for himself or, as the Minangkabau maxim puts it, 'to let the world be your teacher'. The

young adventurer was now free to find out things for himself, and by dint of hard work, usually as a pedlar or petty trader, to make his own living without having to depend on anyone else, least of all on those in authority. If he made good, he would eventually return home, wealthy in either goods or learning. But if he did not succeed in making his way, he would be reluctant to return empty-handed to his kith and kin<sup>14</sup>.

Like other boys of his age, Tahir also attended the local school, following the system laid down by the Dutch, up to Standard Three. After this at Standards Four or Five pupils generally joined a government school – known as the Dutch Vernacular School (*Hollandsche Inlandsche School/HIS*). To gain admission to these institutions was the ambition of every bright young student, but places were restricted to the children of government servants. However, Tahir did not follow his classmates after Standard Three because he received an invitation from his cousin, Limbak Urai's son, Sheikh Ahmad Khatib<sup>15</sup>, to go and stay with him in Mecca and continue his religious studies under the Khatib's personal tutelage.

When Tahir left home for Mecca, he was just eleven years old, very young compared to most Minangkabau boys who started out on their travels. For the sake of his studies and in order to fulfil her own aspirations for him to become a pious, dedicated and educated man of religion, who would command the respect of his friends and associates at home, Limbak Urai agreed to let Tahir go. After all, she reckoned, he would be under the direct care of her own son, Sheikh Ahmad, who could be trusted to guide and instruct him properly until her dreams were realised.

Sheikh Ahmad, who had lived in Mecca since he was also eleven years old, was well versed in its ways, in particular the way in which religious instruction at the Great Mosque (Masjidilharam) was carried out. Once there Tahir joined up with other students who had come from all over the Malay Archipelago for the same purpose. All religious subjects were taught in Malay. At the same time the students also learned Arabic by rote, sitting together in the traditional semi-circle with their teacher facing them in the middle<sup>16</sup>.

Tahir must have been a very good student. He was quick to assimilate all the ins and outs of the syllabus, from logic to grammar and



from Islamic law to Islamic history. He also acquired a good command of Arabic and a smattering of Dutch and English, and in the end was fluent in four languages (including Malay). Within no time Sheikh Ahmad made him an assistant teacher, and three years after that Tahir became a fully qualified teacher in his own right. Besides his duties as a religious teacher, Tahir also lent a hand in helping the pilgrims who arrived during the season of the pilgrimage, acting as their guide (*naqib*) to the ritual that they were supposed to follow, so that they could perform it properly. Needless to say, his efforts were highly appreciated by everyone he helped, above all by those from his Minangkabau homeland.

### The Return Home

All the same, however far a fish may swim out to sea, in the end it will still return to the same spot on the sea-shore<sup>17</sup>. And so it was, more or less, the case with Tahir, who in 1893, now a religious scholar, mature in outlook and an orator of note, felt the urge to return home, for he had been away for thirteen years. Yet, curiously enough, when the time came, he did not go straight back to Minangkabau. Instead he disembarked at Penang, where he was given a warm welcome by Sheikh Ahmad's former students who were living there. He also took the opportunity of this stop-over to renew other old acquaintances and to establish new ones before continuing on his way. Even then, when he reached Sumatra, he still did not go back to Minangkabau, but went on first to Deli and then to Riau. In fact, on this first return to the Malay World from Mecca Tahir never went back to Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek at all, leaving everybody wondering why.

The same thing happened on Tahir's second return from the Middle East in 1899 after he had taken his degree in mathematics and astronomy at the al-Azhar School in Cairo and spent a couple of years teaching astronomy at Mecca. Naturally his reluctance to return home surprised many people, and created the impression that he had even lost interest in his own family. Such behaviour was quite contrary to Minangkabau practice, as the traditional *pantun* affirms<sup>18</sup>.

One explanation for Tahir's behaviour which occurred to some of his friends was that he could still be haunted by the barbarous execution of

his grandfather, Sheikh Alamuddin, at the hands of the Dutch. Perhaps he felt that he was not yet ready to avenge the crime should he set foot in Minangkabau again. Or could it be because his aunt, Limbak Urai, whom he adored so much, had passed away? Whatever the reason was, the question remained unanswered. In the event, Tahir only returned home once, that was over twenty years later in the 1920s, as will be seen below.

Tahir's return to the Malay world in 1899 was for good, although he did visit Mecca again on a couple of occasions afterwards. But as we have seen, instead of returning to Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek in Sumatra, he settled down in Malaya, first briefly at Penang, and then in Kuala Kangsar where in 1899 he got married. His bride was Aishah bt Hj Mustapha, the daughter of a well-known and well-to-do merchant in Perak, who was to become his life-long partner.

### The Islamic Reform Movement

Whilst he was studying mathematics and astronomy at the Al-Azhar School in Cairo, Tahir had come into contact with the Islamic Reform Movement (*Islah Islamiyah*). This movement, inspired by the pan-Islamic ideas of Sheikh Jamaluddin al-Afghani and led by Sheikh Mohammad Abduh, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, was spreading rapidly at the time, its message disseminated widely throughout the Arab world by means of books, journals and pamphlets which, in contrast to the traditional religious tract confined strictly to theological matters, addressed current political and economic issues. Its aim was to highlight such issues as part of the campaign to combat Western imperialism and to unite all Muslim communities throughout the world into one brotherhood (i.e. *ukhuwah Islamiyah*). One of the main organs of the movement was *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse), a reformist journal founded by Syed Muhammad Rashid Redha, whom Tahir had met and become friends with when they were studying together in Cairo. Rashid's team produced a constant stream of articles through its columns, and the journal made a great impression on the young Tahir<sup>19</sup>.

The primary objectives of the Islamic reform movement were to make Muslims all over the world conscious of the threat that Western imperialism posed to their religion and for them to understand the urgent

need to stand up and oppose it. For Tahir this was a cause, the promotion and development of which was to be taken very seriously by all Muslim writers, especially by those whose peoples were already under the colonial yoke, as in Malaya and Dutch East Indies. He resolved that when once he got back home it would be his mission to ensure that by their efforts Muslim writers set the example for other Muslims to follow.

The first step would be to get rid of the corrupting influence of those customs and traditions based on empty and foolish beliefs which formed barriers to Muslim progress. Tahir himself had learned the meaning of the word 'revolution' from his cousin in Mecca, Sheikh Ahmad, who had impressed the necessity of purging Minangkabau society of outdated and retrogressive ideas upon a generation of his students, amongst whom was included the father of the future great Indonesian scholar, Hamka<sup>20</sup>.

### Scholar and Reformist

Nevertheless, immediately after his second return from the Middle East, Tahir was first and foremost recognized for his high qualifications as a religious teacher and for his knowledge of astronomy rather than for his reformist views. As a result, soon after his return he found demands for his expertise to be put to practical use in determining the correct time for the starting of the fasting month, an operation normally done by the naked eye. This was a duty that Tahir performed in Perak, and also later in Johor for the first few years after he had settled down in Malaya.

Alongside this, for all the time that he was living in Kuala Kangsar, Tahir carried out the functions of a true scholar of Islam, holding regular religious classes in his house. Inevitably these activities came to the knowledge of Perak's progressive Ruler, Sultan Idris I. Duly impressed, the Sultan took advantage of Tahir's mathematical expertise by commanding him to check on the *kiblat*<sup>21</sup> of the main mosques in the State and correct it where need be. He also appointed Tahir tutor in Islamic (*syari'ah*) law to the entire royal household, and in 1904 made him a member of the 'Council of the Chiefs and Religious Elders of the State of Perak'. Another official position bestowed on Tahir by the Sultan was that of adviser on *syari'ah* law to the secular high courts at Taiping and Ipoh.

Tahir performed his judicial functions with strict impartiality, basing his judgements on incidents from the life of the Prophet so as to ensure that no injustice or conflict of opinion arose. As the most senior religious official in Perak, it behoved Tahir to accompany Sultan Idris to London on the occasion of the coronation of the new British monarch, King George V, in 1911.

Sheikh Tahir's religious activities and contributions in Perak attracted in turn the attention of Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, who at the time was looking out for a religious teacher of calibre to train his own judges in Islamic law. In 1907 Tahir took up this appointment. Three years later the Sultan proposed to offer him the post of State Mufti, but this move was opposed by his Menteri Besar (Chief Minister), Datuk Jaafar Haji Muhammad<sup>22</sup>, who considered that Tahir's reformist ideas were too advanced and radical for local Muslim (Malay) society. In 1912 Tahir resigned from his post as instructor in Islamic law, but two years later he resumed his appointment at the State Religious School at Johor Bahru, and at the same time was made Inspector for Religious Education in the districts of Muar and Batu Pahat<sup>23</sup>.

Tahir took full advantage of this post to introduce a number of reforms into the local religious schools. Students were encouraged to participate in essay competitions, debates, discussions and public speaking in Arabic, activities that had never been carried out before, though boys and girls were carefully segregated during their classroom hours. He also urged them to have a go at learning English, so long regarded by the orthodox as the language of the infidel. Annual gatherings of teachers, students and local members of the local community were instituted<sup>24</sup>. All the same, however spectacular his efforts in teaching and preaching may have been, Tahir made it a rule never to accept the offer to take the lead at Friday prayers, arguing that the actual *imam* of the mosque was the person most suited to do this, and that his presence was merely as an ordinary member of the congregation. His attitude, far from causing offence, won the respect of local *imam* and *khatib* for its modesty and diplomacy.

### *Al-Imam*

In the meantime, despite all this activity as an educationist, Tahir never lost sight of his primary aim of spreading the message of the Islamic Reform Movement by means of the written word, and of founding a local journal for this purpose modelled on the lines of *Al-Manar*. So teaming up in Singapore with two like-minded companions, Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi and Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha, he set out to launch a journal there which they called *Al-Imam* (The Leader). By 1906 the three of them had succeeded in raising the funds necessary for doing this and on 22 July of that year the first issue of *Al-Imam*, with Tahir himself as its first chief editor, appeared<sup>25</sup>.

In publishing this new journal, the aims of Tahir and his friends were quite clear-cut. Their purpose was to persuade local Muslims to go back to the basics of the Quran and of the Sayings of the Prophet (*Hadith*), but without at the same time rejecting modernism as represented by science and technology. They accepted the rationalism of Western thought and saw it as a tool with which to reestablish the fundamental truths of Islam. However, such radical ideas were misconstrued by most Malay Muslims of the older generation at that time, and the message of the reformists, who were disparagingly referred to as *Kaum Muda* or 'The Younger Generation'<sup>26</sup>, was rejected out of hand.

In such an atmosphere *Al-Imam* could not hope to survive long, and two years after its first issue the journal abruptly ceased publication, allegedly because of lack of funds. Sheikh Tahir, needless to say, was still determined to go ahead and revive *Al-Imam* under another name, but in the end his efforts came to nothing. It was only some twenty years later that he found a new outlet for his ideas, namely in *Al-Ikhwān* and *Saudara*, two journals started by Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi in Penang in the mid-1920s, both of which followed in the tradition of *Al-Imam*<sup>27</sup>.

### Back to Teaching

After the *Al-Imam* episode, Sheikh Tahir resumed his role as an educationist. While he was in Singapore editing the journal, he was

helped by Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi in establishing the Madrasah al-Iqbal, a school which differed from the traditional religious school (*sekolah pondok*<sup>29</sup>) in that it incorporated some of the features of ordinary secular schools. Tables and chairs, for instance, were provided. There was a division between primary and secondary levels. There was a fixed timetable for all lessons and some non-religious subjects were added to the curriculum. However, the Madrasah failed to attract many students, because a conservative Muslim society saw it merely as an extension of Kaum Muda activities<sup>30</sup>. Then, as we have already seen, for the next few years Tahir was involved in the religious schools of Johor.

Tahir's academic attainments became well known not only throughout the Malay Peninsula, but also beyond, in neighbouring Riau and Sumatra. Many were the invitations that he received from various quarters to fill the posts of teacher or religious administrator. One of the most enticing of these was the offer of a teaching post at the Madrasah al-Masyhur in Penang, because so many of his former fellow-students with reformist ideas from Aceh and Minangkabau had now settled down there. Moreover, the students at the Madrasah itself were drawn from all corners of Malaya and Sumatra. But Tahir had not been teaching at the Penang Madrasah for very long before receiving a yet more congenial and challenging offer as principal of the Madrasah Muhammad Thaib at Parit Jamil, Muar, Johor. This second offer was particularly difficult for him to turn down, for having served for four years in that district as Inspector of Religious Schools, he was very well acquainted with local conditions. However, Tahir only accepted this post after he had fulfilled his obligations in Penang.

So, in the middle of 1925 Tahir and his family moved to Muar in order to take up this new appointment. At that time the Madrasah Muhammad Thaib had only 70 students. Two years later the number had risen to over 200, and students from outside the State were also clamouring to join because of Tahir's charismatic reputation as its Principal. He introduced a completely new syllabus along with new methods of teaching and learning. He laid stress on Arabic but did not neglect Malay, and the many books which he had brought over from Sumatra after his visit in 1926 (see below) were to be found lining the shelves of the Madrasah's library. In this way Tahir ensured that his

students could master two languages. Alongside this, Tahir tightened the school's discipline. Dress codes for boys and girls were laid down, mosque parades for Friday prayers were introduced, and once again boys and girls were carefully segregated in the classroom.

While he was at Muar, Tahir frequently received visits from old friends from far and near who came to obtain the latest news, especially about the state of affairs in his Minangkabau homeland. Many of them pressed him to go back and stay there for good because they reckoned that Tahir owed it to the community which had nurtured him to give them the benefit of his knowledge and proficiency as an established religious leader. But although Tahir took pride in the struggle of his forbears in opposing the Dutch, and grieved over the political turmoil and the friction between the older and younger generations of *ulama* which came to his ears, he did not show any enthusiasm about going back to his birthplace and settling down there.

Nonetheless, in the end because of the appeals of his friends and of the continuously disturbing reports from Minangkabau, Tahir's conscience pricked him into the decision to go back after all, if only for a short while. This would enable him to see things at first hand, and possibly even to offer some of his own ideas, as far as these seemed appropriate, regarding the bitter conflict dividing the two groups of local *ulama*. As he never tired of pointing out, differences between any two opposing religious factions never lay in religious fundamentals, but merely on issues of approach and practice. False beliefs and misinterpretations of Islam could only be overcome if there were agreement as to the basics on the part of all parties concerned, because such issues were complex, sensitive and obviously out of kilter with the true faith.

### **The Sumatra Trip**

So, once having made up his mind, Sheikh Tahir went back alone to Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek at the end of 1926 for the first time in the forty-five years of his going abroad. Nevertheless, for all the long while that he had been away, he had never lost touch with his family and old friends. He had made a point, in particular, of always corresponding with those

whom he had once taught in Mecca as well as with his former fellow-students who lived there and who, such as Sheikh Muhammad Jamil Jambek, Sheikh Sulaiman ar-Rasuly and others, had now settled down and become established as local *ulama*<sup>20</sup>. By means of these contacts, Tahir had been able to keep abreast with the latest developments in political and religious affairs in Minangkabau, the course of which were still determined by the twists and turns of Dutch policy.

On arrival, Tahir received a rapturous welcome from all his relatives and friends for whom it was like a dream come true. Their love and affection was overwhelming. For he returned as an *ulama*, a leader of Islam, and each and everybody wanted him as a son-in-law, husband or brother /sister-in-law. In other words, Minangkabau custom had come to claim him, because however rich, devout or famous a man might be, if he did not marry someone from his own community, he would be found wanting. For does not the Minangkabau adage say that such a person 'has not yet observed the tradition that come sun or rain, he remains the same'<sup>21</sup>?

Sheikh Tahir without doubt now found himself in a tight corner and a quick way had to be found to get out of it. Otherwise the whole purpose of his returning home would be lost, and his high hopes of being able to reconcile the two rival *ulama* groups with their conflicting approaches to religious practice would be dashed to the ground. But if the question of marrying a woman of his own community could be speedily settled, then he would be able to devote all his mind and energy to solving the problem of the two rival factions. Accordingly, having obtained the prior consent of Aishah back in Kuala Kangsar, Tahir got wedded not to one, but to two of the ladies of Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek at one and the same time, and with this the demands of custom were duly satisfied. But, alas, contrary to the hopes of all concerned, neither of the two new brides conceived. So, in the event the dream of bearing the offspring of a man of piety was only realized by the faithful Aishah, for fortune had failed the two ladies of Koto Tuo and had betrayed the hopes of the community to witness the birth of Tahir's offspring on the soil of his ancestors.

Meanwhile the dispute between the two religious groups became ever more bitter, much to the advantage of the Dutch who were able to tighten their grip over Minangkabau. All the attempts by Sheikh Tahir, as the honest broker, to reconcile the two parties and reach a compromise were



consistently undermined by Dutch agents. It also so happened that this deadlock coincided with the outbreak of the abortive Communist rebellion of 1926-7 which mainly affected West Java and the Minangkabau region of Sumatra's West Coast<sup>12</sup>. The Dutch immediately started rounding up all suspected Communist elements. As a result of this many innocent people ended up in jail, betrayed often enough by their local enemies.

One of these victims was Sheikh Tahir himself. Ever since his arrival in Minangkabau he had been under the constant surveillance of the Dutch, fed by false information from those who were not in accord with his religious ideas. The Dutch were also doubtless influenced by the fact that Tahir was a grandson of the Minangkabau hero, Sheikh Alamuddin, whose struggle against their power was still well remembered. Therefore, from the Dutch point of view, it must have seemed the logical move to curb the ideas of Islamic reformism which Tahir had brought along with him before it was too late and got beyond their control.

The arrest of Sheikh Tahir sent shock waves throughout Minangkabau society and, indeed, throughout the whole of the Dutch East Indies. Protests and appeals poured in upon the colonial regime. At the 18th session of the Muhammadiyah Congress at Solo, Java, Tahir's arrest became an issue for debate and resulted in the issuing of the following statement:

The arrest of an *ulama* in Minangkabau, namely Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin, who was on a visit there from the Malay Peninsula, shocked all members of the Muslim community when they heard about it. The Muslim community is dismayed because they feel that they have been humiliated by the arrest and detention for six months of one of their religious leaders, as a consequence in all probability of the jealousy and instigation of certain parties who caused the matter to be raised in the Volksraad. It is to be hoped that the arbitrary arrest and detention of Muslim leaders who bring only good to the people and are held in high esteem by all Muslims, will not be repeated. Sheikh Tahir's pronouncements have always been sincere and have contained nothing that is mischievous or wrong.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst still in prison, Sheikh Tahir naturally thought about his future which was now so full of uncertainty. He also thought in particular about

his two Minangkabau wives whom he had only just wed, and came to the conclusion there and then that he must divorce both of them. His two wives, for their part, received this decision calmly and without protest, merely praying that he be released from Dutch captivity as soon as possible. Thanks to the petitions and prayers of local leaders, Sheikh Tahir was held for only seven months, and was finally set free on condition that he left Minangkabau. On the same day as his release he said goodbye for ever to his birthplace and to all his family and friends there who were so dear to him, and went back home to his wife and six children in the Peninsula, and resumed his career as the Principal of the *madrasah* at Parit Jamil, Muar.

### Singapore Interlude

However, in 1929 Tahir moved once again to Singapore which he chose as being the most suitable place to resurrect his life-long ambition to reform Islam. The bustling entrepot was ideal for carrying out his preaching and writing and for this purpose he took up teaching at the local Madrasah al-Joned. The move also provided him with the opportunity to renew his contacts with the Singapore Arab community. He mixed well with the Arabs and made many new friends. In so doing he was able to obtain the latest information on developments in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Singapore also was a convenient place for starting the schooling of his two children, Hamdan and Hamid, who were still small. Moreover, Mohamad and Ahmad, the two elder sons who were already grown up – born in 1904 and 1906 respectively – had also settled down in Singapore on their own after having completed their studies at the Anglo-Chinese School, Penang. Like most Penang youths of those days who had been educated at one of the three English-medium schools there – i.e. Penang Free School, St. Xavier's and the Anglo-Chinese School – they had no alternative but to go to Singapore which as a commercial and cultural hub could offer a variety of occupations for the English-educated school leaver.

As the capital of the British colony of the Straits Settlements (which included Malacca, Penang, Labuan and the Cocos Islands as well) and because of its strategic position at the heart of the Malay Archipelago, all

political and commercial activity was focussed on the great entrepot. Mohamad and Ahmad had no difficulty in finding employment in the city. Mohamad got a job as translator of English and Malay at the office of the British Governor of the Straits Settlements in the Fullerton Building, while Ahmad became a hospital assistant at the famous Tan Tock Seng Hospital. They both got married and they both remained in their respective occupations until it was time respectively for each of them to retire.

Tahir decided to stay with Mohamad, who lived on the Bukit Timah Road. This was convenient for it was not far from the Tanglin Kechil Malay (primary) School, which Hamdan and Hamid attended until they completed Standard Three in 1931. Every morning the twins walked four kilometres along the railway track leading from Bukit Timah to Johor Bahru under the watchful eye of their parents – that is, until Tahir decided that the family should go back to his wife's place in Kuala Kangsar once more.

However, before Tahir himself went back to Kuala Kangsar, he performed the pilgrimage, staying in the Holy Land (Saudi Arabia) for two whole pilgrim seasons. While in Saudi Arabia he revisited the school of the Shafi'i Sect at the Great Mosque at Mecca and on a trip to Egypt he observed the progress being made in the modernization of the al-Azhar University in Cairo as well. He returned to his family in Kuala Kangsar in late 1931.

### **Back at Kuala Kangsar: propagandist, journalist, educationist - the last round**

From 1931 onwards, Tahir stayed permanently in Kuala Kangsar, apart from occasional visits to Penang in connection with the articles he was now contributing to *al-Ikhwān*, *Saudara* and *Majlis*. Through the medium of a regular column in *al-Ikhwān* which appeared under such headings as 'Choosing the Right Path in Islam', and 'Guide to Proper Conduct for Muslims', Tahir expounded his views on Islamic reform, emphasizing that:

To return to the true path of Islam does not mean adding on things which the Prophet never taught; nor does it mean whittling down the divinely-

inspired laws of our Faith. What it does mean is to go back to its basic tenets and to evince a genuine desire to learn about Islam as it was in the days of the Prophet and his companions, a time when Islam spread with great success.... Do not add things that are only a waste of time.

In the same vein, Tahir urged Muslims to purge their beliefs of all traces of the foolish myths and fantasies of their ancestors, and go back to the true source of Islam, namely the Quran and the Sayings of the Prophet (*Hadith*)<sup>54</sup>.

Tahir never lost his enthusiasm for the topic of education in his articles for *Saudara*, *Majlis*, *Bumiputera* and similar academic magazines<sup>55</sup>. In a verse which he wrote for one magazine, Tahir stressed how important it was for the Malays to make education their top priority:

Oh, all you who to school or college go,  
Use your knowledge and your mind;  
Your folk the path of truth to show,  
So wasteful thoughts are left behind.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, as far as education was concerned Tahir looked far ahead into the future, a legacy of what he had observed as a student at Mecca and Cairo. For it was there that he had suddenly realized just how far the Malays lagged behind in this all-important sphere. Years later in Perak, during the time of Sultan Iskandar Shah, he went so far as to propose that a university be established in the State, and was bold enough to address the Ruler himself on the subject. Part of Tahir's memorial to the Sultan ran as follows:

*Ampun Tuanku, beribu ampun...*

We beseech Your Royal Highness to bestow your most gracious attention to the subject of our request, namely that at an appointed place a congress of all faculties of learning, which they call a university, may be established in this State (of Perak), especially so that the Muslim community in general may receive instruction in all fields of knowledge from those that have long been established to those that are new, and that one of those fields should be the study of Islam and its language (Arabic) which will show the way for the people of the East to transact their affairs in Egypt and other places....

Tahir then went on to propose that the curriculum for such an institution should include secular subjects such as geography, history and mathematics, and also provide for a greater emphasis on the study of Malay as a language, including classical Malay, while not leaving English out of account. He stressed that the purpose of the university was to enhance the common man's understanding of practical affairs, to develop his intellectual faculties, and to arouse his self-awareness and his sense of social obligation. By these means the ordinary Malay would ultimately acquire the desire to extend his knowledge still further and so be equipped to withstand the strong pressures of colonialism and better defend the interests of the Muslim community<sup>17</sup>.

### **The Closing Years**

Throughout his life Sheikh Tahir's reputation rested on his achievements as a progressive Muslim leader and a prominent educationist. However, although Tahir was clearly opposed to colonialism, his role in the context of Malay nationalism was marginal. In this connection, by the 1930s nationalist feeling amongst the Malays which had been fomented by a group of religious and lay Malay leaders had become more overt. Nationalistic leaders such as Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Ishak Haji Muhammad, and Ibrahim Haji Yaakob were setting up political organizations which were becoming a matter of concern to the British colonial authorities. A number of these leaders had dealings with Tahir, sometimes in order to seek clarification about some religious matter, but sometimes to discuss the future of the Malays who as a community were now finding themselves apparently placed almost at the bottom of the pile in their own country as a result of the flood of immigrants from China and India. In a poem entitled 'The Livelihood of Man', Tahir clearly alluded to this problem, as the following excerpt from it shows:

These facts of life are very real,  
He who strives will sure progress;  
For he who works hope is the deal,  
For kith and kin it brings success.  
But those who do not their living earn,  
Leave their breed and folk in chains,

As creatures that live but cannot learn,  
Oh friends, think of what action gains<sup>38</sup>

This new sense of nationalism was further promoted by the Japanese Occupation, especially with the merging of the two territories of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra under a common Japanese military administration. Religious leaders, journalists and nascent politicians frequently came together and discussed the benefits that a strengthening of religious principles and the achievement of independence would bring to the Malays. However, Tahir did not join any political organization, even after the Japanese Occupation when the political situation in Malaya was so totally different from what it had been before. For now he was ripe in years and his time was nearing its end. In fact, Tahir never lived to see the day when the country finally gained its independence, because he breathed his last on 26 October 1956 at the age of 87. He was laid to rest in the Muslim cemetery in Jalan Baru, Kuala Kangsar<sup>39</sup>.

Quite apart from his role as a teacher and religious reformer, Sheikh Tahir's role in reviving the science of astronomy in Islamic studies in South-East Asia was very significant. In presenting a working paper entitled 'The Importance of Islamic Astronomy in Islamic Studies as a Civilization Element' delivered at the University of Brunei Darusalam in 1995, Professor Mohammad Ilyas, of the Unit of Astronomy and the Atmosphere, University of Science, Penang, declared:

Sheikh Tahir indeed set the best possible example, for he laid stress on the role of astronomy as a facet of Islamic studies, particularly with regard to Islamic law. For the past hundred years the science of astronomy has been closely linked with Sheikh Tahir al-Falaki al-Azhari. He played a leading role in making this field part of a collective discipline through the teaching, application and dissemination relevant to Islamic knowledge in this part of the world amongst the ulama who are responsible for determining the local Islamic calendar.

From the point of view of astronomy, Tahir's essay on 'The Determining of Time' published in 1935 was of great significance in that in it are discussed the correspondence between the reckoning of the *Hijrah* and the Christian eras, the direction of the *kiblat*, and the hours of prayer down the ages. His second most important work, *A Handbook of*

*Arithmetical Tables*, which included the use of logarithms, was designed to instruct laymen how to work out the correct times of prayer and the direction of the *kiblat*. This book was published in 1941<sup>6</sup>.

The death of Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin marked the passing of a religious leader, who was eminent in the fields of astronomy, education, and journalism, as well as of a man whose ideas harboured the seeds of Malay nationalism. For the best part of a century he gave his unstinted service to the uplifting of his religion, his people and his country. A man of many parts, far-sighted and ahead of his time, these formed his legacy to his children, one of whom, Hamdan, was to make his own contribution towards realizing the lofty vision of this great religious idealist and innovator.

1. i.e. traditionally a Muslim resident in Mecca (local Arab or other) who acts as a kind of agent for helping new pilgrims in this way is called Sheikh.

2. Bernard H.M. Vlekke, *Nusantara, A History of Indonesia*. The Hague and Bandung, W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1959, p.317. The Dutch always refer to it as the Sumatra Treaty.

3. The origin of the term 'padri' here is disputed by scholars. Some say it comes from the word 'padre' meaning a Christian priest; others argue that it is derived from 'pidari' a corruption of Pedir, the name of a well-known port of embarkation for the pilgrimage in northern Sumatra.

4. The Wahabi sect originated in central Arabia, founded by Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab ca. 1740. It was a thoroughgoing puritanical reform movement that reached the peak of its political influence when, with the military backing of the local emirates, Mecca fell into its hands in 1806. Its political power was broken 12 years later by Pasha Mehmet Ali of Egypt, but its profound religious influence remained. The three Minangkabau pilgrims in question were, according to Sanusi Pane (*Sedjarah Indonesia*, djilid 2, Djakarta, PPKPP&K, 1956): Hj. Miskin from Agam, Hj. Sumanik from Limapuluh Kota, and Hj. Piabang from Tanah Datar.

5. Yulizal Yunus, *Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin, Ulama Pembaharu Abad ke-20 Peranan dan Identitas*, Ianib Press, Indonesia, p.5. Incidentally, 'Tuanku' was not an aristocratic title, but a Minangkabau honorific bestowed on a district head – see *Kamus Dewan*, 3rd ed., Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996.

6. Actually, his father, Muhammad, died when Tahir was only two years old; his mother died when he was eight.

7. i.e. literally 'the reader of the sermon in the mosque'

8. Haji Bachtiar Djamily, *Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin al-Falaqi al-Azhari*, Jakarta, P.T. Kreasi Jaya Utama, 1994, p.13.

9. *ibid.* p.16.

10. Yulizal Yunus, *op.cit.* p.6.

11. i.e. holding the official status of Quran reader

12. i.e. a place of worship used also for religious instruction, etc., but without a congregation large enough to earn the status of a mosque: the Islamic equivalent of the Christian chapel.

13. Haji Bachtiar Djamily, *op.cit.* p.19

14. *Ensiklopedia Nasional Indonesia*, vol.10, Jakarta, P.T.Cipta Adi Pustaka, 1990. pp.320-2.

15. Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabaw was born at Bukit Tinggi in 1859 and died at Mecca in 1916. He had the unusual distinction for a non-Arab of being appointed Imam for the Shafi'i School at Mecca and taught at the Great Mosque there. Many of his Malayan students became the heads of *pondok* schools when they returned home.

16. This mode of learning is known as *halaqah* in Arabic. Haji Bachtiar Djamily, *op.cit.* p.24.

17. i.e. *Sejauh mana seluang melaut, akhirnya balik ke tepi juga* (Malay proverb)

18. e.g. Singkarak kotanya tinggi,  
Sumanik mendada dulang:  
Awan berarak hamba tangisi,  
Terkenang dagang di rantau orang

The walls of Singkarak rise steep,  
Stout shields guard Sumanik's strands:  
As clouds sail by I weep  
For those who roam in foreign lands.

A *pantun* is a quatrain with double meaning or hidden allusions, a special form of Malay verse. Minangkabau *pantuns* liked to dwell on the return of the wanderer.

19. William Roff, in his book on Malay nationalism, states that 'it is clear that he (Tahir) was profoundly influenced by the reformist ideas current in the "Al-Manar Circle" in the last years of the century'. W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya Press, 1967. p.61.

20. Roff, *ibid.* p.62.

21. *kiblat*: i.e. (pointing in) the direction of the Ka'abah in Mecca, which all Muslims must face when they perform their prayers. All mosques should be so orientated for this purpose, so that their congregations are facing in the right direction.

22. i.e. the father of UMNO's founder, Dato' Onn bin Jaafar.

23. Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam. Its Role in Malay Society, 1906-1908*, Kuala Lumpur, Pustaka Antara, 1991. p.123.

24. Haji Bachtiar Djamily, *op.cit.* p.47.

25. A.M. Iskandar Haji Ahmad, *Persuratkhabaran Melayu, 1876-1968*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1973. p.6.



26. The label *Kaum Muda* for the reformists stuck, while at the same time the conservatives or reactionaries who were their elders ended up by being known as the *Kaum Tua* (i.e. 'the older generation') The great debate between the two factions lasted up till the eve of the Japanese Occupation. See Awang Had Salleh, *Pendidikan ke Arah Perpaduan. Sebuah Perspektif Sejarah*, Petaling Jaya, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1980. p.29.

27. A.M. Iskandar Haji Ahmad, op.cit. pp 18 & 20.

28. i.e. literally 'hut schools', because the students who attended them lived in their own little huts in the compound of their *guru* or teacher.

29. Awang Had Salleh, op.cit. p.10.

30. Haji Bachtiar Djamily, op.cit. pp. 48-57

31. i.e. 'Belum memakai adat Minangkabau yang tak lapuk dek hujan. dan tak lekang dek panas'. *ibid.* pp.58-61.

32. G.T. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1963. p.84.

33. Volksraad = People's Council, a representative body for the Dutch East Indies set up by the Dutch. See Yulizal Yunus, op.cit. p.23

34. Yulizal Yunus, *ibid.* pp.99-100

35. As a sideline, he also translated books from Arabic into Malay, including a detective story very popular at the time entitled *Rokambul*.

36. i.e. Ayuhai sekalian ahli pelajaran,  
Gunakan ilmu serta fikiran;  
Angkatkan kaummu daripada keterlanjuran,  
Tunjukkan bangsa jalan kebenaran

37. Yulizal Yunus, op.cit. pp.70-1.

38. i.e. Kehidupan ini dapat merasa,  
Siapa jua berusaha berjasa;  
Membuat perkerjaan faedahnya asa,  
Memberi kebajikan kaum dan bangsa  
Orang yang tidak mengambil habuan  
Kaum dan bangsa dibiar tertawan,  
Hidupnya sama seperti haiwan,  
Fikir dan tilik ayuhai ikhwan.

39. The Museums Department has proposed that his grave be gazetted as a national monument in recognition of his great contribution to the nation.

40. In recent years, the Penang State Government has built an observatory and centre of astronomy named after him at Pantai Acheh on the Island in recognition of his contribution in this field.



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TWO  
*Growing Up*

**The Move to Kuala Kangsar**

**S**heikh Tahir's decision to go back to his wife's home at Kuala Kangsar had not been an easy one. He had been on the move for so long – from Penang to Muar and from Muar to Singapore – all in the cause of imparting the knowledge which was his and of making use of the influence which this gave him to serve the up-and-coming generation of his people, besides pursuing his own religious mission in life. He was always welcome in those circles whose members he had got to know well. Indeed, it was for ever their hope that he would settle down with his family in their midst so that they would continue to derive the benefit of his presence. However, in deference to his wife, Aishah, who put the interests of her children first and wanted to make sure that they received an education which was smooth and uninterrupted, he had made up his mind to go back to Kuala Kangsar. For, in Aishah's opinion, their own home was the ideal place for the children's education, while the town possessed all the necessary schooling facilities that she could ever dream of.

Looking back on the role of his mother whom he loved so much, and on the great influence that she had had on the mental and physical development of both his twin brother, Hamid, and himself while they were still in the years of early childhood, Hamdan has written:

My mother was a caring person who devoted her body and soul to her family. She was not an educated person like my father. My grandfather, Haji Mustapha, was very conservative and old-fashioned, but strong-

willed. He made known his stand that if any of his daughters or grand-daughters ignored his advice and went to school, he would disown them. My mother's character was quite different from that of my father. I adored my mother while, to tell the truth, I was never wholly at ease with my father. My father was exceedingly strict. He would never allow us to play such games as 'Snakes and Ladders', but expected us to study all the time. Only as I grew older did I begin to appreciate my father's point of view. I now realize that he was a man ahead of his time. And I also now realize that he was the first person to have had a deep influence on me'.

Hamdan's mother, like other women of her generation, had never escaped from the tight cocoon of the mores of traditional Malay society which regarded education for girls with the deepest suspicion. It was enough that education should be given to boys, the future breadwinners and moulders of families. Furthermore, from the religious point of view, it was considered not right for girls to study side by side with boys. Nevertheless, the authorities did not allow such old-fashioned ideas to go unchecked. In order to get round them, separate schools for girls were opened, starting with two in Perak in 1890. By 1894 there were already seven girls' schools in the state.

However, to say that Islam was an obstacle in the way of education for girls is a mistake. The real obstacles were outdated traditional attitudes and the narrow interpretation of Islam which prevailed in Malay society at that time. However, with the setting up of separate schools for girls, the old prejudices against allowing them to receive a formal education were gradually overcome. But now a new problem arose: how to get girls to continue with their schooling once they had reached the age of ten or so? For it was normal practice amongst the Malays to keep their daughters indoors at home when they had reached the age of puberty right up till the time that they got married; in fact, many of them were married off while they were still young.

Although Aishah had also been confined to the house when she was of age and had never received any formal education, she had been provided with adequate instruction in religion during her childhood so that later she could read the Quran well enough so as to be able to teach her own children when she got married. Out of deference to the wishes

of their conservative-minded grandfather, Aishah did not permit Hamdan's two sisters, Rahmah and Azizah, to go to school. However, with her own religious background and training, Aishah was in a position to ensure that all her six children were brought up in the proper Islamic manner. All the same, her task as a parent was not made any the easier by the fact that Tahir's duties as a leading religious scholar often kept him away from home as he travelled up and down the Peninsula and in neighbouring Sumatra and Riau in the execution of his responsibilities. As a result, the burden of bringing up and educating the children with all the love and attention that she could give them rested squarely on Aishah's shoulders alone.

So, when in Singapore Aishah proposed to her husband that they should all go back to Kuala Kangsar in order to resume their life together and devote all their attention to the children's upbringing in a happy family atmosphere, Tahir had listened and agreed. The family moved back to Kuala Kangsar in 1931. This was at a time when the Great Depression, which had begun two years earlier, was at its height, and when the prices of rubber and tin, the mainstays of the Malayan economy, were at their lowest and unemployment was rife<sup>2</sup>.

Tahir and Aishah had already decided that, once back in Kuala Kangsar, Hamdan and Hamid were to continue their studies at the Government Malay School there<sup>3</sup>. The twins did not face any problem in adjusting to the new school because their knowledge of Malay, English and Arabic already acquired at the Madrasah Haji Thaib in Johor and the Tanglin Primary School in Singapore was quite adequate for them to be able to hold their own.

The Kuala Kangsar school was one of the oldest Malay primary schools in Perak<sup>4</sup> and was also the central school for the Kuala Kangsar District. Kuala Kangsar, on the Perak River, had grown up in size and importance as an area of Malay settlement as a consequence of first Sayong (across the river opposite to Kuala Kangsar), and then Kuala Kangsar itself becoming the residence of the Sultans of Perak<sup>5</sup>. The steady increase in the local population which followed led to the decision of the state government to open up a Malay school there based on British ideas of modern education.

## **The Special Malay Class**

The syllabus for Malay schools at the time was a simple one based on the three 'Rs' and went only as far as Standards Five or Six. A boy in the Malay medium who wanted to continue with his studies up to secondary level, which would mean switching to English, could only do so by sitting for a special entry examination at Standard Four (i.e. to show his ability), passing which would qualify him for entry into the so-called 'Special Malay Class', which was conducted in English, for two years and from there gain eventual admission into an English-medium secondary school. The Standard Four examination was highly competitive and only the best could hope to pass. The Special Malay Class had been specially established for Malay primary schoolchildren but places in it were strictly limited'.

Early in 1932, after having successfully sat for and passed the Standard Four examination in the Malay School, Hamdan and Hamid were admitted into the Special Malay Class (First Year) at Clifford School nearby. All this was thanks to the efforts of Sheikh Tahir who was determined to see that his two sons mastered English, for although he could not speak the language fluently himself, he realized its importance for their future'. If they were up to it, Tahir also wanted them to acquire a proper command of Arabic and French later on. On their first day at Clifford School, he took them himself on foot from their house at Kampung Basong, behind the Kuala Kangsar railway station, to the school which was about two miles away.

Although Hamdan and Hamid had now finished their education in the Malay medium, they were fortunate enough to be able to continue studying at the Malay School every weekend up to Standard Six (with the approval of the school's headmaster), taking advantage of the fact that English-medium schools took Sunday for their weekend break whereas the Malay schools took Friday off. This meant, of course, that the two boys had no free time at all but studied all seven days of the week. However, they managed to take all this in their stride. As for their father, this seemed to be a good way of killing two birds with one stone – they would acquire proficiency in Malay and at the same time it would help sharpen their minds.

The British purpose in providing secondary education for a select number of Malay children was in order to ensure that they could fill administrative posts or become suitably qualified leaders of the Malay community. It was not in order to give a broader education *per se*, a policy which was justified on the grounds that they did not wish to upset the rural way of life, for education, so it was argued, that was not adjusted to local wants must lead to distortion and social unrest. So English-medium education was limited by means of scholarships to Malay students who were intelligent and hardworking<sup>9</sup>.

The Special Malay Class was established so as to overcome the problem of bringing the standard of the English learned by students from the Malay medium up to the same level as that of the students whom they joined on entering the English-medium stream<sup>10</sup>. For it was established policy that Malay students should go to Malay-medium schools first so that they would not forget their own language and culture. Those who gained admission to the Special Malay Class only studied for two years there, with the emphasis being placed on the English language so as to enable them to join the normal stream in English-medium schools at Standards Four, Five or Six according to the progress that they had made. This system came to be severely criticized in the Barnes Report on Malay Education of 1951<sup>11</sup>. Such criticism emanated from circles which did not understand the local situation at the time and did not believe in the scheme. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Today there are many administrators, graduate teachers, political leaders and prominent persons, most of whom have now retired, who were enabled to enter English medium schools as a result of joining the Special Malay Class. Amongst those who had their schooling with Hamdan in Kuala Kangsar were Raja Mohar bin Raja Badiozaman and the late Mohd Suffian Hashim.

However, there were also many who fell by the wayside or who left in order to find work before they had finished their term because their families could not afford to support them any longer. In this respect Hamid and Hamdan were fortunate in that they came from a family of some means and so were able to get on with their studies successfully without facing domestic problems which could have affected their progress. Furthermore, Hamdan and Hamid were selected for the Special

Malay Class because they had already received a sound schooling, and whose wholesome home background was reinforced by their father's stern discipline and encouragement of the reading habit.

Before the Second World War, Kuala Kangsar could boast of having three English-medium schools – Malay College, Clifford School, and the Government Girls School. Except for the Malay College, these schools offered a Special Malay Class for all Malay students regardless of background or descent<sup>12</sup>. After two years in the Special Malay Class, the students were able to join the normal English medium classes at Standards Four or Five.

Students in the English medium stream came from various races. Most of them were Chinese or Indians because they lived in the towns where educational facilities were available. The climb for Malay students up the secondary school ladder was steep and strewn with thorns all the way to the top. The number of them who succeeded in gaining admission to the Special Malay Class, all of which were found only in town schools, was small. The facilities for study, with which they were provided, were also limited, especially for those who had to continue living with their own families, most of whom were poor. In order to overcome this problem the government provided hostels equipped with facilities for study to cater for pupils from the rural areas.

### **Challenges and Competition at the Clifford School**

After the King Edward VII School in Taiping, Clifford School was the oldest secondary school in Perak. It had started in 1887 as a single class of forty students in the English medium, and was housed in the Malay School. By the beginning of the twentieth century, what should have properly been called the Government English School, Kuala Kangsar, was known as Hogan's School after its first headmaster, an Englishman called James Percival Charles Hogan. The school was now a wooden building with plaited bamboo walls standing in the compound of the Malay School of the royal town. In 1928, its name was changed to Clifford School, after Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay States of the day. There is also another school named after Sir Hugh Clifford at Kuala Lipis in Pahang.

Once embarked on his English medium education in 1932, Hamdan no longer allowed himself to be deflected, but gave his undivided attention to his lessons. He was known to his schoolmates as a 'book-worm' and also as 'the son of a pious man', yet who enjoyed playing basket-ball, a game that was generally very popular amongst Chinese schoolboys. His character differed from that of his twin brother, Hamid, who was of a more easy-going disposition, tended to be a bit naughty and playful, and on occasion was to be seen loafing around town with his friends.

Nevertheless they were clearly very attached to one another as children. 'We were very close. We liked to play marbles, fly kites and play football, but when it came to studies our interests were different'. So close were they that they were virtually inseparable. Both were members of the same 'house' (Hogan House) at school. However, Hamdan was the clever one and so he managed to get a double promotion, leaving his classmates behind after Special Malay Class Two, and won a scholarship worth \$8.00 a month. His strong desire to learn, alongside the influence of his disciplinarian father, enabled him to complete his schooling in the English medium within six years. He passed his Senior Cambridge Certificate exams in 1938.

The schoolmate who provided him with the keenest competition at school from the Special Malay Class One onwards was Raja Mohar bin Raja Badiozaman<sup>11</sup>. In 1933 Raja Mohar won the second prize on the school's Speech Day, with Hamdan coming behind him, and once again when they were in Special Malay Class Two in 1934 Raja Mohar won third prize, leaving Hamdan behind. On the other hand, when they were both in Standard Six it was Hamdan's turn to gain first place in class, with Raja Mohar finishing third. Healthy competition such as this was good because it had a positive effect on the performance of the other students in class. The race to win first prize always acted as a spur to work harder and to become highly motivated. In the case of Hamdan and Raja Mohar, the high standards which they set one another enabled them both to get double promotion and to finish their secondary schooling in a comparatively short time<sup>12</sup>.

Hamdan and Raja Mohar were also rivals in extra-mural activities through their respective Houses when they were in Standard Six. Raja



Mohar was in Head House and Hamdan (with his twin brother) in Hogan House. Head House often beat Hogan House in various sports and games, above all in cricket, but Hamdan became both basketball and cricket captain when he was in the senior classes. Nevertheless, the school was more prominent in hockey, understandably so because many boys liked the game and were very good at it. The school's hockey players were able to travel over almost half of the Peninsula – up to Alor Star, Penang and Taiping, and down to Ipoh and Tanjong Malim. The Clifford School team often won, even when playing away on their opponents' turf. So it comes as no surprise that when the Malay Hockey First Eleven went overseas to Hong Kong and Macao in 1934, they included five players from Clifford School. One played as full back while the other four were all forwards. Out of the four matches which they played, the Malayan team won the lot.

### **The Boy Scouts and a Momentous Occasion**

Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, was also famous for its very active Boy Scout Movement<sup>15</sup>. The school had three troops – the Second, Fourth and Fifth. Hamdan was very interested in the Scouts because there were so many things to learn, particularly in terms of character building. Accordingly, he joined the Scouts the moment he joined the school and was taken into the Fourth Troop. The moving force behind the Scouts was Bernard Preedy (headmaster, 1930-7). By dint of his efforts and leadership, and with the approval of the Scouts Commissioner for Perak, the Clifford School Scouts were given the honour of hosting the Perak Scouts Jamboree held in November 1934.

The guest of honour invited for this occasion was none other than Lord Baden-Powell, the World's Chief Scout. His visit to Kuala Kangsar left an indelible impression on the minds of scouts and teachers alike all over the country, but on those at the Clifford School in particular. At that time Hamdan was in Standard Five and had become an active scout himself. He had started off by getting the Tenderfoot Badge, then one by one climbed the rungs of the ladder from Patrol to Troop Leader, until in the end he succeeded in gaining the award of the

certificate and badge of a King's Scout. He managed to achieve all this within the period of his involvement in the movement from 1932 until he left the school in 1939.

At the time of the visit of Lord Baden-Powell (BP for short) Hamdan had not yet achieved any major position in the movement. The honour of escorting and presenting the salute to BP who had come from England expressly for the occasion was given to the King's Scouts. Having arrived by train, BP and his wife were greeted by Preedy and all the State Scout leaders in a colourful ceremony and was then taken to the Polo Ground. There, scouts from all over Perak were ready waiting, and as soon as he appeared they gave him three rousing cheers. BP was amazed at the size of the gathering, along with the smart and spruce uniforms of the scouts themselves. He praised the high standard displayed by the Malayan Scout Movement.

The arrival of Lord Baden-Powell at the Polo Ground had long been looked forward to. I was one of the scouts lined up for his inspection. Without my realizing it, the tassle pinned to my uniform had become detached and was hanging down loosely from my shoulder, making me look far from smart, and he adjusted it for me! I was taken aback for a moment when quite unexpectedly I found this large Englishman towering above me. All I could think about was the remarkable thing that he had just done.

relates Hamdan, reminiscing on that momentous occasion in his life over half a century ago.

Baden-Powell's visit to Malaya was most significant and made the Boy Scout Movement still more popular amongst school students and youths in general. Indeed, the aims of the Movement are highly laudable. They provide activities which can give an individual self-confidence, help develop his character and make him a leader of men, enabling him to stand on his own feet and to be a loyal companion as well, who knows to keep clear of bad company. Moreover, the knowledge and expertise that the scouts progressively acquired from Class Two up to the level of King's Scout proved of lasting benefit to them when they left school.

## Preparing for the Future

Before Hamdan succeeded in becoming a King's Scout, Mohamad Suffian bin Haji Hashim was already in the Second Troop. Suffian's personality dominated one aspect of school life up till the mid-1930s as a result of his brilliant results in the Senior Cambridge at a very early age. He went on to obtain a Queen's Scholarship to the University of Cambridge, the first Malay in all the Peninsula to do so<sup>16</sup>. Preedy said that Suffian's success was not only a source of pride to the school and to Perak, but to all Malays as an example 'of what a Malay boy can accomplish – without money and without influence – if he possesses ability and determination'<sup>17</sup>. Suffian became a role model for his schoolmates, and was nothing if not generous in sharing the knowledge that he possessed. Hamdan and several of his friends always turned to Suffian when it came to Latin, a pass in which (or in some other classical language) was then a condition for entry into the universities of Cambridge and Oxford.

Hamdan's actual Latin tutor was V. Nadeson. Nadeson taught Latin to Suffian and two or three other boys individually, on the understanding, in Suffian's own words that:

the Latin we learned from him one day we had to teach to Raja Mohar, Hamdan Sheikh Tahir, Ismail Marzuki and a few others the next day. That was why later I claimed as my old students these three when they had done well in their professions.... the late Ismail Ngah Marzuki, Chief of the Penang Port Authority, the late Ibrahim Arshad, an engineer in the D.I.D., Raja Tan Sri Mohar, Shaari bin Harun, and Tan Sri Hamdan Sheikh Tahir (a great educationist)<sup>18</sup>.

Another person who made a strong impact on the minds of the Clifford School boys was Captain Preedy<sup>19</sup>, their headmaster. Perak School Inspectors used to dub Clifford School as 'Preedy's family nursery', whose members grew up to be a healthy brood of youths. He always encouraged his students to work hard and take advantage of all the facilities and opportunities that lay open to them. For, particularly as far as Malay boys from the *kampung* were concerned, there was no other way except to 'Go forward and win!', a phrase which he repeated time and again at the school assembly.

Sheikh Tahir himself harboured high ambitions for Hamdan once he had finished his Junior Cambridge in 1937. He wanted his son, who was obviously good academically and held great potential for the future, to follow in his footsteps. When the time was ripe, he would send Hamdan to Egypt to study Arabic and French, as he himself had once done. One of the reasons why, of all his sons, he pinned his highest hopes on Hamdan was because of Hamdan's ability to memorize the first part of the Quran, thanks to the guidance of his elder sister, Azizah. Since Hamdan's reading and enunciation of the Quran were so good, he was often made to lead the evening or night prayers (i.e. *maghrib* and *isyak*, and sometimes the midday prayer *zohor*)<sup>20</sup> as well. On these occasions, Hamdan always took the greatest care with his pronunciation, because he was well aware that his father paid the closest attention to each word as he read it. Summing up the quality of his family life under Tahir, Hamdan observes:

We were carefully brought up in a family which had a high sense of discipline. We were extremely fortunate in being under the tutelage of a father who was strict and of a mother who was loving, as was Mak Esah. My twin brother was my close friend....

We always played together, had our quarrels, and once in a while scrapped with one another. He was more practical-minded than I was, and had a great interest in anything that was technical. This interest developed in him to the extent that it led him to choose a technical education when he went for higher studies.....

Rahmah, my eldest sister, died after giving birth to two children. Azizah, my next eldest sister, was very fond of both of us. As for our two elder brothers, they were already grown up when we were babies, as a consequence of which we did not get to know them quite so well<sup>21</sup>.

Hamdan's interest in education started to bud because he often used to go and be with his father who was for ever delving into books and preparing lectures for his students. Sheikh Tahir would work on his books until late at night while Hamdan would be at his side reading or doing his homework. Sheikh Tahir was, of course, a Minang man through and through. He loved to travel, and he wanted Hamdan likewise to inherit this love of his in his earlier days to take to the road in his pursuit of knowledge, the spread of his reformist ideals and the search for a livelihood.

Sheikh Tahir had divulged his hopes for Hamdan to Aishah when Hamdan had just passed the Junior Cambridge. However, 'my mother was not prepared to be separated from her son and opposed Tahir's proposal. As a result, I continued with my studies at Clifford School and passed the Senior Cambridge in 1938'. So, once again, where family matters were concerned, Tahir had bowed to his wife's wishes.

To go back to what Hamdan was like at school, his Malay language teacher in the Senior Cambridge class at Clifford, Mohd Ibrahim bin Haji Abdul Samad (a future State Supervisor of Schools, Selangor), who was responsible for guiding him to the point that Hamdan achieved his highly satisfactory results, remarks:

(It would be improper) to attribute his excellent result in Malay to my coaching and guidance, when actually it was the foundation built in the Malay School, at the hands of qualified teachers, coupled with Tun's upbringing and healthy home environment that mattered most. He was always a patient and attentive listener. Whatever was given him to do as homework, usually a piece of composition, one could rest assured to receive from him some neat work, in very legible, bold handwriting, symbolizing his penchant for hard work, sincerity, and honesty of purpose – a quality reflected in any activity (indoor or outdoor) in which he participated<sup>17</sup>.

As for Sports, Hamdan was not an outstanding athlete. However, he took any game he played, whether it was basketball, hockey, or cricket, seriously. He was always very active on the field harrying his opponents, determined always to have the upper hand at all costs. With respect to the strong character and self-discipline which Hamdan had inherited from his father, Ibrahim was reminded of an English verse composed by one of the Clifford School teachers which served as an exhortation to the students of his time to work hard:

When you have work to do, Boys,  
Do it with a will,  
Those who reach the top, Boys,  
First must climb the hill.

Standing at the foot, Boys  
Gazing at the sky,

How can you ever get up, Boys,  
If you never try.

Though you may stumble, Boys,  
Never be downcast,  
Try and try again, Boys,  
You'll succeed at last.<sup>21</sup>

### **Raffles College, Singapore**

Having passed his Cambridge School Certificate at the age of seventeen with excellent results, Hamdan now applied for an FMS scholarship with which to continue with his studies at Raffles College, Singapore<sup>24</sup>. It was fortunate for him that in that year ten new scholarships had been created for the first time in the College's history, and that he was amongst the selected ten. The successful applicants comprised five Malays and five Chinese.

These scholarships were offered specially for those who had passed the Senior Cambridge in schools in the FMS. A student who had obtained top results in that exam had a chance of winning one of these scholarships and of being selected for admission to Raffles College. On the other hand, for a Queen's Scholarship there was only one award each year. Hamdan could be satisfied that he had won an FMS scholarship. Two other successful candidates that year were Toh Chin Chye (later to become a Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore) and Choi Siew Hong, (a future chairman of the Pacific Bank in Kuala Lumpur).

The FMS scholarship was worth Str\$720 for the academic year, but that was only sufficient to cover the course fees, accommodation and food in the hostel. Therefore Hamdan had to get some extra money from home. 'My mother had to pawn her belongings in order to send me some money, because I didn't have enough', he recalls when thinking of Aishah who always paid the greatest attention to her children's education.

On the other hand, however, in contrast to the FMS students, the scholars from Kedah and Johor (both Non-FMS), received larger allowances and enjoyed a comparatively affluent life-style since their scholarships were, comparatively speaking, quite generous. So the more fashion-conscious amongst them were able, for instance, to sport their

he is willing to tell them till breakfast is over. Mr. X then goes back to his room to search for his lecture note-books for the day's work. He finds two books are missing, but he knows for certain that they are in Y's room, which is next to his. He goes to Y's room where he finds not only his books, but also Y attempting to finish his essay.

Hamdan continued with his articles about Messrs X and Y, who in fact were specializing in the same subject. Both of them regularly went together to chase after their lecturer who was for ever making critical comments on their work. In the lecture hall, Hamdan always worked hard and paid full attention to the talks given by his lecturers, each of whom had his own idiosyncrasy. One would speak too fast like a machine-gun, another was fond of using bombastic language which never failed to provide a source of amusement to Mr. X who would mimic his style. Before the mid-day meal, Hamdan would go to the reading room to see if there were any letters for him. He was always hungry at lunchtime and often asked for a second helping. He spent the time while waiting for the next lecture to begin or before going to the library which opened at two o'clock by listening to the discussions going on in the reading room, some of which at times became quite heated. Topics discussed ranged from the issue of polygamy to the fate of those who left College. The latter usually focussed on the theme, 'A good diploma is better than a bad degree' – an allusion to graduates of the King Edward VII College of Medicine who could only get an LMS (Singapore)<sup>29</sup> instead of the MD Degree awarded to graduates at British and other foreign universities. Generally 'Mr. X' kept quiet as he followed these debates, and would only give his opinion after everybody else had had their say. So Hamdan was usually the one who got in the last word.

After the afternoon lecture, Hamdan would go back to the library to do his work, staying there till 4 p.m., occasionally interrupted because there was something he wanted to see. He selected his reference books with care so as to get the suitable material for next week's essay. Having finished looking for references, he sought out a geography or history journal to read. Then he usually had a game of badminton with some of his fellow collegians. When it was dusk, the washrooms would become the most crowded of places. The students enjoyed having their showers,

including 'Mr. X', singing at the top of their voices old favourites such as 'Balalaika' and 'Daisy, Daisy'.

The gong sounded for 7 p.m. This meant that supper would be served half-an-hour later. The period before this meal was the noisiest one of all in the hostel – some took the opportunity to air their views to all and sundry, others liked to display their singing talents, while others simply horsed around, cracking jokes and filling the air with raucous laughter. The College dining hall had room for more than one hundred hostelites. The general feeling of *joi de vivre* (joy of living) was reflected on all their faces, including that of 'Mr. X', who was always a picture of animation as he sat chatting and joking with everyone around about him. Then the shrill sound of the hostel warden's whistle would suddenly pierce the hubbub, demanding their attention either for an announcement or as a warning to quieten down. A moment later, the warden himself<sup>90</sup> would appear and personally inspect each student to make sure that he was properly dressed together with his bow-tie, one of the requirements for mealtimes.

After supper, Hamdan would go to the reading room which not only contained reading matter but also games such as darts, which was the preference of many after a full day of study. The hostel was still noisy, but towards 9.00 at night the clamour gradually died down:

...and Mr. X, having changed his clothes, is now sitting down quietly with one of the library books in his hands, with a fountain-pen ready, and a writing-pad open to make some notes. Though Mr. X looks very studious, he is actually half-distracted by the talk in the next room about the intended marriage of a graduate, and how much the dowry will be. This conversation makes him resolve to work hard through his graduate course, so that he will be soon in the same position as this lucky graduate. Mr. X does not read rapidly as he is slowly dozing off.

The identity of the 'Mr. X' of the articles, surprisingly enough, apparently remained a mystery for a number of readers of the 1940 issue of *The Cliffordian*, though there were many members of the school community who correctly guessed who it was.

Besides the news which Hamdan sent to his old school, his twin brother, Hamid, also wrote in from the Technical College in Kuala



Lumpur, using the very thinly-disguised pseudonym of Hamid al-Johary b. S.M. Tahir.

Hamid wrote mostly about the civil engineering course at the Technical College, which was his choice of field of study. The contents of this course were based on local experience, covering a lot to do with the construction of roads, buildings, drains and irrigation canals, water supplies, the supervision of work, estimates, and so on. Apart from civil engineering, the Technical College also provided training in electrical and mechanical engineering, telecommunications, and surveying. College graduates were normally destined to become Foremen or Technical Assistants (TAs) and were generally regarded as assistant engineers. But for those who were more ambitious, there were higher positions to strive for, which they could hold after having undergone a more rigorous practical training. Ismail Marzuki, for instance, one of Hamdan's classmates from Kuala Kangsar who was particularly talented, passed with distinction in civil engineering<sup>31</sup>.

Another correspondent of *The Cliffordian* was Abdul Aziz Jaafar (father of Datuk Paduka Rafidah Aziz, Minister of International Trade and Industry at the time of writing) who sent in his contributions from the Agricultural College, Serdang. This institution offered two courses, a main course and a short course. The main course of three years was conducted in English. The theory was given in the lecture room and the practical in the laboratory. The subjects taught included agronomy, physics and chemistry, botany, veterinary science, tumourous diseases, stockbreeding, estate health and hygiene, mathematics and land survey. The short course of two years was in Malay, and was designed for the higher grades of the Malay schools. It was very general and prepared its students to become Junior Assistants in the Department of Agriculture or progressive farmers in their own *kampungs*.

Serdang could take in eighty students at any one session. Once a week the students were required to do practical work at the Central Experimental Station where important crops such as rubber, coconuts, rice, oil palm, tea, coffee, spices, derris and fibrous plants like bananas were grown. With this two-year course the student had a brighter future and could get a job with the Department of Agriculture and the Rubber Research Institute, as well as on the big estates owned by Europeans and

Asians. The demand for jobs in this direction was encouraging, for Malaya had established a good reputation as an exporter of first-class cash crops.

The three old Cliffordians – Hamdan, Hamid and Aziz – succeeded in clearing the first hurdle at the end of year one. In Hamdan's case, not only was he grateful for having passed this first test but so was all his family. They had always believed that a diploma graduate from Raffles College would one day emerge from amongst their ranks. They all shared in the joy by celebrating Hamdan's success at a family reunion held in Singapore in 1940, of which photos taken at the time to record the occasion are still extant. Sheikh Tahir was overjoyed at his son's success. For him it was the first indication that presaged a great academic future for Hamdan in the years to come, because, as everyone knew, apart from the King Edward VII School of Medicine, Raffles College was the symbol of higher education in Malaya at that time.

## War

Whilst they were experiencing the pleasures of studying at an institution of higher learning and rejoiced in each other's triumphs, the flames of war were beginning to scorch places which were not far from Malaya. The military threat of Japan, which became evident with the Mukden 'Incident' and the Japanese annexation of Manchuria in 1931, was growing ever greater. In 1937 Japan launched its campaign to bring China under their heel, and although the Chinese resisted and refused to give in, large parts of the country and many of its most important towns fell to the Japanese. The outbreak in 1939 of war in Europe which involved Britain and France against Germany increased the gravity of the situation, and when France too fell to the Germans in June 1940, the Japanese seized the opportunity to occupy the northern part of French Indo-China (i.e. Tongking or North Vietnam) the following August, and soon after this entered into a friendly understanding with Germany.

These moves alarmed the Western colonial powers, including the United States, which attempted to put pressure on Japan to withdraw from China, etc. by banning the supply of all war and 'strategic' materials (such as rubber, tin and petroleum) to Japan. This action threatened to

cripple Japan's campaign in China and faced with what they saw as the deliberate attempt by the Western colonial powers to strangle their economy, the Japanese tried to negotiate a settlement with the USA, the most powerful of the Western nations. But, at the same time they started to prepare for war and the conquest of South-East Asia and its raw materials. In July 1941, three months before attempting to negotiate with Washington, the Japanese occupied French military bases in Cochin-China (South Vietnam), a move which brought them within only some 500 km from Kota Bahru, Kelantan and less than 1000 km from Singapore.

The news of the mounting Japanese threat and their advance was given great prominence on the front pages of local newspapers and became a frequent topic for discussion in the coffee shops, clubs and also the hostel of Raffles College. The British had long been aware of the Japanese threat and as early as the 1920s had started making preparations to meet it by constructing the largest naval base in the Far East at Singapore. This base was finally completed in 1938, two years before Japan bared her teeth in this part of the world<sup>12</sup>.

The victorious Japanese campaign of conquest down the Malay Peninsula, starting with the landings on the beaches of Kelantan in the early hours of 8 December and culminating in the unconditional surrender of the British in Singapore some 70 days later (i.e. 15 February 1941) is well known and does not require repetition here. Suffice it to say that one of the few heroic incidents of defence throughout the whole campaign was the gallant stand put up the 1st Malay Regiment on Pasir Panjang Ridge before being overwhelmed by superior numbers of Japanese a few days before the fall of Singapore<sup>13</sup>. 'They fought to the last man even though the Japanese appealed to them to surrender, and yet they still fought on with a fighting spirit which would not accept defeat. Although in the end they were beaten and Malaya fell into the hands of the Japanese, the reputation for courage which they had won for themselves as Malay warriors is not only remembered and held in high esteem but also serves as an example for all Malay soldiers of future generations'<sup>14</sup>.

Needless to say, with the Japanese invasion, studies at Raffles College came to an abrupt halt. Some of the students answered the call to serve as auxiliaries in the medical services, including Hamdan. He

volunteered along with his fellow-student, Maurice Baker (a future Minister in independent Singapore), and the two of them helped civilians wounded in the bombing on a number of occasions. Raffles College was now turned into a casualty centre. The first groups to receive medical attention were survivors from the ill-fated British battleships, *The Prince of Wales* and *The Repulse*<sup>55</sup> along with some out-patients from the British Military Alexandra Hospital. The students, including Hamdan, were then formed into a medical unit called the Medical Auxiliary Services (MAS), headed by Professor W.E. Dyer<sup>56</sup>. The Professor later praised the high standard set by his students in the assistance which they gave: '.... all of them did excellent service in circumstances of discomfort, difficulty and danger, for which nothing in their experience had prepared them'. On 10 February 1942, a few days before the British surrender, an Indian medical unit took over and MAS was moved elsewhere. While all this was going on, a number of students signed up to join DALFORCE, an underground organization formed to fight the Japanese<sup>57</sup>.

However, as Hamdan remarks, 'This was a very critical time for all of us. The British authorities were not happy with our desire to go back home as soon as possible. One of the lecturers, C.T.J. Owen (lecturer in chemistry) went so far as to liken us to rats leaving the sinking ship, and called us skunks'<sup>58</sup>.

It was clear by the end of December that the war was going in favour of the Japanese, while the British went from one defeat to another on land and sea. Hamdan, along with most other Malaysians, was astonished at how the British, with their allegedly invincible naval base and their famous men o'war could be defeated by the Japanese 'like a dragon-king being swallowed by a whip-snake'. Hamdan and a number of his fellow-students, all of whom felt quite disillusioned, saw no choice but to leave Singapore. So they boarded a freight train bound for Kuala Kangsar, with a thousand questions pounding in their heads, 'What future have I got now', Hamdan asked himself time and again, 'under these unsettled conditions? How am I going to be able to get on with my life and further my studies even in my own beloved homeland?' At the same time fond memories played in his mind as he thought back on all his activities outside the hours of lecture and study and of his involvement in College clubs and societies, such as the Muslim Society<sup>59</sup>, the Geographical

Society (of which he had been the Secretary), or the Historical and English Literary Societies (in the two of which he had been an ordinary member). All these memories remained embedded in his heart. He had never expected everything to come to such a sudden end.

While Hamdan was on his way back home travelling north, his former headmaster, T.P.M. Lewis, was travelling in the opposite direction in an attempt to join up with the Perak FMSVR as the news spread of the swift Japanese advance southwards. Lewis, a Welshman, was a highly dedicated headmaster, who took up his post just as Hamdan was selected to join Raffles College. Lewis liked to keep a diary and always wrote down everything which happened around him in his daily life. He described in this diary his last moments at Clifford School:

It was 11 a.m. on Monday, December 1, 1941. The international situation was looking very ominous. Kurusu, the Japanese special diplomat who was attending the peace negotiations at Washington, was not, it seemed, making much progress and war appeared imminent. I was at my desk at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, Perak, but not engaged in the work that I normally did at that time of the year. For although it was the first day of the Cambridge School Certificate examinations for which Clifford School was the centre for the two local secondary schools, I was not the invigilator. Owing to the tense international situation, I had had to provide a substitute.\*

From these words, it can be seen that the school where Hamdan had once studied for six years was still carrying on as usual, in particular with the exams, even though the country was already in an unsettled state. Only when the situation became still more serious did Lewis leave the school which he loved so much – in line with its motto, 'The Ship is more than the Crew' – in order to join up with his fellow Volunteers.

Without his realizing it, the train on which Hamdan was travelling, was approaching Kampung Basong, Kuala Kangsar. The questions that had been pounding in his head about his future found their answer after he had been with his family for several months after the Japanese Imperial Army had conquered Malaya.

1. *Pendidik Istimewa, Tun Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991, p.5.

2. The Great Depression or Slump of 1929-33 had far-reaching repercussions on the inhabitants of the Peninsula and tended to raise tensions between the Malays on the one hand and the Chinese and Indians on the other. All parties were hard hit by the Depression. Opportunities in the government services in which the key clerical and technical posts were held by non-Malays were reduced for the Malays, while the non-Malays were badly affected by the large numbers of them who were laid off work on the tin mines and rubber estates. The hardships caused by the Depression made the Malays, in particular, more aware of their precarious economic position in their own homeland, and made thoughtful parents like Sheikh Tahir and Aishah all the more keen to ensure that Hamdan and Hamid got the best possible education to start them off in life.

3. Now known as the Sultan Idris II National School, Kuala Kangsar.

4. Perak led the way in terms of Malay education in the Federated Malay States (FMS). By 1898 there were 94 Malay schools for boys as well as the 9 Malay girls schools in the state, a figure which was larger than that for all the other three states of the FMS combined at that time.

5. i.e. Sultan Yusuf Sharifuddin Muzaffar Shah, Regent 1877-86; Sultan, 1886-7, at Sayong; and Sultan Idris Murshidul A'zam Shah, Sultan 1887-1916 at Bukit Chandan, Kuala Kangsar.

6. i.e., as the English put it - 'reading, (w)riting, and (a)rithmetic'

7. see below

8. As we have already seen (refer Chapter One) Tahir himself was highly proficient in Arabic, having graduated in that language at both the Darul-Ulum College at Mecca and at the al-Azhar School in Cairo.

9. In fact, English Language was not introduced as a subject to Malay-medium schools until 1950!

10. Prior to the Japanese Occupation Malay and English medium schools were organized into 9 'Standards' as shown below, viz.

Age/year	MALAY		ENGLISH	Age/year
6/7	Standard I		Primary 1	6/7
7/8	Standard II		Primary 2	7/8
8/9	Standard III		Standard 1	8/9
9/10	Standard IV	SMEE	Standard 2	9/10
10/11	Standard V	SMC 1	Standard 3	10/11
11/12	Standard VI	SMC 2	Standard 4	11/12
2/13	Standard VII	=	Standard 5	12/13
			Standard 6	13/14
			Standard 7	14/15
		JC Class	Standard 8	15/16
		SC Class	Standard 9	16/17

notes: Standard 6 marks the beginning of secondary school education (for the English medium). Standards 6-9 were the equivalent of today's Forms 2-5

abbreviations: SMEE Special Malay Entrance Examination  
SMC 1 Special Malay Class Year 1  
SMC 2 Special Malay Class Year 2  
JCSC Junior Cambridge School Certificate  
SCSC Senior Cambridge School Certificate

source: Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: educational policy in Malaya 1874-1940*. Kuala Lumpur, OUP., 1975. Diagram 1., p.136.

11. The Barnes Report, named after its chairman, L.J. Barnes, Director of Social Training, Oxford University, was appointed in 1951 to enquire into the state of Malay education in the Federation of Malaya and make appropriate recommendations. The recommendations it made were radical and controversial.

12. Because the Malay College was reserved for the sons of royalty and the Malay aristocrat class, Hamdan, despite his excellent Special Malay Class results was not selected for admission there. But both he and his twin brother were quite content to be at Clifford School, which was separated from the College only by a broad playing field.

13. Raja Mohar, born in Kuala Kangsar in 1922, went on to have a brilliant career in the Malayan Civil Service. Having taken in the UK a degree in economics at Cambridge, followed by a diploma in agricultural economics at Oxford, he rose rapidly in the administrative hierarchy to become Secretary-General of the Ministry of Commerce in his early forties, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance in 1971, and then from 1972 until his retirement in 1988 Special Economic Adviser to three Prime Ministers (i.e. Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein Onn, and Dato Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad). He has served as Chairman of various major official committees and government corporations, such as the Foreign Investment Committee, the National Productivity Centre, the Federal Industrial Development Authority (FIDA, now MIDA), the Malaysian Airline System (1973-91) and the Islamic Bank of Malaya (1983-92).

14. In fact, both Hamdan and Raja Mohar got double promotion twice while they were in the Special Malay Class, first being moved from SMC II to Standard V, and then from Standard VI to Standard VIII (i.e the Junior Cambridge class. This did not reduce their age gap with the English stream pupils but it reduced their years of stay in the Secondary English School, taking only six as opposed to the normal nine years for SMC students to prepare for the Senior Cambridge School Certificate. The careers of Hamdan and Raja Mohar continued to run along parallel lines up to and including their years at Raffles College in Singapore. Thereafter their paths diverged.

15. The Boys Scouts Association - usually referred to simply as 'the Boy Scouts' - was founded in 1908 by Robert Smyth, Lord Baden-Powell (1857-

1941), a distinguished British general, soon after he had retired from active service in 1907. It started as an experiment, on guide-lines developed by Baden-Powell himself based on his military experience, for training youths in out-door activities as a means to develop character. The movement caught on very quickly in Britain and in British territories such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and soon to other countries as well. It was introduced to Malaya (Penang) in 1908, but at first not with much success. However, after a troop was established in Singapore two years later it started to become more popular and spread throughout the Peninsula. By 1931 the Boy Scouts were active in all nine states of Malaya, and in Sarawak as well. Incidentally, the founder of the Boy Scout movement in Kedah in 1922 was E.C. Hicks, then a newly appointed colonial education officer, who after the Japanese Occupation came to know Hamdan through the movement and was to play an important part at one stage of Hamdan's career (see Chapter Four below).

16. Tun Mohammed Suffian bin Hashim was born in 1917 at Kota Lama Kiri, Kuala Kangsar, the son of a *kadi*. He completed his degree in law at Cambridge in 1940 and was called to the English Bar in 1941. The outbreak of the Pacific War later that year prevented him returning home. He had got as far as India, where he perforce had to stay but got a job with All-India Radio in New Delhi. Before the war was over, he was back in London, heading the Malay Section of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), but as soon as it ended, he returned home. Almost immediately he entered the MCS. His first posting was as magistrate at Malacca, but since at the time there was no provision for him on the establishment he was made harbour-master as well, to ensure that he could be paid a salary! He then transferred into the Legal Service. His rise was rapid: the first Malayan to be appointed a State Legal Adviser (Pahang); the first Malayan Solicitor-General (1959); High Court Judge (1961); Federal Court Judge (1968); Chief Justice of Malaya (1973); Lord President (now Chief Justice) in 1975 till 1982 when he retired. Humble yet outspoken, and a man of high principle, Tun Suffian raised the Malaysian Judiciary to heights of prestige that it had never attained before nor has ever maintained since. He died in September 2000.

17. *The Cliffordian*, April 1936, p.42. Clifford School is very proud of being the only school in Malaysia up till today to have produced as many as five old boys who have been conferred with the title of 'Tun', the highest grade in the Malaysian Order of Chivalry, and restricted to only 25 members at any one time. Apart from Hamdan himself, the other holders have been the late Tun Mohamed Suffian bin Hashim, Raja Mohar bin Raja Badiozzaman, the late Tun V.T. Sambanthan (former Minister of National Unity) and Tun Syed Zahiruddin bin Syed Hassan, Orang Kaya Bendahara Sri Maharaja (former Governor of Malacca).

18. Tun M. Suffian, 'I Remember', *Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, 1897-1997*, 1997, Old Cliffordians Association, p.129.

19. Captain Bernard Preedy, born in England in 1894 and an Oxford graduate, took part in the First World War, during which he won the Military



Cross. His first appointment in Malaya was in 1922 at the King Edward VII School in Taiping, followed by the Anderson School, Ipoh. He was made Headmaster of High School Kajang in 1927 and transferred to Clifford School as Headmaster in 1930. During the next eight years he became virtually synonymous with the school, its scouts and its hockey. In 1939 he was posted as Headmaster of Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Star. He spent the Japanese Occupation in internment. After the war, he was Superintendent of Education, Kedah till 1949 when he retired and went to live at Kuantan where he formed the Kuantan Life Guard. He died there in 1970.

20. i.e., three of the obligatory five prayer-times a day.

21. In interview with Goh Boon Leong, *The Sun*, 13 July 1996.

22. Note from Tuan Haji Mohd Ibrahim bin Hj Abdul Samad to Mohd Nor Long of 13 July 1998. Ibrahim, who now aged over ninety lives in Petaling Jaya at the time of writing, was born at Kuala Kangsar in 1909 and attended the Anderson School, Ipoh where he took his Senior Cambridge. He then went for training in the normal class at Taiping (King Edward VII School) and joined the Clifford School in 1932 where he remained until 1958. In the latter year he was appointed headmaster of the Central Malay School, Ipoh, and then in 1961 was posted to the Selangor Education Department in Kuala Lumpur as Organizer of Malay Schools (i.e. now *sekolah kebangsaan*) in the State till his retirement in 1969. Ibrahim's two main passions were scouting and hockey. He was the Commissioner of Scouts, Perak from 1959 till 1961, and was made State Commissioner of Scouts, Selangor, when he was transferred to that state. He was subsequently in charge of Development at the Boy Scouts Federal HQ from 1966 till 1971. In 1999 he was awarded the Darjah Johan Negeri (DJN), Penang, in recognition of excellent service.

23. Tuan Haji Mohd Ibrahim, *ibid.*

24. Raffles College offered a three-year diploma course in the Arts, which included Geography, History, English Literature, English Language and also Economics. Many Raffles' graduates became Junior Administrative Officers in Government service (i.e. the Malay Administrative Service/MAS) or teachers in English schools.

25. In Hamdan's own words (in a note to the translator, dated 28 October 2001), 'I selected three Arts subjects, namely English (including English Literature), History and Geography. I had decided right from the beginning to become a teacher in English secondary school capable of teaching any of these subjects after graduation in the future. Incidentally, these were the subjects that I did well in at school when attending the Junior and Senior Cambridge classes in 1937 and 1938.' He remembers his teachers in these subjects at Clifford School over those two years with great affection and gratitude – Captain Preedy, his headmaster, and Lt-Col. C.A. Scott, who taught him English; Paul Chang and Khoo Kai Hong (both Raffles graduates) who taught him English literature; and Pragasam, a graduate of Madras University, who taught him both History and Geography. However, when he got to Raffles, Geography emerged as Hamdan's pet subject. This was largely due to the character of his principal lecturer in

Geography, Dr.E.H.G. Dobby, of whom more anon (see Chapter 4). Suffice it to say here that one day at the University, to Hamdan's great surprise (and embarrassment), just before starting his lecture, Dobby said: 'May I know who is this gentleman, Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir?'. Hamdan accordingly revealed himself, to which Dobby simply responded, 'Oh, it is you', and handed him back his essay which had a large "A" marked on it. From that time on, Hamdan pursued his studies with extra vigour, and Dobby never lost sight of his brilliant student.

26. Amongst the 113 students whom Hamdan recalls in particular were Junid Rahim, Toh Chin Chye, and Tsang Ah Liat from the 10 selected from Perak; Majid bin Mat, Abdul Manaf bin Jalil and Choi Siew Hong from Pahang, and Alias Yasin and Too Chee Chew (C.C. Too) from Selangor. Junid entered the MCS in 1955 and rose to its highest echelons; Toh Chin Chye made Singapore his home, went in for politics and rose to become a Cabinet Minister in the PAP Government; Tsang Ah Liat became a schoolmaster and is remembered with affection at the Anderson School, Ipoh, where he taught for many years as Senior Science Master till his death; the brilliant C.C. Too became the master-mind in the psychological warfare which was used so effectively against the Communists during the Malaysian Emergency.

27. *The Cliffordian*, December 1937. A letter from a student at the King Edward VII College of Medicine, Singapore, who signed himself as 'Crooked Crocodile'. This is an allusion to the higher standard of the LMS Diploma (Licenciate of Medicine and Surgery) awarded by the King Edward VII Medical College. see below, fn 29.

28. Actually, there were two hostel blocks facing each other: one (the 'E' Block) was known as the FMS Hostel, which as the name suggests housed students (including Hamdan, of course) from the states of the Peninsula, especially the FMS; the other, named after the renowned Penang-born millionaire tin-miner and philanthropist, Eu Tong Sen, was reserved for students from Singapore. Chong Seck Chim, fellow student and a future colleague of Hamdan's in the Ministry of Education in Kuala Lumpur has spoken of 'the happy, ideal lives led by the hostelites' - despite the monotonous hostel food. Every student had to stay in the hostel for at least one year. The compilers of *Beyond Degrees, a History of the National University of Singapore and its pre-war antecedents* (Edwin Lee & Tan Tai Yong, eds. Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1996) remark - 'the regret of some students was that they could not stay longer'.

29. i.e. the Licence in Medicine and Surgery, the Diploma issued by the King Edward VII Medical College, which was, however, recognized by all medical institutions in the British Empire as the equivalent of a university medical degree (MD). The rub was that it did not entitle the local Malayan licentiate to be placed on par with his British graduate counterparts in the Malayan Medical Service.

30. namely E.H.G. Dobby, lecturer in Geography. See Chapter 5, fns. 7 & 8, for further details regarding this remarkable man.

31. After the war, Ismail Marzuki rose to become the Chairman of the Penang Port Commission.

32. By this time the Japanese had developed a wide intelligence network in Malaya, usually through the medium of Japanese photographers long resident in the country. T.P.M. Lewis, Preedy's successor as headmaster at Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar related a story current at the time of the opening of the Singapore Naval Base by the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, of how official photographs of the opening ceremony and of the base itself had been taken by a well-known Japanese photographer for development - there were few good non-Japanese photographers at the time. When second thoughts led to the hurried collection back of the photographs, it was the general view that their prints by then were already on their way to Tokyo. See T.P.M. Lewis, *Changi: The Lost Years: A Malayan Diary 1941-1946*, Kuala Lumpur, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1984, p.8.

33. General A.E. Pecival, GOC Malaya at the time of the Japanese invasion himself acknowledges in *Askar Melayu, 1933-47*, (Kuala Lumpur, Dept. of Public Relations, 1946, p.28) that 'The Malay Regiment at that time was not sufficiently prepared for the challenges and hardships with which they were to be confronted. Nevertheless, although this was the case, these raw soldiers who had never before been under fire acquitted themselves with a refusal to admit defeat in a manner that can bear comparison with the best soldiers to be found in all Malaya. I say this with particular reference to their stubborn stand at Pasir Panjang Ridge during the Battle of Singapore'. Incidentally, this episode has been highlighted in a recent Malay film production, *Lieutenant Adnan*, which focusses on the life of one of its main heroes.

34. Ibrahim Mahmood, *Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur, Pustaka Antara, 1981, p.23.

35. These two capital ships, the pride of the British navy, had arrived in Singapore a few days before the Japanese invasion, and were immediately sent northwards up the coast towards Kota Bahru as soon as news was received of the Japanese landings there in order to intercept them. But with no air protection of their own, the two warships were spotted by Japanese planes off the Pahang shore near Kuantan and sunk.

36. Dyer was Professor of History, and a former schoolmaster himself. He was a strict disciplinarian, a stickler for punctuality and dress, and did not encourage familiarity between students and their lecturers. He was also somewhat bombastic in speech and as such was probably the subject of Hamdan's mimicry (see above). However, at the height of the Japanese onslaught on Singapore, he showed his mettle by mixing freely with his students and giving them encouragement. See Lee & Tai, op.cit.

37. Chan Keng Howe et. al. *Raffles College, 1928-49*, Singapore, National University of Singapore, 1993, p.9.

38. 'Tun Hamdan: A Raffles Collegian', *The Alumnus*, September 1993. This unfortunate incident is also recorded in some detail in Edwin & Lee, op.cit. A graphic account of what conditions were like on the campus in the last few weeks before the British surrender of Singapore has been given by Dato' Paduka

Dr. Abdul Wahab bin Mohamad Ariff, in his *Medical Students During the Japanese Invasion of Singapore, 1941-1942*, Singapore, Academy of Medicine, Singapore, 1987. Wahab came to know Hamdan well through the Muslim Society (see below and Chapter 5).

39. The Muslim Society of Raffles College and the King Edward VII of Medicine had been in existence since the founding of the latter in 1905. It was probably, from the Malay point of view, the most significant of all the clubs and societies to be found on the College campus. This is because it brought together for religious and social occasions all the members of the Malay student community at the two colleges, who were separated physically in terms of location and of the courses which they were pursuing. The Malay and Muslim students in either college were much smaller in number when compared to the total student population, so that the existence of the Society served a very real need. Through the Society friendships were formed which were to last a lifetime. As a freshman before the war, Hamdan participated fully in the Society's activities. However, it was only after the Occupation when in 1946 he returned to Raffles to take his diploma and then once again in 1955 to take his degree (by which time both colleges had been absorbed into the new University of Malaya) that he played a leading role in its affairs. See Chapters 4 and 5 below.

40. Lewis, *ibid.*, p.18.



### THREE

## *Culture Shock; The Experience Of The Japanese Occupation*

#### The New Order

No-one ever imagined when the Japanese landed at Kota Bahru, Kelantan, in early December 1941 that they would succeed in destroying the might of the British army in Malaya within such a short space of time. The British forces, led by General Percival, surrendered to General Yamashita on 15 February 1942. The Japanese had reckoned that they would be able to defeat the British within a hundred days; in the event it took only seventy<sup>1</sup>. The sinking of the two capital warships of the British fleet, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, within the first forty-eight hours of the war was a severe blow to the British. Other factors for the British defeat were inadequate and poorly sited defences, troops untrained and unacclimatized, and the attitude of the Thai government<sup>2</sup>, which allowed the Japanese to go through their territory to attack Malaya. But most decisive of all was the lack of air power, without which not much could be done to thwart the Japanese advance on the ground, and left the Japanese with virtually unchallenged command of the air.

Hamdan naturally felt very frustrated at having his studies interrupted by the war. He was in his third year when the Japanese invasion took place. He now had to face a new era full of uncertainty. The dominant question in his mind concerned his plans for the future. Would he still be able to pursue his ambition to become a qualified teacher or would he have to face a period of doing nothing because of the Japanese Occupation? For a while after the fall of Singapore, the situation in

Malaya was chaotic. There was a complete breakdown of law and order; people simply did what they liked, especially in the larger towns such as Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang. All British officials including the Police had left, while the Malay and Sikh rank and file had gone back to their own homes.

Theft and larceny were rampant. The first target of the looters were the big stores and godowns owned by foreigners. These places were stripped clean of all their goods which were taken to people's homes where they were received like manna from heaven. The streets of the towns were full of the debris which the thieves and looters had left behind – broken boxes, smashed appliances, shattered glass and all kinds of rubbish. Their ruthless and irresponsible acts made a good number of them very rich. The loot itself came to be described as 'axe-patented goods', because the looters used hatchets and parangs<sup>3</sup> to break into warehouses and shops in order to grab them. Things did not get back to normal until the Japanese had set up their own administration.

At first the Malays and Indians generally welcomed the Japanese because they supposed that the nation of the Rising Sun would free them from their imperial shackles and that their arrival heralded prosperity to come. This reaction was largely the result of having been taken in by Japanese propaganda with its alluring promises designed to win over the support of the local population for their rule. The Chinese, on the other hand, reacted with great suspicion, for they could see what lay in store for them because of their past boycotts of Japanese goods and of the large donations they had contributed for the defence of their fatherland against the Japanese invaders.

However, law and order were eventually restored and the Japanese Imperial Army started about establishing an effective administration of its own that could maintain the peace and revive the economy. By means of their propaganda, the Japanese set out to convince Malayans that they had come in order to give the people a share in the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', with Japan (of course) as the leader. Recourse was frequently had to this kind of rhetoric in order to win public support, particularly from the Malays who had suffered long enough the humiliation of living under foreign colonial rule. This pro-Malay policy, however, aroused deep resentment amongst the Chinese and resulted in

the growth of hatred and mistrust between the two communities. Unfortunately, these suspicions were to persist after the war had ended, giving rise to sporadic racial clashes in certain parts of the country.

It was the policy of the Japanese regime to treat 'the sons of the soil' well, because by exploiting long-felt Malay grievances not only against British rule but also against the great influx of immigrants from China and India – many of whom ended up better off than the Malays themselves in their own country<sup>4</sup> - they hoped to gain Malay support and loyalty. The traditional Malay name for Malaya is *Tanah Melayu*, that is, 'The Land of the Malays', and just like the British before them, the Japanese rationalized that therefore it was only right that the Malays should retain some share in the administration of the country's affairs. However, in reality Japanese policy was no more altruistic than that of any other nation, and it all boiled down to a failure to practise what was preached, because in fact the Malays also suffered badly in a number of ways under the Japanese. Only in the early stages of the Occupation did the Malays show any degree of real support for their new rulers, as reflected in a variety of comments in (Japanese-inspired) Malay newspapers such as *Perubahan Baru*, *Seruan Rakyat* and *Majlis*<sup>5</sup>.

In the effort to reinforce their propaganda campaign, the Japanese called upon certain Malay writers who at this period were prepared openly to urge their compatriots to back the Japanese cause. Even Hamka, one of the outstanding literary figures and religious leaders of the Malay-Indonesian world, wrote a long poem, entitled 'On the Fall of Old Melaka', which appeared in the magazine *Fajar Asia* (Asian Dawn) on 'the 25th day of the 8th month of the Japanese era', extolling the new order<sup>6</sup>. Another writer, Abdul Muneer bin Haji Zainuddeen, wrote an article entitled 'British Exploitation in Malai', which highlighted in retrospect British exploitation in the Peninsula from 1874 up till 'the brilliant dawn of 8 December 1941'. Its conclusion was that the British had never been sincere in their support for the Malay Rulers<sup>7</sup>.

In order to realize the concept of the 'Co-Prosperity Sphere' under Japan, all the State administrations in the Peninsula were reorganized and placed under the control of Japanese governors, while the Malay Rulers were retained as Heads of Islam and custodians of Malay tradition and custom in their respective States. For administrative convenience,

Malaya was joined together with Sumatra (formerly part of the Dutch East Indies) with the capital for the two regions at Syonan (i.e. 'Light of the South', the Japanese name given to Singapore) under the supreme command of the head of the Japanese Imperial Forces, who was styled 'General and Commander-in-Chief of Nippon in Malaya'. The task of the military administration was to see to the restoration of law and order, and at the same time to keep a close watch over the allocation of local resources so as to ensure that the needs of the military establishment in the country were met. Once things had settled down, a civilian administration was expected to take over and manage all key facilities, including those for trade, communications, industry and finance, so as to keep these firmly under Japanese control.

### **Hamdan Opts for the Teaching Profession**

On returning to his father's house in Kuala Kangsar, Hamdan found that all his family were safe and sound. After a few weeks at home, it was announced that the Perak Japanese Military Administration or *Gunseikanbu*, which had its headquarters in Taiping, wished to select candidates from amongst local youths to send to Singapore to study at the *Shonan Koa Kunrensho*. The *Koa Kunrensho*, or Officers' Training Institute, was the name of an academy set up for training Malayan youths for leadership training so that, in the short term, they would be the future local assistants to the Japanese administration<sup>9</sup>. The three month course, which was run on military lines, included learning Japanese language and culture. In Perak, interviews for selecting the candidates were held at Taiping, which was still the State capital at the time. The interviewing panel was chaired by Raja Kamarulzaman, one of the senior Perak chiefs, and a number of Japanese officers.

Hamdan did not want to forgo this golden opportunity, for the desire to seek experience and work at the same time was deeply ingrained in his mind. In fact, the opportunity for learning yet another foreign language was another one of his dreams. Moreover, the candidates were informed that besides becoming administrative assistants, they would also be required to teach Japanese language and culture. To be a teacher was



something that had always been close to Hamdan's heart, even if it meant having to undergo military discipline in order to achieve it.

So when my father became a teacher, he gave me every encouragement to follow in his footsteps. My interest in education began when I watched my father at work. My interest increased still further when I read his books and his articles in the newspapers, and listened to the way he taught. For me my father was some kind of hero in the field of education.

In other words, Sheikh Tahir's legacy to his son was to instil in Hamdan's mind that what was expected of him was to become a teacher. So Hamdan's choice of the teaching profession was not a matter of chance.

At that time I had only three choices. The first was to join the Japanese army. The second was to become a Japanese-style businessman. Neither of these appealed to me, least of all that of becoming a soldier, because I did not know even how to handle a gun. On the other hand going into business needs capital, and I had none. So I was only left with the third choice, to become a teacher. So that's the choice I took!<sup>10</sup>

Ten were selected, after undergoing a rigorous screening process, from the first batch from Perak, including four Malays, two Chinese, two Indians, and two others. The selection of two Chinese for the course was to show that the policy of the Japanese administration towards the Chinese was not one of unremitting oppression and discrimination. It also reflected the Japanese recognition that by adopting an accommodating approach towards the Chinese, they could stimulate the Chinese to cooperate with them in tapping the financial resources of the Chinese trading and commercial community so as to bring about a speedy recovery of the Malayan economy<sup>11</sup>.

Hamdan was very happy to have been selected for the course at the Singapore *Koa Kunrensho*, for amongst other things it would enable him to learn to read, write and speak Japanese. But his mother was not so pleased. She was not at all keen on the idea of Hamdan's departure in the middle of 1942, at a time when conditions in the country were still very unsettled. However, Hamdan had inherited his father's steely will and roaming spirit, and was not to be deterred.

## **Teacher Training, Japanese Style**

In fact Hamdan was ready to accept the military discipline which formed the basis of the training, even though it would be strict, with its insistence on punctuality and unquestioning obedience to orders at all times, along with a lot of hard and tough work. As a future educator Hamdan realized the importance of both strict discipline and high motivation as a means to inculcate what the Japanese called *seishin-ippai*, meaning the state of always being on guard, alert and competent, mentally, physically and morally.

The first batch chosen for the course consisted of 85 young men aged between 17 and 25 who came from all over the Peninsula as well as from Singapore. They had to undergo training alongside several Japanese education officers under the command of teachers specially brought from Japan. Apart from learning Japanese language and culture, the trainees were also indoctrinated not to despise manual labour, whether in the field or at the workplace, because the contribution of the ordinary working man was seen as vital, especially in times of crisis. The trainees were issued with khaki uniforms and bush hats little different from those worn by the regular army.

At the Institute, which was located at Tampines Road, Singapore, Hamdan came together again with his fellow-students from Raffles as well as with ex-students from the King Edward VII College of Medicine, the Technical College, Kuala Lumpur, and the Agriculture College at Serdang. There were also former teachers and government officials as well as police and army officers from the British time. Many of the Academy's graduates were destined to become leading figures in their respective fields after Malayan independence<sup>12</sup>.

For the students military training, which was tough and taken very seriously, was a new experience. It imbued them with a high sense of discipline, making stoics out of them, and also making them very hardworking – all geared to the aim of moulding them into loyal subjects of the Japanese emperor as well as to their more immediate superiors wherever they might be. Even before first light (i.e. at around 5.30 in the morning) they had to get up for drill and PE to tunes blared out over Radio Taiso<sup>13</sup> as a daily routine before they started on their lessons which

went on till 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Besides the drill and the physical jerks, the trainees were also taught how to grow tapioca, sweet potatoes, yams and other vegetables in the Institute's compound in the afternoons<sup>14</sup>.

Having completed the training course after three arduous months, Hamdan went back to Ipoh for further training as a teacher and then, in September 1942, joined the staff of the Teachers' Training Centre newly established in the premises of the Convent School in Brewster Road (now Jalan Idris Shah II), and known by its Japanese name of *Kyoin Yosei Jo*. Others recruited as teachers for the Centre at around about the same time included Raja Mohar Badiozzaman, Junid Abdul Rahim, Ho Peng Yoke, Lee Guan Meng, Zainal Abidin Ismail, Ambrose, Mailwagnam and Ahmad Abdul Hamid<sup>15</sup>. Once appointed, they were required to take another three month course learning Japanese language and culture. The head of the *Kyoin Yosei Jo* was S. Banno, a Japanese officer who was also Director of Education and Propaganda, Perak, and was in charge of all teacher training institutions in the State<sup>16</sup>.

The *Kyoin Yosei Jo* offered a re-training course for qualified teachers from primary and secondary schools, each session lasting three months. Along with learning to teach in Japanese and understand Japanese culture, there was another course of six months to train teacher trainees (recruited from youths – male and female). The same tough and demanding training that Hamdan had undergone in Singapore was applied to teachers and officials in Perak. The first batch of students consisted of about ninety young people in their late teens or early twenties, of whom thirteen were women. Most of them had completed their English secondary education (i.e. up to Cambridge School Certificate level), and the rest were made up of small groups of young Malay-medium, Chinese and Tamil schoolteachers. When the training was over, most of the new graduates were sent to teach in ordinary schools in the State. However, a number of them were taken in by government and commercial offices which needed Japanese language interpreters and translators in line with the 'nipponization' policy which aimed at establishing a Japanese-style administration.

### **Making Ends Meet: Learning from the Japanese**

'I learned a lot of things, more especially by mixing and talking with Japanese officials, most of whom were cultured people and possessed a deeply implanted interest in education', relates Hamdan. One of the best ways to learn a foreign language is, of course, by mixing with native speakers, and to adopt the philosophy that 'not to know is not to love'.

Besides improving his command of Japanese and his understanding of Japanese culture, Hamdan also followed the Radio Taiso PE programmes regularly, and took up *sumo* (wrestling) and *kendo* (fencing). He became so taken up with *sumo*<sup>17</sup> that he ended up becoming a champion wrestler, even besting Japanese officers at the art for several years running<sup>18</sup>.

At the *Kyoin Yosei Jo* Hamdan developed good relations with a number of the trainees who were to become lasting friends, including Aminuddin Baki, of whom more anon<sup>19</sup>, and Abdullah Ayob (a future Chief Secretary to the Malaysian government). He also fell for the charms of one of the women trainees, one Siti Zainab binti Haji Baharuddin. She stole his heart and – as will be seen – in 1956, they mounted the bridal dais together and became man and wife.

During this period under Banno, Hamdan was appointed senior assistant, or *joshoo*, to help run the Institution. Killing two birds with one stone, he not only supplemented his own knowledge of Japanese language and culture but also taught the language at a primary school near the *Kyoin Yosei Jo*. Now being a teacher himself gave Hamdan the opportunity to meet up again with a number of his former teachers who had taught him at Kuala Kangsar before the war. In training the teachers under his instruction he felt driven by the desire to pass on to them all what he had been taught regarding all aspects of PE, based on the Radio Taiso programmes, and hoped that they in their turn would do the same to those under their charge when they went back to their own schools.

In early 1943 Banno's place as Perak Director of Education was taken over by another remarkable and more senior official, namely Hiroshi Sugoro<sup>20</sup>. Sugoro was an economist graduate of Tokyo University, who had lectured in his speciality of marine insurance at the University of Kobe. It was during Sugoro's tenure of office that teen-aged secondary

school leavers were given the opportunity to join a new scheme for training youths to undertake courses not only in youth leadership, but also in technical subjects such as mining, and electrical and mechanical engineering. For this purpose Suguro opened a vocational training centre, named the *Seinen Kunrensho* (Youth Leadership Training School). The new school, at which multi-disciplinary courses - very practical and utilitarian in content - were instituted, occupied the old Anderson Primary School building in Douglas Road, Ipoh. It was placed under the control of Mizutani, another Japanese education officer. Under Mizutani's overall control there were three separate institutions - the Youth Leadership Training School itself (*Seinen Kunrensho*), along with the School of Mines (*Kozan Gakko*) and the Industrial School (*Kogyo Gakko*). An Agricultural School (*Nogyo Gakko*) was started a little later (see below). Each of these schools offered a three month course<sup>21</sup>. All the participants had to undergo intensive and tough training, which included a motivation programme which was more or less the same as what Hamdan himself had experienced previously in Singapore.

Mizutani was a very capable organizer who liaised actively not only with the Japanese and local education officers at the Perak Education Office, but also with the senior officials of local government agencies such as the Mines and Geological Survey Departments (both of which had their headquarters in Tiger Lane, Ipoh), with the former Kinta Electrical Distribution Company<sup>22</sup> (which owned the Malim Nawar Power Station), and with the various motor workshops for the services of experienced mechanics and foremen needed for giving practical training skills to the youthful trainees.

Hamdan was transferred from the Teachers' Training Institute (*Kyojin Yosei Jo*) in Brewster Road, Ipoh, where his enthusiasm and zeal had made a great impression on both Banno and Suguro, in order to assist Mizutani as his Senior Assistant at the new Youth Leadership School in Douglas Road. At the same time five other trained and competent young Malayan teachers were appointed to the School's academic staff to help in the teaching of simple Japanese and to help maintain the discipline of the school and the hostel<sup>23</sup>.

Hamdan and his small bunch of colleagues immediately found themselves immersed in the job of closely supervising the physical,

mental and moral health of the students under their charge. This involved keeping the students busy with their drill and PE based on the daily Radio Taiso regime, and their participation in *sumo*, *kendo* and other recreational activities. Besides this, all the students were required to grow vegetables and other kinds of food crops in the school's compound, attend classroom lectures, learn practical vocational skills and perform various other school activities. Not surprisingly, everyone involved, teacher and student alike, found that the intensive three month course had come to an end before they were aware of it.

The first batch of ninety bright young students enrolled came mainly from the English secondary schools. A duty roster was carefully kept allocating the members of the staff who were to accompany the students on their field and practical work outside the school several times a week to ensure their welfare.

After their three months of intensive training, the students had become proficient in simple written and spoken Japanese and had acquired the self-discipline, physically and mentally, associated with the Japanese work ethic.

Their Japanese supervisors and local teachers and instructors had been well selected, and the courses they had to follow were both relatively simple and well-graded. In fact, this vocational and technical training proved a very effective and valuable exercise and experience for the students, because there was a dearth of trained young technicians. So when they left the School, they had no difficulty in finding employment with the Japanese military or with the civil administration, as well as in the scores of workshops and small industrial establishments that existed in Ipoh, the Kinta valley, and elsewhere in Perak.

In all, it can be said that Suguro's vocational schools based in Douglas Road, Ipoh, made an invaluable contribution during the period of the Occupation by providing a pool of young, disciplined technical assistants who were able to meet immediate needs and formed the nucleus of a new generation of Malaysians equipped in the technical and professional fields after the war was over<sup>24</sup>.

## Perak as a Centre for Education

But this was not all. When Suguro was transferred to Singapore at the beginning of 1944 to become Director of Education there, he was succeeded by Saburo Kodera, another first-class Japanese educationist<sup>25</sup>. Soon after his arrival Kodera set about establishing another vocational school, this time for agriculture. The Agricultural School (*Nogyo Gakko*) put up in the premises of the Yuk Choy Secondary School, then in Hugh Low Street, Ipoh, and was placed under the charge of Tamura. The founding of this school, at the end of 1943, led to Hamdan being transferred for a second time, this time from Douglas Road to Hugh Low Street in the same capacity as second-in-command, while a new bunch of teachers were recruited as his colleagues. The first intake of thirty students, who came mostly from the kampungs of Central Perak along the banks of the Perak River (i.e. in Kuala Kangsar District which at that time included Parit), followed a course whose syllabus was focussed basically on agriculture and lasted for the standard three months.

In order to make the course truly beneficial, the Perak Education Department managed to get the help of a number of Japanese and local officers from the Agricultural Department, who lectured the students and supervised their practical work in areas close to the School, and who organized visits to agricultural stations in other parts of the State. Hamdan remained at the School for a period of some six months overseeing the administration, discipline and environment of the School before he once again was sent on transfer towards the last quarter of 1944.

Hamdan's new transfer brought him back to where he had started, at the Teachers' Training Institute at the Convent School in Brewster Road, but the Institute itself was now in the process of being upgraded to the status of a 'Higher Teachers' Training Institute (*Perak Jokyu Shihan Gakko*) on the initiative of Kodera, who apparently aimed at making the State the focal point of the new education in the whole Peninsula<sup>41</sup>. So Mizutani was transferred from the youth vocational centre in Douglas Road, with Hamdan as his deputy. The upgraded Institute continued to provide three month courses very much along the same lines, following the same syllabuses and co-curriculum work, as had been done in the days of Banno and Suguro, but now they were aimed at the older and

already trained teachers and for more mature students who were taught Japanese language and culture in addition to the para-military discipline and training. Hamdan was to spend the rest of his time at the Institute until the war came to an end in September 1945.

The record of the Japanese during their three and half year Occupation of the country has, with considerable justification, received a bad Press. However, it has to be remembered that, whatever their shortcomings, the Japanese never had a chance to prove their mettle, for within three months of conquering Singapore, they were starting to lose the war with their naval defeats in the Pacific<sup>27</sup>.

As a result, the much-vaunted Japanese Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere never got under way, and the benefits that it might have brought were never realized. On the other hand, as was Hamdan's own experience and that of all those who held key positions in the essential services during the Occupation, the Japanese period brought with it a number of positive benefits. From the educational point of view Japanese educationists of stature such as Banno, Suguro and Kodera rendered signal service in preparing a new generation of Malaysians who possessed critical technical knowledge and a new self-confidence engendered by having made the grade in areas which under colonial rule had been denied them.

### **Life during the Occupation**

In the meantime, Hamdan had been given another opportunity to improve on and hone his skills and broaden his experience. In October 1943, he was selected by the Perak Military Administration (*Gunseikanbu*), to take a supplementary three months specialist course in physical education (*tairenka*) under official sponsorship at the Advanced Teachers' Institute (*Jokyu Shihan Gakko*) in Singapore. Those selected were all twenty-four years old, mature, and highly motivated, drawn from all over the Peninsula, including some of his colleagues such as Junid Haji Abdul Rahim, Lee Guan Meng and David Loh, all from Ipoh. This course enabled Hamdan to improve his skills as a *sumo* wrestler and in other physical activities such as cross-country running. Besides those involved in the PE course, another group formed consisted of older and



more experienced lecturers and teachers, thirty in all, for training in a *bunkyoka* class which concerned Japanese education and culture. Their course lasted for six months.

Amongst the participants in the *bunkyoka* class were Tagar Singh from Penang, Abdul Razak from Johor, Haji Din from Perak, Ahmad Miun from Kuala Lumpur, Selamat from Singapore, Haji Shaari from Negeri Sembilan and a number of others.

Hamdan got to know and get on close terms with all of them whilst at the Institute. In a period when the country was unsettled, all of them shared the same ups and downs which brought about a close-knit intimacy between them that has endured up till the present day. Whilst serving in the Ministry of Education after the war, Hamdan got the opportunity of meeting them all again as he made his visits all over the Peninsula. The close friendships and old memories of such momentous times are not easily forgotten, and in moments of nostalgia Hamdan frequently recalls them.

The political situation in Malaya outside these institutions of higher learning at the end of 1943 was not so pleasant as that which existed on the campus. The attitude of the Japanese military regime towards the local populace changed as they realized that the war situation was becoming more critical. All the fine promises which had been so liberally made up to this point appeared increasingly empty once the locals began to lose their faith in the leader of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. By early 1943 many people, though mostly Chinese, had become secret sympathisers of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), an underground organization which had the blessings of the British, despite the fact that it was Communist-dominated, in its guerilla tactics against the Japanese<sup>28</sup>.

In a shrewd counter-measure, the Japanese started encouraging the locals to think of defending themselves and of preserving security in the country. The formula used was to set up voluntary, semi-military defence units like the *Jikeidan* (for maintaining security in the neighbourhood, rather like the Rukun Tetangga – the *Heiho* (auxiliary army), the *Gyutai* (voluntary bodies) and *Gyugun* (military volunteers). The *Jikeidan* and *Gyutai* were established in every district and comprised both Malays and Chinese. However, the Malays tended to prefer the voluntary bodies<sup>29</sup>.

The Japanese, nevertheless, persevered with their pro-Malay policy in the hope of winning their wholehearted support in opposing any British attempt to return to the country. They not only encouraged political activities amongst former leaders of the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), but also appointed some of them to lead *Gyugun* or Pembela Tanah Air (PETA - 'Defenders of the Motherland') units. Alongside this Ibrahim Yaacob, former leader of the KMM, was allowed to set up his Kesatuan Rakyat Istimewa (KRIS - 'The Chosen People's Association')<sup>30</sup>, which later changed its name to Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung (The Indonesia/Peninsula People's Association) in 1945, as a move towards independence for Malaya within an Indonesian framework<sup>31</sup>. With this kind of encouragement, Malay nationalism got a strong boost. Of course, the leaders of the KMM had had contacts with the Japanese which went back to pre-war days. In fact, several of them were arrested just before the outbreak of war by the British authorities who feared that these links would mount a threat to the colonial regime.

In general, standards of living deteriorated as the future remained uncertain and the economy stagnated. Imports of food, in particular, declined, causing difficulty all round. 'Everybody in Perak lived in hardship and penury', according to one well-known local historian<sup>32</sup> 'because of the shortages of food and clothing; in fact, never before in their history had the people of Perak suffered such privations'.

In order to overcome the food shortage, the Japanese authorities encouraged the cultivation of tapioca as an alternative crop. Indeed, Hamdan recalls how in the early stages of his training at the *Shonan Koa Kunrensho*, he was taught how to grow five food crops, including tapioca, so as to be prepared for any eventuality such as that which they were facing then.

However, although by this time things were no longer going in their favour, neither in Malaya nor on the Pacific war front, the Japanese still carried on with their efforts to make Malayan youths fluent in their language. This attitude commands respect. Although confronted with an increasing number of problems of all kinds, the Japanese were resolved not to relinquish their efforts to introduce Japanese culture to Malaysians.

## The Occupation Comes to an End

Signs of the impending Japanese collapse grew increasingly evident on all sides. First and foremost were the rumours, corroborated by the steadily worsening state of the economy and by the drastic fall in the value of the 'banana leaf' currency<sup>33</sup>. In other words, there was soaring inflation which went completely unchecked, and the Japanese-Malayan currency became almost worthless<sup>34</sup>. American bombers were now frequently seen flying high in the sky, but sometimes they flew low enough to drop propaganda leaflets telling of Allied victories and of the preparations being made for big attacks on the Japanese in various theatres of war in the region.

With the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, followed by the landing of Allied armed forces on the beaches of Port Dickson and Morib in September, the story of the Japanese Occupation in the Peninsula came to an end. With it, the *Jokyu Shihan Gakko* also ceased to function. Japanese officials and citizens were rounded up and sent to Changi Gaol in Singapore before being sent back home by the British Military Administration (BMA).

## The Impact of the Occupation and Its Aftermath

The teachers and students of the *Jokyu Shihan Gakko* were all packed and ready to go back to their homes. The three years and eight months during which Japan controlled this country were years of war, and no-one could predict or foresee what the future would hold at the end of the Second World War.

So wrote Hamdan in notes he made when looking back on the Japanese surrender. The scenario was almost the same as that at the time of the British defeat four years previously, when Hamdan and his fellow-students had to leave their posts and return home. The only difference was that this time no bombs were falling, in contrast to his experience when in Singapore he was in 1942.

The three years and eight months of Japanese rule left behind a mixture of impressions on the local population – some happy, some sad. For those who had happy memories, the departure of the Japanese was

certainly a sad occasion, because under the Japanese they had been a little better off than they had been under the pre-war British colonial administration.

For Hamdan, those years were filled with cruelty and fear. Nevertheless, at the same time they were ones which had taught him the meaning of courage, self-reliance and the will to survive, alongside an appreciation of human values, which gave to the individual physical, mental and spiritual strength. This experience gave Hamdan the resources with which to face up to the numerous challenges which he was to encounter in his future career as an educationist.

In general, the Japanese Occupation left an indelible impression on the minds of ordinary people as to how to stand on their own feet, to make do and improvise, whether by growing tapioca for their food, mending clothes or making new ones, or finding spare parts to make engines work. To survive a man must be prepared to struggle for existence and not simply surrender himself to fate. The truth of the saying that 'necessity is the mother of invention' never makes itself more apparent than when faced with a crisis. Hundreds of youths and young men and women all over the Peninsula benefited from various practical activities that they learned at school during this period, which to a greater or lesser degree opened opportunities for them to get along by using the new skills that they had acquired.

The trade schools can be said to have absorbed the ranks of the young unemployed and filled up their spare hours with activities that were both practical and profitable. On the other hand, the Japanese tactics of favouring one particular community, in other words a deliberate policy of 'divide and rule', resulted in the generation of mutual suspicion amongst the Malays, Chinese and Indians, which led to a number of racial clashes in various parts of the country after the collapse of Japanese authority.

Everybody in Malaya, regardless of race or status, had undergone hardship during the Occupation, and so the returning British were popularly regarded as 'saviours'. However, some six weeks elapsed between the Japanese surrender and the return of the British. This interlude provided the opportunity for a few amongst those who had been the victims of Japanese oppression and torture to try and get their own back not only on the Japanese but also on all those who had collaborated

with them. In several States certain Chinese groups – for it was the Chinese who had suffered the most at Japanese hands during the Occupation – took the law into their own hands, threatening, torturing and killing anyone they suspected of having been a collaborator<sup>35</sup>. Taking advantage of this situation, the Communist guerillas, parading under the banner of the MPAJA, came out of the jungles, equipped with weapons supplied to them by the British, and tried to take over some of the principal towns while assisting in the witch-hunt.

In fact, the Communist plans went much further. They aimed at seizing power and declaring a Communist Republic of Malaya. However, the BMA was able to establish itself too quickly for the Communists to be able to put this plan into immediate effect. So for the time being, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) took the decision to defer taking violent action and bide their time for a suitable opportunity. In the meantime the Communists went in for infiltrating the new trade unions and other organizations and spreading their influence by fomenting strikes and posing as champions of the workers against the capitalist, colonial regime.

At no point in the country's history had the future seemed so unpredictable and uncertain as it did in September 1945.

1. Lewis, *The Lost Years*, op.cit., p.15.
2. Phibun Songgram, the Thai Prime Minister, openly declared in December 1941: 'I want to assure you, in this instance, that I am not a traitor. I would like you to know that Japan is our greatest friend in life or death, and we have to walk together shoulder to shoulder to fight our common enemy. All of you should know that Britain took a large piece of our territory in the south for which Japan is now fighting. I hope our army will be proud to be in the same front with the Japanese army. Presently we shall ally ourselves with Japan.', quoted in Lord Strabolgi, *Singapore and After: A Study of the Pacific Campaign*, London, 1942, p.53.
3. i.e. a long-handled blade used for cutting undergrowth and small trees, etc.
4. According to the 1931 census, Chinese and Indian residents in three out of the four FMS (i.e. in Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan) outnumbered their Malay populations. The same was also true of Johor, and needless to say of Penang and Singapore. See Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya*, Kuala

Lumpur, OUP, 1967. Appendix II. For more details of the imbalances between the Malays and the non-Malay immigrant communities, see Rupert Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*, Kuala Lumpur, Pustaka Ilmu, 1964. esp. pp.182-4.

5. Abdul Wahab Hashim, 'Kedah during the Japanese Occupation (1942-45)' in *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah*, 8.1990, Kuala Lumpur, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia. p.40.

6. i.e. Side by side with Japan we fight  
Greater East Asia now starts to rise  
If Western influence is thrown away  
Then peace and order will return to the East

My stand is now quite clear  
We must fight until the last  
With Japan we shall go forward  
A great new Asia will be born

7. Zakiah Hanum, *Thought for the Day and News of the Day*, Kuala Lumpur, Adicipta, 1997. p.133.

8. Zakiah Hanum, *ibid.* p.4.

9. *The Shonan Koa Kunrensho*, which was opened in May 1942, was the most famous of the various training schools set up by the Japanese in the Peninsula. Another well-known training school of the same type was also established at Malacca. The inspiration for the introduction of these schools and the training programme that they provided came from the Head of the Japanese Military Administration in Malaya, Colonel Watanabe Wataru. Watanabe firmly believed that those who had lived under colonial rule should be weaned away from their addiction to the materialism of their former colonial masters and taught to endure hardship through physical and *seishin* training. He targeted Malayan youth, the wave of the future, as being the most suitable material for absorbing this Japanese ethic. Watanabe also stressed the importance of learning the Japanese language not merely for purposes of communication but in order to instil *Nippon seishin* into Malaysians. For further details of Watanabe's philosophy and the implementation of the *seishin* programme, see Akashi Yoji, 'Learning the "seishin" in 'Millennium Markers'', *The Star*, Monday, 20 November 2000.

10. *Pendidik Istimewa*, *op.cit.* p.6.

11. Yoji Akashi, 'The Japanese Policy towards the Malayan Chinese, 1941-45', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol.1. no.2. September 1970. p.61

12. Amongst the long list of future Malay(sian) leaders who underwent this training were Syed Mohamad Alhady (surgeon), Kwan Sai Keong (a future Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Singapore), Fred Arulanandam and Eusoffe Abdulcader (both to become High Court Judges at Penang), and Wan Abdul Hamid bin Mohd Saleh and Ungku Mohsin bin Mohamad from Johor.

13. Radio Taiso or Radio P.E. was the name for this radio station which provided a series of PE programmes numbered 1, 2 and 3 (i.e. *dai ichi, dai ni* and *dai san*). These numbers corresponded with three grades of physical movements, the first grade being 'simple', the second grade 'more vigorous', and the third grade 'very vigorous'. These movements followed the tempo of the tune blared out over the radio, but in the absence of the radio, the same movements could be used by repeating verbally the appropriate numerals.

14. According to Akashi Yoji (*The Star*, op cit.), the physical aspect of the training consisted, amongst other things, of bouts of *sumo* wrestling where the loser still stayed on in the ring until he collapsed from sheer exhaustion, while route marches over distances of more than 60 km were carried out with full military kit in the tropical heat; no-one was allowed to drop out, and those who were exhausted still had to finish the march, even if only with the assistance of their fellow cadets. However, the students were allowed some time to themselves. Hamdan used these breaks to visit places in Singapore of interest to him, including the world-famous Botanical Gardens, which were not far away from the School. There in the Gardens – in fact at the Orchid Greenhouse, Hamdan came across a very well-known figure, Professor R.E. Holttum, the third of a famous line of Directors of the Gardens (i.e. from 1927 till 1941), had already made his mark as the pioneer of orchid cultivation in South-East Asia and was the founder (with two others) of the Malayan Orchid Society in 1928. Meeting this great man was an experience for Hamdan who had already developed an interest in the botany of tropical rainforests as part of his studies in Geography. Hamdan learned from Holttum that he owed his freedom from internment through the direct intervention of the Emperor Hirohito, a distinguished biologist, who issued specific orders that steps should be taken to save the scientific records and materials of the Raffles Museum and Botanical Gardens from destruction. Holttum retired from active employment in 1984 but continued to be actively involved in research. He visited Penang in 1984 as a guest of honour of the State Government for the celebration of the centenary of Penang's Waterfall Gardens, by which time he was already aged ninety.

15. The first four named were his friends from Raffles College, or in the case of Raja Mohar from his school days – all of whom returned to Raffles to complete their diploma course at Raffles when the war was over.

16. Hamdan formed a high opinion of Banno as a dedicated educationist and very capable administrator. Holding a BA degree in Literature from Waseda University, Tokyo and one in Economics from Michigan University, USA, Banno had a good command of English as well as, of course, Japanese. He had a strong personality and took his duties seriously, choosing to live in at the *Kyoin Yosei Jo* throughout the whole period he served in the State, so as to ensure effective supervision. He also took great interest in the training of the young student-teachers under his charge, carefully selecting teachers and instructors of calibre from among the Japanese staff of the Perak Japanese Military Administration (*Perak Gunseikanbu*). Some of the Japanese non-military personnel were bi-lingual and so were able to teach Japanese, while the

military members of the staff took charge of drill and other forms of para-military training at the Institute. Banno himself prepared three small standard text-books on Japanese grammar and syntax and made a point of finding the time to teach with the aid of his own books. As a result of his efforts, most of the student-teachers under his charge acquired a basic mastery of the two syllabaries *kata-kana* (side-script) and *hiragana* (running script) which accompany the *kanji* characters, and enabled them to read, with some degree of success, a Japanese newspaper.

17. *Sumo* is a Japanese sport first practised some 2,000 years ago and which today is regarded as one of Japan's national sports. Usually the wrestlers are stoutly-built and pot-bellied men, who are wont to eat about ten times as much (if not more) than the ordinary person and consume large quantities of beer and sake into the bargain. To all appearances they are overweight and carry too much fat. However, that fat clearly gives them great resilience and strength. Their long hair is tied into a knot around the top of their head as a crown, following the *samurai* (knight warrior) tradition. In the ring the wrestlers wear only a loin cloth. See Zakiah Hanum, *op.cit.* p. 121.

18. A poem composed by Mahsuri S.N. which appeared in the *Berita Malai* (a local, Japanese-sponsored paper) on 24 December 1944, describing the excitement and value of the Japanese style of wrestling, goes as follows:

On the empty field people gather  
All around, in a circle  
Cheering loudly, smiling broadly  
Watching the champions at work

Locked in struggle, one is felled  
Gets up again, measures his tread  
Both seek ways to be the victor  
Without respite but both exhausted

Although seen as a common affair  
Like a game for pleasure played  
But the essence springs from the soul  
And the will to fight till the end

Thus *sumo* brings its joy  
Perfection should always be copied  
Healthy body, a lively spirit  
Ready to fight for the new era

in Pyan Husayn and Ismail Ahmad, *Puisi Zaman Jepun*. Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1978. p.16.

19. i.e. refer in particular to Chapters 7 and 8.

20. Suguro as Director of Education, in charge of the State's Education Department (*Perak Kyoiku-ka*) was assisted by a number of education officers who had come from Japan. Their main task, apart from training local youths to



speak Japanese, was to show them how to acquire practical skills by joining various training institutions.

21. The School of Mines and the Industrial School were both housed in the former Anderson Primary School. At the School of Mines the students learned something about the geology of the Kinta Valley, but they were also given practical training in mining surveying at the open-cast tin mine at Pengkalan Pegoh on the outskirts of Ipoh. Those who passed were sent to work on tin mines in the Kinta District. At the Industrial School students were trained to become motor and electrical mechanics. The electrical training, however, was carried out at the Malim Nawar Power Station, some 40 km away near Kampar. Those who passed their training at this school found work in various factories around Ipoh. The youths involved in all these fields – tin-mining, electricity and mechanics – received their elementary knowledge from Japanese and local instructors in English and Malay. A pass in any one of these fields guaranteed employment, especially for those who had already become fluent in Japanese.

22. The KED and all pre-war electricity undertakings in the Peninsula had been taken over by a Japanese corporation (established in 1939) called the Nippon Hassoden Kabushiki Kaisha (Nippon Power Supplies Company/NHKK) in collaboration with the Kansai Haiden Kabushiki Kaisha (KHKK), a Japanese electricity distribution company. The NHKK and the KHKK managed Malaya's electricity supplies for the duration of the Japanese Occupation.

23. The five were Yuen Yuet Leng, Thong Kuo Sin, Ariffin Ariff, Raja Azhar bin Raja Ahmad and Chin In Kam. Both Yuen and Thong both elected after the war to make their careers with the Police. Yuen (now Dato' Seri), born 1927, rose to become Chief Police Officer, Perak, somewhat suddenly in 1975, on the assassination by communists of his predecessor, Tan Sri Khoo Chang Kong, in Ashby Road near Anderson School, Ipoh, and ended up Commissioner of Police, Sarawak before retirement in 1984. Dato Seri Yuen has published an account of his earlier days during the Emergency when he was with Special Branch, entitled *Operation Ginger* (1992). Thong, on the other hand, rose to become Deputy Superintendent of Police, Marine Branch (Northern Division), stationed at Penang, and then in 1969 was transferred to Police Headquarters at Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur. He retired prematurely on medical grounds in 1978 with the rank of DSP. Ariffin Ariff became a Malay school teacher, and retired as Headmaster of a school in Beruas, Perak.

24. Several of the graduates of these Ipoh vocational institutes made their mark after the war in the process of nation-building in Malaya and Malaysia. One of the most prominent was (Tan Sri Datuk) Hashim bin Yeop Abdullah Sani. Born at Ipoh in 1928 and educated at the Anderson School, he was enrolled in the Mining School (*Kozan Gakko*) but after the war opted for Arts and obtained his B.A. degree at the University of Malaya in 1955. He subsequently entered the MCS, and then the Judiciary (in 1958) and rose to become a High Court Judge in 1973, then promoted to the Supreme Court, and finally was appointed Chief Justice of Malaya in 1988 in the wake of the

downfall of the Lord President of the Council, Tun Mohamed Salleh bin Abas, in that year. He suffered from a stroke in 1992 and subsequently went into a coma from which he never recovered. He died in 1998. Another two notable graduates from the Youth Leadership School were Mohd. Kusasi bin Mat from Teluk Anson (Intan) who ended up as Senior Inspector of Police at Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur, and Abdul Latif Tan Deman from Tapah, who was to become the Manager of Ipoh Airport.

25. Kodera was yet another graduate of Tokyo University, who had the distinction of having specialized in both English Language and Literature. This and the fact that he looked almost English - being tall and fair-complexioned - did not sit too well with some of his more fanatical countrymen who did not approve of anything to do with the language and culture of the enemy. Nevertheless, as far as Hamdan and the other Malaysians who were under him were concerned, he proved to be a very good and popular Director of Education.

26. This raises the point - why Perak? Hamdan surmises that the Japanese administration in Selangor was too wrapped up in administrative affairs, since Kuala Lumpur was the capital, and did not have the manpower or resources to devote to the promotion of education as was the case in Perak. Penang, with its predominantly Chinese population, was probably regarded as being too disaffected for being able to secure local cooperation. Malacca was too small and Johor too close to Singapore.

27. The decisive turning point was the Battle of Midway Island in June 1942, when the Americans inflicted crippling losses on a Japanese fleet which was attempting to thrust further into the Pacific. After this, the Japanese lost the initiative, and were basically on the defensive as they lost command of the seas.

28. Khoo Kay Kim & Others, *Kenegaraan 25 Tahun: Satu Perspektif Sejarah*, Kuala Lumpur, Persatuan Muzium Sejarah, 1982, pp. 12-13.

29. It was for instance, reported from Kelang that an oath-taking ceremony for a Malay *Gyutai* detachment was held in the presence of the Sultan of Selangor at Kelang in February 1944. Zakiah Hanum, op.cit., p.146.

30. The KMM had actually been banned by the Japanese in June 1942 when they found that some of its members had been trying to establish contact with the MPAJA. However, the Japanese still courted its leaders, especially Ibrahim Yaacob. The acronym KRIS was cleverly chosen, since keris is the Malay name given to the traditional wavy-bladed dagger, which is a symbol of the Malay warrior and his fighting spirit.

31. Zainal Abidin bin Abd. Wahid, in *Glimpses of Malaysian History*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1970, pp.95-6.

32. i.e. Haji Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Perak*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1972, p.115.

33. i.e. because of the engraving of a banana leaf on the Japanese notes. Towards the end of the Occupation, kabung palm sugar was selling at \$80.00, refined sugar at \$20.00, coffee at \$60.00 per kati., and eggs at \$25.00 each!

34. T.P.M. Lewis, op.cit. p.390.

35. Some of them even went so far as to ask the British, once they had arrived, to allow them forty-eight hours in which to dispose of the remnants of these pro-Japanese traitors before the BMA formally took over power in the country. However, fortunately the British authorities did not entertain this request. See T.P.M. Lewis, *op.cit.* p.415.



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FOUR  
*Raffles Graduate: 1946-1955*

**Starting Afresh**

It was against the background of confusion and uncertainty that prevailed at the end of the war in September 1945 that Hamdan, like everybody else, made his way home to his family and started thinking about what he was going to do next. For one thing he decided to stay clear of the restless politics sweeping the country. This was a crucial decision because, by virtue of his background and qualifications, he belonged to that select number of young Malays who had the potential and competence to provide leadership in political affairs at that time. In fact, he was well known to several prominent budding Malay politicians of the hour who were actively involved in the movement which led to the establishment of UMNO, and who tried to persuade him to join them'. But Hamdan said 'No'. He already knew that his true vocation lay in education and that he would best serve his country and his people by keeping to that line. If his answer had been otherwise, the whole story of his life would have been very different from what it actually has been.

On the other hand, Hamdan was never one for just sitting down at home and doing nothing. Instead, he occupied himself in a number of ways, all of which were to bear fruit, whilst waiting for news about the re-opening of Raffles College. The first and most practical one was doing some gardening, using a few of the techniques which he had picked up at the *Nogyo Gakko* (Agriculture School). He planted tapioca and sweet potatoes on his father's rubber smallholding, and within about three

months had reaped a bounteous reward which produced enough food to feed the whole family. He also managed to get himself appointed as a temporary teacher at his Alma Mater, the Clifford School at Kuala Kangsar. However, not content with that, the moment he was accepted as a temporary teacher, he joined a course for a Teacher's Certificate run by the Cambridge Correspondence Course in England. At the same time, he also enrolled himself with the University of London for taking correspondence courses in Geography, History, English Literature and Latin with a view to being able eventually to sit for that University's external degree examination.

### **The Sekolah Gaya Pos Experiment**

The burning of all this midnight oil paid off well in terms of the invaluable experience and benefit which he derived from it<sup>2</sup>. However, the most significant pay-off was the inspiration and know-how which they gave him for starting a correspondence course for teaching the English language tailored to the needs of schoolchildren in this country. Such were the origins of what was probably the first correspondence school in Malaya open to all, which he named *Sekolah Gaya Pos*. He realized that by this means he would be able to reach out to all those interested in learning English instead of its being confined to his teaching small groups of boys and girls in the classrooms of one school. It was, in fact, a form of distance learning so much in vogue today, with the difference that it was carried out by the limited means of the printing and other technologies available at the time.

Indeed, the Sekolah Gaya Pos was started by making full use of the facilities found at the bookshop of his brother-in-law, Yahya Ariff. Hamdan on his own initiative and following his own ideas, prepared the one-year course. It consisted of fifty-two lessons, which he composed himself, and cost those who took it only \$3 a month. Having successfully completed this fifty-two week course and having passed the final test, the correspondents were certified as having passed the equivalent of the English language examination taken at Standard V in an English-medium school.

The *Sekolah Gaya Pos* owed its creation to one man, but it was not a one-man show; it never could have been. Hamdan knew that once he resumed his studies at Raffles College, he would no longer be in a position to run and manage the course himself. However, the course was enabled to continue even after this happened through the good offices of two loyal friends and colleagues, both well-known and experienced teachers, namely Tuan Haji S.M. Zainal Abidin<sup>1</sup> from the Penang Free School, and Tuan Haji Mohd Zain bin Ayob<sup>2</sup>, who taught at the Anderson School, Ipoh. It was because of these two men and their dedicated reliability, patience and perseverance that after Hamdan's departure for Raffles College in 1946 the *Sekolah Gaya Pos*' English Language course carried on successfully for a number of years, with those who passed their tests duly receiving their certificates at the end<sup>3</sup>.

As for Hamdan himself, the venture made him feel that he had become, for a young man of twenty-four years, 'quite important' in the 'sleepy' Royal Town (of Kuala Kangsar) – with an entree to the Postmaster (Tuan Haji Yusof) and the P&T Officer (Tuan Haji Ghazalli) – and 'with not one day passing by without something new happening to make life interesting and worthwhile living.' Without his realizing it, this venture also taught him the ins and outs of business enterprise, though it was never Hamdan's intention to run the scheme for profit.

Indeed, so as to avoid any possible misunderstanding with Clifford School on this point, Hamdan sought permission to carry out his project from the Perak Education Office. The Chief Inspector of Schools at the time, E.C. Hicks<sup>4</sup>, was most agreeable to the proposal, and readily granted his permission. Hicks himself was very sympathetic to the idea of helping the less fortunate boys and girls of school-going age to get the opportunity to have a sound education, particularly where the medium of instruction was English. He was also well aware that Hamdan was not out to make money for himself, but was acting out of a sincere desire to help those who needed help – a highly laudable trait that he had inherited from his own family.

Such was Hamdan's philosophy, instilled in him since he was a child, which always shone like a candle in his mind. It was the idealism of a teacher, for whom the reward of teaching lies in enabling another fellow-being to see the light.

### **An Eventful Train Journey, 1946**

Nevertheless, despite all this activity, Hamdan's intense desire to resume his studies at Raffles College always nagged his thoughts. Every day he waited to receive the news, either by post or through an announcement in the Singapore newspapers, that the College had been reopened. But all was silence. Finally he made up his mind to go to Singapore himself to find out how things stood with that institution of higher learning.

On hearing of Hamdan's firm resolve, his mother sighed; 'There you are, now that boy wants to go off again. Why can't he wait till things have quietened down a bit?' For, she thought to herself, this was the fourth time that Hamdan had left the house for distant Singapore. The first time, to go to Raffles; the second, to join the Japanese language institute; the third to take the PE course - and now yet once again.

His father, Sheikh Tahir, on the other hand, a man who was well aware of Hamdan's fighting spirit, thought otherwise. 'Let him go!', he declared. 'A young man should be ready to move around and see the world, provided that he knows what he is looking for and that it is for his own benefit and for that of his race and religion'. Not for one moment did Sheikh Tahir have any misgivings about letting his son leave the house, even though the situation in the country was still far from stable, because he understood the commitment that lay behind Hamdan's purpose.

Money was a problem. At first Hamdan tried to get some help through the good offices of Dato' Wan Razali, the Territorial Chief of Kuala Kangsar' at the District Office, for he did not have enough savings of his own. However, unfortunately the Dato' had no money to spare because the State administration was still recuperating from the effects of the Occupation and all available resources were earmarked for the top priority of restoring living standards as a whole. All that Dato' Wan Razali could do was to give Hamdan an official letter certifying that he was a former student of Raffles College who was domiciled in Perak and wanted to resume his studies in Singapore now that the war was over. In the end, the only money which Hamdan managed to take with him was \$30, a gift from Hamid, his twin-brother, who was only too happy to let

him have it. Hamid, incidentally, was now working as a hospital assistant, because he had lost interest in continuing his studies in order to be a technician at the Technical School, Kuala Lumpur. However, a few years later he went in for being a radiographer, a job he remained with until he retired.

With the blessing of his parents and his trust in Allah, Hamdan boarded the train at Kuala Kangsar for Singapore, quite innocent of what was in store for him.

Just as the train was approaching Kanthan Halt about ten miles before Ipoh, it was brought to a halt by a band of Three Star (i.e. Communist) guerillas, who were in uniform complete with their five-cornered caps. Paying no heed to the convenience of the passengers on board, the guerillas dashed into the coaches, brandishing their weapons as if they were the lords of all they surveyed. With bloodshot eyes smouldering with revenge, they sought out anyone whom they suspected of having been Japanese collaborators during the Occupation. Two of them chased some suspects down the railway track and shot them dead on the spot. Hamdan saw this cold-blooded killing with his own eyes – like a scene from some Wild West movie. The guerillas had shot their victims without the slightest compunction or mercy, a classic example of summary bandit justice.

When at last the train was allowed to go on its way leaving that terrible scene behind them, Hamdan (and no doubt everybody else on board) heaved a great sigh of relief and gave his thanks to the Almighty that he had come out of it unscathed. All the same, he reflected, in a society where law and order do not exist, the law of the jungle reigns supreme - and might is right! He fervently hoped that he would never have to undergo such a dreadful experience again. However, that hope was soon dashed to the ground, for once more, later on the same journey he was confronted by an almost identical situation, with the major difference being that this time he was directly involved. This second incident took place at a station near Labis, Johor, where, just like at Kanthan, a gang of Three Star guerillas stopped the train, boarded it and dragged out anyone they suspected of having been a collaborator. To Hamdan's horror, a couple of the gang approached him as he leaned back against his seat in a state of suspended animation. His heart thumped



wildly and he thought that his last moments had come. They shouted at him to get off the train for questioning, but it was clear that they were set to beat him up because they had received information that he was a former collaborator masquerading as a medicine seller on his way to Singapore. Hamdan, needless to say, had no intention of moving from his seat because he had no doubt as to what his fate would be if he did so, and made up his mind on the spot that, come what may, he was going to stay put. If the worst came to the worst, he would have to put to use his *sumo* skills and other self-defence tactics which he had acquired during the war. Then Hamdan suddenly remembered Dato' Wan Razali's letter, pulled it out of his bag and showed it to them, not knowing whether they would be able to understand it or not. At the same time, he told them that he had to reach Singapore that day because of an important engagement. Just at that moment the engine whistled, indicating that the train was about to move, and the guerillas hurriedly thrust the letter back into his hands. Was it because of the blast of the whistle, or had they understood the contents of the letter after all? Whatever the reason, the letter had undoubtedly proved to be a most effective talisman. It was an episode that Hamdan would never forget.

### **Waiting for Raffles: Odd Jobs in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur**

When he finally arrived at Tanjong Pagar Station in Singapore, Hamdan felt a great sense of relief, and without wasting a moment made straight for the house of Mohamad, his elder brother, in McNair Road. Mohamad was once more working as a translator at the Governor's Office in the Fullerton Building as he had done before the war, and now held the position of Chief Malay Translator. As soon as he could, Hamdan went out looking for his former college mates to find out what was the position of those whose studies had been interrupted by the war. He and a number of others attended a meeting at the house of Lee Kuan Yew (the future Prime Minister of Singapore) at No.18, Oxley Rise, at which it was decided that they would appeal to the college authorities at Raffles for the courses to resume as soon as possible.

Their appeal was favourably acknowledged by the College authorities but they had to be patient and wait until the middle of 1946 to

give the College time to repair the damage done to its buildings and facilities during the Japanese Occupation, when they had been used as the Kempeitei headquarters<sup>8</sup>. In fact, throughout the whole of the Occupation the College had served as a detention centre for those suspected of harbouring pro-British sympathies, many of whom were tortured there and subsequently executed.

Whilst waiting for the College to reopen, Hamdan looked around for work so that he could support himself and not be a burden to his brother. Mohamad managed to get him a job as an interpreter at the offices of the BMA under Colonel D.C. Watherston<sup>9</sup>. At the end of 1945, the BMA shifted to Kuala Lumpur and set up office in the Sultan Abdul Samad Building (i.e. the present day Federal Law Courts), Hamdan following along in tow. He continued working there till April 1946 when the BMA came to an end, and civil administration was restored under the short-lived Malayan Union.

In Kuala Lumpur Hamdan stayed with Haji Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba)<sup>10</sup> in Kampung Bahru. Za'ba had once been a student of Arabic under Sheikh Tahir and had become a close friend of Hamdan's two elder brothers, Mohamad and Ahmad, in Singapore during the war and Occupation. Back in Kuala Lumpur, Za'ba was working at the Publications Office of the Kuala Lumpur Municipality as Chief Translator, along with two assistants, Abdul Kudus bin Muhammad and Sulaiman bin Hmazah. Hamdan was very content to put up in Za'ba's house because he regarded him as one of the family. Whilst staying there, he learned a lot from Za'ba, especially with anything to do about Malay language and literature. Nevertheless, when Raffles College reopened in October 1946, Hamdan had to give up his job and go back to Singapore and resume his diploma course. Out of the 196 pre-war students of the College, only 115 returned, to be joined by 81 fresh students, of whom 14 were women.

### **Back to Kuala Kangsar and Clifford School (1947)**

The few months required formally to complete his diploma course passed quickly by, and Hamdan, now a Raffles College diploma-holder, was ordered by the Perak Education Office to take up his duties as a

teacher at his Alma Mater, the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar. The school by that time was under the charge of K.D. Luke, an Oxford graduate, with a Dip. Ed. from London who had been a PoW for the four years of the Japanese Occupation, first at Changi Gaol, Singapore and then in Thailand.

Because they were spacious and had many rooms, many English-medium schools during the Occupation were taken over by the Japanese military and converted into either administrative centres or officers' quarters. Clifford School was no exception. At first, it was occupied by the military, the main building becoming a hostel for Japanese officers, and the attap huts attached as a store for their equipment and also as a stable for their ponies. Then, in March 1942 the local Malay School was moved into the school buildings, for as far as education was concerned the Japanese gave priority to the Malay medium. In the afternoons, the school premises were used for learning Japanese or *Nippon-go*, which took in some 300 pupils, boys and girls, though later on that year certain subjects were allowed to be taught in English. A number of former teachers from Clifford were retained to teach there on condition that they too learned Japanese. One of them was V. Arumukham<sup>11</sup>.

The scars left behind by the occupation by the Japanese military of the Clifford School were sad to behold. Apart from the actual buildings themselves which had not been maintained throughout their tenancy, all the other school facilities including the library, the furniture and the garden, etc., had been ruined. The 2,000 odd books in the library and the teachers' common-room had been completely destroyed. After the Japanese had left, Arumukham was given the task of taking charge of the school administration as Deputy Headmaster. He faced a tough job in restoring the situation. The BMA itself occupied the buildings as soon as they got to Kuala Kangsar, although they stayed there for only a couple of weeks, as they met Arumukham's appeal for them to move elsewhere so that the school could be reopened.

Apart from the general lack of amenities, the school also suffered from a lack of teachers when it was finally re-opened in early October 1945. A hunt was made for temporary teachers. Amongst those who were roped in were some old teachers from the Malay College, including Salleh bin Hussein and the late Ariffin bin Mat Nam (both later made

Dato's) who were sent there while waiting for the College itself to be re-opened.

The arrival of Hamdan and three other teachers with diplomas<sup>12</sup> in early 1947 was therefore all the more welcome. With their assistance the problem of reviving Standard VII, which later became the School Certificate Class, was overcome despite the shortage of chairs, desks and textbooks. To deal with the lack of books, lessons were written out on the blackboard and copied down by the students. Such then were the conditions faced by Hamdan as he set out to teach Geography and History, the two subjects assigned to him. Nevertheless he tackled all these difficulties with determination, for had he not taken a solemn vow when he joined Raffles College to become a dedicated teacher?

Conscious of that vow and equally conscious of the fact that he was now back at his former school which had served him so well, teaching children of his own kith and kin who were thirsty for knowledge, Hamdan realized that he would have to work very hard if he was to succeed in raising the standards of those whom he was teaching. At the same time, he was fortunate in that he was not beset by any personal problems. He came from a family with a sound religious background and a strong sense of pride in their heritage. He was also held in high regard by his colleagues as well as by his students. Moreover, he was able to stay in his own home in Kuala Kangsar which made it easy for him to go to school and back every day. One of his former students, Haji Wan Hassan bin Haji Wan Teh, who later was to be head of the Financial Division of the Ministry of Education when Hamdan was Director of Education, fondly recalls his own impressions of Hamdan at this time:

K.D. Luke was followed up the stage by another gentleman whom at first I thought was another white man, due to his fair complexion, European look, and his style of speaking English. He is no other than Hamdan who is the greatest teacher that Clifford School has ever produced<sup>13</sup>.

Hamdan, needless to say, at twenty-five was a smart and prepossessing young man. To a strong personality which bore the stamp of the son of an *ulama* was added the mark of his determination to both teach and learn. Geography was his speciality, but he preferred to teach

History, all the more so when living in a royal town such as Kuala Kangsar which had so much of historical interest to offer. Besides teaching, Hamdan was also actively involved in extra-mural activities, in particular through the geography and history clubs under his charge.

He was a very strict disciplinarian, and it was very hard to find any class he taught which was rowdy or unruly. For Hamdan was a firm believer in the English adage that 'to spare the rod is to spoil the child'. But that does not mean to say that he relished using the cane. In fact, it was the combination of his strictness with a fair and even-handed manner that won him the respect of his pupils. His command of English was exceptional. He was at home with all aspects of the language, including speaking and writing, which made him a formidable debater and not easy to get the better of in discussion either. All this accords with what Haji Wan Hassan, who marvelled at the fluency of Hamdan's English at the weekly school assembly, has had to say.

Hamdan believed that a class properly disciplined and looked after would promote effective teaching and learning. In order to improve discipline he would make sure that he aroused the interest of the class in whatever they were being taught so that they would always be highly motivated. A class that was able to engender that kind of spirit would be sure to achieve first-class academic results. Nevertheless, Hamdan was not altogether satisfied with his own performance. In order to be still more effective in the classroom, Hamdan considered it necessary to go into the art of teaching still more deeply, particularly with regard to methodology and approach, but he felt that in this respect he was lacking. When he was at Raffles College sitting for his Diploma Course, he had never been really exposed to the art and science of teaching. He had acquired a smattering of teaching method as a teacher of Japanese in Ipoh, besides attending Japanese teacher-training courses, but the latter had also been too brief and crammed.

### **Normal Class, the Emergency and the Call of Education (1947-8)**

Therefore, when after having started off his professional career at Clifford, Hamdan was instructed to attend the last year of the Normal Class Course which was being held at Ipoh, he was overjoyed. This

directive conformed with the Perak Education Office's reinstatement of the pre-war policy of requiring the holders of Raffles College teachers' diplomas to attend the third and final year of the Normal Class course at either Taiping or Ipoh<sup>14</sup>. Hamdan was very excited at this opportunity and waited impatiently to be registered for it. Needless to say, once enrolled, he followed the Third Year of the Normal Class course at Ipoh with his usual keenness and determination, and completed it the following year (1947) with flying colours. He had every reason to feel pleased with his success and now, as a fully trained diploma-graduate teacher, career-wise he was in a strong position to move on to greater things.

The year after this, 1948, was the one in which the Emergency was declared, and the country was still in a state of unrest and uncertainty. As a result of these unsettled conditions which had in fact prevailed since the end of the Japanese Occupation, Malay students became infected with a deep sense of nationalism, one reflection of which was the emergence of the first pan-Malay student organization. Named the Peninsular Malays Students' Union (*Gabungan Pelajar-pelajar Melayu Semenanjung/GPMS*), it was established on 14 August of that same year under the leadership of a young student called Aminuddin Baki<sup>15</sup>. This Union had its origins in the Enlightened Malay Students Movement (*Pelajar Melayu InsaffPERMI*), also led by Aminuddin Baki, which had been started in Ipoh. Aminuddin's charisma succeeded in attracting his fellow-students at the University of Malaya in Singapore and in getting them to team up and form the GPMS, which had a more national character than PERMI.

Some of the spray from this political surf splashed onto Hamdan, as it had done immediately after the Occupation in 1945-6. Now that he had completed his first year as a fully-trained teacher at Clifford School, his friends thought that he would be able to make an effective contribution, if he so chose, since he already had had some experience as a youth leader on training courses during the Japanese Occupation. In fact, Hamdan very much wanted to be associated with this kind of movement, all the more so because it involved students and because it was related to his own career and ambitions. However, as two years previously, Hamdan placed his vocation as an educationist above everything else, so that whatever he could do in the realm of politics was hemmed in by the rules and

regulations which governed him as a teacher. He could only cheer from a distance.

Nevertheless, Hamdan did manage to get across a message to the GPMS through one of his own students. His message was that the student organization must implant in the minds of its members a firm commitment and resolve to give their undivided attention to the pursuit of knowledge, for only through knowledge could an individual put himself on par with those of other races in the country who were more advanced. Hamdan was not content merely to appeal to his own students to work hard, but practised what he preached by himself never giving up the learning process.

### **A Spell in England: Nottingham and London (1949-1950)**

Thanks to his determination and grit in pursuing his own studies, in 1949 Hamdan won a British Council scholarship to the University of Nottingham in England. There he was entered for a one year course in social science, with specialization in youth leadership. Then in 1950 Hamdan was awarded a second scholarship, this time to take a one-year course in teacher education at the Institute of Education, University of London. Thus he was out of the country continuously for two years as he took his courses at Nottingham and London. By the time that he returned home in early 1951 he was fully qualified to train teachers who had not been through the Normal Class at Ipoh<sup>6</sup>.

It was certainly unusual for a Raffles graduate teacher to receive two scholarships to run consecutively; indeed, it was difficult at the best of times to get a scholarship at all. This is where the Japanese spirit of being mentally, physically and spiritually alert at all times (i.e. *seishin ippai* or 'imbued with the fighting spirit') which he had been taught during the Occupation stood him in good stead. This attitude, coupled with the initiative and enthusiasm which he had displayed as a teacher at Clifford School, caught the eye of his superiors and accounts for his eventually obtaining these so hard-to-get awards.

Hamdan, of course, had always been very keen on getting the chance to further his studies abroad, but his attempts to obtain a scholarship for this purpose from the Perak and the Penang State Governments had

hitherto met with no success. He had failed to get a Perak State scholarship, despite all the efforts of Dato' Osman Talib<sup>17</sup>, who was State Secretary of Perak at the time and whom he knew personally, because although he had had all his primary and secondary education in Perak schools, he was not a state subject since he had been born in Penang. But when he had then tried to obtain a Penang State scholarship on the grounds of having been born there, he was disqualified because he had had all his primary and second education in Perak!

Very fortunately for Hamdan, a way was found around this classic example of bureaucratic red tape by E.C. Hicks<sup>18</sup>, the Senior Inspector of Schools, Perak, who had come to know Hamdan through the latter's involvement in the Boy Scouts movement at Clifford in 1946. Hicks, a dedicated educationist and sworn enemy of all bureaucratic red-tape, got round the scholarship conundrum by persuading the British Council to offer him the Nottingham award. Not only that, but when Hamdan had finished his course at Nottingham in 1950 and was about to return home, Hicks – convinced that Hamdan would make a good Education Officer – cabled him to stay put in London and take the Institute of Education (London University) course in teacher training. Then, with the backing of Osman Talib, he scraped together enough funds from the Perak Education Department's own savings to enable Hamdan to stay in London for an extra year<sup>19</sup>.

In April 1950, whilst at Nottingham, Hamdan wrote a letter to his old school telling of his experiences during the Youth Leadership Course and in particular in those he had whilst qualifying for the 'Wood Badge'. The letter was printed in the December 1950 issue of *The Cliffordian* for the benefit of all Cliffordians. Following are some excerpts from Hamdan's letter:

I travelled to Birmingham and London during the Easter holidays. I stayed in Birmingham at the Kingstanding Settlement for two weeks, and spent the third week at the University Overseas Centre.

At the Birmingham Kingstanding Settlement<sup>20</sup> I did some practical work as part of the Youth Leadership Course. Whilst I was there I was staying with English people who had decided to live self-contained, independent lives, each carrying out his affairs according to the dictates of his or her particular abilities and needs.



In this Settlement everybody performed various activities which were aimed at focussing on the needs of schoolchildren, school-leavers, and also of adult men and women. Based on a given timetable all the voluntary helpers would come there to play darts, billiards, ping-pong and cards. The adults would cook or attend lectures, but the easiest form of work was simply engaging in gossip.

I was fortunate because the headquarters staff were extremely friendly and I was treated like a member of the family. Each of us of his own accord would wash up the dishes after each meal. We would then work in the garden, repair the tents and mend the bedding, oil the cricket bats, and do a lot of other things besides.

When staying at the University Overseas Centre, the British Council arranged for me to visit Stratford-on-Avon to see Shakespeare's birthplace and the church at which he is buried. I was also given the opportunity to visit Cadbury's factory where they make chocolate and the famous brewery of Mitchell's & Butler. And for the first time in my life I went to a football match at which Birmingham City were playing Manchester United. I was also amazed to find myself at a motor racing circuit, watching Birmingham racing against Tamworth. These were amongst a number of things which I saw for myself when I was at Birmingham.

The last eight days of my holiday I spent camping at Gillwell Park, Chingford, not far from London, where I underwent the most challenging part of the course. We were required to carry out our activities from 8.00 in the morning till 10.30 at night. We were only allowed to rest between 1.00 and 2.30 in the afternoon so that we could take turns in cooking. I served as a cook for three days, first as assistant to the deputy cook, then as deputy cook, and finally as chief cook. So you can imagine just how difficult it was for a fellow all on his own to learn to be a cook in such a short time. Nobody was willing to get up at 6.00 in the morning just in order to light the camp fire unless they were forced to. Only the cooks did that because it was their job. There were a number of times when we had lazy cooks. When that happened we had to put up with cold meat and cornflakes for breakfast.

I had only got one change of uniform, and of course, when I got back to my tent it smelt to high heaven. However, this 'pleasant' outing at last came to an end and the last two days of the camping were given over to trekking. For this we had to take along with us our note-books. I also

took along with me three blankets, a small tent, an overcoat, a pair of pajamas, a knife, a fork and a spoon, etc. On the first day I thought that I was going to die. But on the second I felt much better because I had eaten a lot and slept like a log. We were not allowed to bring any bread with us because we were supposed to make it for ourselves by baking the flour after it had been kneaded in the pan. I feared for my safety walking alone in the forest because all the time we had to rely solely on our map and compass. However, nothing untoward happened – thank goodness – for it was this week of all weeks which would determine whether we would qualify for the certificate by having completed the second part of the ‘Wood Badge’ course successfully or not.

I didn’t get a chance to visit Mr. Jones<sup>21</sup> and his family when I was in London. I arrived late at his house and found that they were out. I could not wait as I had to go back to Nottingham that very same day, because the new session had already begun. I arrived at Nottingham just in time to resume lectures the following day. I had had no day off for the past two weeks but I was grateful that I had still some energy left. After this I had no more problems.

Please give my regards to all the staff, Che Awang, Din and all the boys.

This description of the tough leadership course which Hamdan took in England reveals his typically wholehearted commitment to whatever he undertakes to do and the benefits to be gained from it. However, despite so much of his time being taken up with such activities, he still found time to explore the Nottingham countryside, which helped him learn something more about English life and also to make friends with a number of people who made him welcome. As for the Wood Badge exercise, it served to give him a deeper understanding of the Boy Scout Movement. On his return home, Hamdan would devote still greater energy and enthusiasm to the task of raising the standard of scouting activities not only at school but also at District and State levels.

#### **Headmaster: Government English School (Sekolah Iskandar Shah), Parit (1951-1954)**

When he arrived back at his old school in Kuala Kangsar, Hamdan was given a hero’s welcome by the whole school community, because in those days there were not many Malays who got the opportunity to obtain

two overseas certificates on a single trip. His return was all the more welcome because it was everyone's expectation that his newly-acquired knowledge would be applied to the benefit of the whole school. However, these high hopes soon came to nothing because after a very short time Hamdan was promoted to the post of Headmaster of the new Government English School (GES) at Parit. From the Education Department's point of view, a well-qualified teacher ought to be given a wider responsibility because this would have a multiplying effect. When at Clifford, he was teaching only a couple of classes so that the number of students who could benefit from his teaching was very limited. The larger the school, the greater the number of students and teachers who would interact with him and would gain the benefit of his training and experience.

However, it was just by chance that Hamdan was offered this new post, for both Khoo Kai Hong and Utam Singh, two of his senior colleagues, had rejected the same offer for their own reasons. The school at Parit was the first English-medium school to be established in the rural part of Central Perak (i.e. Kuala Kangsar District<sup>22</sup>) after the war<sup>23</sup>. This move signified a great change in the schools system after the Occupation, because up to this point most English-medium schools were only to be found in the larger urban centres. By the same token, the move was also designed to encourage more rural Malays to send their children for secondary education, for usually Malay children from the countryside who wanted to get an English-medium education had to go to a town where they would have to stay in hostels. This method, no doubt, was successful in its way but the numbers involved were very small, perhaps not amounting to more than ten per cent of the total rural Malay population of school-going age.

The manner of Hamdan's appointment as Headmaster of the new English school at Parit was as unexpected as it was sudden. One day he was called by Hicks to the Education Office in Ipoh<sup>24</sup>. 'Hamdan, you have been to London. You are a qualified person. You have obtained good passes. And now the time has come for you to become a Headmaster', Hicks told Hamdan the moment he entered the room. These words came as a complete surprise to Hamdan. Although to learn that he was going to be promoted was like music to his ears, Hamdan felt that he had not yet had enough teaching experience. He was also anxious to put into practice

the methodology and new approaches to learning that he had picked up in London for the benefit of his students for whom he cared so much. So, plucking up all his courage, Hamdan gently demurred. 'Tuan', he said, 'I have just begun teaching geography. So what about my specialization in that field?' and waited nervously for the Englishman's reaction. 'If you are not willing to go to Parit, then all that I can say is that all your training in London has been literally wasted', came Hicks' response, terse and with a trace of anger. To this Hamdan promptly replied, 'If that is your conclusion and decision, Tuan, of course I concur and am ready to be transferred to Parit'. 'That's my boy', smiled Hicks, and the interview was over.

This little episode made Hamdan realize how badly the services of properly qualified teachers were needed in the rural areas where in any case the great bulk of the school population were Malays. Moreover, for a school that had been opened just recently, it was obvious that there were so many things which could be done, and that with the sum of his experience from attending Japanese courses during the Occupation down to those which he had recently taken in England there was so much that he could do. He was also quite confident he would be able to produce results within quite a short time to the satisfaction of both parents and the State Education Department.

So Hamdan left his Alma Mater at Kuala Kangsar with its motto, 'The ship is more than the crew', for the last time. As the well-known Malay proverb puts it, *Patah tumbuh, hilang berganti* - 'The broken stem will heal itself; those who depart will be replaced'. In other words, although a valuable teacher may be lost, a replacement for him will always be found.

In December 1951, Hamdan embarked upon his duties as Headmaster of the GES at Parit. At that time Parit was a small place on the banks of the Perak River, which despite being connected by road from Ipoh some 35 km away, could still be considered isolated and remote. For in the 1950s transport and communications had their limitations, and conditions were made still worse with the declaration of the Emergency, which resulted in Parit becoming virtually cut off from Ipoh altogether. Therefore it is hardly surprising that two of his senior colleagues<sup>23</sup> had

turned down their chance to be Headmaster at Parit, leaving the way open to Hamdan.

The people of Parit felt proud to have an English-medium school built in their midst. Their satisfaction was further enhanced by the presence of a Malay Headmaster, for they were sure that it would be easy to communicate with him in any matter which might arise in connection with their children attending the school. Hamdan took over from Captain Tuan Syed Shaidali<sup>26</sup>, with whom he shared one thing in common - they had both taught at Clifford. As Syed Shaidali's successor, Hamdan seemed to be the right man for the job, given his belief in hard work and high standards of discipline, his commitment to doing the best that he could for the children under his charge who were so keen to learn, and his ability to mix and identify himself with the local community<sup>27</sup>. His superiors in Ipoh were quite sure that he would do the job well.

Although Hamdan was now alone and far from his family, in facing this new phase in his life he did not feel lonely, even though he was confronted with various difficulties. In the first place it was not easy to get government quarters in Parit because the township was not a district headquarters and so official accommodation was limited. For the time being he had to put up in the house of a relative. However, the relative's house was only a few metres away from the school itself, which meant that it was easy for him to go to the school and back without having to worry about the time involved. In fact, Hamdan spent almost all his time in the school, planning and organising and supervising all its activities, besides teaching one of his favourite subjects, Geography<sup>28</sup>.

As the head of a rural school which lacked for so many things, his task was a challenging one. The top priority was to secure permanent and adequate facilities. By dint of unremitting pressure on the relevant parties for which he was to become famous, Hamdan managed to ensure that work on putting up a proper school building started in earnest in November 1952. Work on this was completed by August the next year, the building consisting of an administrative and classroom block, and a boy's hostel. The hostel was another fruit of Hamdan's tireless campaign to convince the relevant authorities of the great need for one for Malay children living in isolated areas along the Perak River<sup>29</sup>. If the GPMS was making a lot of noise pressuring the government to open up all over the

country as many opportunities as possible for Malay children to continue their education, Hamdan was quietly laying the foundations that would guarantee that his young charges would receive a sound education and would not drown in the swift currents of change that were sweeping through the nation after the war.

### **Handling Youth: Boy Scouts and Girl Guides**

Besides teaching and running the school, Hamdan also played an active role in youth activities. This was where he got the chance to apply his knowledge of youth leadership which he had gained at the University of Nottingham in order to show Malayan youths how to make good use of their spare time. The main thrust of his activities was through the Boy Scouts movement. There was already a Scout Troop (the 11th) which had been established by Syed Shaidali in 1950, the year previous to his arrival, which consisted of twenty-two members. With his customary zeal Hamdan straightaway immersed himself in the activities of this core group, and when not long after he was appointed Deputy Commissioner of Scouts for the Sub-District of Parit, he extended his efforts to all the other schools in the district<sup>30</sup>. In fact, almost from the very beginning and for the next three years at Parit, Hamdan was 'the nerve-centre and catalyst'<sup>31</sup> of the movement. By the time that his period as Headmaster came to an end in 1954, the Boy Scouts of the school had grown sufficiently in strength for a second troop to be formed (i.e. the 14th Troop in 1953). By this time, too, he had also started a branch of the Girl Guides (1952) and the junior wing of the Boy Scouts – the first local Wolf Cub Pack.

The Boy Scouts and Girl Guides carried out the usual activities associated with these twin organizations, including learning how to tie various types of knots, read maps and use the compass; how to camp out and survive on their own resources; how to read the clouds for the weather; all this accompanied, of course, by regular spells of drilling in the school compound. Every weekend was taken up by such activities, while from time to time Hamdan, on a bicycle himself, would lead a pack of Boy Scout cyclists on tours of the neighbouring countryside down to Teluk Anson (Intan) and as far afield as Tanjong Rambutan and Taiping<sup>32</sup>.

In 1952 a permanent camping site was established on the banks of the Perak River at Padang Seleboh (now Padang Kerbau), two km from Parit town, and named Camp Badaruddin after the ADO of Parit Sub-District at the time, Dato' Badaruddin bin Alang Ahmad, who was a strong supporter of Hamdan and his initiatives. Camp Badaruddin became a favourite place for camp bonfires, picnicking and swimming.

The Scouts and Guides movement filled a big gap in the lives of the local boys and girls of Parit, teaching them many practical things and also how to spend their time in an enjoyable yet useful way. The high level of achievement which the Scouts achieved during Hamdan's period there was reflected by two of their members achieving the status of Queen's Scouts<sup>11</sup>. The effectiveness of his role was sadly enough highlighted by the marked decline in scouting activities which took place after his departure<sup>12</sup>.

The establishment of the Girl Guides Group was quite a bold step in a rural backwater such as Parit was at that time. Indeed, at first it proved too much for its conservative inhabitants, because the Guides had to wear skirts as part of their uniform. This resulted in Hamdan being the subject of a *surat layang* (i.e. anonymous letter) signed (*lebai kampung*) by way of complaint, but he was quite unfazed by this<sup>13</sup>. In any case he received the unhesitating support of Dato' Badaruddin bin Alang Ahmad, the Parit ADO, and the opposition quietly faded away.

Apart from this, however, the old tradition that the proper place for the woman is in the home died hard on the banks of the Perak River, and Hamdan made it part of his personal mission to take up the cause of education for girls, and did all that he could to encourage them to carry on with their education up to higher levels. To this end, he would cycle around the neighbouring kampungs and meet with parents to persuade them of the importance of education regardless of gender. But such bicycle trips were not only confined to girls. On a number of occasions he would cycle to places such as Bota and Lambor to hunt down promising pupils whose parents could not afford to keep them at school<sup>14</sup>.

## Adult Education and Illiteracy

During his first year as Headmaster of the GES, Parit, Hamdan became involved in another key area which involved education in the wider context of local society, namely that of adult education in general, and in terms of the specific need for a concerted effort to abolish illiteracy. In this effort Hamdan was able to make a notable contribution by interacting with other social activists who were interested in this field. By so doing, he was fulfilling yet another of the great goals of education, that is to reach out beyond the compound of one's own school and of normal school hours to the whole of society.

Hamdan's interest in campaigning to end illiteracy was first aroused when he was approached for help by Tunku Hussein bin Yahya, then ADO of Kinta District stationed at Batu Gajah, and also Chairman of the newly-formed Perak branch of the Adult Education Association of Malaya (AEAM)<sup>17</sup>. Tunku Hussein was very keen on extending the Association's work to the rural areas of the State and in dealing in particular with the widespread incidence of illiteracy amongst adults in these areas. In order to gain Hamdan's participation in his efforts, he invited the young headmaster from Parit to accompany him on his visits to various rural districts in Perak so that he could see for himself the problem at first hand and the value of the sort of work that the Perak branch was doing.

Hamdan was a ready convert to the cause, and as a result was soon to be seen on his bicycle once again pedalling along the *kampung* tracks along either bank of the Perak River from Parit to Belanja, and from Parit to Layang-Layang, Bota and Lambor. This time he was out to canvas for the support of the *penghulus* and *ketua kampung* along the way, as well as that of teachers and other influential and committed local individuals, both men and women, for the illiteracy campaign. His main target group were the housewives, who had been deprived of their formal school education on account of the War and the Japanese Occupation.

Of course, there was much more to be done than simply exhorting village leaders to express their support for the campaign to stamp out illiteracy. The key question was by what means could this be done, and



large numbers of adult illiterates helped master the alphabet and learn to read proficiently within a short space of time.

The first attempt to cope with the problem of adult illiteracy on a concerted basis took place in the late 1940s with the introduction of a simple system first developed in Colombia in South America<sup>38</sup> and taken up by Dr. Frank C. Laubach, an expert in the field, who was attached to UNESCO. All that it required was the portrayal of the letters of the alphabet, pictures of appropriate objects to show their meaning, and a 'teacher' – he need only be a literate local – to give their proper enunciation.

This was a system that could be implemented anywhere, including the most isolated places, providing that a teacher was available. But the outbreak of the Emergency rendered the scheme impracticable in rural areas for reasons of personal safety and so had to be abandoned for the time being. However, this difficulty was overcome by substituting the local 'teacher' in the classroom by short-wave radio broadcasts given by a 'teacher' in the radio studio. The way ahead was shown by Radio Malaya, Singapore (Singapore was still a British colony) which in 1949 launched a series of adult education radio broadcasts along these lines. These lasted for one year carrying on over into 1950 and proved reasonably successful<sup>39</sup>.

The man who had been put in charge of the series of programmes was a young junior assistant with Radio Malaya Singapore's Schools Division called Dol Ramli<sup>40</sup>, who had studied before the war at Raffles College, which was where he had first got to know Hamdan, and at the University of Malaya after it. Once the first series of broadcasts was completed, Dol Ramli wrote and published a book entitled *Belajar Rumi di Radio* ('Learn How to Read the Roman Alphabet by Radio'), based on a draft in English that had been prepared by Laubach himself as well as on the actual broadcasts. This book and the series of tape-recorded Singapore Radio broadcasts became adopted as the tools for the AEAM's anti-illiteracy campaign when it was launched in 1951<sup>41</sup>. Hamdan was able to take full advantage of his contact with Dol Ramli to make use of his book and the broadcast materials. By these means, the housewives of the Parit Sub-District acquired literacy and were able to teach their own children how to read and write during the period in which Hamdan was Headmaster at the GES Parit<sup>42</sup>.

### **A Visit to Rome (1952)**

Hamdan's commitment to education beyond the school compound and in particular his contributions to youth organizations in Parit did not pass unnoticed<sup>45</sup>. So when the World Youth Council of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur sponsored the holding of Conference of Youth Leaders to be held at the Vatican in Rome in 1952, Hamdan found himself as one of the three selected to attend as Malayan representatives, in his case on behalf of the Malayan Boy Scouts Association<sup>46</sup>. They spent two weeks as the Malayan representatives in Rome, during which time they had the opportunity of meeting leaders from all types of youth organizations from all over the world. Hamdan was able to establish contacts which were to prove very useful in the years to come<sup>45</sup>. Hamdan felt that he had been very well rewarded for his involvement in youth work.

In October 1954, Hamdan was given the opportunity to return to Raffles College in Singapore to take his Honours Degree. So the time had come for him to leave the Iskandar Shah School (as it was now called in honour of the late Sultan Iskandar Shah (1918-1939)<sup>46</sup>, to go for further studies again. In view of the very active part that Hamdan had played in the life of the community, his presence was sorely missed by everybody in Parit. Under his governance, the influence and activities of the school had virtually touched the whole of the Parit Sub-District, from Belanja upstream to Kota Setia, just above Teluk Intan, in terms not only of pupil intake but also in terms of the various activities in which the school, staff and students, had been collectively involved. It was a hard act to follow.

1. Amongst those involved were Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang Abdul Wahab bin Toh Muda Abdul Aziz, Perak's first Menteri Besar; C.M. Yusuf, Dato' Bendahara of Perak, and two UMNO youth leaders, Zainal Abidin bin Endut and Syed Salim. Both the Dato' Panglima Gantang and C.M. Yusuf were founder members of UMNO. It was C.M. Yusuf, in particular, who in 1946 tried his best to get Hamdan to join the Perikatan Melayu Perak which Dato' Abdul Wahab had just formed.

2. Hamdan has spoken of the great satisfaction which he derived from these courses because of what he was able to learn from the comments of well-qualified tutors to the answers which he submitted on his course papers.

3. Zainal Abidin bin Sutan Maidin, born in Penang 1898 of a well-to-do Tamil Muslim merchant from Madras and a Malay mother, was educated at the Penang Free School (PFS) and became a teacher there in 1918. In 1930 he obtained an external degree in Geography (BA) from the University of London, a rare achievement for a Malayan at that time. In 1938 he was made headmaster of the Francis Light Preparatory School, attached to the PFS. He was a prolific writer on subjects relating to the Malay language, Islam and Education and was well known for his reformist views. He was in the late 1930s president of (Persaudaraan) Sahabat Pena, a reformist organization associated with Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi in Penang, founded in 1934. After the war, he became an active supporter of UMNO in Penang. He was the father of the well-known radio personality, Zainal Alam.

4. Mohd Zain bin Ayob (1897-1988), born at Taiping, Perak, on leaving Malay school, went in for teacher training. He taught at the Teachers' Training College, Malacca, then at King Edward VII School, Taiping, where he took and passed his Senior Cambridge School Certificate. Subsequently he became Assistant Inspector of Malay Schools in Selangor, Penang and Perak (Teluk Intan). Finally he was a teacher (pre-war) at the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, and at the Anderson School, Ipoh (post-war) until he retired in 1952. He was an active writer and translator of subjects dealing with language, Islam and education.

5. In Hamdan's own words, 'They responded well to correcting, commenting and assessing the answers to questions set at the end of the weekly lessons, thereby encouraging and inspiring the students to be interested to continue with their lessons to the end.' Hamdan freely admits his debt to others as well, including Gerald Labrooy of the Caxton Press, Ipoh, who made sure that the fifty-two lessons plus the questions set at the end of each lesson were printed on time, often in great haste and with last-minute amendments to boot. There was also the unstinted cooperation of Hamdan's brother-in-law, Yahya Ariff, and of his friends such as Mazlan Nordin (who performed as clerk in the bookshop) and the late Bakhtiar Djamily (office boy) in Kuala Kangsar – both of whom made names for themselves in the world of journalism in later years.

6. re Hicks, his contribution and background, see fn.18 below.

7. i.e. *Orang Besar Jajahan*, Kuala Kangsar, who held the title of *Orang Kaya Menteri*, one of the Eight Great Chiefs of Perak. The functions of his office concerned Perak State protocol.

8. i.e. the Japanese Secret Police, equivalent to the Nazi (German) Gestapo.

9. i.e. the last British Chief Secretary, Federation of Malaya (later knighted).

10. Za'ba (1895-1973), born in Jempol, Negeri Sembilan, of Bugis-Menangkabau parentage: educated at a Malay school, then at St Paul's English School, Seremban, where he took and passed his Senior Cambridge in 1915, the first Malay boy in Negeri Sembilan ever to do so. Za'ba wanted to be a doctor but there was no opening at the time and he ended up becoming a teacher. His main stint as a teacher was at the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar (1918-23), where he played a major role in founding the College's Old Boys Association

(MCOBA) in 1920. After that he was engaged by the FMS Education Department as a translator and editor of Malay textbooks, etc., at the Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjung Malim, and when war came, as translator of government propaganda for the British up till 1941, and then for the Japanese up till 1945. After the war he dabbled briefly but significantly in politics, particularly in the movement which led to the founding of UMNO in Kampung Bahru, Kuala Lumpur in 1946 - he was responsible for the adoption of the name UMNO (i.e. United Malays National Organization) itself - but after this went back to the academic life. He was lecturer in Malay at the School of Oriental Studies of the University of London (1947-50), and joined the University of Malaya in Singapore as a contract lecturer in 1952. He stayed with the University until he retired for reasons of ill health in 1958. The greater part of that time he was in charge of the Malay Studies Department (formed in 1953). However, Za'ba's fame does not rest so much on his academic achievements, but as a writer, literary critic, reformist and propagandist. By 1945 he was universally recognized as the doyen of Malay letters and literature and as a leading Islamic reformist.

11. V. Arumukham, a Sri Lankan Tamil, joined the school staff in 1921 and prepared the Junior Cambridge Class for its first public examinations. After the war, soon after his stint as temporary Headmaster at Clifford (see below), he was appointed Headmaster of the GES (Sultan Yussuff School) Batu Gajah. On retirement, he returned back to his native Jaffna. Two other stalwarts who taught in these afternoon classes were V. Nadeson of pre-war Latin-tutoring fame, and Arthur Mutiah, both of whom were old boys of the school and had joined the teaching staff in the 1920s. See Haji Alias Shamsuddin (ed), *Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, 1897-1997*, Kuala Kangsar, Persatuan Penuntut Lulusan Sekolah Clifford, Kuala Kangsar (Old Cliffordians Association), 1977, and in particular the contribution of Tun Mohd. Suffian.

12. namely, Choo Seng Tak, Lee Yeow Yin and Khoo Kai Hong.

13. See Haji Alias Shamsuddin, *op.cit.*

14. re the Normal Class system, see fn. 4, Chapter 6

15. For Aminuddin's background, see Chapter 8, fn. 25.

16. The qualifications which Hamdan acquired whilst in England were (1) Certificate of Youth Leadership from Nottingham University, and (2) the Certificate of Education from the University of London. He passed both courses with distinction. However, there was one person less impressed by Hamdan's decision, namely E.H.G. Dobby, his former lecturer in Geography at Raffles College and now Head of the Geography Department at the University of Malaya. Soon after Hamdan was awarded his scholarship to go to Nottingham, Dobby had got in touch with him, asking him to take an honours degree in Geography at the new university. But now Hamdan was already committed and could not pull out. So he went to Singapore to explain to Dobby personally why he could not accept the offer. Dobby was quite displeased, and although content to hear of Hamdan's resolve to take his degree later, bluntly said: 'Hamdan, I do not know what you are looking for by going overseas. I should tell you this; that

you are really catching mosquitoes when you should by now be catching elephants'.

17. Tan Sri Dato Seri Osman bin Talib, Dato' Bendahara of Perak, was born in Perak in 1906 and educated at the Anderson School, Ipoh, and the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar. He joined the Malay Administrative Service in 1926 and was promoted to the MCS in 1939. After the war he rose swiftly up into the higher echelons of the Government hierarchy, first as State Secretary, Perlis (1948-9), followed by State Secretary, Perak (1949-52); Deputy MB, Perak (1953-7) and Chief Minister, Malacca (1957-9); subsequently he became chairman of RIDA and then of the NEB (1960-70). Friendly, relaxed, approachable, Dato Osman was a hands-off administrator. He died in 1984.

18. Hicks joined the Malayan Education Service in 1921 with his first posting at Penang. Subsequently he served in Kedah, Selangor, Johor, Pahang and Perak, his longest stint being in Perak. He first came to Perak in 1938, was fortunate to be out of the country when the Japanese invasion took place in December 1941, and returned with the BMA in 1945. He retired from the Malayan Education Service in 1953, and went to stay in Sarawak where he continued his career as an educationist. He was responsible for the opening of two new secondary schools in that State. A life-long bachelor, he died and was buried at Kuching in the early 1970s.

19. All this was not quite so simple as it sounds. Hicks had to bend a few government regulations in order to procure the necessary funds from State Education Office reserves. Furthermore, Osman Talib went out of his way to authorize that Hamdan continue to receive an allowance equivalent to half his salary for the extra year, in addition to the second scholarship, although following the rules he should have been placed on half pay. Without this concession, Hamdan would have been obliged to return home at once, since he devoted half his salary to supporting his now aged parents. Incidentally, Hamdan was not the only beneficiary of Hicks' largesse; a good number of other promising candidates for the education service also obtained his vital support in the form of scholarships, etc. to continue their studies and later serve the nation, which otherwise they would not have been able to do.

20. The Kingstanding Settlement at Birmingham was a rehabilitation centre both for adults and young persons who had been displaced or had had their lives seriously disrupted as a result of the Second World War. The aim of the centre was to help these people adjust to circumstances and so prepare them for occupations suitable to their physical and mental capacities. It could be considered as a kind of skills development centre to meet the social needs of the time.

21. i.e. F.H. Jones, Headmaster, Clifford School, 1948-50.

22. In fact, there were also the Malay College and the Central School, both English-medium schools, at Kuala Kangsar, but Kuala Kangsar itself, as a royal town and district capital, was classified as an 'urban' area, despite its small population.

23. i.e. Government English Schools in Perak were also established in the 1950s at Lenggong and Selama. Before the war there had been five Government



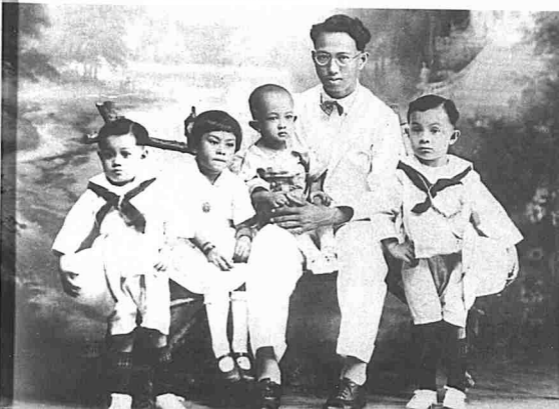
1. Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin al-Falaki al-Azhari; picture probably taken in Penang when he was in his thirties (i.e. ca. 1900-1910).



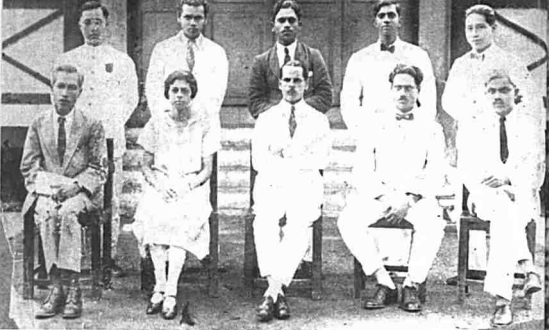


3a. Sheikh Muhammad Tahir with his family in Penang in 1915: L-R: Ahmad (3rd child), Rahmah (the eldest), Tahir, Azizah (4th child), Aishah bt Haji Mustapaha (wife), and Mohamed (2nd child). The books in the cupboards behind are now deposited with the Universiti Kebangsaan Library, Bangi.

3b. Hamdan (extreme right) and Hamid, his twin brother (extreme left), aged three, with their uncle, Mohamed and two of his children, in Penang, 1924.



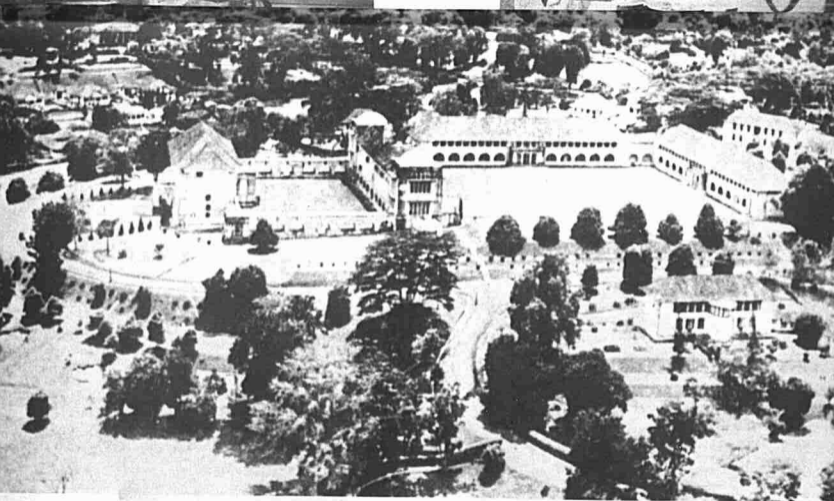




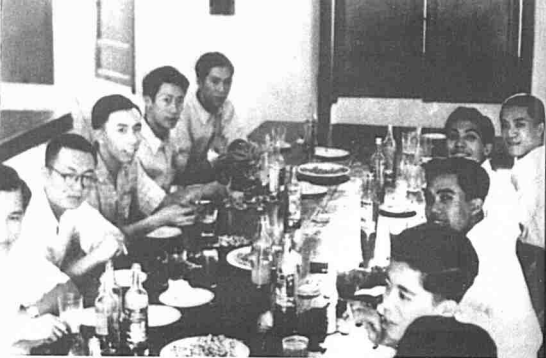
4a. Clifford School (then Govt. English School), Kuala Kangsar teachers, 1927, most of whom taught Hamdan: L-R sitting: Md Arshad; Ms M.E. Hogan (later Mrs Syed Shaidali), Syed Shaidali (HM), V Arumukham, A.J. Wadsworth: L-R standing: Khoo Kai Soon, Arthur Mutiah, S.G. Pragasam, V. Nadeson, and Chung Kim Fook.

4b. 'Captain Preedy's Boys': The Clifford School Hockey First XI, 1932, with Preedy in the middle and hockey masters S.G. Pragasam and N. Caleb on extreme right and left (front row) of picture respectively. The school never lost a match for eight years running!



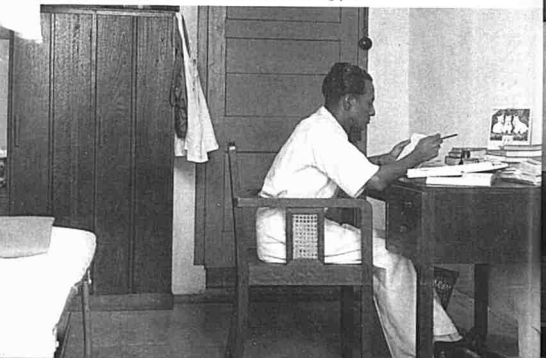


5. Raffles College, Singapore: aerial view taken in the late 1940's.  
*courtesy: Alumni Affairs & Development Office, National University Singapore.*



6a. Raffles College: Hostel Life: dinner time – everything by the Warden's whistle.  
*courtesy: Alumni Affairs & Development Office, National University Singapore.*

6b. Raffles College: Hostel Life: basic but bearable – spartan but self-contained.  
*courtesy: Chan Kee Kok, Singapore.*



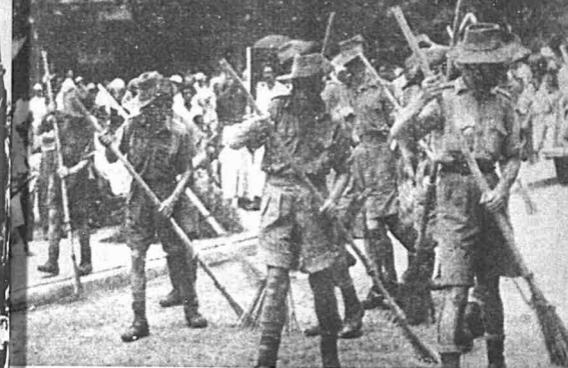


7. Family gathering at brother Ahmad's house off McNair Road, Singapore to mark Hamdan's success in his Raffles College exams, 1940. L-R standing: Hamid, Hamdan, Ahmad, Tahir, Mohamed, Yahya Ariff, (brother-in-law who was of great help with Hamdan's Sekolah Gaya Pos in 1945), Abdullah Ahmad (nephew) and Abdullah Mahlique (cosuin). Sitting centre is Aishah, and on her left Hamdan's sister, Azizah, the wife of Yahya Ariff.



8. Banzai! Victorious Japanese soldiers express their elation at the capture of Singapore, February 1941. The greatest military victory ever won by a Japanese army, it changed the face of world politics. Nothing was ever the same again.

*courtesy: Imperial War Museum, London.*



9a. Australian PoWs sweeping the streets of Singapore, with Malayans looking on soon after the British surrender, February 1941.

*courtesy:* Imperial War Museum, London.

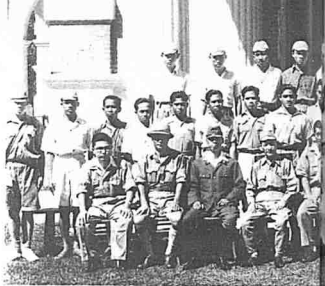
9b. A rare photo of Japanese top brass taking their ease in the Cameron Highlands at some time during the Occupation. On the left, General Tomoyuki Yamashita, Commander of the 25th Army, and conqueror of Malaya and Singapore; in the centre, General Kubota, Governor of Perak; on the right, Field Marshal Count Terauchi, Commander of the Southern Army (i.e. Japanese forces in South-East Asia).

*courtesy:* Yap Hon Kuan, Petaling Jaya.



10a. Students of the Youth Leadership Training School (Seinen Kunrensho), Ipoh, in a group photograph with Kubota, Governor of Perak (seated centre, with sword) and senior Japanese officials in the State Government, 1943. Hamdan on extreme left 2nd row, standing next to Raja Azhar Raja Ahmad – both senior asst. teachers; Yoon Yuet Leng (future Dy Cr Police) 3rd row extreme right, next to Gurbachan Singh (clerk) who is only partially visible.

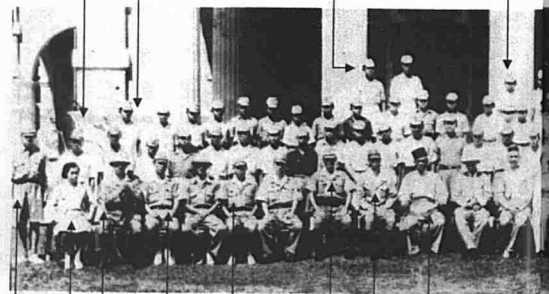
*courtesy: Dato' Seri Yuen Yuet Leng, Kuala Lumpur.*



Taharin Tamrin  
Kusasi

Kamaruddin

Hashim Sani



Tun Hamdan

Mitsutani

Otsuji

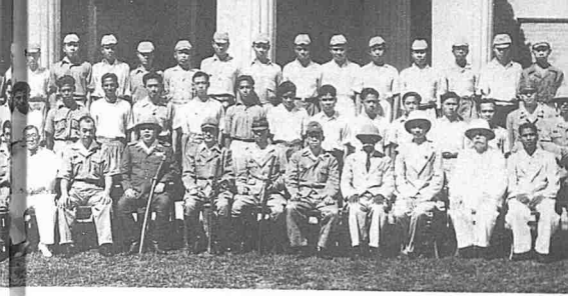
Kita

Suguro

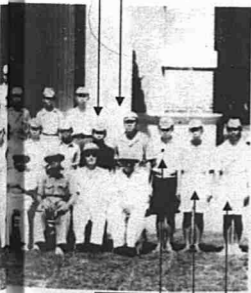
N. Kawamura

Raja Muda

Kimura



**Ghazali Ng Kim Hooi**



**Khee Ying Kham**

**Raja Azhar**

**Yuen Yuet Leng**

10b. Students of the Mines and Industry Schools (Kozan Gakko and Kogyo Gakko resp.) photographed in 1943 with Raja Yussuff (Raja Muda Perak) and senior staff of the schools. Names of some of the Japanese and Malaysians identifiable in the picture are indicated by arrows. Raja Yussuff, the 'Raja Muda' (with songkok) seated in centre.

*courtesy: Dato' Seri Yuen Yuet Leng, Kuala Lumpur.*



Standard Text-Book

for

Kougo Nippon-Go Grammar

(VOLUME II).

by

Mr. S. BANNO, B.A., (Litt.) — Waseda University, Tokyo,  
B.A., (Econ.) — Michigan University, U.S.A.

Director of Education and Propaganda, Perak.

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*speaking* Nippon-Go in three months.)

11. Cover of Japanese Grammar specially prepared for English-speaking students attending the Teachers' Training Centre (Kyojin Yosei Jo), Ipoh, written by its Principal, S. Banno, who was also Director of Education and Propaganda, Perak, and printed by Charles Grenier of Ipoh. Hamdan, who was one of the teachers there, found the Grammar very useful.

辭令

イポー第一日本語學校 ハムダン

教員ヲ命ス(日本語教員養成所助手)

給料 六十五弗ヲ給ス

昭和十九年二月一日

ペラ州長官 川村直岡

賞状

種目 相撲

個人

一等 ハムダン

右者大東亞戦争三周年記念相撲大會ニ於テ頭書ノ成績ヲ得タリ仍テ茲ニ之ヲ賞ス

昭和十九年十二月七日

ベラ州總務部教育科長小寺三郎



12a. Certificate of Merit for Sumo, individual first prize, won by Hamdan: 'The above person has obtained the said result at the Sumo Tournament in commemoration of the Third Anniversary of the Greater East Asia War. Thereby I hereby award this certificate. 7 December 1944, SABURO KODERA, Director, Educational division, General Affairs Department, Perak State Government'.

In addition to these, Hamdan also won several other similar certificates during the course of the Occupation, incl. (1) Certificate of Merit, Shonankoa Training Institute (Singapore) 'for good conduct and excellence in scholarship' (14 August 1942) (2) Certificate of Merit, Malay Higher Grade Teachers' Institute 'for gaining 3rd place in long distance run: 'Takuma Sera, Director' (26 December 1943.

12b. Certificate of Appointment for Hamdan's posting as Teacher at Ipoh, First Japanese Language School, with salary of \$65 a month, 1 February 1944.



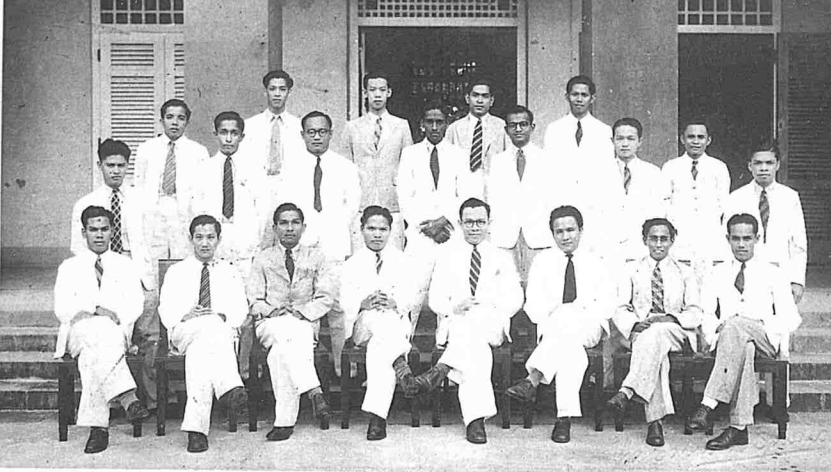
13a. Old (Japanese) Malayan hands in Tokyo, October 1966, and former officers, teachers and friends of Hamdan whom he met during visit to Japan for the annual reunion of members of the IPPO-KAI. Front row: (L-R) Inamura, Ishizaki, Otsuki, Matushima and Kodera. Back row: (L-R) Shibue, Mizutani, Kita, Katano, Sako and Sawada. Missing is Suguro who took the picture.



13b. Hiroshi Suguro, one-time Perak Director of Education during the Japanese Occupation.



14. Family reunion: Hamdan with his brothers and sister in Singapore, 1946: (L-R) Hamdan, Mohamed, Azizah, Ahmad, and Hamid.



15. Hamdan at Raffles College (1946-7) to complete his Diploma course seen here with a group of his hostel-mates. L-R seated: Saad Walad, Lim Ah Yu, Kamal Baharein, Junid Rahim, Hamdan Tahir, Fred Sabapathy, unidentified, Harith Mohd Liki; L-R 2nd row: Raja Khalid Raja Harun, M. Thilagaratanam, Mohamed Ariff Hitam, C. Sumasundram, Stanley Padman, Oh Bak Kim, Abdul Shukor Haji Alwi, Abdul Aziz Zakaria; L-R 3rd row: Wan Sulaiman Pawan Teh (future High Court Judge), Koh Eng Kiat, Khoo Beng Chuan, Shariff Hassan, Mohd Daud Hashim.



16. Hamdan back at his Alma Mater, Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, to take up his first appointment as a regular teacher. Seen here seated 7th from left, next to Mrs Luke, the HM's wife, and K.D.Luke himself, 1947.



17a. E.C. Hicks, then Senior Inspector of Schools Perak (i.e. in the early 1950s), a benefactor to Hamdan and many other promising students and young teachers, at a ceremony attended by Sultan Yussuff Izuddin Shah of Perak (in *songkok*).

17b. Hamdan as assistant master, Clifford School, with other members of the staff, shortly after his return from Britain in 1951. L-R seated: Lee Yeow Yin, Chingar Singh, Khoo Kai Hong, Baghwan Singh, Puan Ibrahim, D. Bennett (HM), V. Nadason (Senior Assistant), A. Muttiah, Karam Singh, Choo Sin Tak, and Kartar Singh – all well-known and trusted teachers to generations of students. Among others behind are: 2nd row: (1) Kamaruddin Ali, (2) Hamdan, (3) Mariam Wong, (4) Fatimah Askiah, (5) Chin Mook Loy, (6) Teoh Teik Lee (of Life-Saving Society fame); 3rd row: (7) Soh Kai Jan, (8) Jagbir Singh, and (9) Nelson.





18a. A rare glimpse of Hamdan relaxing in his quarters in the Hugh Stewart Hall of Residence, Nottingham University, England – with his books close at hand, 1950.

18b. Hamdan on the lawn outside Hugh Stewart Hall, Nottingham University, 1950.



18c. Hamdan, soon after emerging from his ordeal roughing it out in Gillwell Park, Chingford, near London, having completed his final round of tests for the 'Wood Badge'.





19a. Hamdan in his first appointment as Head-master: group photograph with his students in front of the temporary building – note the atap roof-housing the new Government English School, Parit in 1953. It was renamed Sultan Iskandar School the following year.



19b. Hamdan and his teachers, Government English School, Parit, in 1952. Sitting in the front row, one removed to the left of Hamdan is his Senior Assistant, Kartar Singh, before the diplomatic removal of his beard and turban.





19c. Hamdan, with the apple of his eye, the GES Parit Scouts, all set to take part in the coronation celebrations for the British Queen (Elizabeth II) in 1953.





20. Professor Dobby, Hamdan's mentor, in action at a Geography Society meeting, University of Malaya, Singapore, in the 1950s.

*courtesy: Wan Abdul Hamid.*

21. Hamdan and fellow graduates gathered to celebrate the awarding of their honours degrees from the University of Malaya in Singapore, 1956. Among those identifiable in this picture are (1) Wan Hamid who ended up as GM of PERNAS; (2) Ungku Aziz (future Royal Professor); (3) Hamdan; (4) C. Sumasundram; (5) Ong Poh Kee; (6) Yap Hong Kuan; (7) Toh Chin Chye (Future Singapore cabinet minister); (8) Nellie Chen and (9) Enid Pereira.





22a. Hamdan and Siti Zainab: on the bridal dais at last: Batu Gajah, 1956.



22b. Hamdan and Siti Zainab, after Hamdan had received his Honours Degree from the University of Malaya in Singapore on 13 October 1956.



23. Hamdan and Siti Zainab with his father and mother, Tahir and Aishah, after marriage and conferment of Hamdan's degree, 1956. With them is their 'best man', Mon bin Jamaluddin, a future ambassador of Malaysia. Two weeks after this photo was taken Sheikh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin passed away.



24a. In their Tiong Nam Settlement home, Kuala Lumpur, 1956 with Hamka, on a visit to Sheikh Tahir, his former teacher. Hamka is sitting next to Sheikh Tahir, on his right, with Hamdan standing behind him on the extreme left of the picture.

24b. In their Tiong Nam Settlement home, 1956, with Syed Nasir (front extreme right), Organizer of Primary Schools, with Hamdan standig behind him, and Abdullah Ayub (front, 2nd from left), a Queen's Scholar and a future Chief Secretary to the Government.



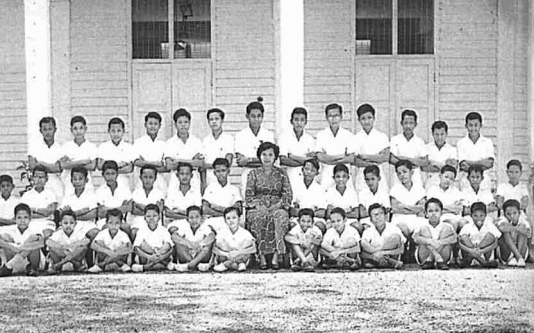


25. Siti Zainab: in Hamdan's words – that pretty girl, all alone, in Batu Gajah.



26. Siti Zainab's parents: Haji Baharuddin bin Lebai Yusuf and Hajah Adha bt. Zaiton, on their return from Mecca in 1954.





27a. Siti Zainab as teacher in charge of the Special Malay Class II at the Anderson Primary School, Cator Avenue, Ipoh, in 1950, with her flock – a temporary posting between her two training courses in England.

27b. Siti Zainab, as Supervisor of National (i.e. Malay) Primary Schools in Kedah. Among those seated in the front row are (1) Salleh Haji Ahmad (Visiting Teacher, Kota Star); (2) Salleh Hashim (Organizer of Boys Schools); (3) Pa' Darus Abdul Rahman (Siti Zainab's head); (4) Che Tom, (Lady Supervisor) and (5) Siti Zainab, sitting in the front row in a group photograph of Malay schoolteachers and teacher trainees at Seberang Perak, Alor Setar, ca. 1953.

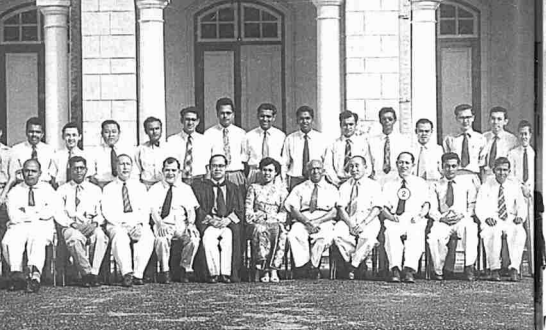




28a. Siti Zainab and her Kirkby College friends in Switzerland on their tour in Europe. Siti Zainab standing 4th from right between her friends, Kamariah (on her left) and Amy (on her right). Asiah Abu Samah's brother, Baharum, is next to Kamariah. While most of them stuck to teaching, Ali Isa, standing on extreme left, went into business and became a director of Lam Soon, the soap manufacturers.

28b. Hostel life at Kirkby College, England: Siti Zainab (extreme left) and her hostel mates getting ready to have lunch together. In the middle is Kamariah Md Zain, a future Principal of Padang Tembak Primary School, Kuala Lumpur.





29a. Siti Zainab as the sole female teacher at the Maxwell Road Secondary Boys School, seated in the front row next to the Principal, Paul Chang Min Phang. Also in this group photo of 1956 are T. Mori (1) and Walter Ayerdurai (2) who were to make their names as outstanding teachers.

29b. Siti Zainab with her first teaching post on her return to Kuala Lumpur, at the Bukit Bintang Girls' School, 1960. Siti Zainab is sitting 3rd from the right, with the celebrated Elena Cooke, the Principal, in the centre.





30a. Siti Zainab, Principal, Padang Tembak National Primary School, Kuala Lumpur, officiating at a school function, 1969.

30b. Siti Zainab, Principal, Jalan Residensi National Primary School (1) Georgetown, Penang, delivering a speech on the School's Sports Day, 1977.





31a. Siti Zainab and the first-born, Siti Khatijah, at the Batu Gajah Hospital, Perak, 1957.

31b. Hamdan, Siti Zainab, and their two daughters, Siti Khatijah and the new-born Siti Aishah, 1959.



31c. Hamdan, Siti Zainab, Siti Khatijah, Siti Aishah and the third and last addition, Tahiruddin, about two years old, in 1968.



English Schools in Perak, viz. at Kuala Kangsar (1897: renamed Clifford School in 1928); Batu Gajah (1911: renamed Sultan Yussuff in 1951); and Tronoh, Gopeng and Tapah (1923). The establishment of the Government English School(GES) at Parit was the result of an initiative taken by the Parit Town Board whose members unanimously passed a resolution in 1947 that 'an English school should be opened at Parit and that the Government should be addressed on this matter'. This resolution was then forwarded by the Board's chairman to the Perak State Education Department for consideration, and the call was subsequently taken up in the Perak State Council by its Malay members, who moved that the school should be established at Parit by no later than 1949 instead of 1950 as originally planned. This motion was passed, despite the difficulties in providing teachers and adequate facilities at such short notice, and the new school was officially opened on 1 February 1949 with an enrolment of 86 pupils, divided almost equally between Primary One and Special Malay One. At first the school had no premises of its own, so that Primary One was housed in the Parit Recreation Club and the Malay Special Class in the Arabic School, Parit. The GES acquired its first (temporary) building in August that year. For the history of English schools in Perak in general, see E.C. Hicks (comp.), *History of English Schools in Perak*, Ipoh, Perak Library, 1958. For the history of the Iskandar Shah School, see Ahmad Zakuan Razi (ed.) *50 Tahun, Sekolah Iskandar Shah*, Penang, Sinaran Bros (printed), 1999.

24. *Pendidik Istimewa*, op.cit. p.20.

25. Ironically enough, Utam Singh in the end did become Headmaster of the Parit school in 1954, as Hamdan's successor. However, he had only lasted one year, for he was in poor health and was to die three years later, though still comparatively young. In his prime Utam Singh won a reputation when teaching at the King Edward VII School, Taiping as an outstanding art master – quite a rarity amongst teachers – an expert in hygiene, and possessor of an unusually powerful command of English.

26. Captain Tuan Syed Shaidali, born 1891, became a teacher at the age of 18 and was only 33 when appointed in 1924 as the GES Kuala Kangsar's second Headmaster. His tenure was short, for at the beginning of 1928 he was posted as Headmaster of the GES Batu Gajah where he remained for the next twenty years (except for the period of the Japanese Occupation). However, within his short period in Kuala Kangsar, he raised teaching standards in the classroom and introduced hockey – to become the School's champion game – and regular athletic sports meets. A keen sportsman himself, he was a distinguished cricketer and an official of the Perak Cricket Association. A man of many parts, besides his involvement in sports activities Syed Shaidali was, before the war, Honorary Librarian of the Perak Library, Ipoh, and President of the Malayan Teachers' Association. Above all, he was a very keen and active member (with the rank of Captain) in the FMS Volunteer Reserve (FMSVR), a para-military organization formed in 1902 to help the civil power in case of emergency or war. In fact, he was one of the first two non-Europeans to be enrolled and commissioned as an officer when the Volunteers were opened to non-Europeans in 1915. He took

part in the ill-starred Malayan campaign, being disbanded in Singapore just before its surrender to the Japanese in 1942. After the war, on reaching retiring age in 1947, he was appointed Local Records Officer, Volunteer Forces, from which post he was called back on Hick's recommendation to start the new GES at Parit. A very anglicized member of the older generation, military in bearing, and dressed more like a European planter than a schoolmaster, and a highly dedicated professional as well, he established a very Spartan regime, which in the circumstances of the time was no doubt very necessary. At the beginning he taught the Special Malay Class, while his wife, also a retired teacher, took over Primary One. For a lively description of this founder couple, see 'Secebis Sejarah Awal Sekolah Iskandar Shah (1949-1951)' by Dato' Haji Mohd. Sidek bin Elamdin in Ahmad Zakuan Radzi, *op.cit.* Also see Haji Alias Shamsuddin, *op.cit.*

27. In this respect Hamdan provided a complete contrast to his predecessor, Captain Tuan Syed Shaidali, who was never known to eat with members of his staff during break or at lunchtime, and was never seen in any of the restaurants or coffee shops of Parit town. Being already of retirement age, Syed Shaidali was not prepared to undergo the rigours of temporary accommodation in Parit, but travelled every day by car to and fro from Ipoh, leaving promptly at 6.30 in the morning, arriving at the school at sharp 7.30, and going back home equally promptly when school hours were over. Dato' Haji Mohd. Sidek bin Elamdin, who taught at the GES Parit in the early 1950s, used to get a lift on these daily journeys, and still remembers the silent Shaidali ('not a word escaped his lips'), his garrulous wife who talked all the way there and all the way back, and their patient driver the ever-smiling, Encik Mohd. Said. See Dato' Haji Mohd. Sidek bin Elamdin, *op.cit.* Incidentally, Dato' Haji Mohd Sidek himself is one of the most distinguished of the teachers to have served at the School. Born in 1930 at Taiping, he taught at Parit between 1949 to 1951, after which he was selected to go to Kirkby. In his subsequent career, Sidek rose to become headmaster, then served for over five years as Private Secretary to three Governors of Penang, and finally retired as Commissioner of Lands, Penang. Even then he did not rest, but instead studied at the University of Science in order to obtain a Master's Degree in Islamic Literature in 1999 – the oldest graduan in the University's history.

28. According to his 'perception as a student', Dato' Ahmad Hassan bin Osman saw that Hamdan played four major roles: (1) as Geography teacher; (2) as scout-master; (3) as teacher of Latin and (4) as Headmaster. See 'Cerita – Dato' Ahmad Hassan bin Othman berkenaan Cikgu Hamdan pada Majlis Makan sempena Mengenang Guru yang Berkesan', in Ahmad Zakuan Radzi, *op.cit.*

29. The school was very fortunate at this time in receiving an unexpected benefaction in the form of a stout and spacious wooden house and its adjoining land (then consisting of rubber trees and secondary jungle) which had been purchased by the State Government with the original intention of putting up a hospital on the site. The owner of the land in question was Tuan Haji Zainal Abidin bin Mat Asin, a prominent, well-to-do Parit resident hitherto not known for his generosity and good works, who sold it for a mere \$14,000/-. In the event

the Parit hospital did not materialize (expansion of the hospital facilities at Batu Gajah had a prior claim), and the State Government, as a result of Hamdan's insistent campaigning, allocated the property to the new school instead. Hamdan made the house the headmaster's quarters, but typically enough he used it not only for himself but for housing boy boarders, whose hostel was not yet ready, for extra classes, and for providing space for a *surau*. The house continued to be used by Hamdan's successors for some time after he had left, but now is used as a hostel for the girls.

30. The Scouts Commissioner in Parit at that time was Haji Salleh bin Jabot, the Malay Inspector of Schools, who had his office at the State Education Department in Ipoh. Parit itself was then a sub-district of Kuala Kangsar District.

31. See Dato' Ahmad Hassan bin Osman, 'Pergerakan Pengakap Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Iskandar Shah, Parit (1949-1954)', in Ahmad Zakuan Radzi, op.cit.

32. One such outing described by a pioneer Girl Guide says it all: 'Together with Encik Hamdan we visited the tin mines at Tronoh, which was about six kilometres from our school. We had the experience of watching tin dredging, the *palong* method, and the *dulang* washers. The boys cycled all along the way but the girls went by bus. Sometimes it is good to be a girl for we were pampered by everyone. Another interesting activity was the needlework class being taught by Cik Askiah...'. See 'Down Memory Lane for SMKIS, Parit School Girls in the Early 1950s', etc. in Ahmad Zakuan Radzi, op. cit.

33. The two Queen's Scouts in question were Ahmad Zahari bin Basri and Syed Ahmad bin Mohd Zain who were given their Badges personally by Lord Rowallan, the Chief Scout of the Commonwealth of the day, at a ceremony held at Hertset Camp, Tiger Lane, Ipoh, in 1954. (Tuan Haji) Ahmad Zahari who was Captain of the School at the time, was the first to be appointed Assistant Scout Master of the 14th Scout Troop, Parit, when it was formed in 1953. After leaving school, he joined the MCS and by the 1980s had reached the higher echelons, first as Principal Assistant Secretary, Supplies Division, Ministry of Defence (1980-3) and then as Senior Director, Maritime Security Division of the National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Department until he retired in 1987. He was a founder member of the Old Boys' Club, the Iskandarians, (1986) of which he became the President. Syed Ahmad also served as an Assistant Scoutmaster whilst at school. Subsequently he became a Malay Settlement Officer in various Perak land offices. By the time he retired in 1987, he was Assistant Collector of Land Revenue at Slim River. Dato' Ahmad Hassan bin Osman (a grandson of the school's benefactor, Tuan Haji Zainal Abidin bin Mat Asin), another former scout from the days of Hamdan, whom he remembers as an inspired leader, rose very rapidly in the MCS and was Secretary-General, Ministry of Housing and Local Government by the time of his retirement. He is now the member of a number of voluntary service organizations.

34. In passing, it is worth mentioning that Hamdan also gave his encouragement to the St. John's Ambulance, and maintained a keen interest in its activities throughout the whole of his career. In recognition of his services to the



movement, Hamdan was awarded the Darjah Setia Utama (DSU) of the St. John's Ambulance, its highest award, which was conferred on him in a special ceremony held at Padang Kota Lama, Penang on 4 March 2001 (when he was Head of State, Penang) by Dato' Low bin Teik, the Commander of the ASJ at the time.

35. Hamdan was not the only victim of Parit's parochialism. Kartar Singh, who joined the school and became its first senior assistant and first warden in 1952 was actually assaulted on the sports field for reasons unspecified but probably for not being a Malay. However, as the record shows, Kartar Singh not only handled that incident with aplomb but even went so far as to remove his turban and beard to soften local sensibilities. His success in getting himself accepted by Parit society, including by his assailant (who wanted to get his son admitted to the school a few years later), is reflected in the fact that he has to date been the longest serving senior assistant (i.e. 26 years) that the school has known. In retirement, he has resumed both beard and turban.

36. Hamdan recalls one particular case where the boy's guardian was his grandfather, who protested that without the boys's help at his *kampung* stall he would not be able to survive. By a judicious mixture of blandishments (e.g. such as of financial help to keep the boy in the school hostel) and threats (a police report might have to be made), the grandfather relented, and the boy returned to his classes at Parit and when he left school made a successful career in the world.

37. The AEAM itself was formed in Kuala Lumpur in July 1951. The establishment of the AEAM at federal level precipitated, according to the *Federation of Malaya Annual Report 1952*, 'the rapid advance' of local Adult Education Associations, which between July 1951 and October of 1952 came into being in every state of the country.

38. The system had been pioneered by Jesuits priests in Colombia on a classroom basis with great success. Laubach, who was in contact with the adult education movement in Singapore in the late 1940s introduced the system there.

39. The first series consisted of 42 broadcasts spaced out over a year, with follow-up tests. All that those interested in following the course were required to do was to pay \$1/- for registration which covered the cost of a printed book containing the letters of the alphabet and pictures, an exercise book, a pencil and a rubber, and postage costs. The second series launched the following year consisted of 20 broadcasts.

40. Dato' Haji Dol Ramli, who was born in Singapore in 1922, rose to become Director-General of Radio and Television Malaysia in 1972, and subsequently General Manager of Bernama. He has had a very wide experience of broadcasting national and international levels Malaysia. He has also been a very active member of other associations and institutions, especially the Malaysian Historical Society of which he has been a stalwart member for over three decades and is at present its Vice-Chairman.

41. Dr. Laubach visited Malaya in May 1951 in order to help launch the adult literacy campaign on a national scale. He visited Penang and Kelantan and trained some 290 literacy teachers.

42. Subsequently, in recognition of his contribution to the campaign to overcome illiteracy, Hamdan was conferred the Certificate of Patriotic Service by the AEAM in 1963.

43. Amongst those who took note and gained a favourable impression of Hamdan's activities were Frank K. Sands, General Manager of Malayan Publishing House (MPH) in Kuala Lumpur, and E.M.F. Payne, Director of Education, Malaya, both of whom were Scout Commissioners. Incidentally, Hamdan was also responsible for the successful establishment of the St. John's Ambulance and Red Cross associations, another example of his broad and tolerant outlook.

44. The other two were F. C. Arulanandam, a lawyer who later rose to become a High Court judge and gained a datukship, for the Malayan Association of Youth Councils, and Mohd. Rashid Ahmad, a lecturer at the College of Agriculture, Serdang, on behalf of the Malayan Young Farmers' Association. Both were old friends of Hamdan's from the days of the Japanese Occupation (refer Chapter Three, fn.12). Rashid Ahmad, especially, was one of Hamdan's heroes as an exemplar of the older generation who devoted his whole life to the cause of uplifting his fellow-countrymen. Born in 1914 at Tanjung Pagar, Singapore, he was always interested in education but had a particular bent for agriculture. So having taken and passed his Senior Cambridge at Raffles Institution, Singapore in 1930 and spending the next four years teaching in a Singapore school, he managed to get a place in the diploma course in agriculture run by the School of Agriculture at Serdang, near Kuala Lumpur. After completing the two year course successfully in 1937, Rashid was appointed an Agricultural Officer in Pahang where he stayed for the next nine years (including those of the Japanese Occupation). During that period he became aware of the great need for effective, professional leadership and guidance amongst peasant farmers if they were ever to break out of their cycle of poverty, and of the importance of higher education to provide the leadership and the expertise. So he accepted with alacrity the offer to go back to Serdang (now upgraded to a College) as a lecturer where he could play a role to a wider audience. The rest of Rashid's career and life was identified with agriculture and agricultural education for the benefit of the small farmer. After he had reached retiring age and left Serdang (now a University) in 1977, he still remained active. From 1982 till 1985 he served as Secretary-General, to the Smallholders' Association of Malaysia. He died in office in that latter year. Hamdan saw in him a kindred spirit.

45. They were also received, along with the other world youth representatives, in audience by Pope Pius XII, who was incidentally the first holder of this office to make use of radio as a means for spreading the Christian message.

46. The school was officially opened on 4th March 1954 by Sultan Yussif Izzuddin Shah, with its new name of Iskandar Shah School. This name was the one selected out of three put forward. The two other proposals were 'Queen Elizabeth School, Parit', which would have been an anachronism, and 'The

Nordin School, Parit, after Dato' Nordin, who was the Dato' Setia Bijaya diRaja, one of the Eight Chiefs in the Perak hierarchy, whose office was at Kuala Kangsar at the time. In the end his name was given to the new bridge thrown across the Perak River at Belanja, a few kilometres upstream from Parit.



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*FIVE*  
*Education Officer: 1956-1960*

**The University of Malaya in Singapore (1955-6)**

**H**amdān's departure from his post as headmaster at Parit in order to prepare and sit for his Honours Degree at the University of Malaya in Singapore, of which the old Raffles College now formed a part, marked the start of the final phase in his pursuit of higher education. The pursuit had been long and intermittent because of the upheaval of war and the Japanese Occupation which had disrupted the lives of a whole generation of students and prevented many of them from ever realizing their goals. Hamdān belonged to the relative few, who by a combination of changed circumstances, a bit of luck and sheer determination, were able ultimately to reach university level and obtain their degrees.

The University of Malaya in Singapore had been established in 1949. The idea of establishing a local university had long been pressed for by leading local citizens in pre-war British Malaya, but it was not until 1938, nine years after the foundation of Raffles College itself, that the McLean Commission was appointed to go into the question. The Commission favoured the proposal in principle with Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine serving as its nuclei. However, the Commission considered that although the Medical College had already attained university status level, Raffles College had not and required another five years to do so. So its implementation was deferred for five years. In any case the outbreak of the Second World War intervened, making postponement inevitable.

Now that the war was over, the idea was revived and a new commission, headed by Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, was set up. The Commission completed its work in May 1948, and forthwith issued the following inspiring statement:

On the understanding that the system of external examiners would be adopted, we have no hesitation in recommending that full degree-granting powers be conferred upon the institution resulting from the fusion of the two colleges<sup>1</sup>.

Draft legislation for the setting up of the university was introduced simultaneously in the Legislative Assemblies of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore in 1949. The Governor-General, Sir Malcolm MacDonald, was appointed its first Chancellor, and Dr. G.V. Allen, former Principal of the King Edward VII College of Medicine, became its first Vice-Chancellor. On 8 October 1949 at a glittering inaugural ceremony held in the Oei Tiong Ham Hall in the presence of 23 representatives from 78 universities invited to witness the historic occasion, MacDonald in his opening address trenchantly declared:

The role of a university in creating a new nation can be viewed in a variety of ways. For example, where the people of a nation consist of several different races, it is of prime importance that the racial barriers which divide them be pulled down, and they learn to be progressive enough to reduce their racial differences and to emphasize their heritage and character as the inhabitants of Malaya

and went on to express the hope that the University would become the seeding ground in which a truly Malayan society free from all racial prejudice would be nurtured and raised<sup>2</sup>.

When the University of Malaya was established, Hamdan was already pursuing his career in the field of education, and it might at first have appeared that by virtue of his age and his existing commitments, the opportunity to enrol in it in order to get an honours degree had passed him by – for surely it was the up-and-coming generation of students fresh from school for which the new university was designed. However, the presence of Hamdan and a select pool of other Raffles graduates of the immediate pre- and post-war years was a godsend for the harassed Malayan Department of Education. Confronted by the urgent need to

cope with the post-war demand for change and expansion, the Department had to overcome the dearth of qualified local teachers in the country. The Raffles graduates offered the ideal solution to the problem. They were obviously the right material academically for a university education, because they had already covered the groundwork, while in terms of natural justice they deserved to be given the opportunity to further their studies which had been denied them through no fault of their own. So they were eagerly sought after by the Department and encouraged to take special one year courses at the newly-established university, at the end of which they would emerge as honours degree specialists<sup>3</sup>. This opportunity was especially relevant for those interested in teaching, for it provided them with the means by which they could raise their own professional qualifications and at the same time make them eligible to become Education Officers in the government service.

Obviously Hamdan (and the other Raffles' graduates) jumped at this golden opportunity. So, for one whole year he was a student again. It was a very crowded, significant and enjoyable year. Although he did not have much time for socializing and extra-mural activities, he renewed his membership of the Muslim Society, of which he had always been a keen supporter. In fact, the first thing he had done when he returned to Raffles College in 1946 to complete his Diploma in Education was to rejoin it. That was when he came to know Dr. Abdul Aziz Omar, the President of the day, and Abdul Wahab Ariff, who was its Treasurer<sup>4</sup>. It was also during his short spell taking the Diploma course, that Hamdan was elected the Society's Assistant Treasurer, as a result of which he got to know most of its members personally. Once again he was 'surprisingly' – as he himself modestly puts it – elected onto its executive committee, now as President<sup>5</sup>. By this time, the significance of the role which the Society played in bringing together all the Malays and Muslims from their different disciplines at the university, had greatly increased. Virtually everyone who was to become part of the post-Merdeka Malayan establishment and had passed through the University of Malaya in Singapore was a member, and it was through the Society that Hamdan came to know future leading lights in the medical field such as the late (Tan Sri) Dr. Mohd Din bin Ahmad, who was to revolutionize health care in the rural areas after Merdeka; (Tan Sri) Dr. Abdul Majid Ismail, a

future Director of Health Services, Malaysia (1971-6); (Tan Sri) Dr Raja Ahmad Noordin, who rose to become Assistant Director of Medical Services, Malaysia and member of a World Health Organization (WHO) planning committee, and Dr. Zakaria Salim (now Dato')<sup>6</sup>, who opened a flourishing practice as a general practitioner in Terengganu – to name just a few.

That crowded year at the University also brought him into contact once more with his former mentor, Professor E.H.G. Dobby<sup>7</sup>. Dobby had had a mean reputation amongst those whom he did not teach. He had been considered an over-zealous warden in the pre-war days at Raffles College, when he used to fine students for sins of dress and deportment. On the other hand, he was not overly loved either by his expatriate colleagues after the war because he was considered to be too 'chummy' with his students, and because he was undoubtedly non-conformist and somewhat eccentric, with his long hair and unconventional ways. But he was an excellent teacher of Geography and idolized by his students, including Hamdan who regarded him as a godfather. Reciprocally, Dobby always took the closest interest in his students<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, in the middle of 1956, Hamdan emerged with his Honours Degree in Geography, and was immediately made an Education Officer, a position held in high esteem<sup>9</sup>. It also led to his at last getting married. (see the next Chapter)

### **Tun Abdul Razak and the New Fully-Residential Schools**

However, in his new capacity Hamdan was not sent back to the Iskandar Shah School, Parit, to resume his duties as Headmaster there, for he was now overqualified for that post. Naturally parents in Parit were very disappointed, but despite their pleas the Federal Education Department had other priorities, and Hamdan found himself immediately transferred to Kuala Lumpur as Organizer of Secondary Schools. This was a new position that had been created in order to cope with the administration of the growing number of secondary schools in the country.

Hamdan was now thirty-five years of age, quite young for the holder of a senior post in the Ministry. His appointment was the direct result of

being handpicked for the job by the new Minister of Education, Dato' Abdul Razak Bin Haji Hussein<sup>10</sup>, who had known Hamdan since the days when they were both at school in the same town – Kuala Kangsar – where they had met casually on the playing field and at the mosque at the Friday prayer. They had also been acquaintances at Raffles College in 1940-1 which they both attended, but since they were following different careers these contacts were not close. What proved a turning point in their relationship came soon after Razak's appointment as Minister of Education in 1955 when he made an official visit to the University of Malaya at Cluny Road in Singapore, where Hamdan was now studying for his Honours Degree. The purpose of Razak's visit was to meet Malayan students there who were undertaking degree courses, particularly those of them who were teachers – amongst whom, of course, was Hamdan – in order to urge them to join or remain with, as the case might be, the Education Service on their return home.

Hamdan vividly recalls 'the very inspiring lecture' that Razak delivered on that occasion during which the Education Minister described in some detail the plans that he was formulating for the future of education in the country, which were to form the essence of the Razak Report on Education of 1956<sup>11</sup>.

Central to Razak's proposals was the aim of establishing Malay as the National Language and ultimately as the main medium of instruction in all schools. As a first step to this end, a new Federation of Malaya Certificate (FMC) would be introduced in tandem with the existing School Certificate examination (i.e. refer to fn.11 above), the awarding of which would require a pass in Malay. However, English remained as compulsory subject in the Cambridge examination.

This, of course, represented the thin edge of the wedge for establishing a national Malay-medium system of education. Now, for the first time, Malay acquired a market value and a status which could no longer be ignored. For the Government immediately recognized the validity of the FMC, and not only was prepared to employ those who had passed in Malay and got it, even though they had not passed in English, but made possession of the FMC a condition for employment in government service. This gave a great boost to Malay and its recognition not only symbolically as the National Language but as having an



economic importance and serving as a main-stream medium of knowledge. Although in the world of business and commerce, English and Chinese no doubt continued to remain supreme, the way had also been opened for the gradual spread of the use of Malay in these areas as well. As Hamdan himself remarks:

This new principle, firmly acted upon, encouraged all candidates to study both the English and Malay languages conscientiously and well so as to gain passes in both for employment. At the same time this dual language proficiency would ensure that the citizens of Malaya's plural society would be influenced to becoming more united because they could all speak and write in both languages proficiently. This policy was a very far-sighted move towards future national harmony and solidarity.

Its corollary was the establishment of Malay-medium schools at secondary level, thereby breaking through the barriers which hitherto had prevented the great bulk of Malay boys and girls living in the rural areas from rising beyond primary school level in their education<sup>12</sup>. Under the existing system, which prevailed before the Japanese Occupation, Malay children were enrolled in the nearest primary Malay school to their *kampungs*, and after having completed five or six years there, left to seek employment – or to remain unemployed in their own homes. As we have seen, only a handful of the very bright and very fortunate managed to get selected for the Remove Classes held in certain schools which would enable them to make the transition to the English-medium and open up the possibility of getting higher education.

Razak's scheme of getting round these obstacles was to establish fully-residential schools with adequate facilities and carefully selected teachers for bright Malay students who could make the grade, to continue their studies at secondary level and eventually to proceed to the university or other institutions of higher learning for further studies<sup>13</sup>. This would also solve the problem that Malay parents faced in having to send their children for education at secondary level to ordinary day schools located in urban areas far from their homes, which in most cases lay quite beyond their means to do. At the same time, Malay boys and girls selected for the new residential schools were required to attend their first year in a

Remove Class so as to enable them to master English before being enrolled in Form One. By this means the great drawback that this language was not taught in Malay primary schools would be overcome. At the beginning there were plans for eight such schools to be established<sup>14</sup>.

All these proposals were described by Razak to the students in his lecture of the University of Malaya in Singapore in late 1955. During the question time and discussion that followed, Hamdan was prominent in asking a series of pertinent questions about the new system and its organization, to which Razak gave comprehensive and wholly satisfying answers. Whether his questions, his record at Parit, or memories of their previous acquaintanceship was the deciding factor, we shall never know, but obviously Hamdan had made an impression on Razak's mind, for his appointment as Organizer of Secondary Schools immediately after he had obtained his degree from the University of Malaya was made on Razak's express orders<sup>15</sup>.

### **Organiser of Secondary Schools, 1956**

Nevertheless, when Hamdan discovered that he had been appointed Organizer of Schools at the Ministry of Education in Kuala Lumpur, instead of being sent back to Parit in Perak to resume his teaching, he was not a little surprised. On the other hand, the new post was very much to his taste, and he felt inspired not only by Razak's patronage and confidence in him, but also by the exciting and novel prospect of having 'to implement the new principles and approaches in education which were obviously very, very different from what had happened in the past.' It was a most vital and crucial period of educational development for the Federation of Malaya as it stood on the threshold of independence.

In fact, Hamdan's first stint at Federal house was to prove a very short one – a matter of a few months – but for him it was one of the most significant periods in his whole career. Suddenly he found himself at the very hub of educational affairs, in direct contact with the very top British expatriate officers and with the most senior Malayan officers in the Ministry at the time. The most senior British official was E.M.F. Payne, the Director of Education himself, and his right hand men at the Ministry

were officers such as Davies, Christie, Pitkeathly, Godman and Douglas Muir. Prominent amongst the Malayan officers were Abdul Aziz Yeop (later the aggressive Permanent Secretary to the Ministry in the mid-1960s when Hamdan became Chief Education Adviser), and the professionals including Aminuddin Baki, of whom more anon; A.K. Arianayagam<sup>16</sup>, Aminuddin's Deputy when the latter became first Malayan Chief Education Adviser; Chang Min Kee, Director of the Teacher Training Division<sup>17</sup>; Paul Chang, a Raffles College graduate destined to become Chief Inspector of Schools and ultimately to plump for academe<sup>18</sup>; Ariffin Nam, a veteran teacher from pre-war days<sup>19</sup>; and Syed Nasir bin Ismail, who was Hamdan's opposite number in charge of Malay Primary Schools in 1956, a future Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, and an UMNO politician. They were all involved in continuous discussions relating to the working out in detail of the implementation of the new policies contained in the Razak Report which had just been published, from the administrative, financial and educational angles. Their work found its final expression in the Education Ordinance of 1957.

Although Hamdan was responsible for all secondary schools in the country, he naturally was obliged to pay the greatest attention to implementing the scheme for establishing the new fully-residential schools as outlined by Razak in his lecture at the University of Malaya in Singapore the previous year. By the time that he took up his new appointment, three new secondary residential schools – at Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru – were already on the drawing boards. It was now with the planners and architects, consisting of both expatriate and local officers that he found himself in conclave, confronted with the myriad problems involved, which included site and construction plans, and the provision of proper and adequate facilities – classrooms, dormitories, science laboratories, lecture and dining halls, kitchens, storerooms and staff quarters.

As was to become the hallmark of his management style, Hamdan never allowed himself to get tied down by the technicalities of an operation, but in the manner of the best type of administrator, issued the main guidelines, made sure that they were understood, and then delegated his authority to the experts and the specialists, giving them his full

confidence in their ability to get on with and successfully complete the job. At the same time, he kept a close personal eye on the progress being made and kept everyone on their toes with his surprise visits and off-the-cuff discussions with the people at work on the spot. He took the Malay College as his model, but the experience which he had gathered from his own student days, and later as a teacher and headmaster, greatly helped him in his endeavour to present the ideal concept of what such a school should be for the approval of the educational establishment.

In his dealings with the architects, whose role was crucial in creating a conducive physical environment, Hamdan worked with and reposed his trust in Tongue, an Australian, who was chief architect with his office in Federal House. It was Tongue who was told to draw up the detailed site plans and the designs of the buildings of the new school at Ipoh and to ensure that everything was ready and complete by the end of 1957 – a great challenge to Tongue, and of great interest to Hamdan who was slated, even if he did not know it at the time, to become the school's first principal. Another vital area of concern was the selection of the right kind of teacher for the job. In this instance, Hamdan relied on Pitkeathly, a British expatriate Education Officer, whose main hunting ground for the best candidates he found amongst the new graduates returning from Brinsford Lodge and Kirkby in England.

According to the original plan, all these secondary residential schools were to be Malay-medium, in response to pressure from Malay nationalist groups who wanted to raise the level of Malay-medium education in the country in time for Merdeka (i.e. freedom from Britain) at the end of August 1957. Nevertheless, Hamdan and his planners had to face up to the realities of the situation as it stood at the time. There were still no secondary Malay schools at all in the country, the highest level still being fixed at Standard VII (i.e. the equivalent of Standard VI primary level for English-medium schools), classes for which could only be found in the bigger towns. Those who passed out from Standard VII were usually earmarked to be Malay primary school teachers and were sent for teacher training at either Tanjung Malim or Melaka. Therefore all Malay school teachers were products of primary schools and were obviously not qualified to teach at secondary school level, whether in Malay or English.

Moreover, those Malay teachers who had passed through Kirkby or Brinsford Lodge and were now teaching in English-medium schools were not so proficient in teaching in Malay.

Faced with this dilemma the only solution was for the new residential schools to use English as their medium of instruction. This was a reality which the nationalist champions of the Malay-medium had to accept, at least for the time being, and be prepared to give their support to the steps taken by the Education Department<sup>20</sup>.

Having taken the decision to adopt the English-medium in the new fully-residential schools, the next move was to multiply the number of Malay English-medium graduates who would teach in them. On their shoulders was now placed the heavy responsibility of realizing national aspirations through their mastery of both Malay and English so that they could form the nucleus of the teaching staff Malay-medium secondary schools of the future.

While immersed in all these matters, Hamdan was suddenly informed towards the end of 1956 that in January of the new year he was to proceed to Ipoh to take charge of the new fully-residential school still in course of construction there.

### *The Malaysian Historical Society*

Despite the great pressure of work to which he was subjected during his few months at the Department prior to his transfer to Ipoh, Hamdan still found the time to get involved in the affairs of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia or PSM (Malaysian Historical Society)<sup>21</sup>, of which he had been a member since it was founded in 1953 when he was still headmaster in Parit. Now, at the invitation of Aminuddin Baki, who was a member of the PSM's Council, Hamdan was made a member of the Society's Working Committee. Once again, Hamdan found himself in distinguished company and was able to broaden the range of his contacts in the educational and academic worlds<sup>22</sup>. He hardly needed any arm-twisting to be persuaded to be drawn closer into the work of this important cultural organization, because he had already seen for himself in England the importance accorded to history as a means to preserve, enrich and enhance the identity of a nation and its culture, reflected in the

attention the British paid to the preservation of their historical buildings, records, documents and other memorabilia in archives and museums, and in the imaginative way in which history was presented and projected in schools.

In this way began Hamdan's active connection with the PSM which has lasted to the present day – he is now a Fellow of the Society (the only one). In 1956 his connection at the centre was short-lived because of his transfer to Ipoh.

But he soon emerged as a leading member of the PSM's branch activities in Perak<sup>23</sup> and, as will be seen, was to play a forceful role as chairman of its central working committee from 1966 onwards for the next twenty years.

### **Principal, Sekolah Tuanku Abdul Rahman (STAR), Ipoh (1957-1960)**

While holding the onerous post of Organizer of Secondary Schools, Hamdan was also given the task of laying the foundations of the Malay secondary school planned for Ipoh, by being appointed its first Principal in January 1957, that is only eight months before the country was to obtain its independence. So from being the planner and organizer of all three new residential schools in the country, he now became directly involved with the actual administration of the first of them on the ground, as if it was his own personal progeny.

#### ***Teething Problems***

At the beginning the school was housed in a collection of wooden huts which had until recently served as quarters of a military camp in Baeza Avenue, Ipoh, where everything was lacking and the classrooms had adjustable partitions between them. In the meantime, whilst waiting for the permanent buildings, which were being built under Tongue's supervision, to be completed on their 16 ha (40 acre) site in Tiger Lane on the outskirts of Ipoh, other basic amenities such as playing fields were extremely limited.

Because of these conditions the first intake was confined to 129 students, all of whom had been through an intensive remove class course with special emphasis on the English language at centres from all over the

country and who now joined Form One. Recalling this moment, Hamdan says:

...Students who first joined STAR were not only good, willing and obedient, but also a very well-motivated bunch of youngsters. The Federal Education Department, Kuala Lumpur, had allowed me to hand-pick the teachers for all the subjects that STAR would require to be taught, from among the best graduates from Kirkby and Brinsford Lodge and from local teachers' training colleges in the country. In spite of all kinds of shortcomings, such as inadequate playgrounds, a shortage of classrooms and dormitory accommodation, as well as a shortage of proper dining and kitchen facilities, the whole school population worked hard as a team to produce the best all-round inside and outside the school<sup>24</sup>.

The average age of the teaching staff was the mid-twenties, all of whom, as we have seen, were hand-picked college-trained teachers. Although inexperience – they were all just fresh from college – could lead to some minor hiccups<sup>25</sup>, having such a young team was to prove a great asset because, without exception, they were all highly motivated and possessed the will and energy to work hard<sup>26</sup>. The first batch of Form One students soon settled in and the school time-table was established and was working smoothly despite all the shortcomings of their temporary quarters. They were kept very busy. Some were deeply involved in the running of specific co-curricular activities, such as the Boys Scouts<sup>27</sup>, St. John's Ambulance, the Red Cross Society, and of the School Debating Society, Arts and Drama Club, while others were put in charge of athletics, games and other miscellaneous outdoor activities. The wardens were chosen from amongst the bachelor teachers, who were provided with special rooms in each of the hostel blocks to keep an eye on their young charges. A prefect system run by the boys themselves provided a welcome back-up to the teachers in assisting them in maintaining the discipline and good name of the School.

The new school weathered an outbreak of Asian flu, although many students were affected by the epidemic which swept the whole of Ipoh towards the middle of 1957. By this time, however, Hamdan was able to turn his attention to the nitty-gritty of providing the facilities and amenities of the classrooms, dormitories, dining-hall and kitchens –

desks, chairs, tables, cupboards, lockers and blackboards; double-decker beds (of steel), mattresses and pillows; long tables and chairs, plates and cutlery; cooking utensils and ovens, etc., etc. This exercise was delegated to the staff, 'who worked long hours tirelessly, with plenty of dedication as a well-knitted team of volunteers' - achieved through his own untiring presence and supervision.

### *The Official Opening*

By early 1957 the new school buildings in Tiger Lane were ready for occupation and the great move was made lock, stock and barrel from Baeza Avenue to the school's permanent home. Headmaster, staff, and students moved from the most primitive conditions to a state-of-the-art complex. The main buildings consisted of a two-storeyed block of thirteen classrooms, an administrative block, a separate large dining hall, an assembly hall which could accommodate 500, and six separate hostel blocks, which were all connected to one another by covered concrete ways, each hostel equipped with its own recreation room and sick bay. There was an intercom system by means of which Hamdan could address the whole school from the convenience of his office and the school was provided with the most up-to-date visual aids equipment. Within the spacious grounds were three hockey fields, two soccer pitches, a rugby pitch, four tennis courts and a number of badminton courts. A gymnasium and a *surau* were soon to come. The cost amounted to M\$2.5 million<sup>28</sup>.

The new residential school was now the largest residential institution of its kind in Malaya. By this time, the Form One students had advanced to Form Two, and a second intake of Form One Students had taken place. The total student population now stood at 440 boys, with a staff of 22 teachers to look after them. The students came from all over the Peninsula, the biggest number (91) being from Johor, followed by Malacca and Penang. There were 6 boys from Brunei.

This first 'Malay residential school' now needed to have a proper name and to be officially opened. The name finally chosen was Sekolah Tuanku Abdul Rahman, named after the nation's first Yang Di-Pertuan Agung (Paramount Ruler), Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the Yam Tuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan. The original proposal, put forward by Khir Johari,



Razak's successor as Ministry of Education, after discussing the matter with Hamdan during his first visit to the School in early 1958, was to name it after Tunku Abdul Rahman, the country's first Prime Minister, but when this proposal was put to Tunku Abdul Rahman himself, the Tunku in his usual unassuming and common-sensical way observed that there was no need for a glut of places and institutions to be named after him, and that it would be much more appropriate to name the new school after the country's Head of State<sup>29</sup>.

However, it was Tunku Abdul Rahman who actually did the honours in officially opening the school and in proclaiming its new name in a grand ceremony held at the school on 14 May 1958, an event which caught the headlines of the national dailies. It took place before 'a large and distinguished gathering', according to the *Times of Malaya and Straits Echo*, which included Dato' Abdul Razak (now Minister for Defence); Mohd Khir Johari, Minister for Education; Sardon bin Haji Jubir, Minister for Post & Telecommunications (a predecessor of Hamdan as Governor of Penang); Ghazali bin Jawi, the Menteri Besar, Perak; J.N. Davies, the Chief Education Adviser; and P. Roberts, the Chief Education Officer, Perak) - as well as a good number of other VIPs.

The Tunku in his speech congratulated all concerned upon the very remarkable progress made by the school in such a short time. He then went on to say, in reference to the great amount of effort and money the Government was putting into the establishment of all the new residential schools:

I would like to emphasize that there is one thing the Government will not consider in terms of lack of money, and that is the question of education. In this case the Government is giving special consideration in order to honour its education policy because the future of the country depends a great deal on the students of today.

If we look back we find that the decline of the Malays in the past was due to the lack of interest by our forebears in the whole field of education. But on the other hand the success we have achieved today resulting in independence for our country, can be attributed to education, because our parents have now taken a great interest in giving education to their children.

As such, if we are to maintain our independence and if the Malays want to live in peace and prosperity, we have to take an active interest in education. In short, education is the weapon which can redeem us.

The Education Committee, led by Dato' Abdul Razak, has laid down an education policy and recommended the establishment of secondary schools so that Malays would no longer be denied education.

Khair Johari, in his address which followed the Tunku's speech, paid tribute to the planning and establishment of the school, which he declared was 'mainly through the efforts of Dato' Abdul Razak'. 'I hope', the Minister continued,

that with the existence of this school the Malay language, the national language, will be developed and that the standard of living amongst the Malays improved with more youths going abroad for higher studies.

The seal on national and state recognition of the importance of STAR and what it stood for was set with subsequent royal visits, the first made by the Yang Di-Pertuan Agung, Tuanku Abdul Rahman himself in September the same year, who planted a fir tree at the school roundabout to commemorate the occasion. The Perak Ruler, Sultan Yussuff Izu'd-din Shah, who accompanied the Yang Di-Pertuan Agung on this occasion, became a regular visitor to give away prizes on Speech Day during the remaining four years of his life<sup>31</sup>.

### **Setting Standards**

Old boys of STAR regard Hamdan as a model 'founding father' who combined modernity with tradition and preached the ethic of excellence in work. Amongst the traditions which he established was the regular Monday morning assembly, as is indeed now a practice followed in most schools. The assembly was not limited merely to announcements of events for the forthcoming school week. It also provided an opportunity for sharpening the intellect, and for promoting the art of public speaking, by making students go up onto the stage and speak in front of the whole assembly. The dignity of the occasion was underlined by the presence of the Principal himself, standing on stage majestically robed in his academic gown.

Another tradition which Hamdan introduced was the regular hostel inspection which took place on Sunday mornings, which he conducted personally with the hostel master in tow. Although at first there were a number of students who did not take this occasion too seriously, the strict and thorough manner in which it was carried out (it included the hostel store) and the punishments which awaited the careless and the lazy, soon drove the point home. In other words, the weekly hostel inspection was yet another way of inculcating the virtues of cleanliness and self-discipline. Dinner at the High Table every Thursday night was a third tradition established by Hamdan. This gave students the chance to get to know their Principal and other members of the teaching staff on a more informal basis. For most of the students, who all came from rural areas, were still very raw and knew little about the outside world, so that when their turn came to sit at the same table with their Principal and other teachers, they felt as if they had been transported into a new dimension<sup>11</sup>. The evening meal on Thursdays also provided the occasion when Hamdan would deliver one of his famous exhortations, always aimed at motivating the students to higher things: '... you *kampung* boys, if you are given the opportunity and proper guidance, you too will become useful members of the community and succeed like any other'. Such words always inspired the boys of STAR, and till today still remain in each of their hearts<sup>12</sup>.

### Portrait of a Headmaster

But what kind of headmaster was he? Without question Hamdan was very formidable with a stentorian voice which could make the boldest student tremble. He was also a very hard worker and expected everyone else to work as hard as he himself, and made sure that they did. As one old boy, Omar Othman<sup>13</sup>, puts it: Encik Hamdan was always smartly dressed with fitting trousers, but he seldom smiled. Even when cracking jokes, he would look very serious', while another old boy, Aziz Badli bin Haji Awang Chik<sup>14</sup>, described him as 'A Principal who was greatly feared, respected and well-read'. In other words, behind the stern demeanour and occasional fierceness, was a patently sincere and dedicated man, whose interests were in the improvement of the school and of its students.

Encik Hamdan's ceaseless and relentless efforts and dedication (succeeded) in ensuring a strong foundation during the formative years of the school. It was clearly his mission to put STAR on (the) educational map of the country –

has said Abdul Hamid Mohd Nor<sup>15</sup>, yet another of his former students, while Abdullah Hassan<sup>16</sup>, who also joined the academic world on completing his studies, observes:

...his philosophy and values clearly provided the firm foundations upon which the shaping and development of STAR were laid. Much of that philosophy and those values for which he strove were also adopted by many of those who passed through STAR. One of them to which I adhere up till today is that we must be dynamic human beings who are able to make our own contribution to race and country in more than one way.

Equally telling are the comments of some members of Hamdan's staff during these pioneering years of the school:

I was thrust into an institution that had been given concrete-reinforced foundations by its founding father, Encik Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir. He was the personification of the yet-to-be-born Malaysian slogan: "Leadership through Example".

Tan Teong Leong (Teacher, 1958 till retirement):

His academic attire and rousing speeches must have motivated many a student to follow in his footsteps towards a university education. His self-confidence and ability to speak on any subject must have amazed them and made them wonder how his head could carry so much knowledge. I am sure that many an ambition in the students had their birth at these assemblies.

Lau Hut Yee<sup>17</sup>:

The other factor that contributed greatly towards the success of the new school was the able and inspiring leadership of the Headmaster himself. He was none other than our great Encik Hamdan.

Mohd. Perdaus bin Badiozzaman (Senior Assistant, STAR, 1957-65), now retired

Meanwhile Murad Mohd. Noor<sup>18</sup> who took over from Hamdan as Principal in 1960, has commented:

He was a leader who became a source of inspiration to his staff to work to and give of their best. He instilled a very high level of dedication in

the teaching profession and was totally committed to his task. He himself worked hard, with all his energy and firm devotion. Whoever worked under him will always remember his sincerity and warmth. For the staff he was easy to mix with, regardless of status or age...and as for myself, I never had any problems (when taking over as Principal) because whatever I had to do was in line with the goals that he had already set.

Finally, behind the stern disciplinarian and idealist, with his concern for perfection and detail, there was the other, more homely side of his character which did not escape the candid camera focus of his keenest watchers, his students. According to Abdul Hamid bin Mohd Nor, one of them, Hamdan never drove, even though he was the owner of an Austin A40 (vehicle registration number, BD 493):

It took some time for us to get used to the sight of Puan Zainab (Encik Hamdan's wife) driving him around in the evening, for during office hours the school driver could do the job. It was quite amusing for most of us to see our formidable Principal quite helpless at a task which other people took in their stride".

On occasion, the Principal's car became a taxi when STAR boys found themselves stranded by the side of the road waiting for a bus to take them into Ipoh which was late in coming:

One day, when I and my friends were waiting for the bus in front of the school, suddenly a great Austin A40 pulled up in front of us. We were all invited to take a lift, and although at first we declined, in the end we were all obliged to get in. My friends managed to sit at the back. It was my bad luck to have to take the front seat, probably because I was in Form One and the smallest of our group. I was sweating all over because I had to sit on the Principal's lap!

Such was the experience in 1958 of Abdul Halim bin Haji Othman, who today is a *haji* and Education Officer himself".

### ***The Moment of Truth: The First Public Examinations, 1959***

Nevertheless, the going was not always smooth, and there were crises as well as successes. One crisis which threatened to put Hamdan's whole

competence into question occurred when his pioneer group of students were sitting for their Lower Certificate of Education (LCE) in 1959. Apparently most of them were still haunted by an inferiority complex. They were scared of taking the examination, most of which was in English, even though they had been exposed to that language for three years. 'An epidemic of fear spread amongst the students; fortunately it did not amount to hysteria. One group wanted to give up and transfer straight to the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) at Tanjong Malim. Clearly this fear infected several of their weaker classmates who were also worried about how they would fare in the examination.'<sup>44</sup>

This want of confidence alarmed Hamdan who immediately summoned all the Form Three boys and gave them a good talking to. When he had finished, he challenged the whole lot of them, saying: 'Whoever wants to follow his emotions, please leave!' In response, only one boy was hardy enough to leave the school on the spot – to become in the end a primary school teacher.

In the event, the LCE examination vindicated the effectiveness of the Remove Class idea, for that year nearly all the STAR boys who sat for the examination passed it. Moreover, he had the gratification of being able to witness the first signal success of his school – the fruit of the enthusiasm, hard work and dedication of all the STAR teachers – when the second batch of boys scored 100 per cent passes in the LCE examinations in 1960<sup>45</sup>. But by this time Hamdan had left the scene. For in April that he was once again transferred at very short notice back to Kuala Lumpur, once more as Organizer of Secondary Schools.

### **A Trip to London, 1960**

A couple of months before Hamdan's sudden transfer to Kuala Lumpur in April, he received a surprise and very welcome invitation from the British High Commissioner<sup>46</sup> in Kuala Lumpur to join a party of four heads of Malayan secondary schools on a fortnight's visit to Britain under the sponsorship of the British Council<sup>47</sup>. The visit was a typically busy one, with many things to see and do, on a very tight schedule. There was a cultural tour of London's theatres, museums, libraries, and colleges, etc., followed by visits to Edinburgh, Belfast, Dublin and a few other

centres. Apart from the nostalgic interest of such a visit for Hamdan, it was well worthwhile in terms of the information and new ideas and concepts in education which they were able to pick up with a view of their possible adaptation to Malayan conditions. It was also a pleasant experience in that they met a number of 'old Malayan hands' – former expatriate members of the Malayan education service such as Payne, Godman, Muir and G.E.D. Lewis, and also, as far as Hamdan was concerned a couple of his old headmasters, T.P.M. Lewis and F.H. Jones, who went out of their way to make them all feel welcome.

Although Hamdan did not know this at the time, the London visit was to be a kind of final curtain on that part of his career in which he had been directly involved in education at ground level – as teacher and headmaster. It was also the first of a long series of visits overseas which broadened his knowledge and experience of education and its development on a global basis.

1. Harry Chan Keng Howe, *The Raffles College Story: A Souvenir Publication to Celebrate the 65th Anniversary of the Founding of Raffles College in 1928*, p.10. This recommendation in effect meant the consummation, over a hundred years later, of Stamford Raffles' dream for the establishment of an institution of higher learning whose objects were not only to educate 'the sons of the upper class of native', but also 'to afford the means of instruction in the native languages to such of the (English East India) Company's servants and others as may desire it', and to provide facilities for research into the history, conditions and amenities of the country. (from a Minute by Raffles on the objects of the Singapore Institution, quoted by Abu Zahari Abu Bakar, *Perkembangan Pendidikan di Semenanjung Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1984, p.65.)

2. Abu Zahari Abu Bakar, *ibid.* p.30.

3. Abu Zahari Abu Bakar, *op.cit.* p.67.

4. Dr. Abdul Aziz Omar, born in Penang in 1919, qualified as a doctor but was always interested in politics and was elected to Parliament in 1969 as the (Alliance) representative for Tumpat, Kelantan. He now runs a private practice in Kota Bharu. Abdul Wahab Ariff (later Datuk Paduka Mahkota Brunei), was destined for a brilliant career in public health and welfare administration.

5. In this capacity, Hamdan (who had also been appointed Hostel Warden) was able to do a good turn for a group of Muslim Society members, who had been expelled from their hostels for excessive ragging of 'freshies', by finding them alternative accommodation. Duly repentant, they turned over a new leaf

and, having successfully graduated as doctors, expressed their gratitude to Hamdan.

6. Dato' Dr Zakaria Salim was Hamdan's immediate predecessor as President of the Muslim Society.

7. The Professor was apparently delighted to see Hamdan joining the Honours Degree course in Geography, expressing his pleasure in a typically 'Dobbian' manner during a geographical trip to Katong: 'I am delighted to have one of my loyal old boys back after several years', he declared, 'come back to join the Geography Department still a bachelor and unattached to finish his course'. Dobby had actually founded the Geography Department at the University when he arrived as a lecturer in 1936. During the war he was engaged in political intelligence activities based on India and by the war's end was Head of the Malaya-Indonesia Division of the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office. On his return to Malaya, he re-established the Geography Department at the new university and during his period there served also as Dean of Arts and Acting Vice-Chancellor. During the 1950s he was variously Visiting Professor at Yale University (1950-1), at the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies at Washington, DC, (1952), and at the University of Washington in Seattle (1957-8). He also conducted a series of lecture tours while in the USA. His final academic fling was in the continent of Africa, with one year at the University of Ghana, an Acting Vice-Chancellorship in Nigeria, and five years as Visiting Professor of Geography at the University of Capetown, South Africa. He retired in 1969, and died in 1981 aged seventy-five at his home on the Isle of Man, Great Britain.

8. Dobby used to keep in touch with his students once they had left the University, going so far as to paying them visits in their home-towns. Hamdan himself had this experience. When Dobby came to look him up in Kuala Kangsar, Hamdan – having nothing else by which to show his appreciation – presented him with a pair of slippers woven by his mother for his own use. At first, Dobby was a little taken aback by this gift – 'Are not these meant for women?', he had exclaimed – but on having been given an emphatic 'no' by Hamdan, he accepted the slippers graciously. One of the things about Dobby which most impressed Hamdan was his mastery of Mathematics and his skills as a pianist. Once Dobby had left Singapore to teach elsewhere, Hamdan never managed to meet him again. Their paths almost crossed in Nigeria in 1958 when Dobby was Acting Vice-Chancellor of Ibadan University. Hamdan had arrived at Lagos to attend a Commonwealth Education Conference, but the bus taking Hamdan to Ibadan broke down on the way, so that he never arrived. The second occasion was yet more frustrating. On a visit to England in the 1970s, Hamdan 'phoned Dobby at his home on the Isle of Man, expressing the desire to come and visit him. But Dobby dissuaded him from doing so, on the grounds that it was the holiday season and that there would be no place to stay. The last that Hamdan heard of his erstwhile brilliant teacher was that he was dealing in millinery on the Isle of Wight!



9. Nearly forty years later (i.e. in June 1993) Hamdan attended the 65th Reunion of Raffles College graduates, at which he served as co-chairman for the occasion. In his speech, he almost plaintively observed: 'This Sixty-Fifth Reunion will leave us all with the dearest of memories, for I cannot but fear that when the next reunion takes place in five years time, a number of us may no longer be here to attend. I say this because I have been told that in the efforts to bring together all our former fellow students for this occasion, there were many who wanted to come but could not for reasons of ill-health, while yet others were prevented from doing so because of unavoidable circumstances....'. However, when the year 1998 dawned, Hamdan himself was still around!

10. Tun Abdul Razak bin Dato' Hussein, was born at Pekan in 1922, the son of a territorial chief of Pahang. He had his secondary education at the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, where he ended up as Headboy, and like Hamdan joined Raffles College in 1940. After the war, a Queen's Scholar, he studied law in England and was called to the English Bar in 1950. On returning to Malaya in the same year, he joined the MCS; he was appointed State Secretary Pahang in 1952 and Acting Menteri Besar Pahang in 1955. But soon after that he resigned in order to enter politics and took part in the first general election to be held in the country. In August 1955 he was made Malaya's first Minister of Education. He headed the committee which produced the seminal Razak Report on Education of 1956. He became Deputy Prime Minister in 1957 and the country's second Prime Minister in 1970. He died in office in 1976.

11. The basic aim of the Razak Report was to unite the peoples of Malaya into one nation. To achieve this aim, the Report laid down the following basic principles: (1) existing primary schools to be converted into either National Schools (Malay medium) or National-Type Schools (Chinese, Tamil or English medium); (2) one type of national secondary school to be established open to all races, although national-type secondary schools (Chinese and English medium) to be permitted on the same basis as for primary schools; (3) Malay and English to be compulsory subjects in all primary and secondary schools; (4) common content syllabuses and timetables to be introduced for all schools. In connection with the last point, the Lower Certificate of Education (at Form Three) and the Federation of Malaya Certificate (at Form Five) examinations were to be introduced and taken by all candidates at all schools in tandem with the existing Cambridge School Certificate examination. The Report advocated the setting up of an independent Inspectorate of Schools to ensure that the provisions of the new national educational policy were properly implemented, and it welcomed the steps being taken to establish a Language and Literary Agency (i.e. the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* which was actually established in June 1956) as an important agent for developing and promoting the use of Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) as the National Language.

12. It will be recalled that there were only two secondary schools exclusively for Malay students in the whole Peninsula at the time – the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, founded in 1905; and the Kolej Perempuan Melayu (Malay Girls' College) established at Damansara, Kuala Lumpur, in 1945. In any

case, both were English-medium and with their limited facilities would manifestly be unable to cope with the proposed expansion in secondary level education for Malays.

13. As Razak (quoted by Hamdan) put it: 'I would pinch the best students from the primary schools in the rural areas from all over the country and put them into fully-residential secondary schools so that they could get a better education'.

14. viz. at Georgetown (Penang), Ipoh, Johor Bahru, Kota Bharu (Kelantan), Kuala Lipis, Kuala Lumpur, and Tanjung Malim for boys, and one at Malacca for girls. Basically it was proposed that each school would be housed in new buildings on a new location, but, for obvious reasons of financial constraint, it was only practicable to start with the construction of one new school, while two more were to be housed – at least temporarily – with existing institutions. The first school to be built was the one planned for Ipoh, while another boys' school would be sited at Tanjung Malim where it was to share its grounds and premises with the SITC, already long established. A new girls' school at Malacca was similarly to be attached to the Malay Women Teachers' Training College, another institution of long vintage. In the event, the mix of training college and secondary school (both residential) in the same compound did not work out satisfactorily – there were demonstrations against it by the boys at Tanjung Malim – so that in the end the boys' school was transferred to a new site of its own at Seremban, and the girls' school was re-located at Johor Bahru (Sekolah Menengah Tun Fatimah).

15. Relations between Hamdan and Razak were always to be distant yet close. Hamdan may have supposed at first that he was a mere cypher in Razak's scheme of things. He was therefore all the more surprised when one day in 1956 in a chance encounter in Federal House (in Jalan Raja, Kuala Lumpur) Razak said to him: 'Hamdan, if ever you are free, please come upstairs to my place, for I would like to consult you on some matters'. Coming from the Minister to a new and comparatively junior official in the Ministry's hierarchy, Hamdan was almost shocked, for Razak did not lack for many advisers more senior and qualified than himself. 'Actually', comments Hamdan, 'I had no occasion to go and see him, for I was always preoccupied with my work.' On a more informal level, Razak was obviously intrigued by Hamdan's somewhat austere habits. One day when they were both official guests at Sekolah Datuk Abdul Razak, Tanjung Malim – the fully-residential school named after Razak himself in 1971 – Razak asked Hamdan, after they both had enjoyed a rather heavy lunch, as to whether he ever smoked after having had a satisfying meal. When Hamdan proudly declared that he had never done so in his whole life, Razak gently chided him for 'missing something which is a real ecstasy in life'. In response to this, Hamdan said: 'Well, Sir, I am really prepared to miss that kind of ecstasy', a response which in later years made Hamdan wonder whether he had given Razak the impression that he was 'a real simpleton and nincompoop'. The longest periods that Hamdan had with Razak were at meetings of the Malaysian Historical Society (see below). In all, bearing in mind their long association, 'I was very much at home in his company', Hamdan says. 'As far as I am concerned, I have

had in him a good friend and excellent leader whom I shall forever cherish and remember....' and whom he held in the highest regard for his great contribution to education and and yet greater role in national development.

16. Arianayagam was a Ceylonese honours degree man who came to this country after the Japanese Occupation in response to a recruiting drive launched by the Malayan Ministry of Education for Indian/Ceylonese graduates to meet the need for experienced and qualified teachers. In view of his qualifications and experience, Arianayagam moved rapidly up in the Ministry until he was one of its most senior officers, and eligible for the post of Chief Education Adviser, after the departure of the last expatriate holder of that post. However, this was politically impossible, with the result that he became Aminuddin's Deputy, and when Aminuddin died, was sent as Malayan Permanent Representative to Paris. He lived in retirement for some time in Langkawi, but then moved to England where he died in the 1990s.

17. Chang Min Kee, with whom Hamdan was to share many an experience in their later careers in the Ministry of Education, was born in Ipoh in 1919, the son of Chang Yin Fatt, a wealthy tin-miner philanthropist. His teaching career started in Penang as a teacher in a Roman Catholic missionary school, but after the war he opted to renew his career as a teacher in government service, and wisely took the opportunity to take an honours degree at the new University of Malaya in Singapore. Because of the great dearth of local graduate teachers, Min Kee rose rapidly up in the Ministry, starting as Inspector of Schools, Penang (1955-7), Chief Education Officer, Kelantan and then Headmaster of Sultan Ismail College, Kota Bahru (1957-8); Chief Education Officer, Terengganu (1959-61); after which he got irrevocably involved in students' affairs – through teacher training, being appointed Head of the Ministry's Teacher Training Division in 1962 (hence the Hamdan liaison); as the Director of the Malaysian Students Department in London (1968-71); and as Malaysian Permanent Representative to UNESCO in Paris (1972-7). In all these appointments Min Kee faced crisis situations of one sort or another, but having great resilience, diplomacy, determination and force of character was able to overcome them all.

18. Paul Chang was born in 1918, a graduate of Raffles College and the University of Malaya in Singapore; he served variously as headmaster, Director of the Malaysian Students Department, London (1961-4); Chief Inspector of Schools (1964-70); in 1969 initiated the Commonwealth Conference for Inspectors; joined the Science University of Malaysia in Penang, where he set up the off-campus courses of the university. He has had a long association with UNESCO, starting with a UNESCO fellowship which enabled him to take his MA in Education at the University of London; subsequently, Secretary-General of the National Commission for UNESCO. In 1979 Chang was made a Fellow of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration for his contributions in the field, the first person from South-East Asia to be admitted to the Fellowship and at the time only the seventh recipient of the honour.

19. Datuk Ariffin bin Mohd Nam was one of the few old-timers still in the service of the Department of Education and one of the very few in its higher

echelons. Born in 1911, having graduated from Raffles College in 1934, he spent the greater part of his teaching career at the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, which he joined in 1937. He left the MCKK in 1956 to become the first Principal of the new Malay Secondary School at Tanjung Malim (later Sekolah Dato' Abdul Razak). Later on, he was State Director of Education, Perlis, and then a member of the Railways Services Commission. He retired in 1964, and died, aged 88, at his Petaling Jaya home in March 2001.

20. Ariffin Nam, on the occasion of the re-naming of the Tanjung Malim Secondary Malay School as Sekolah Dato' Abdul Razak, and speaking in the presence of the Minister of Education, Mohd Khir Johari, described the criticisms made against the use of English in Malay-medium schools as 'unreasonable and short-sighted', adding that 'To all right thinking persons, such a move has been wise. It will give a chance to kampung boys to raise their standard of living, to be better equipped to take part in running the country and to be more useful citizens'. Those who campaigned for the promotion of Malay-medium education at the expense of English were vociferous, emotive and persistent, and gained a considerable following. One of their main protagonists was Syed Nasir Ismail, who wanted all subjects taught in the new residential schools to be in Malay from the very beginning. As it was, Hamdan regarded the strong-willed and obstinate Syed Nasir as the most formidable opponent of the Ministry in its attempts to implement its strategy based on the ideas shared by Ariffin and himself on the issue. They both favoured a more gradual approach to the introduction of Malay as the medium of instruction, concentrating at first on improving the effectiveness of the teaching of Malay and Malay literature in schools by improved approaches and methods, leaving all other subjects for the time being to be taught in English, with the exception of art, music and physical education. Holders of such views were regarded by Syed Nasir at the time as 'anti-nationalistic'. For more on Syed Nasir Ismail and the National Language, see Chapters 9 and 10.

21. The PSM had been launched at a glittering ceremony held at the Old Town Hall in Kuala Lumpur on 30 April 1953, attended by an audience of some 200 people representing the cream of the academic world and the importance of the occasion being emphasized by the presence of six of the nine Malay Rulers (or their representatives), and that of the High Commissioner, General Sir Gerald Templer. The meeting was chaired by Dato' E.E.C. Thuraisingham, the Member for Education (i.e. Minister of Education). In his message for the occasion, Thuraisingham wrote: '...there is a need to establish a central body or society which will be responsible for encouraging the people of all communities to take an interest in the culture and history of Malaya. It is felt that the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society and the (Malayan) Nature Society do not perhaps possess a sufficiently wide appeal and that it would therefore be better if another society was established. This will have the immediate effect of inspiring the formation of local historical societies and thereby provide active support to the societies already in existence.' General Templer, in his launching address, declared: 'Critics may say that in the middle of the Emergency we have no time

to develop this kind of enterprise. I do not agree. The Emergency cannot be won by guns and barbed wire alone, but only by capturing the hearts of the people, and I believe very strongly that one of the ways to do this is by making them conscious of the greatness of their cultures and showing them how these cultures in the past have contributed, and will still contribute to the building up of this Malayan nation. A nation which does not look back with pride upon its past, can never look forward to its future. And this is not a Society for government officers, for the educated alone or any class or section of the population; it is for everybody, and everybody has something to contribute to it.'

22. The first President of the Council was Dato Mahmud bin Mat of Pahang, an old boy of the Malay College (joined 1909), who worked his way up through the MAS (Malay Administrative Service) to the MCS (Malay Civil Service), and became the first Speaker of the Federal Legislative Council. Its Vice-Presidents included Dato E.E.C. Thuraisingham, Dato' Nik Ahmed Kamil, one-time Menteri Besar of Kelantan and now successor as Member of Lands, Mines and Communications to Dato' Mahmud bin Mat, and Dato' Sir Tan Cheng Lock, the founder-president of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). Besides this, the Raffles Professor of History at the University of Malaya (Professor C. Northcote Parkinson) and the Curator of Museums, Federation of Malaya (G.de G. Sieveking), were amongst the ex-officio members, and others of the Council included leading (and budding) lights in history and culture such as J.C. Bottoms, M.C. ff. Sheppard, and G. Hawkins amongst the expatriates, and Wang Gung-wu, Dorai Raja Singam, Haji Ghulam Sarwar, and Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba) amongst the Malaysians.

23. In 1959 the PSM was organized for the first time on a State as opposed to District basis, with the Menteri Besar (Mohd Ghazali Jawi) as President and Hamdan as Chairman (of the Working Committee). In the middle of the same year, Hamdan, following in the traditions of the weekend excursions with his pupils at Iskandar Shah School, Parit, led what must be one of the biggest excursions ever undertaken by any branch of the PSM when they visited the traces of the old port-capital of Bruas and then went on to Bota and Teluk Bakong to visit the graves of two of Perak's sultans. The participants in the excursion consisting of members of the PSM, students, and friends, came up to around 300 people, who made the trip using twenty-five cars, a bus and a van.

24. quoted in Lau Hut Yee and Tan Teong Leong, (eds.) *STAR through the Years STAR Merintis Jalan*, Kuala Lumpur, Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1992, p.xiii (Foreword).

25. One celebrated incident which occurred in the first year is related in a letter dated 1 October 1997 to Mohd Nor Long from Encik Kamaruddin Hashim, a former teacher at STAR and one time lecturer at the Teachers' Training College, Penang. The STAR teachers had decided at the last moment that the school should demonstrate that despite its recent beginnings it was already on par with the other leading but older schools of Ipoh, by holding its first annual sports day despite lack of training and proper facilities. So preparations were made, and on the eve

of the Sports Day itself the PE teacher and a colleague set about marking out the race tracks, using chalk for this purpose. But that night it rained heavily, unknown to the PE master and his assistant as where they stayed no rain fell, and who were confidently looking forward to the morrow when everybody could admire their handiwork. But the next morning when Hamdan arrived on the scene, of course well before anybody else, he was astonished to find the tracks still unmarked, the chalk lines having been washed away by the night rain. So as soon as he met the PE master, he naturally asked: 'Where are the lines?' – the last question that the PE expert expected to hear!. From this time on for many years, the phrase 'Where are the lines?' was a standing joke in the staff room of STAR!

26. Hamdan was very content with the services rendered by all members of his staff, but inevitably those of a certain few of them stand out particularly in his mind by virtue of the functions that they performed. There was, for instance, Mohd Perdaus bin Badiozzaman, his Senior Assistant; Lau Hut Yee, one of the wardens (for more details about both these, see below); Michael Liau Tet Loke, in charge of the School Library, and Joseph Tan Chiew Kiang, who was Manager of the School Bookshop.

27. One of Hamdan's trademarks lies in his co-opting persons of unique personality and specialist skills to assist in the development of his own projects. One classic example is provided in the context of the Boy Scouts of STAR in his acquiring the assistance of H.R. Herstlet, who had served in the British Royal Navy (China Station), and finally come to settle down in Perak. Herstlet was a keen scouter of long standing, and was ever ready to help in any Boy Scouts activity. A bachelor with an Orang Asli boy as an adopted son, he was known to Chan Teng Hong, then in charge of the STAR Boy Scouts, who introduced Herstlet to Hamdan. Hamdan provided him with a room in the bachelor's quarters, provided him with free meals – he ate with the wardens and the hostelites – and Herstlet in return provided his services free of charge. He would advise and teach the scouts in all scouting activities and skills from knotting to camping, and prepare them through each stage of the Scout curriculum from Tenderfoot to First Class and King's Scout level during the weekends. He taught them how to repair torn soccer or rugby balls and other useful jobs. Hamdan 'came to like Mr Herstlet, and I will not forget his very simple advice on how to become a good scout. He used to tell them that they should always look neat and smart in their uniforms and always remain honest in their dealings with other people. He advised the scouts not to forget to have on their person three things at all times.... They should carry a pen-knife, one ten-cent coin, and a piece of string for tying up purposes.' Herstlet was also of great help to the school as a medium for encouraging the students to get used to hearing and speaking good English, and apart from befriending the students during their free time, he would also make a point of attending all the School's important out-of-door functions. He remained at STAR for as long as Hamdan was Principal. Says Hamdan: 'Mr. H.R. Herstlet was a very humorous and simple old man with a very smart appearance. He left very good impressions as a scouter, and the Ipoh Tiger Lane

Scout Camp was named after him.' See also Chan Teng Hong, 'Scouting in STAR', Lau and Tan, *op.cit.*

28. This was a very large sum at the time, constituting an amount unheard of for use on Malay education. As such, it represented a complete break from the traditional cheese-paring approach of the colonial administration. It also aroused comments in the Chinese newspapers, accusing the Ministry of Education of being unfair in its distribution of allocations for different types of schools.

29. On the same occasion, Khir Johari and Hamdan agreed that the new residential school for boys at Tanjung Malim should be named after Dato' Abdul Razak, in honour of his being the first Minister of Education and the 'father' of the new Malay residential schools. When approached for his permission, Razak accepted the honour.

30. Sultan Yussuff reigned from 1948 till 1963. Hamdan remembers him as a humble man despite his high birth who took great interest in education in his state. He recalls how when he was in Ipoh immediately after the war while serving as a temporary teacher at Clifford School, he would occasionally meet Raja Yussuff (who was then still Raja Muda). On seeing him, Raja Yussuff would always stop and ask how he was getting on.

31. This tradition was modelled on a similar practice at the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, and indeed at many residential schools in Britain and other parts of the world. Those accorded this opportunity were the senior batches of students from the six school hostels or 'houses' on a rotational basis, so that no-one got left out. As far as the food was concerned, the fare on the high table was the same as that for all the boys in the dining-hall.

32. Lau Hut Yee, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-6.

33. Old Boy, 1957-62, now executive chairman, Permatang Development Corporation Sdn Bhd. Petaling Jaya.

34. Headboy, 1957-61), now a Dato' and District Officer, Kuala Terengganu:

35. Old Boy, 1957-63, now a company secretary

36. Old Boy, 1957-63), now Dean, the International Islamic University, Gombak.

37. Hamdan recalls Lau Hut Yee with special affection as a dedicated teacher who spent the whole of his career at STAR and, as noted, was co-author of a history of the school published in 1992. Very popular with the boys, he was known as 'Pak Lau'; he was one of the teacher-wardens and was in charge of all those who fell sick.

38. Tan Sri Dato' Haji Murad was born in Penang (in 1930) but was brought up and had his schooling in Kedah, ending up at Sultan Abdul Hamid College. He was destined to follow in the footsteps of Hamdan as far as most of his career in the Ministry of Education was concerned. He got his first degree at the University of Malaya in Singapore and joined the Education Service in 1955. His first post was Senior Assistant at SAHC, followed by headmaster at STAR (1960-2). In 1962 he went to take a diploma in Educational Administration at the University of Reading, England, and on his return was successively Chief

Education Officer in Pahang (1963-4) and in Kelantan (1964-6); Controller of Examinations (1967-70); Director of Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) (1970-6), and Director-General of Education (1976) until his retirement. After retiring from the Ministry, he became chairman of UDA for a while, and was involved in various other bodies including the International College, Penang, of which he was also chairman. He is the holder of two honorary doctorates - the University of Reading (1990) and the University of Science, Malaysia (1992).

39. Lau and Tan, *op.cit.* p.6.

40. At the time of writing Abdul Halim is Senior Education Officer, Seberang Perai Selatan, Penang.

41. Lau and Tan, *op.cit.* p.291.

42. This was well above the national average; the pass rate to qualify for promotion for the first three years in which the SRP was held (two of them on a trial basis) stood at only 25 per cent. For a detailed discussion on the launching of the Malay secondary schools and the Malay-medium examinations, see Omar Mohd Hashim. *Pengisian Misi Pendidikan*. 2nd ed. Kuala Lumpur, DBP, 1999.

43. The British High Commissioner in question was Abercrombie, who paid a visit to STAR in 1959 and was suitably impressed. This visit apparently led to the invitation to Hamdan to visit England.

44. The three other Principals involved were Elena M. Cooke from Bukit Bintang Girls' School, Kuala Lumpur, where she was to make her mark; Fatimah Ahmad from Sekolah Tengku Mahmud, Besut, Terengganu, and Waung Yoon Nien from the Chung Ling High School, Penang. Unfortunately, soon after their arrival Waung fell ill with acute hernia and had to be sent straight back to Penang for medical attention. This deprived him of the opportunity of meeting with more than one hundred Chung Ling High School old boys who were studying in Dublin, Eire, at that time.





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SIX  
*Siti Zainab*

In the meantime, just before his appointment as Principal of STAR, Hamdan had at last got married.

#### **A Prolonged Courtship**

Long courtships are rare, and certainly rarer still is an engagement lasting for over a decade. In this, perhaps, the thirteen year long engagement of Hamdan and his bride-to-be represents some kind of record. In any case, why this happened was not because of opposition from a third party, but simply because time and circumstance did not permit.

Hamdan first met his bride-to-be during the Japanese Occupation. Like Hamdan, Siti Zainab was obliged to put to one side her ambition to further her studies because of the war. When the invasion came, she was still attending the English Secondary School at Batu Gajah (now Sultan Yussuf Secondary School). War's perils were forcibly brought home to Siti Zainab and her family by the actions of licentious Japanese soldiers who in the early days of the Occupation frequently molested local girls. For this reason, Siti Zainab's parents concealed Siti Zainab and her two sisters in a remote *kampung* in the Kinta District until things had quietened down and a regular civil administration had replaced that of the Japanese military.

After this, at the urging of her father, Siti Zainab summoned up the courage to apply for admission to a Japanese language course to be held

at the Convent School in Brewster Road, Ipoh. The Japanese authorities, of course, were striving their utmost to encourage local youth to learn Japanese, so that the language would be more widely spoken, and those who took the course and passed it would become either teachers or administrative assistants in the local Japanese administration. Siti Zainab, through whose veins coursed a tradition of teaching, did not want to miss this golden opportunity. Her application was successful. She joined the course and along with some twenty-five other women participants stayed in a hostel not far from where it was being held.

It was there that I met this young teacher who looked very fierce but had a good heart. But I did not have the slightest idea that this same young man would pluck at my heart strings until I ended up by becoming his wife.<sup>1</sup>

The seeds of affection, which sprang from Hamdan's having fallen in love with her at first sight, first started to germinate around the middle of 1943 in the Kinta Valley, or more precisely in a Japanese language lecture room. For as the saying goes, 'The heart has its reasons, which are quite unknown to the head'. This was when Hamdan, who was twenty-two at the time, was holding the post of Senior Assistant at the Higher Teacher's Training College (*Jokyu Shihan Gakko*) at Ipoh. It so happened that Siti Zainab, who was then a sweet sixteen, was one of the very few female trainees under his charge. However, there was no opportunity for him to get to know her better whilst undertaking her training at the College, because, unlike nowadays, religious constraints and traditional Malay morality were very rigid, and so prevented him approaching the girl who now enthroned in his heart. As Hamdan himself somewhat tersely puts it:

Times were hard during the Japanese Occupation. We had very little of everything then. I courted her for thirteen years. It was worth the wait, as I told myself that I'll wait for the Queen of my heart<sup>2</sup>.

Hamdan only saw Siti Zainab for the six months during which she attended the course, and then they went their separate ways, he remaining in Ipoh and the girl of his choice at her home in Batu Gajah. Although these two places are not far from one another – a matter of some 30 km –

it was not easy for them to meet often, not because of lack of transport but because of the limitations imposed on a Muslim whose deeds must never sully his parents' good name. This precept is constantly instilled into a Muslim's mind from the time he is born until he reaches maturity. In traditional Malay society at that time even the exchanging of letters was considered taboo.

Nevertheless, with the consent of the parents on both sides, Hamdan and Siti Zainab got engaged the moment the Japanese surrendered in 1945. On this occasion, Hamdan solemnly swore that 'I will marry her only when I have obtained a university degree'. This, as events were to show, was to mean a wait of another eleven years<sup>3</sup>.

### **On Becoming a Teacher: Kedah Experiences**

Although the war was over, circumstances still kept them apart. However, they were at least both living in the same state, Perak. Hamdan, was now working as a temporary teacher in the Clifford School since his return to Kuala Kangsar in 1945, while Siti Zainab resumed her studies in the Senior Cambridge class at Batu Gajah in January 1946. In December of that year she was able to sit for the exam at the Methodist Girls' School, Ipoh, along with fifteen other candidates from Batu Gajah. Thanks to the Grace of God, when the results were announced early the following year, all those from Batu Gajah were found to have passed with distinction.

Looking back on her school days at Batu Gajah, Siti Zainab still remembers that:

The girls played hockey in long skirts (*sarung*), particularly the Malay girls. It was still unheard of for a schoolgirl to wear shorts of any kind, whether for hockey or any other game. Our coach then was Raja Azlan Shah (the present Sultan of Perak) who was very good at the game.

Having passed her Senior Cambridge, Siti Zainab got a job as an untrained teacher at the Government English School (i.e. Sultan Yussuf) Batu Gajah, and every Saturday went for the Normal Class<sup>4</sup> held at the Anderson School, Ipoh. It so happened that Hamdan who was, technically speaking, an untrained teacher as well, even though he had attended

Raffles College, was also required to attend the third year of the Normal Class at the Anderson School, Ipoh....

After having passed her Normal Class, in 1950 Siti Zainab was offered the post of Supervisor of Primary Schools, North Kedah and Perlis. The education system of the day made it possible for a person to move both 'vertically' and 'horizontally' in terms of postings, which was exactly what happened in the case of Siti Zainab herself. In other words, although she had only just completed her training as a teacher, she found herself loaded with the heavy responsibility of having to supervise Malay schools outside her own state of Perak. Now attached to the Education Office, Alor Setar, she had to organize and supervise Malay Primary Schools throughout North Kedah and Perlis and to make sure that such provision as existed at that time for Malay education produced results.

In carrying out her duties, Siti Zainab sometimes had to visit schools in remote places, including Langkawi which at that time was very remote. This island of legend was still quite undeveloped. Whatever roads existed – most of them were laterite – were in poor condition. She often had to ride pillion on motorbikes driven by her male counterparts.... 'With one hand I had to hold to the seat-belt for dear life. Since, needless to say, I was not prepared to cling on to the *cikgu* (teacher) who was driving the machine, I had to hang on to my umbrella with the other', recalls Siti Zainab with a smile.

There were occasions when she had to go by *sampan* (small rowboat) to visit certain schools in North Kedah, for at that time not all schools in that area could be reached by road. It was quite normal to make the journey alone (apart from the oarsman), silently gliding up or downstream by the edge of some patches of deep jungle or along an irrigation canal, whose high bunds also served here and there as burial grounds, with the occasional coffin jutting out from their eroded slopes. It was necessary to set out even before sunrise in order to reach her destination in time, adding to the eeriness of the journey. 'I was still young then and did not think of the risks that I was taking'. Experiences such as these taught Siti Zainab how to be resolute in carrying out her duties, however difficult or challenging they might be, which she was to face in later stages of her career.

### **First Spell in England: Watford College**

Siti Zainab was fortunate. Her responsibilities as a Supervisor of Schools in Kedah only lasted for six months, for the powers-that-be thought that a person in her position should be made better acquainted with the field of Educational Supervision, even though she was already a qualified teacher. So she was sent on a Supervisor's course at the Women Teachers' Training College at Durian Daun, Melaka for six months, before going on to Watford Teachers' Training College in Hertfordshire, England, for another five under the auspices of the British Council. Twenty candidates – from Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Hong Kong – all then still under British control - were sent to take part in the Watford course.

Watford College was set in an orchard surrounded by wheat fields, which made for a very pretty picture. The college buildings rose majestically in the middle of an undulating valley, calm and serene like an ancient castle, the property of some English lord in days gone by. The new intake to which Siti Zainab belonged arrived in summer, the time when schools and institutions of higher learning in England are closed for the long vacation. This was good, for it enabled the new arrivals to carry out a variety of activities without interfering with the normal college timetable as otherwise would have been the case. They were to be there for only five months, so that the course prepared for them was an intensive one. However, it was a guiding principle for such short courses that though they were highly condensed, their primary objective was not lost sight of and that at the end of it, each participant would receive a certificate testifying that he (or she) had attended a specific training programme. Although the course schedule was extremely tight, time could still be found to visit London and see something of the Hertfordshire countryside by way of an informal introduction to English culture and heritage.

In the middle of 1950, as soon as the Watford course was completed, its participants were all sent back to their respective homelands. On her return, Siti Zainab was temporarily posted to the Anderson Primary School, Ipoh, while waiting for her departure on another course, this time for English-medium schoolteachers, which was to be held in England the

following year. This was in line with the recommendations of the Barnes Report (1951) which aimed at revamping the whole Malayan education system which had hitherto been developed along communal lines, and to put in its place a new education policy, based on English and Malay as the mediums of instruction<sup>5</sup>, whose goal would be the establishment of a national system of education for the whole country. Furthermore, the Barnes Report had also recommended that the number of young Malays (male and female) teaching in English schools should be substantially increased.

All this while, although the Normal Class system for teachers in English schools had been in existence for some time conducted at various centres throughout the Peninsula, up till 1951 there was no specialist training college where they could be sent specifically for this purpose. To meet this need as soon as possible, once again on the recommendation of the Barnes Report, a training college for teachers in English schools was set up in England itself at Kirkby, near Liverpool<sup>6</sup>. Siti Zainab was amongst those who were selected to be in the first batch sent to this new institution<sup>7</sup>.

## Second Voyage to England

In the early 1950s, air travel still took second place to a voyage by sea, so that the first batch to Kirkby found themselves passengers on board SS *Chusan*, bound for London on a voyage which would take twenty-one days. They sailed at the end of 1950 from Swettenham Pier, Penang, seen off by their friends and relatives. It was both a sad and merry occasion, and there were tears as well as laughter as the ship weighed anchor and set sail. For most of those involved, it was the first time that they had ever left home and their loved ones behind. For Siti Zainab too, it was a moment of mixed emotions. As the voyage proceeded across the broad ocean, new friendships were formed, as all members of this first batch were keenly aware that they were entering into an entirely new phase in their lives as strangers in a strange land, where they would be dependent upon one another for the next two years. Many of the close friendships which were established while they were away from home have lasted up to the present day, and indeed some of them

ended up on the wedding dais. However, as far as Siti Zainab, already engaged, was concerned, she could only hope and pray that her man, who was waiting for her back home, would not change his mind though she was far out of his sight. 'Out of sight, out of mind', runs one cynical saying. 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder', is the reply of those who are sincerely committed to one another, as was the case with Siti Zainab and Hamdan.

The arrival of the first batch at Tilbury Docks, near London, was greeted by overcast, wintry skies. 'We felt depressed because of the chill and the dark, when in fact it was only four o'clock in the afternoon', wrote Siti Zainab'. Many of them were overcome by home-sickness and shed silent tears. However, the spirits of the women in the party were restored as they saw how their male counterparts, full of wise-cracks, rose to the occasion and quickly dispelled all feelings of gloom and doom.

When far from home, your companions become your family and friends whenever you need help or advice.

### **Background to the Kirkby Experiment**

Without any delay the Malayan teachers were put on a train at Tilbury Docks which took them straight to Liverpool, the great port of north-western England, on the outskirts of which Kirkby was situated. There for the next two years, as they imbibed the art of teaching, they would undergo all sorts of experiences – some very unusual, others very amusing, but all of which went to making them still more mature and more open-minded. As time went by, getting used to things removed the irritants and new experiences became routine in a country which has a climate of four seasons and a culture which is so different from their own.

Most of the members of this first batch of Kirkby trainee teachers, who included Malays, Chinese and Indians, were in their early twenties. With the experiences of the Japanese Occupation still vividly impressed on their minds, they were in fact maturer than most young people of their age and possessed inner reserves of strength. They were all Senior Cambridge Certificate holders and had a good command of English. Once they had completed their training, they would become general

purpose teachers in Malayan secondary schools where they would be required not only to teach English, but other subjects as well, like geography, history, mathematics, etc. On the other hand, the Malays in the batch were seen as being the future teachers of Malay as a subject in the English schools, as had been envisaged in the Barnes Report. Because of this, at Kirkby Malay lecturers recruited from Malaya trained the Malay members of the batch in handling all aspects of the language for use when they returned home.

In fact, the Ministry of Education's original idea was to open a training college for teachers in English schools in Malaya itself, and to recruit teaching staff from England for that purpose. However, this plan had to be put off for the time being because of the outbreak of the Communist rebellion (better known as 'the Emergency') in the middle of 1948. Since Europeans were among the prime targets of the Communist insurgents<sup>9</sup>, it was therefore decided that the teacher training would have to be carried out in England, where it was easy to procure competent teaching staff in a safe environment<sup>10</sup>.

At this period, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the British were facing serious economic problems of their own, and at the same time political power had fallen into the hands of a government controlled by the Labour Party, which was committed to the establishment of a welfare state at home and to a more liberal policy towards Britain's colonial empire overseas. In the Malayan context, the British Labour Government had already publicly declared that its policy was to prepare the country for self-government<sup>11</sup>.

As has already been noted, one of the most obvious priorities in preparing for Malaya's independence was the reform of the education system – hence the Barnes and Fenn-Wu Reports – and the creation of a new generation of Malayan teachers who would be the pioneers of the new national schools. This was a point about which the members of the first batch of Malayan teacher trainees at Kirkby were acutely aware, imposing upon them a formidable challenge to give of their best and to excel both in their training and when they returned home to teach. It was a challenge to which most responded creditably.



## **Life at Kirkby**

Meanwhile, each one had his or her own speciality. For Siti Zainab it was embroidery, and she chose to compile a lace and embroidery sample guide on the subject. In order to get interesting materials for the book, she had to go to Wales, a land famous for this craft. The visit was a revelation. 'I discovered for the first time that there are twenty-five different kinds of embroidery... Most of them are very hard to find nowadays', she relates. 'At Kirkby, we had the services of a very good lecturer - Ms Chester, who taught me stitchcraft, and who had once stitched the bridal dress of Queen Elizabeth'.

Swiftly passed the time, like the legendary winged horse which outraced the clouds in the sky. It did not seem that two years had passed because every spare minute appeared to be taken up by the intensive course load. There was so much to be learnt on a wide range of subjects which embraced child psychology, the sociology of education and the science of teaching, plus the history of education and its philosophy, English literature, and the most important aspect of all, actual teaching practice. There were many amusing incidents when it came to doing practicals at schools around Liverpool. One can imagine what a challenge it was for a foreigner to give his or her lesson as a teacher trainee to a class full of children whose mother tongue was English. Siti Zainab did her practicals at Merseyside School, teaching eleven year olds. Some of the Malaysians felt quite scared the first time that they faced such classes, but by making a determined effort to overcome their fear, they were able to carry out their teaching quite successfully.

Siti Zainab recalls one thing she found out when teaching at a school close to the docks: '...the pupils were very lively and liked to talk. If they didn't find the subject they were being taught interesting, they would force their teacher to bone up on his facts and make it more interesting'. This, of course, is hardly the kind of situation which a trainee teacher would like to find himself/herself in.

Besides the actual course work and its demands, the Malaysians were also exposed to English life and environment through informal discussions and reading. In order to gain some insight into the way in which people lived in the neighbourhood of Kirkby itself, a foster-parent

scheme was started at the College. Through this scheme the Malayan teachers were invited into English homes for tea and other occasions and so got to know their foster-parents well. In a number of cases the ties of friendship which were thus established carried on even after they had left Kirkby. Siti Zainab herself became friends of one particular family, the Harrisons, a relationship which was to last for over fifty years.

However tight their timetable was, there was always time to put on a cultural show for religious occasions such as the celebrations held to mark the end of the Fasting Month (*Hari Raya Puasa* or *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*) and the feast of sacrifice associated with the climax of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hari Raya Aidiladha*). There were also visits to places of historical interest and participation in social gatherings. Siti Zainab never forgot that she was already engaged, so tended to be 'very reserved' on such occasions. These usually were held at the weekends when the trainee teachers would try out their talent at the waltz, foxtrot, tango and quickstep.

There were, of course, several 'couples' amongst the Malayans who were 'going steady'. They generally kept to themselves, so that the female teachers who were still unattached would find their partners amongst the males who likewise had not yet been 'hooked'. All the same, Siti Zainab noted, College discipline was very strict. All hostelites had to be in their dormitories by ten o'clock at night. Most of them kept to this rule. However, there were some amongst the men who sought release from the pressures of hostel discipline by making lots of noise and generally fooling around. One winter night, for instance, a group of them waited for the lecturer on duty and his assistant to do their rounds, and then 'ambushed' them with snowballs as they went back. However, all this was taken in good part and no-one got upset, because such pranks were nothing out of the ordinary as far as most of the English staff were concerned.

As for the cultural shows, Siti Zainab learned the candle dance and the *tarian inang*<sup>12</sup>, and felt proud to perform some of the traditional dances of her people. All these things were translated into fond memories on her return home, when she also brought back with her the Kirkby Certificate which meant that she was now entitled to be a fully qualified teacher. The first batch flew back to Malaya in 1953.

## **Supervisor of Malay Schools, Kedah**

Now that her training at Kirby was over, Siti Zainab was posted once more to Kedah in September 1953, where she got back her old job as Supervisor of Malay Schools. The first batch from Kirkby were very fortunate because a good number of them were not sent back to schools as ordinary teachers but were straight away promoted to important positions as lecturers, supervisors, coordinators and senior assistants, as indeed happened in the case of Siti Zainab.

As in the other States of Malaya, the Kedah Education Office was undergoing a structural reorganization with the creation of four divisions based on the four mediums of instruction - English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil - under the charge of an Englishman who was styled Superintendent of Education<sup>1)</sup> - Siti Zainab was placed in the Malay Schools Division under Mohd Darus bin Abdul Rahman, the Senior Inspector of Malay Schools (SIMS). Mohd Darus was a competent officer. He was also prepared to help members of the staff under him. Siti Zainab felt very fortunate to have such a sympathetic head, and from Pa' Darus, as he was called by all the office staff, she learned a lot of the tricks of the trade in what is a complex and challenging field.

In those days it was very rare for a woman to work in a government office, for those who had been trained as ordinary teachers were usually posted to schools, an area considered most suited to women educators. There were only three women altogether employed in the Kedah State Office at that time, including Siti Zainab herself. Of the other two one was a typist in Customs and the other was Che Tom binti Datuk Abdul Razak, also a Supervisor, who had followed her husband when he was posted to Kedah from Selangor.

Siti Zainab did not find herself all alone in a strange place because her sister, Siti Bidayah, a normal-trained teacher, had met her match in a young man of Kedah and was now living and teaching in Alor Setar. Although there were times when Siti Zainab sorely missed her parents and relatives back home, her spirits were restored every time she went to see Siti Bidayah. Since they were in the same profession they had much in common, and it was easy for Siti Zainab to pour out her heart to her sister regarding her problems at work.

At a time when the country had not fully recovered from the war, on top of which came the Emergency, it was obvious that the worthy aim of raising educational standards would be difficult to achieve. There were not only the constraints of limited human and financial resources, but also those created by the ingrained conservatism prevalent amongst the older generation of teachers who had had their fill of various new-fangled approaches and methods of teaching and learning. The old-timers were proud of what they had achieved in the past and had shown that their methods had produced good results. If from the outset new teaching methods were not well received by them, how much more so when these innovations were introduced by a young lady teacher like Siti Zainab. The old hands were prepared to concede that their new Supervisor was well up on the latest theories of education, but these were only theories and were no substitute for methods which had been well tested by those experienced in the nitty-gritty of practical teaching in the classroom. They were convinced that the old ways were the proven ways, but what they failed to realize was that all knowledge, be it theoretical or practical, was for ever expanding and would continue to do for as long as people could think. In fact, the older teachers should be able to make room for the new so that everyone could share alike their knowledge and experience to the benefit of all concerned.

### **Kuala Lumpur and Marriage: the Family Background**

It was for only three years that Siti Zainab was able to make her contribution in Kedah before the time came for her to go to Kuala Lumpur to join Hamdan, now an Honours graduate and holding the post of Organizer of Secondary Schools, who was waiting for her in order to set up house. At long last, the period of waiting was over, and on 1 September 1956 the wedding ceremony was duly performed at the house of Haji Baharuddin bin Lebai Yusuf, the bride's father, at Batu Gajah.

Siti Zainab had been born into a family of teachers, a tradition which went back for six generations, starting with her great-great-grandmother on her maternal side down to her own two parents. Before British colonial days, teachers learned their profession in their own *kampungs*. The emphasis was on religious instruction focussed on the Quran. Alongside

this came the teaching of basic living skills such as house-keeping for girls and more practical preparation for the outside world for the boys such as in the arts of self-defence (*silat*), traditional medicine, astrology, and interpreting the supernatural, as well as the humdrum but important skills of writing and translation<sup>14</sup>.

But to come back to Siti Zainab and her family: she was born on 1 November 1926 in a house in Jalan Baru, Tanah Kebun, Parit Buntar, Perak. She had two sisters and one brother, who were all elder than herself. Both her sisters, Siti Bidayah and Hendon, also became teachers, but although her brother, Abdullah Sani, who was the eldest of them all, started off following in this family tradition<sup>15</sup>, it soon became clear that teaching was not his forte. So he wisely changed his vocation and went in for a job with the Information Department instead.

Baharuddin, the father of the family, was a graduate of the Malay Teachers' Training College at Matang<sup>16</sup>. After leaving Matang, Baharuddin taught at the Malay School at Parit Buntar up till 1932. He was then promoted to Headmaster and was sent to Batu Gajah. Baharuddin was a progressive-minded man, seen in his allowing his three daughters to pursue their studies for as high as they could go. He was even prepared for them to gain admission into English-medium schools, which as we have already seen<sup>17</sup>, was very much against the idea of what constituted a proper education for young girls in Malay society at that time.

Nevertheless, Baharuddin paid no heed to such prejudices, but went ahead with his purpose to ensure that his daughters would be able to pursue their education for as far as they could get, including to the Government English School (i.e. now Sultan Yussuff Secondary School), Batu Gajah. However, at the same time their religious education was not neglected, for this was seen as a sure defence against negative elements penetrating their innocent minds. They were given a foundation of Malay school education up till Standard Five. Baharuddin reckoned that he would be able to assess their full potential if they joined the English medium later. He did not want them to go through what he had gone through when he was a child.

Thanks to their father's foresight and determination, all his three daughters passed their Senior Cambridge and then straight away

embarked upon their teaching careers in the true family tradition<sup>16</sup>. With the constant encouragement of their parents, they found out for themselves how spiritually rewarding the teaching profession was, like a torch bringing light to those who sat in the darkness of ignorance, and the primary role of which was to develop character. This made them all determined to be the best possible educationists that they could ever be. Of the three of them, Siti Zainab was the most successful, because she had been given the opportunity to study overseas, as a result of which when she returned she was given an important post in the Department of Education.

The three sisters were not only keen on their role in the classroom, but also enjoyed taking part in extramural activities. One of these was the Girl Guides Movement (Pandu Puteri). It was Hendon who distinguished herself the most in this sphere, rising to become the Girl Guides Commissioner for Malaysia, a position she occupied for ten years. She also became the Malaysian representative on the Movement's World Council. Siti Bidayah, on the other hand, became the Guide's State Commissioner for Kedah, and in recognition of her stalwart services and leadership was bestowed the *Anugerah Layang-Layang*, the Movement's highest award.

### Principal's Wife

The newly-wedded couple were not able to enjoy their life in Kuala Lumpur for long, for in early 1957, as we have seen, Hamdan was transferred to Ipoh. Having had barely any opportunity for getting to know her colleagues at the Maxwell Road Secondary Boys School in Kuala Lumpur, to which she has been posted, Siti Zainab now had to start all over again with the teachers at the Cator Avenue Primary School, Ipoh. Hamdan, on the other hand, was now the Principal of an institution into which parents from all over the country were trying to get their children admitted.

Because the Principal's quarters at STAR were not yet ready, for the time being they had to travel every day to and fro from Siti Zainab's family home in Batu Gajah. The road between Ipoh and Batu Gajah in those days was narrow and winding, and made for a difficult daily

journey to school. So when they got the offer of staying at a government chalet in Ipoh itself, they moved in immediately, and became their home for several months while waiting for the Principal's house in the STAR compound to be ready.

It was here that a daughter, the first child of their union, was born. They named her Siti Khadijah, in honour of the first wife of the Prophet. Their first baby was naturally the object of all the love and affection they could bestow upon her, and of course became another bond which strengthened their love for one another. In the view of Islam the new-born child is like a pure, unsoiled sheet of cloth, onto which the parents will inscribe their pattern for better or for worse. Hamdan and Siti Zainab, as parents who had received both a religious and secular education, were able to bring up their child to be both morally strong and also practical in her affairs. Moreover, as teachers the ingredients for a sound education were well established in their minds, so that it was all the easier for them to apply them in the upbringing of their own daughter.

Meanwhile, both Hamdan and Siti Zainab spent much of their time having to deal with their own pupils in class, to whom they not only imparted their knowledge but provided them with lessons in discipline and morality as well. Their experiences in the classroom helped them to build up a happy family. The job of bringing up their daughter was not entrusted to the mother alone. The father also played his part in ensuring a wholesome family atmosphere. The preservation of this harmony and tranquillity was always uppermost in their minds wherever they might find themselves, be it in a bustling noisy city like Kuala Lumpur or in the quieter surroundings of a town like Ipoh.

The truth of the old cliché that behind every successful man stands a woman is borne out in the case of Hamdan. Siti Zainab was a true source of encouragement to him in the fullest sense of the word, inspiring her husband to carry out his responsibilities to the limits of his ability, however difficult the circumstances might be, in the struggle to realize his most fundamental ambitions and dreams as an educationist. Her steadfast support for him was sensed by Lau Hut Yee:

Puan Siti Zainab used to bring lunch to Encik Hamdan at his office at Baeza Avenue. On some days, she would bring extra fruits or dessert and

invite us, the bachelor teachers, to join them. She would inquire after our welfare and always had an encouraging and comforting word for the students she met. Her Morris Minor, together with her husband's famous Austin BD 493, were frequently used for transporting boys to hospital or the Kinta Swimming Pool, or for games on borrowed fields in other schools, for our school did not have a van, a bus or a field. Puan Siti Zainab's thoughtfulness and little acts of kindness were endearing, and her tenderness and caring made us feel we had a sister in her<sup>19</sup>.

For all those at STAR, Siti Zainab was the 'live wire', and she has remained fresh in the memories of teachers and students alike. On the other hand, Hamdan always assisted Siti Zainab with her daily chores outside office hours in the school compound in the evenings. Another old boy of STAR writes:

My friends in the same group still remember how Encik Hamdan, accompanied by his devoted wife, pushed the pram with Siti Khadijah in it across the playing field to go to Yellow House before the evening prayer in order to make sure that we were all back in the hostel.<sup>20</sup>

### **Back to Kuala Lumpur**

After three years of serving in her native state of Perak, Siti Zainab was transferred back to Kuala Lumpur when Hamdan was promoted to the post of Principal Assistant Secretary of the Scholarships and Training Division of the Ministry of Education in early 1961. From that moment on she never looked back or needed to worry about having to move again for many years to come. For her career was now fixed in Kuala Lumpur as her husband started to mount the rungs of the hierarchical ladder as one of the most experienced officers in the Ministry. All the same, she still remained an ordinary teacher, starting off at the Bukit Bintang Secondary Girls School where she stayed for a while before being transferred to the Cochrane Road Secondary School where she remained until 1967. She was then promoted to be Headmistress of the Padang Tembak Primary School from January 1968 until she was promoted yet once again, to become Headmistress of the Padang Tembak Secondary School. This last appointment created a precedent because Siti Zainab was the first woman to be put in charge of a co-educational secondary school (i.e. with boy



and girl students). Her greatest challenge was the problem of discipline which affected many schools in the 1970s.

.....school discipline was very bad. I shall never forget how I had to work non-stop for over a month to meet this challenge. In the end, little by little we managed to bring about the kind of discipline that we wanted, and after that the school ran well and we achieved success<sup>21</sup>.

There were a number of factors which account for this crisis in school discipline. Amongst the various theories put forward, one of them stressed social change which had led to a corresponding change in values. This situation created a generation gap between parents and their own children. The cultural shock of modernization, a decline in moral standards which was linked with other social ills, the migration from the rural areas to the towns and a host of other factors all contributed to the general problem. In conclusion, it could all be summed up by saying that there were four basic factors involved – social, psychological, the question of values, and problems of administration.

After this daunting episode, Siti Zainab was transferred in 1974 to the Selangor Education Department to take up the post of Organizer of Primary Schools in the state, where she stayed until she had to move to Penang to accompany her husband who had been appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Universiti Sains Malaysia in October 1976. The following January she took up her last post in the Ministry of Education as Headmistress of the Jalan Residency Primary School, Pulau Pinang, where she remained until her retirement.

However, as will be seen, as her husband's career moved for ever upward, Siti Zainab's days in the classroom and office came to an end, and she had to play a very different role as Hamdan's consort on his official duties, first as the Permanent Malaysian Delegate-cum-Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris, and then as the First Lady of Penang when he was appointed its Yang DiPertua Negeri or Head of State.

1. 'Brief Memoir' by Toh Puan Dato' Seri Siti Zainab binti Haji Baharuddin to the author, 24 December 1997.

2. Nevertheless, whether Hamdan was aware of it or not, his courtship of Siti Zainab had not gone unobserved. (Dato' Seri) Yuen Yuet Leng, who happened to be in Ipoh soon after the Japanese surrender, dropped in at the Yuk Choy Primary School in Hugh Low Street, which was still occupied by the Japanese. 'Now and then I saw Hamdan Tahir in the compound. He was then courting Zainab from Batu Gajah.... Hamdan, being a very correct person courted Zainab standing a respectable distance apart. He always spoke to her outside the classroom and in the open although there was nobody in the classrooms at the time. But that was Hamdan's *sensei*, whose *seishin* was even more perfect than some of the Japanese... They commented that his *seishin* was *ippai* (i.e. 'full')'. (biographical notes, courtesy of Dato Seri Yuen Yuet Leng to the translator).

3. *The Sun*, Saturday, 13 July 1996. Also refer to previous Chapter.

4. 'Normal Class' was the name given to special classes held to provide courses for untrained teachers, who were already teaching in schools or who had newly graduated from Raffles College or the Teachers' Training College for primary school teachers. Such courses had been in operation since the beginning of the 20th century. When Raffles College was established in 1928 initially for the training of teachers, its graduates were required to attend a one year Normal Class Teachers' course and pass the examinations before they could become qualified teachers. On the other hand, teachers graduating from the Teachers' Training College at Matang (replaced later by the Sultan Idris Training College at Tanjong Malim) could only qualify as primary school teachers after receiving three years of training there. All other candidates for the teaching profession who had passed their Cambridge School Certificate examination were required to attend Normal Class Teachers' Training Courses for two years and pass the examinations before they could become qualified teachers.

5. i.e. where one language was used as the main medium of instruction, the other would be taught as a second language. Abu Zahari Abu Bakar, op.cit. p.41.

6. Another similar type of college was set up at Brinsford Lodge, near Wolverhampton, near Birmingham, in 1954.

7. Incidentally, in the second batch for Kirkby one of the women teachers selected was Tuanku Bainum, the present Raja Permaisuri (i.e. Sultan's consort) of Perak.

8. Toh Puan Dato' Seri Siti Zainab, 'Brief Memoir', op.cit.

9. J.M. Gullick, *Malaya*, London, Ernest Benn Ltd., 1963. p.99.

10. Interview: Tan Sri Hamdan with National Archives, 13 May 1987.

11. i.e. this formed the background to the abortive attempt to establish the Malayan Union in 1945-6, which led directly to the formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948.

12. i.e. another court dance for ladies

13. The title of this office was subsequently changed to that of Chief Education Officer in line with the other States.

14. Mansur Sanusi, *Sejarah Perkembangan Pelajaran Melayu*, Penang, Sinaran Bros., p.31.

15. The strong teaching tradition of the family has already been mentioned. Apart from their two parents, other teachers in the family circle at the time were three uncles on their father's side and one aunt on their mother's side.

16. The Matang College was founded in 1913 on the initiative of Sultan Idris I. Admission was restricted to students from Perak alone.

17. refer Chapter 2. pp.25.

18. They all enjoyed successful careers in the teaching profession. Siti Bidayah retired as Headmistress of the Asmah Primary School, Alor Setar; Hendon likewise retired as Headmistress of the National Type Dato' Abu Bakar Secondary School, Kuala Lumpur; and Siti Zainab held a number of senior posts as Headmistress and Supervisor of primary and secondary schools and in the Education Offices of Selangor and Penang before she ended her service with the Ministry of Education.

19. Lau & Tan, *op.cit.* pp.214-15

20. *ibid.* p.101.

21. Toh Puan Dato' Seri Siti Zainab, 'Brief Memoir', *op.cit.*



## SEVEN

### *Transitional: Ministry Man: 1960-1963*

#### **Back to the Ministry**

Throughout his whole career Hamdan was to experience sudden transfers to new posts of responsibility imposed upon him at a moment's notice. This had been the case on being posted to Parit as headmaster in 1951, and again on being sent as first principal of STAR in 1956. History repeated itself a third time in 1960 when he was suddenly transferred from STAR back to Kuala Lumpur to take up his old post as Organizer of Secondary Schools. Once again he had been informed of his appointment through the medium of a rushed interview – in this instance, with Mohd. Khir Johari's successor as Minister of Education, Abdul Rahman bin Haji Talib'.

In early April 1960 whilst attending a short art course at Johor Baru, Hamdan received an urgent summons to go to Federal House in Kuala Lumpur to meet the Minister, with no reason being given. When he duly presented himself at the Ministry and met the Minister, Rahman Talib peremptorily told him that he was to be transferred from STAR back to Kuala Lumpur. This totally unexpected piece of news startled Hamdan who at first was quite reluctant to be transferred. The school's annual budget had still to be prepared, a new intake of boys had to be supervised, and there was all the hassle of uprooting the family. Siti Zainab would have to get a transfer as well, the two girls (Siti Khadijah and Siti Aishah) would have to leave their present school and settle down in a new one, and suitable accommodation for the whole family would have to be found. But the Minister was not to be deterred. 'You've given enough

service to Perak already all these years', he said, 'and we want you to be with us here'. He thereupon instructed Hamdan to take a note to Christie (the expatriate Chief Education Adviser) informing him of the new arrangements, and added: 'Please report for duty next week'.

At this point Hamdan naturally enquired as to whom he was going to hand over the school as his successor at STAR. 'Well, well', replied Rahman, 'whom do you think can take over from you?'. Taken off guard, Hamdan had to do some quick thinking, but he managed to come up with the name of Murad bin Mohd Noor, whom he had known since their days together at the University of Malaya in Singapore, and who was now serving as Senior Assistant to Long Heng Hua at Sultan Abdul Hamid College (SAHC) in Alor Star. Rahman Talib accepted this proposal on the spot and added it to his instructions to Christie. In this way two important transfers were made, as much to the surprise of Murad as it was to Hamdan, and without any official letter of appointment. For Hamdan the next three years marked a period of transition in his life and career. His return to his old post at the Schools Division of the Ministry came at a time that was full of challenge as the Ministry swiftly shed its colonial trappings, expanded, and came into its own. This process was accelerated by the publication in 1960 of the Rahman Talib Report, the implementation of which, as will be seen, posed a great strain on the resources of the Ministry. Another great challenge to the Ministry was finding suitable replacements for its senior expatriate officers as they left under the Malayanization scheme in the early 1960s.

Hamdan's career was directly affected by these developments. It was also during this period that Hamdan was introduced to education on the global stage as a consequence of being sent overseas to represent Malaya at various seminars, courses, conferences and other international gatherings.

### **Scholarships Man, 1960-1963**

Hamdan was, of course, very familiar with the problems facing the Organizer of Secondary Schools. However, the work of the Ministry's Schools Division had been greatly increased by the implementation of two of the recommendations of the Rahman Talib Report, namely the

raising of the school-leaving age to fifteen and the introduction of universal free primary education with effect from the beginning of 1962<sup>3</sup>. One of the obvious consequences of these two measures was that the programme for the building of new secondary schools had to be stepped up, along with an increase in the rate of recruitment of new teachers and in the addition to existing facilities.

Nevertheless, Hamdan remained barely nine months in his old post before, at the beginning of 1961, he was promoted yet once again, this time as Principal Assistant Secretary to the Scholarships and Training Division of the Ministry of Education<sup>4</sup>. His elevation to this new position was a direct consequence of the Malayanization policy, for he took over from John Hackling, the last expatriate to hold the post. In fact, in general as far as the education service was concerned, the process of Malayanization was carried out smoothly enough<sup>5</sup>. Hamdan was one of dozens of local officers who filled the posts made vacant as the expatriates left the country, comfortably compensated for their loss of career.

It is no discredit to Hackling to state that under its new head, the number of scholarships granted, post-graduate courses offered and other avenues for higher education opened increased dramatically. Hackling was inevitably bound by the traditional approach of a colonial administrator whose dictum was 'maximum return for minimum cost' and who lacked the intense urgency of a patriotic reformer. Hamdan, on the other hand, made full use of his new position to increase the opportunities for local students to further their studies at institutions of higher learning on Commonwealth and Colombo Plan scholarships, as well as by means of various other scholarships offered by individual countries such as Indonesia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, besides those available from the UK, other European states and the USA. This was achieved by doing a lot of work making friends and influencing people in the high commissions and embassies of Kuala Lumpur and forging contacts with a variety of foreign educational institutions such as the Alliance Francaise, the Goethe Institute and the Ford Foundation. As the fruit of his labours, Hamdan succeeded in obtaining 450 places in such overseas institutions as compared with the 120 places made available to Malayan students previously.

Typical of Hamdan's style was his willingness to cut corners and brush aside all red tape which hampered progress. A typical example of this was his strategy of communicating with successful applicants directly by 'phone, so that they could make early preparations without having to go through the normal bureaucratic processes which took up so much time and had on occasion actually led to good offers being forfeited<sup>6</sup>. It was a job very much after his own heart – that of being empowered to assist young Malaysians (men and women) of ability and talent to improve their knowledge and skills abroad and so return home well equipped to be of good use to their country.

Another important spin-off of his post in the Scholarships and Training Division from Hamdan's point of view, was the access it gave him to the men at the top and to get a bird's eye view of the work of the Ministry itself. It was during this period that he really got to know Aminuddin Baki well (and vice-versa), after the latter had taken over as the first Malayan Chief Education Adviser from Davies in 1961. His duties in the Scholarships and Training Division obliged him from time to time to report directly to Aminuddin, or to his deputy, K. Arianayagam, as well as to refer to the Ministry's Permanent Secretary.

### **Early Trips Abroad: A Passage to India (1958 and 1960)**

For those who like to travel and see the world, one of the undoubted benefits of holding a high post in government service is the opportunities, which can occur quite frequently, for being sent abroad in some official capacity as the Malayan representative at some international forum or as a member of some fact-finding mission. In this respect, Hamdan was very fortunate, for by the very nature of the posts he came to hold, first in the Scholarships and Training Division, and subsequently as Controller of Examinations and then Chief Education Adviser/ Director-General of Education, it was vital for him to be in touch with and know what was happening in other parts of the world in the realm of education so that the country's education system could keep up with the mainstream of educational development. As a result overseas trips to a good number of places became almost commonplace in his official schedule of duties. Needless to say, Hamdan took his trips

abroad with the same intensity and seriousness of purpose that he showed in managing his responsibilities at home. He never used these occasions for going on a spree, but made full use of the opportunities before him to learn, and returned from each one armed with new knowledge and experience which he knew could put to good use by the Ministry of Education at home.

His first journey abroad in his official capacity as one of the Ministry's senior officers took place soon after his return to the Ministry in 1960 when he attended the Commonwealth Education Conference held in New Delhi, forming part of a five-man Malayan delegation which was led by Rahman Talib, the Minister<sup>7</sup>. However, this was not Hamdan's first visit to New Delhi. He had been there once before, two years earlier (i.e. in 1958), while he was still Principal of STAR in Ipoh, when he had been selected along with Chang Min Kee<sup>8</sup>, the head of the Teachers' Training Division, to represent the Federation of Malaya at a UNESCO-sponsored seminar on educational reforms in South and East Asia<sup>9</sup>, which was held in the stately Vigyan Bhavan. The theme of the Seminar itself – reforms in education – was highly germane to the Malayan situation, raising as it did issues of religious and ethnic difficulties and the problem of national integration<sup>10</sup>. There was enough food for thought for the two delegates from Malaya, but they made their mark. *The (Indian) Statesman* reported that the Malayan delegation had made 'a useful suggestion' by proposing the development of a teacher exchange project among the countries of the South and East Asia region.

For Hamdan this first exposure to the global world of education, no longer as a student but as an education officer, was of the highest value. He also used it to make friends with delegates from other countries and establish relationships, some of which were to last for a long time and prove very useful in the future. 'If you want to succeed, its contacts that matter', his favourite professor and mentor, E.H.G. Dobby, had once told him. Hamdan did not neglect this advice. One of the most long-standing friendships which he made was with Ryoji Ito, one of the Japanese delegates at the Seminar, whose subsequent career was with UNESCO as an education expert and in serving the Organization in various roles<sup>11</sup>. In general, the UNESCO connection was to play an important part in his subsequent work in the Ministry of Education in



Kuala Lumpur. As for India, Hamdan's visits of 1958 and 1960 were to be the first of several<sup>12</sup>.

### **A Tour of the United States and a Trip to Canada (1962)**

Hamdan's visit with the Malayan delegation to attend the Commonwealth Education Conference of 1960 in New Delhi was followed two years later by a visit to the United States, the highlight of which was to participate in the Harvard University International Seminar in July. The whole trip was sponsored and organized by the Asia Foundation and Harvard University<sup>13</sup>, and involved visits to leading American universities, attending the high-powered international seminar at Harvard itself, and ended up with a brief visit to Canada<sup>14</sup>. Hamdan was to regard this tour as the most memorable and valuable experience abroad that he ever had in connection with the cause of education. It was also his first experience of being parted from wife and child since they had got married.

Hamdan started out on his journey on 8 June 1962. The first stop was at Honolulu, where, despite feeling tired because of the change in time zone, he was required the following day to attend a meeting at the East-West Center of the University of Hawaii. While there he met Dr. Annuar bin Mahmud (a future Tan Sri and Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Malaysia) who was carrying out research in the field of veterinary science at the University of Hawaii, and also renewed his acquaintance with the well-known Indonesian educationist, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, who was lecturing at the Center's Institute of Advanced Projects. Alisjahbana was anxious to meet Hamdan, whose presence in Honolulu he had learnt of from Dr. Annuar. So keen in fact was he to meet Hamdan that he arrived at where Hamdan was staying at 2 o'clock in the morning when Hamdan was fast asleep!

The reason for Alisjahbana's visit – he did not want to miss Hamdan who was due to depart the following morning – was because he wanted very much to be able to come and teach at the University of Malaya. Could Hamdan help him? Hamdan said 'yes', and did. As a result Takdir Alisjahbana joined the Malay Department of the University of Malaya the following year and became its Head as Professor of Malay Studies, in succession to the Dutch Professor Roolvink, not long after<sup>15</sup>.

Apart from renewing old acquaintanceships, during his short time in Honolulu Hamdan made a point, as he was duty-bound to do, of meeting up with Malayan students who were attending courses there, a part of the 155 Malaysians who were to be found studying at various places of higher learning all over the United States. For this purpose, on reaching the mainland Hamdan travelled across the American continent from the west to the east coasts, calling in at universities along the way, starting with the University of California and including in particular those of Stanford and Minnesota as well. Of course, he also took the opportunity to see what these famous American institutions had to offer and how they were organized. He was particularly impressed by the achievements of the University of California at Berkeley. At the time of his visit, this university had 33,000 students on its vast campus, and a staff which included 13 professors who were Nobel Prize winners in a variety of disciplines<sup>16</sup>.

In general, he found the high quality of the teaching and research at the top ten American universities quite amazing. At Minneapolis he was able to visit the Dunwoody Institute, a private institution which trained its students for entry into industry all over the States. The Dunwoody visit gave Hamdan the inspiration to bring about the introduction of polytechnic colleges into the Malayan educational system. In Washington, Hamdan was taken to see leading American professionals in education, including the Executive Secretary of Education and International Affairs. He visited his sponsor, the Asia Foundation, who showed interest in a translation project, as did Franklin Publishers, whose staff showed keenness to sponsor the translation of their books into Malay. Hamdan also visited the Ford Foundation, who expressed their readiness to make some contribution to the Faculty of Education of the University of Malaya. One particular encounter which revived pleasant memories was Hamdan's meeting with K.D. Luke, the Headmaster of Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, when Hamdan was a teacher there. Luke was now working with the British Embassy in Washington as adviser to overseas students from East Africa who were studying in North America. At Columbia University Hamdan met Malayan students who were taking journalism. And, of course, he made sure that he dropped in at the American Geographical Society headquarters.

At Princeton University, another of America's leading institutions, Hamdan was attracted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which, he thought, could be copied by Malaya for preparing tests and assessments for schools and colleges, as well as for government agencies and other professional bodies. A non-profit making body established by the American Council of Education, the Carnegie Foundation, and the College Entrance Examinations Boards, the ETS carried out consolidated tests and had also designed new tests and services. This was a revelation for Hamdan which he would make use of when he became Controller of Examinations in 1963.

When he was in New York he got a glimpse of the world of diplomacy and international relations when he visited the United Nations Headquarters. In New York he was taken round the town and shown the sights by Wong Pow Nee (now Dato' Seri) - a member of the Rahman Talib Education Review Committee and a future Chief Minister of Penang.

### **The Harvard International Seminar**

As soon as he had completed his visits to these various institutions and had performed some official duties, Hamdan left for Boston in order to attend the International Seminar at Harvard University. This Seminar was attended by forty-two participants of various backgrounds from all over the world - educationists, journalists, researchers, academicians and also politicians. The participants were split up into three groups, i.e. Political Science, Economics and Sociology, and Arts and Literature. Hamdan joined the last-named because he was attracted by its topics which included discussions on the works of famous American writers such as Henry James, Mark Twain, Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser, etc. This group also discussed Asian and European music, painting and culture. Everyone was required to produce a working paper. Hamdan chose as his subject the 'Role of Malayan Education as a Unifying Factor in a Multi-racial Society'. Whilst still attending the Harvard Seminar Hamdan was also invited to the De Kalb Campus of Illinois University to give a talk on the Malayan background to some thirty Peace Corps volunteers who were then taking their course before being sent to this country<sup>17</sup>.

One session which Hamdan will never forget was the one where he got the chance to meet and talk with the famous American statesman, Henry Kissinger, who was at that time Professor of Government and Director of the Defence Studies Programme. Kissinger had been invited as a guest speaker to talk on the 'Problems of American Foreign Policy'.

There were many other workshops, seminars and lectures which Hamdan attended covering a whole range of issues in which both participants and guest speakers took part. In all, the International Seminar was a very meaningful experience which contained many things relevant to the needs of Malayan administrators and managers in the field of education.

### **Canadian Stopover**

From Harvard Hamdan went to Ottawa to start his four-day working visit to Canada. He was first given a briefing by the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Committee, and this was followed by a series of meetings and discussions, most of which turned on technical education. This was of particular interest to Hamdan in the light of the Rahman Talib Report, which had made special provision for the setting up of secondary trade and technical schools. From his Canadian visit Hamdan saw that there was much more that could be done to raise the status and quality of technical instruction in the existing Malayan system of education. Moreover, the Canadian Government was willing to train teachers from Malaya in the field on condition that their command of English was certifiable.

Once again, while visiting Canadian institutions, he kept an eye out for Malayan students. At the Technical Teachers' College in Toronto he came across two of them – both teachers – studying there. At McGill University, he met Syed Naguib al-Attas, a sole Malay graduate studying at the Faculty of Post-Graduate Studies and Research, who was facing certain problems in pursuing his studies that Hamdan was able to help overcome<sup>19</sup>.

As he embarked on his journey back home, Hamdan felt very satisfied with what he had seen and learned throughout his stay at each institution of higher learning in North America, and at having had the

opportunity of meeting and talking to a number of leaders and experts in their various specialisations. He discovered that there were a number of fields of knowledge that could be introduced and adapted to local conditions and needs for the benefit of all Malayan teachers and educational administrators in this country<sup>19</sup>.

### **Around the World in Twenty-One Days: Privilege Leave and the Pilgrimage (1962)**

Hamdan arrived back in Kuala Lumpur in late August 1962 and reported back for duty at the Ministry towards the end of that month, resuming his position as the Principal Assistant Secretary of the Scholarships and Training Division. He was to spend about another year at this post, until towards the end of 1963 he was once again suddenly elevated to a yet much more senior post, as the Controller of Examinations, which placed him amongst the most senior officers in the Ministry.

During those last twelve months with the Scholarships and Training Division, Hamdan decided that the time had come for him to avail himself of the privilege leave that was the due of every senior civil servant who had served the requisite number of years, and which entitled him to a take a trip around the world at government expense<sup>20</sup>. Although he did not know what the future had in store for him, the rapid development that was taking place in education and the severe shortage of senior personnel to cope with the Ministry's programmes of expansion meant that sooner or later there would be further promotions and still greater responsibilities. It was a question of either now or never. Hamdan carefully selected the time for his round the world odyssey so as to coincide with the season of the annual Pilgrimage, enabling him – in a manner of speaking – to kill two birds with one stone.

In some respects Hamdan's overseas leave of 1963 was very much like a busman's holiday. It had a strong educational and moral content – visits to universities and places of higher learning, inspecting famous historical and cultural sites, performing the Pilgrimage at Mecca. Even though his two daughters were still very young – Siti Khadijah five and Siti Aishah only three – Hamdan insisted on taking them along with Siti

Zainab and himself to pick up whatever they might glean. In any case, whatever it may have been, this trip abroad was to be one of the very few that he was ever able to take with his family as a holiday on their own.

As usual, Hamdan had got his contacts at strategic points. Their first stop after leaving Kuala Lumpur was Bangkok, where the Military Attache at the Malayan embassy there was General Tan Sri Abdul Hamid bin Bidin<sup>21</sup>, with whom they were able to stay. They then went on to India, stopping over at Calcutta, New Delhi and Bombay. After Bombay, they stopped over at Karachi, where Bahador Baba, another old friend, was the Malayan High Commissioner, and also were able to visit the University of Karachi. From Karachi they flew to Aden and from Aden to Jeddah, where they were welcomed by the Malayan Consul-General, Dato' Seri Haji Kamaruddin, and by Haji Abdul Karim Isa, an old family friend. A friend in Jeddah in those days was a friend in deed. Things were not particularly well-organized in Saudi Arabia in those days, especially where air travel was concerned, and Haji Karim was able to ease some of the hassle of making travel arrangements for Hamdan and his family. But the first ten days had to be devoted to the journey to Madinah, Taif and ultimately Mecca in order to perform the pilgrimage, described as the Fifth Pillar of Islam, incumbent upon all Muslims with the means to do so.

The pilgrimage proceeded smoothly, but as Hamdan returned a Haji to Jeddah in order to resume his passage round the world with his family, they were confronted with the frustration of finding that their flight to Egypt and the temples of Luxor had been delayed. This was by no means an unusual occurrence – but their time was limited so that they could not afford to wait. This was when Haji Karim's presence proved crucial, as he played his role in getting them on the first flight to London, their next destination after Egypt. By doing so, he did a favour far greater than either he or Hamdan could perceive at the time, because the plane on which they had originally booked to go to Cairo crashed into the Red Sea, killing everyone on board.

Their few days in England were pleasurably spent first in London, where Hamdan had a host of old friends and acquaintances, then to Oxford with 'its dreaming spires' and finally to the idyllic setting of the Lake District in north-east England. From Britain they flew across the

Atlantic to Canada, and then crossed over the continent till they reached the beautiful surroundings of Vancouver, having called in at Montreal (and McGill including Syed Naguib), Ottawa, and Winnipeg. From Vancouver the next hop was over the Pacific to Japan where once again Hamdan had encounters which were full of nostalgia, including meetings with some of his wartime mentors including Suguro and Kodera, and his UNESCO friend, Ryoji Ito. Finally, the last leg of the journey carried them from Tokyo via Taipeh back to Kuala Lumpur.

Refreshed by the first real holiday that he had ever had since he had joined the Ministry of Education, Hamdan was now ready to face whatever challenges that the future might bring.

1. Abd. Rahman Talib was born in 1916, at Temerloh, Pahang; 1940-5; schoolmaster, Kuantan; 1945, Assistant Inspector of Schools, Pahang; 1956, founded the Religious Affairs Division of the Education Office, Pahang; joined UMNO; 1957-9, Minister of Transport; 1959-60, Minister of Trade and Industry; 1960-2, Minister of Education; 1962, Minister of Health; 1962-4, Minister of Education; resigned as result of a political scandal; subsequently appointed Malaysian Ambassador to Egypt, where he died in office in 1968. Rahman Talib is best known by the Report on Education (1960) issued under his name, the committee for which he was the Chairman. As Chairman he played an important role in promoting the role of Malay in the national education system.

2. for details of Murad's background, refer to Chapter 5, fn. 38.

3. However, it was left to the discretion of the Minister to decide whether primary education should be made compulsory or not. The Rahman Talib Report of 1960 was based on the findings of an Education Review Committee set up the previous year to look into the suitability and implementation of the Razak Report of 1955. In general the Review Committee found that the Razak Report's proposals were working out satisfactorily. For a full discussion regarding the Rahman Talib Report and its implementation, see (Datuk) Omar Mohd, Hashim, *op.cit.* esp. Bab 4, 'A Critical Review of the Rahman Talib Report, 1960'.

4. His appointment followed the Ministry style to which he had become accustomed. One day at Federal House he was called to the Chief Education Adviser's office, where Aminuddin Baki informed him that he was to be posted to Sabah. However, two days later, after Hamdan had ruminated over the changes involved and the arrangements to be made for his family, Aminuddin called him in once again, and told him this time that he was being made Principal Assistant Secretary of the Scholarships and Training Division instead. These *ad hoc* decisions, which did not involve any slip of paper, were the result of deliberations by the top three – the Chief Education Adviser, the Ministry's

Permanent Secretary, and the Principal Assistant Secretary of the Service Division – in consultation with the Minister. At a time when senior officers of experience and calibre were at a premium such sudden postings were doubtless inevitable, but this did not prevent some of the lower echelons coming to regard the Ministry as 'a mad house'!. Incidentally, this promotion meant a leap from Time-scale to Superscale G, so that Hamdan rose in effect from being a captain to a general.

5. Abdul Zahari Abdul Bakar, *op.cit.* p.63

6. Interview and discussion at the National Archives, 13 May 1987.

7. This delegation included the Minister; K. Arianayagam, Deputy Chief Education Adviser; Paul Chang, Chief Inspector of Schools; Hamdan; John Richards, Director of Technical and Vocational Training; and Professor Oppenheim, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya.

8. refer Chapter 5, p. 130, fn 17.

9. The two-week long seminar was the first of a series of regional seminars planned by the Education Division of UNESCO (i.e. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in various parts of the world. The countries represented included Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia (Kampuchea), China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Laos, Malaya, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and the British Borneo territories (British North Borneo, Brunei and Sarawak). Incidentally, Hamdan and Min Kee were speeded on their way to New Delhi by Khir Johari, the Minister of Education himself, who saw them off at the KL Airport, underlining the importance with which their mission was regarded by the Ministry.

10. Dr. K. L. Sharimali, the Indian Minister of Education, in opening the Seminar observed that 'One of the most baffling problems' that faced 'countries represented at the seminar' which had 'attained their independence from foreign rule only recently ...is that production and standards of living cannot be raised without a modern educational system; and more schools cannot be opened until more funds are available. The diversity of religions and dialects makes the problem even more complicated. Religion still continues to exercise a strong influence on education though in many countries its influence is gradually waning.'

11. Hamdan, when Director-General of Education, was to have a lot of dealing with Ito who at that period was Chairman of UNESCO in Japan and closely involved with the UNESCO Commissions in Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (see Chapter 11). Later on, when Hamdan was Malaysian Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris, their paths crossed again (see Chapter 13).

12. i.e. always in the context of education. One of the most memorable of his later visits came in 1968 when, at the invitation of the Government of India, he made a tour of Indian universities and other institutions of higher learning.

13. The Asia Foundation was more or less the US equivalent of the British Council, that is an officially sponsored body that sought to put across American values and culture in foreign countries, and encourage foreigners to study at



higher institutions of learning in the USA. Although no doubt Hamdan gained the Asia Foundation award on merit, it was also a vindication of Dobby's advice about the value of good contacts. In this instance Hamdan owed much to his good friend, John O. Sutter, who with a brilliant academic background (at Yale, John Hopkins and Cornell) had served in the US foreign service in the Far East in the early 1950s and joined the Asia Foundation as Programme Officer in 1959. He was in Kuala Lumpur as the Asia Foundation representative from 1960 to 1963, the period during which Hamdan was with the Scholarships and Training Division of the Ministry, which is how they met. Later on (1967-71) he served as Asia Foundation member for Malaysia in the USA. Incidentally Aminuddin Baki had gone on a similar course at Harvard several years earlier, while Hamdan's immediate successor to represent Malaysia at the annual Harvard Seminar was A.K. Arianayagam, the Ministry's Deputy Chief Education Adviser.

14. The tour of universities as part of his working visit to the United States took just over three weeks; the seminar at Harvard (the annual Harvard University International Seminar) at Cambridge, Massachusetts, went on for six and a half weeks; while the trip to Canada at the invitation of the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Committee lasted for four days - making in all two and half months overseas.

15. Hamdan had first come to know Alisjahbana when taking his Honours Degree at the University of Malaya in 1955-6, at which time the latter was a part-time lecturer there. A distinguished scholar and man of letters, Alisjahbana was born in Sumatra ca. 1900 and by his twenties was already making a name for himself in literary circles. He also became well known amongst those directly involved in the nationalist cause, particularly during the time of the Japanese Occupation and the immediate post-war years. At that period he was close to Sukarno, but his admiration for Indonesia's first President rapidly waned as Sukarno became increasingly dictatorial in his methods. As a result, Alisjahbana distanced himself from active politics. For some years he held the post of Professor of Cultural Philosophy at Indonesia's National University in Jakarta and then left the country, and became a self-imposed exile from his native land for the rest of the Sukarno era. He was a prolific writer in a number of different genres. Most of his books were issued through a publishing house owned by his wife, who was a German. While at the University of Malaya he is credited with having persuaded the Tunku, then prime minister, to restyle the Malay language as 'Bahasa Malaysia' (i.e. as with Bahasa Indonesia) instead of the current official title of 'Bahasa Kebangsaan'. Eventually (after Sukarno's loss of political power) Alisjahbana returned to Indonesia and resumed his role as one of that country's leading intellectuals and literati.

16. In 1962 quite a big proportion of its academic staff consisted of highly qualified lecturers and professors from Britain and other European countries, and also from Japan. Amongst this galaxy was the late Professor Paul Wheatley, who wrote the classic historical geography of early South-East Asia, *The Golden Chersonese*. He had been Professor of Historical Geography at the University of Malaya and his wife (previously Mrs Hanby), lecturer in Human Geography

there, between 1955 and 1956, and Hamdan had been one of their students. They entertained Hamdan to lunch at their Berkeley home on his 1962 visit.

17. In order to give this talk (actually it was delivered over two sessions), Hamdan had to take leave from Harvard for a weekend and fly up to Detroit, near the De Kalb Campus. He went at the invitation of Palmer, the man in charge of Peace Corps training there. In the first part of his talk Hamdan explained the set-up and working of the Malayan Ministry of Education and its goals; in the second he focussed on Malay and its role as the national language, painting in the geographical and historical background at the same time. This encounter marked the beginnings of Hamdan's close and warm cooperation with the Peace Corps and the operations of their volunteers in Malaysia. Hamdan's contact with the De Kalb campus came about through the initiative of Zainal Abidin bin Wahid, then lecturer and later Professor of History at the University of Malaya, and subsequently at the Universiti Kebangsaan at Bangi.

18. Syed Muhammad al-Naguib al-Attas, born at Bogor, Java in 1931, but brought up and educated in Peninsular Malaysia, was to have a distinguished academic career as a specialist in Islamic Studies and played a major role in establishing the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) where he founded the Institute of Malay Language, Literature and Culture and became its first Dean. Unlikely as it may seem, his academic career was prefaced by a spell in the Malayan Army, having been handpicked by General Templer when High Commissioner for Eaton Hall and Sandhurst, England, where he graduated as a commissioned officer. However, in 1959 he resigned from the Army (Royal Malay Regiment) and the following year accepted a Canada Council fellowship at McGill University. Hamdan's visit of 1962 was to prove very opportune for Syed Naguib, who at that time was facing difficulty in pursuing his post-graduate studies because his Indonesian supervisor considered his mastery of Arabic to be inadequate, thereby making it impossible for him to continue with his post-graduate course. Hamdan was able to help by having recourse to his old friend, John Sutter, who arranged for Syed Naguib to be put on to an Asia Foundation award, as a result of which was able to terminate his studies later that year at McGill, and to proceed to the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, where he completed his doctorate in Islamic Studies (with distinction).

19. See his 'Report on a Study Visit to USA sponsored by the Asia Foundation (8 June to 2 July 1962) and on the Harvard University International Seminar held at Cambridge, Boston, Massachusetts (3 July to 18 August 1962)' as a delegate from Malaya; and a short 'Report on the visit of Encik Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, Principal Assistant Secretary (Scholarships and Training), Ministry of Education, Kuala Lumpur, to Canada from 19 to 22 August, 1962.'

20. This was a delightful hang-over from the colonial regime, justifiable in that it enabled senior government officers to broaden their horizons by making the grand tour abroad.

21. Hamid Bidin was born in 1918 at Endau-Rompin in Pahang. He chose a military career, joining the army as a recruit in 1939. He first distinguished

himself as Commander of the Malayan Army under the United Nations in the Congo 1961-2. It was immediately after his return from the Congo that he was seconded as Malayan military attache at Bangkok for a couple of years. He was appointed Chief of the General Staff in 1968 and retired from the Army in 1970. On retirement he was sent back to Thailand as Malaysian Ambassador there (1970-4), then appointed a Senator (1976-81), after which he became Deputy President of the Senate. From 1975 till 1992 he served as President of the Ex-Servicemen's Association of Malaysia. He died in 1996. Hamdan's link to him was through his being the father-in-law of the Minister of Education, Abdul Rahman Talib. However, apart from that Hamid had been Chairman of the Selection Board for recruits to the Federal Military College at Sungei Besi, Kuala Lumpur, on which Hamdan in his later capacity as Director-General of Education sat from 1966 till 1976.



## *EIGHT*

### *Controller Of Examinations: 1963-1966*

#### **The Promotion and Its Challenge**

Once back in Kuala Lumpur, Hamdan resumed his duties in the Scholarships and Training Division of the Ministry – but not for long. He had been barely back for two months when in late 1963, as a result of the departure of Chong Seck Chim, the Controller of Examinations, for work in the new field of educational broadcasting and audio-visual aids, he was informed in the usual casual way that he was going to take over the Examinations Syndicate as Seck Chim's successor. Although the manner of his transfer and promotion came as no surprise to Hamdan, the virtual double promotion that this involved certainly did!

He was also not a little awed by the huge responsibility that had now devolved upon his shoulders. For the Federal Examinations Syndicate lay at the very core of the nation's education system, and though education is concerned with much more than the passing of examinations, public examinations are the inevitable measure by which the progress of the system can be assessed. They also, of course, provide the passport for the future careers and prospects of each generation of school leavers. At the same time, the duties of the Syndicate are highly variegated, complex and technical, and require the greatest attention to detail and accuracy. However, others had no doubt that Hamdan was the right man for the job, including Douglas Muir, who had been the first Controller when the Syndicate was founded in 1956. Muir was delighted to hear the news of Hamdan's promotion, telling his colleagues that he 'is the most hard-working person I've ever met'. Hamdan, on looking back, has come to

regard his years of service in charge of the Syndicate as being 'the most challenging and worthwhile period of my career'.

The Federal Examinations Syndicate had been established just as the country stood on the threshold of its independence. At first the Syndicate appeared to function more like an agency of the Cambridge School Certificate Examinations Syndicate in England than as an independent body. In fact, Cambridge had run the public examinations for schools in this country ever since they had been first introduced in 1891 during colonial times and had held complete responsibility for the preparation and marking of examination papers. This system continued even after Independence. In consequence, a good deal of the Syndicate's work was focussed on purely administrative matters, essential as they were – the registration of candidates, the collection of fees, the organization and running of the examination centres, the despatching of the answer scripts to Cambridge, and finally the publishing of the results and the sending of the certificates to the candidates who had sat for the examinations. Nevertheless, right from the Syndicate's earliest days, a start was made in setting those papers with local content, such as the Malay, Chinese, and Tamil Language papers, and Islamic Studies, in the Malayan Secondary Schools Entrance Examination (MSSE) and the Lower Certificate Examination (LCE), all of which were handled by the Syndicate alone.

Hamdan took over the Syndicate at a time when the national education system was undergoing great change in the wake of the implementation of the Razak Report of 1956. The Report, as we have seen, aimed at the total revamping of the whole schools system, which meant in particular a complete overhaul and readjustment of syllabi, curricula, and examinations so as to fit in with national requirements and objectives<sup>2</sup>.

In 1958, for instance, as we have also already seen, in response to strong pressure from Malay school teachers the first Malay-medium secondary schools had come to be established in line with the commitment to make Malay, as the National Language, the main medium of communication and the most commonly used language in the country. This led in turn to the introduction of the Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (SRP) as the Malay equivalent to the English-medium LCE examination. Preliminary steps were also in process to establish the Malay-medium

counterpart of the Malayan Certificate of Education (MCE)<sup>3</sup>, namely the Sijil Pelajaran Malaya/SPM, by 1962, which was being carried out in cooperation with the Cambridge Syndicate itself.

All this represented an immense challenge awaiting Hamdan, all the more so when the number of Malay education officers at that time available for consultation could be counted on the fingers of one hand. At the Ministry of Education at Federal House there were only three – Izhab Ismail, Majid Osman and the late Syed Nasir Ismail – none of whom were university graduates and were therefore ill-equipped professionally to cope with the demands being made of them, while at the Syndicate itself there was only one, namely Omar Mohd. Hashim, who was indeed well qualified but new and relatively inexperienced<sup>4</sup>.

However, among Hamdan's many sterling qualities are his refusal to back down from any challenge and his willingness to learn from whatever source how to tackle any given task. He is possessed with a way of winning hearts, giving inspiration and instilling confidence in his officers and in outsiders who work with him by a personal diplomacy that is quite unique. He also reposes implicit trust in all those under his charge whom he considers able and trustworthy, a trait which a number of Hamdan's friends suspect has on occasion been taken advantage of and exploited. On the other hand, his willingness to delegate, a thing which many administrators find very hard to do, has enabled him to keep a general eye on progress and focus on those areas which require the most attention, without getting bogged down by detail.

### **The Syndicate Reorganized**

One of Hamdan's first exercises which was to prove crucial for its future development was the reorganization of the Syndicate itself. Initially, the Examinations Syndicate had consisted of three main divisions, namely that of the Controller of Examinations and his Deputy; the Registration Division headed by the Registrar of Examinations; and the Results Division which embraced the processing of entries for local examinations managed by the Syndicate and the announcement of the results. An overall analysis of the examination results as a whole was another function of this last-named division.

Now the functions of these three Divisions were redefined and expanded. A new schedule of duties was introduced. All examinations were placed under a new section called the Examinations Administration Unit, headed by Omar Mohd. Hashim who was made directly responsible to Hamdan himself. As a Senior Examinations Officer Omar was given the major responsibility of handling all dealings with Cambridge, including the conduct and marking of the MCE and SPM examinations, as well as of arranging the overseas training of Malay(sian) examiners and planning for the future. The SPM, along with all the other examinations set by Cambridge, became one of Omar's special charges<sup>5</sup>, along with the supervision of all translations and the marking of all local papers.

At the same time, Hamdan also laid great emphasis on the supreme importance of training his principal lieutenants, the chief examiners and heads of examination panels. From the moment he took over as Controller, he made it his policy to intensify the sending of his senior officers overseas for further training in their various specialities. In 1964 he sent Oh Bak Kim, Omar Mohd. Hashim and Foo Yeow Yoke (Registrar, University of Malaya) to Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Brunei to study 'the true position' of the Cambridge Ordinary and Advanced ('O' & 'A') Levels there. During 1965-6, he sent Omar Mohd. Hashim off again, this time on a journey almost around the whole world to see at first hand the development on a global basis of examinations for secondary school leavers<sup>6</sup>.

Having put Omar in full control of the detailed running of the Syndicate's examinations and completed the general reorganization of its work, Hamdan was now free to devote more of his attention to other matters, especially those which concerned the Syndicate's dealings with the Ministry and other central government agencies<sup>7</sup>, and to conduct negotiations with overseas institutions such as with the Cambridge GCE Board in Britain and the ETS in the USA in his search for expertise. He was also able to concentrate (with success) on procuring financial support from the British, American and other foreign agencies and institutions.

### **The Computer Revolution....**

Soon after assuming his duties as Controller of Examinations, Hamdan came to realize how laborious and time-consuming the

processes of entering for an examination and getting out the results were, for both these major chores were performed manually. Not only was this manually-operated system complex and unwieldy, but with the rapidly increasing number of candidates each passing year it threatened to become completely overwhelmed. This point was driven home by the repercussions of the abolition of the MSSEE examination in 1964 in line with one of the recommendations of the Abdul Rahman Talib Report, which stipulated that education for all children for nine years up to and including Form Three should be free and with automatic promotion. The implications springing from this sudden change were not only that the government would have to build many more classrooms at an ever-rising cost but would also have to accept a greater number of candidates for the LCE/SRP examinations than ever before. A system for handling the huge numbers involved would have to be worked out in order to ensure the smooth operation of absorbing this growing intake cheaply and efficiently so that public confidence in the Syndicate would be maintained.

Speed and accuracy were the two vital requisites for upgrading the Syndicate's operations to overcome this problem, and the application of computer technology offered the obvious solution. At least, this was the solution that is obvious enough to us today, but was not so in the mid-1960s when the use of computers was still in its infancy. Yet Hamdan decided that the Syndicate must computerize its operations or face collapse. It was without doubt a daring decision to take at that time as subsequent developments were to demonstrate, it was absolutely the right one<sup>5</sup>.

#### **.....and its Implementation**

Making the decision was one thing. Implementing it was another. In order to computerize the Syndicate's operations, two formidable obstacles had to be overcome. One was to find the money to pay for the installation of the computer itself, which was an expensive affair. The other was to procure the expertise to manage it.

Hamdan, needless to say, went all out with his characteristic zeal to overcome both these difficulties. There was no hope of getting funds from



the Treasury, then under the capable but frugal hand of Tun Tan Siew Sin, the Minister of Finance. Tan Siew Sin would not hear of the Ministry of Education, let alone the Federal Examinations Syndicate, acquiring a computer of its own, so that Hamdan had to look elsewhere. He would probably have drawn a blank had it not been for the help of foreign agencies in Britain and the United States, in particular through the contacts which he had established and nurtured during his North American tour of 1962. In the end it was the Ford Foundation which came to the rescue by providing the Syndicate in 1966 with an IBM machine<sup>4</sup>.

However, this was not the end of the story. There was no additional hardware such as tape drives or disc drives. There was also the problem of transferring all the data regarding the details on the entry form for each candidate - name, name of school, identity card number, etc., including the final results. Once more it was the Ford Foundation which came to the rescue, this time by providing the necessary hardware, and in the case of the transference of data to the computer, by donating twenty-five key-punch machines for the job.

Having got the computer and all the hardware, the other major problem that had to be solved was that of acquiring the personnel to handle the computer technology. System analysts, programme designers and other relevant staff had to be found, and above all there was the need for an organizer who was competent enough on the technical side, and at the same time a good administrator who would be able to organize a crash training programme in handling computer technology and then supervise the technical staff.

Hamdan once more showed his genius in identifying the right person for the job. At the time, there was hardly a Malaysian in sight suitable and sufficiently qualified for the task, except for one man, a most modest but talented Raffles graduate and science teacher called Oh Bak Kim (now Dato<sup>5</sup>) who had been recruited to work in the Federal Examination Syndicate in its early days and was now Head of the Results Division. In 1966 Hamdan handled him as he had handled Omar Mohd. Hashim, by sending him to the USA on a professional course which included system analysis, programme arrangement, and the creation of a comprehensive package of contents for the processing of the LCE/SRP examinations.

This was an essential move as no such contents package had existed before and the whole thing had to be written out by hand. On his return, Bak Kim, who with his scientific background, versatility, and refusal to admit that anything was impossible, had already established his mastery of the mysteries of the computer, was now confirmed in his pre-eminence in the field, and from this point became virtually indispensable to a succession of Controllers. In short, he was for many years the backbone of the computer operations of the Syndicate<sup>10</sup>.

### **Computerization; the Achievement**

In the meantime the requisite technical staff had been recruited and been given their training at the IBM Teaching Centre in Kuala Lumpur<sup>11</sup>. As a result of all these efforts, by the beginning of 1966 the Syndicate's computerized system for processing, collating and marking was in place, so that entries for Form Four were already processed on schedule early in that year. By the same token the entries and results of the first generation of schoolchildren who had benefited in 1963 from automatic promotion from Standard VI to Form One and who sat for their LCE/SRP examinations at the end of 1966 were now also processed by computer.

Nevertheless, it was the following year that really stands out, because it saw a major great leap forward in computer-processing. For 1967 was the year in which objective tests were introduced on a large scale for the first time<sup>12</sup>, the Board having purchased two Optical Character Reading Machines (OCR) for the marking or scoring of objective test answer sheets for this purpose<sup>13</sup>. However, although objective or multiple-choice tests were a new thing for Malaysia, they had in fact been introduced earlier in 1958 by Professor Morey J. Wantman, an American academic then lecturing on secondment from the ETS, Princeton, USA at the University of Singapore's Faculty of Education. There, the Professor conducted the first six-months course in 'Educational Measurement and Objective Test Construction' at the University, which was attended by a select nine education officers/teachers, five of whom were from Malaysia and four from Singapore itself<sup>14</sup>. At the end of the course, the five Malaysians constructed under Wantman's guidance, a series of objective test papers in Science and Mathematics for the Sixth Form Entrance

Examination and which were made use of later on by the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) of the Ministry for diagnostic purposes.

In 1966 Professor Wantman came to Singapore again and was able to find the time to prepare the Syndicate for its next momentous step forward in extending objective-testing to the LCE/SRP examinations. This time he conducted a crash course of two months (February and March 1966) in 'Objective Test Development' at the Examinations Syndicate for five selected local teachers<sup>15</sup>. These five were then sent to the ETS in Princeton, USA for further training (i.e. in July 1966) and on their return were posted as Test Developers at the Examinations Syndicate, forming the core of the new Test Development Division set up the following year under Oh Bak Kim's guidance. At around about the same time, the name of the Results Division was changed to that of Computer Division, and the Results Analyst, now became known as the Manager, Computer Division<sup>16</sup>. In this way the Syndicate not only achieved its goal of being fast and accurate in producing examination results<sup>17</sup>, but was also the pioneer in introducing objective-type examinations on a large scale in this part of the world<sup>18</sup>.

Oh Bak Kim, who in view of his deep and intimate involvement in the introduction of computerization and the general upgrading of the Syndicate's processing functions ought to know, has commented that:

....it can be said with pride that the Ministry of Education, through the medium of the Examinations Syndicate, was the first ministry in this country to introduce a computer system for use in official affairs. All this was made possible by the hard work, far-sightedness, boldness and dynamism of Encik Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir.

### **The Role of the Examinations Syndicate and the Controller's Part in it**

It goes without saying that the reliability and quality of all the public examinations for which the Examinations Syndicate was responsible, from the MSSEE and Remove Class Examination at the lowest level up to the Higher School Certificate (HSC) which was the gateway for entrance to a university, had to be strictly maintained at all times. The onus for ensuring that the requisite high standards were upheld fell, of

course, on the shoulders of the man at the top, the Controller of Examinations himself. The importance of maintaining these high standards was all the more crucial because not only were local universities involved, but the Syndicate's certificates had also been accorded recognition by universities and other institutions of higher learning in other Commonwealth countries. For this reason, all those who have served as Controllers/Directors of Examinations have always paid special attention to ensure that the Syndicate's high standards were being upheld at all times<sup>19</sup>.

Invidious as comparisons may be, in carrying out his duties Hamdan formed an interesting contrast in method and temperament to his immediate predecessor as Controller of Examinations, Chong Seck Chim. Omar Mohd. Hashim, who served under both, is well placed to draw comparisons, and indeed has done so. He found that of all the Directors of Examinations under whom he had worked, Hamdan and Seck Chim were the two 'who left behind them a great impression'.

To Encik Chong I credit him with having organized the Syndicate in its formative days on lines learned and adapted from the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate and with having made sure that the conduct of examinations in Malaysia was done in a professional manner. To Tan Sri Hamdan I credit him with having broadened the scope of the Syndicate and lifted it to a higher organizational plane.....<sup>20</sup>

In describing what they shared in common in their work-styles, Omar observed that they were both totally committed to their role and gluttons for hard work. Everything had to be done fast; today's work should be ready by yesterday, for speed was of the essence and time should never be wasted. Omar also found that they both possessed excellent communication skills. However, Chong was a man whose interests were primarily intellectual and was at heart a scholar, thorough and systematic. He also liked to do everything himself – talk, type, and produce memos of great length and high quality with despatch but all on his own. Hamdan, on the other hand, who was as fast on the draw as Seck Chim where matters of getting through his work and in his impatience to get things done are concerned, was (as we have seen) a great delegator of functions and specialized in producing short memos rather than long

ones. However, his special knack lay in ensuring the implementation of his ideas and instructions by means of the personal touch - a phone call here and there, or a visit in person to see for himself whether those who were supposed to be carrying out his instructions were actually doing so. This was where his strength lay, because many issues which were the subject of Seck Chim's long memos to the Public Services Department and the Treasury tended to get left to one side and be neglected. Hamdan, on the other hand, would repeatedly harp on the same issue, and follow this up by going to meet personally the officers concerned, explaining the problems that he was facing and extracting from them a firm commitment of their assistance<sup>21</sup>. He also was able to get through to his junior officers by his openness and approachability, and by his willingness to talk to them and find out things for himself. Furthermore, Hamdan's directness in raising and explaining issues, his diplomacy, his persistence, complete honesty of purpose and impartiality, made it difficult for anyone to ignore the requests which he made.

By these means Hamdan was ultimately able to achieve the desired results. Admittedly, in this respect he had a built-in advantage over Chong Seck Chim in that he already knew personally many of the senior officials and decision-makers in the Public Services Department and other government offices who were of the same generation as himself<sup>22</sup>.

### **October 1965: A Trip to the Netherlands**

Hamdan's tenure of the post of Controller of Examinations was to come to an unexpected end in the circumstances created by the tragic death of Aminuddin Baki, the Chief Education Adviser, in December 1965 at the young age of thirty-nine. However, a couple of months before his death (which of course no one at the time had anticipated) Aminuddin sent Hamdan and Nathan, Hamdan's former number two (i.e. senior executive officer) in the Scholarships and Training Division of the Ministry, to take his place on a study tour of the Netherlands (Holland) at the invitation of the Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM). The KLM had extended this invitation to mark the launching of its first regular direct air-service between Kuala Lumpur and Amsterdam.

The tour, arranged by the KLM, included visits to the sights that the Netherlands has to offer - its network of canals, its windmills, its famous

fields of tulips, the historic diamond-cutters of Amsterdam, and so on. But Aminuddin also wanted his two representatives to visit the three leading Dutch universities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Leiden - the latter in particular being a world-famous centre of Indonesian studies. One of the purposes of visiting these higher centres of learning was to sound out the position with regard to recruiting professors and lecturers to serve for a period with the University of Malaya, in particular in its Malay Studies Department. This was a task which Hamdan was very happy to accept, because it would give him the opportunity to renew his acquaintanceship with two distinguished Dutch academicians who had already taught in Malaya - namely Professor R. Roolvink who was attached to the Faculty of Malay Studies at the University of Malaya when he was in the Scholarships and Training Division at the Ministry, and Professor A. Teeuw whom he had met previously at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Both of them were now at Leiden.

The visit to Leiden was from Hamdan's point of view the highlight of their visit to the Netherlands. He was able to meet both Teeuw, now the Professor of Malay at the University, and Roolvink who was in charge of both the famous University library and of its museum. In general, the visit was one which was full of interest. However, from the point of view of recruiting Dutch academics to come to Malaya this mission did not prove so fruitful, although Hamdan returned from Leiden loaded with historic documents relating to Malay history and promises to consider the request for teaching assistance<sup>23</sup>. On their return, he submitted his report on the visit for Aminuddin's consideration.

#### **Hamdan: Inadvertent Understudy<sup>24</sup>**

In fact, for some time Hamdan had been performing duties in the Ministry of Education which lay far beyond the province of the Examinations Syndicate. Aminuddin Baki, as Chief Education Adviser<sup>25</sup>, had been feeling the effects of the enormous strain imposed upon him as he endeavoured to lay the foundations of a national system of education for the country, pressured as he was from all sides<sup>26</sup>. So, although Hamdan's primary function was as Controller of Examinations, Aminuddin had already started entrusting him with some of his own work.

The kind of work which Aminuddin delegated to Hamdan was mainly concerned with the implementation of the Ministry's 'Malay agenda'; in other words the effort to open up wider opportunities in education for the Malays, especially those – who constituted the great majority – located in rural areas far beyond the reach of more advanced centres of learning. The crying need was to facilitate the admission of bright Malay boys and girls from the rural areas into universities, whether local or overseas, via the sixth form. There was also an urgent need to encourage a greater number of them to take up science and mathematics, fields in which – once again largely because of the lack of suitable facilities easily available to them – very few had hitherto entered and done well.

This general problem was well illustrated by the case of the Alam Shah Malay-medium Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur, a pioneer of its kind, whose students would shortly be sitting for their SPM examination (i.e. at fifth form level). They would then find their further progress barred because their only way to the university was via the Sixth Form, where instruction was still solely conducted in English. Aminuddin's solution to this problem was to create a joint examination board which would prepare a special Sixth Form Entrance Examination for Malay-medium students in place of the standard Higher School Certificate, and he passed on this idea to the Examinations Syndicate for implementation<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, in order to overcome the problem of finding more places for Malays from rural areas in urban schools or in providing them with effective education up to fifth form level and beyond, the creation of more special residential schools, and the awarding of 'federal minor scholarships' were also planned and executed by the agency of Hamdan on the instructions of Aminuddin Baki.

At the same time Hamdan found himself being constantly delegated by Aminuddin to attend meetings of the Fullbright Foundation and local university councils in the name of scholarships and admissions of promising Malaysian candidates, even though he was no longer in the Scholarships and Training Division of the Ministry. He was also entrusted with a number of other significant tasks by the Chief Education Adviser, which lay far beyond his official brief. In short, he was on the go every day from dawn to dusk and beyond. The Syndicate itself was transformed into a kind of 'think tank' in the search for the solutions to the manifold

problems and challenges of a rapidly developing national education system. This meant that everybody had to work particularly hard, with Hamdan setting an unmatched example.

If the burden of Hamdan was great, it was greater still for his chief. In fact, the report which Hamdan delivered to Aminuddin Baki on his return from the Netherlands was one of the last direct dealings on major issues which he had with the Chief Education Adviser. High blood pressure made Aminuddin seek relief by taking up tennis, a step which in his condition was probably not well advised. In the late afternoon of 24th December 1965, which happened to be the first day of *Ramadhan* (i.e. Muslim fasting month), soon after returning home from a full day's work at the office and before he had been able to break his fast, Aminuddin suddenly collapsed, and within the hour he was dead<sup>28</sup>.

For the next six months, the post of Chief Education Adviser remained vacant. Then, at the beginning of July 1966 it was announced by Mohd Khir Johari, the Minister of Education that – to the surprise of many people – Hamdan had been appointed as the late Aminuddin Baki's successor.

1. The promotion meant that he moved from Superscale G to Superscale F, which was regarded as marking entry into the highest echelons of the Ministry, and which in view of his comparatively young age and limited period in the service Hamdan never expected to experience within such a short space of time.

2. Apart from these basic changes there was also the need to cater for new subjects in the school syllabi such as arts and crafts, metalwork, woodwork, technical drawing, rural education, domestic science (for girls) – all of which were new and required new practical examination techniques. The same thing went for the new vocational secondary schools, technical institutes and polytechnics which were being set up all over the country and which required new curricula and assessment systems.

3. The MCE itself was the adaptation of the old Cambridge School Certificate examination to Malayan conditions and requirements, with the notable difference that Malay became a compulsory subject in place of English..

4. Dato' Hj Omar Mohd Hashim was to spend almost half his career in education with the Examinations Syndicate - first as right-hand man to Hamdan and his successor, Dato' Murad Mohd Nor (1962-9), and later on (1976-84) as its Director. Born in the Dindings in 1935, where his father was the headmaster of



a local Malay school, he was brought up and educated in the family's home state of Penang. He took his degree in History and Malay Studies at the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1960 and began his professional career as an assistant teacher at Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Star in the same year. After his first spell at the Syndicate, he served at the Military College, Sungai Besi (1969-72), first as Head of Arts, then as Director of Studies; in Sabah as Director of Education (1972-5); briefly as Deputy Director of Schools, Malaysia, then Director of Education, Johor, before being appointed Director of Examinations (1976-84). His final years in service were as Deputy Director-General of Education (1984-90). On retirement he was appointed a member of the Public Services Commission (1990-2); then to the Elections Commission (Deputy Chairman, 1992-9; Chairman, 1998-2000), which was no doubt the hottest seat in which he ever sat! Omar's interests are primarily in literature and history. He was editor to a couple of student publications at the university, and has since made many contributions on education, history and literature in various professional and learned journals, besides writing a couple of books of his own (published by the DBP). As chairman of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia since 1989 until the present day, in succession to his mentor, Tun Hamdan, he has played a major role in spreading an awareness of the importance and relevance of history amongst the general public.

5. In this respect the wheel turned its full circle in 1976 when Omar returned to the Examinations Syndicate as its Director. In that year he carried through the delicate operation of completing the final transfer of complete responsibility for the running of the SPM and MCE examinations from Cambridge to the Federal Examinations Syndicate in Kuala Lumpur. By this time, Cambridge which up to this point had kept a watching brief on the standard of the SPM by checking sample scripts (specially translated into English from the Malay for the purpose) sent to it each year from Kuala Lumpur, found that the increasing volume of work overwhelming.

6. During this memorable series of tours Omar, in 1965, visited the ETS at Princeton, USA taking a two and half month course there in objective testing, besides observing English language tests and medical and vocational exams; he attended seminars on examinations and testing problems at Cambridge and London Universities in England; studied computer systems and examinations in Japan; and made a study tour of the Examinations Council for West Africa at its offices in Ghana and Nigeria, as well as of the East Africa Examinations Council at Nairobi, Kenya. In 1966 he studied the examination systems in Hong Kong and Sri Lanka. Apart from this, between 1961 and 1973, some 124 senior officers from the Ministry were sent for training in England in various fields to become examiners under the supervision of the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate. These programmes formed part of a sustained policy of the Government from the earliest days of Independence to build up a core of officers whose professional knowledge had been deepened and updated by their overseas experiences.

7. Datuk Haji Mohd Omar bin Hashim: memo entitled 'Hamdan dan Lembaga Peperiksaan', delivered to Mohd. Nor bin Long.

8. In his book, *Pengisian Misi Pendidikan*, op. cit. Omar Mohd. Hashim expresses his admiration for the boldness of Hamdan's decision to computerize and along with computerization to introduce objective tests, a form of examination which had only been applied in the USA, Japan and Sri Lanka and which at that time was still looked upon with askance by Cambridge and other GEC Examinations Boards in Britain.

9. The computer in question was known as IBM Model 20 of the series system 360 which has a memory capacity of 8K bytes. Its configuration consisted of a Multiple Function Card Machine (MFCM), a Central Processing Unit, and a printer, all linked together by wire cables. Basically the MFCM works with a type of card called the 'Standard 1581 Card' (or simply 'IBM' Card) made of thin cardboard, each card being 7.5 inches long and 3.5 inches wide, divided into 80 vertical columns across the length of the card. Each column has the numbers 0 to 9 printed on them from top to bottom. Holes are punched through the numbers manually on a key-punch machine which is fitted with a key-board similar to that of a typewriter. With each depression of a key on the key-board, a hole is punched out at a number on the card. These holes are codes which denote letters of the alphabet and numerals from 0 to 9. A letter of the alphabet is represented by 2 holes. In this way, any kind of data can be punched on the card as holes - i.e. names, identity card numbers, grades, etc. The card is really a medium for capturing and storing information just as a tape or disc does. The cards already punched will be put (loaded) into the MFCM which then will input (transfer) the data to the Central Processing Unit, which will in turn output the results through the computer. In this way all input and output instructions to the Central Processing Unit are made through the MFCM. The printer is a separate unit which automatically prints out all results or information from the Central Processing Unit. The MFCM can also sort out cards into various classifications, such as the range of marks, types of schools, examination grades, and details of race, sex, age, etc. of the individual candidates. Thus, in an examination environment all the details contained on the entry form for each candidate as indicated above are processed in this manner by the computer, finally emerging as the results which are automatically printed out by the printer. (Technical description of the IBM computer and its accessories, etc. first used by the Syndicate, provided by courtesy of Dato' Oh Bak Kim.)

10. see Omar Mohd. Hashim, (op.cit., p. 157), who describes Bak Kim as not only a jack of all trades but as master of them all; a person who was supremely adaptable, and who never said 'no' to any directive given to him but always did his best to put it into operation. Oh Bak Kim belonged to that fortunate select batch of pre-war students who were industrious and bright enough to be awarded places at the Raffles College, Singapore. Born at Parit Buntar in Perak in 1924, his formal education was at the Anglo-Chinese School, Parit Buntar, the Penang Free School, and then Raffles College in 1941. After the War and the Japanese Occupation, he resumed his studies at Raffles, graduating with a diploma in Science in 1948. He then joined the Malayan Education Service and was posted

as science teacher, first to Anderson School, Ipoh, then to King Edward VII School, Taiping. In 1957 he was selected after an interview as Result Analyst at the Federal Examinations Syndicate. He stayed with the Syndicate for twenty-three years, and at the time of his retirement in 1979 was manager of the Syndicate's Computer Division. As is related in this Chapter, during those twenty-three years at the Syndicate, Bak Kim played a key role in the successful computerization of the regular school examinations and in running the Computer Division. Among the many achievements of this Division while under his charge was the contribution it made in helping in the computerization of the Federal Public Services Central Staff Record in 1973, which affected some 350,000 civil servants at the time. Another major landmark was the smooth taking over of the SPM Examination by the Federal Examinations Syndicate from Cambridge in 1972, and the complete computerization of its processing, etc. over the following twelve months. The successful computerization was made possible by the work of a special Malaysian delegation headed by Bak Kim which went to Cambridge early in 1972 to acquire the expertise to lay the foundations for 'fixing the standards' for the various papers set for the SPM examination. Oh Bak Kim was also primarily responsible for the highly complex work involved in 'pre-processing' and 'post-processing' the SPM and MCE examinations as part of the issue of transferring to Kuala Lumpur complete control over the SPM and MCE examinations, an exercise that took up much of the energies of the Ministry between 1972 and 1977. On retirement Bak Kim joined the Kuok Group of Companies and was appointed a Trustee of the Kuok Foundation, a prestigious charitable organization – a post which at the time of writing he still holds. He was awarded the KMN in 1973, and was created a Dato' by the Governor of Penang in 1998.

11. Incidentally, the IBM company itself proved very supportive throughout the whole of this training programme in computer literacy for the Syndicate's staff.

12. While Hamdan was the original moving spirit behind this venture, it was his successor, Murad Mohd Noor, who carried it out, a task for which with his marked ability to grasp technical details, he was admirably suited.

13. The rate of scoring by this machine was roughly 60 sheets per minute. It marked the paper by light-sensing the pencil marks made by the candidates on the answer sheets. The answer sheets themselves had to be specially designed and printed overseas – mainly in Japan by Toppan Moore Ltd.

14. The five Malaysians in question were Khoo Eng Choon, Chong Yuen Shak, Lee Guan Meng, A.T. Balraj and Oh Bak Kim himself.

15. namely, Ariffin Suhaimi (now Dato' and one-time Deputy Rector of the International Islamic University/IIU), Khalid Halim (now Dato', one time principal of STAR, Ipoh and Director of Education, Perak), K.V. Thenenthiran, Bernadette Koay, and Saran Singh Sekon.

16. Interview: Mohd Nor bin Long with Dato' Oh Bak Kim, 1 April 1998.

17. This was only made possible in the early stages by dint of much energy and sweat on the part of the Examinations Syndicate's staff. Oh Bak Kim has recorded how in order to cope with the great increase in candidates for the LCE/SRP examinations in 1967, the personnel of the Computer Division had to work two shifts a day during the peak periods, and had to convert their weekends and public holidays into full working days into the bargain. The fact that the Syndicate was able to get the examination results released on schedule every year was a most creditable achievement. Amongst the stalwarts of the Syndicate's team who by their efforts and sacrifices made this happen were A.P. John, one of Bak Kim's right-hand men who had the envious duty of supervising the work of hundreds of women computer typists; Ong Tat Lim, a very dedicated senior system analyst; Tan Teik Keong, a former teacher at the Penang Free School, who was the Registrar of Examinations; Arulampalam, 'the Cambridge man', so called because he was in charge of the Cambridge examinations and a host of others. For further details, see Omar Mohd Hashim, *op.cit.*

18. Some quarters had had grave misgivings from the educational point of view about objective tests being used as a form of examination, including the Cambridge Overseas Examinations Board in England, whose experts thought that the employment of such means would result in the assessment of the writing and thinking skills of candidates being side-lined. However, this criticism was fully taken into account, and much attention was given towards ensuring that the elements of writing, thinking, composing essays, etc. were all catered for in the general scheme of the examination. After the new system had been in operation for only a little time the critics were able to see that their fears had been unfounded. With the cooperation of the Examinations Division of Princeton University, which provided training assistance, the Syndicate managed to get its officers thoroughly proficient in test development and processing the results by computer - to such a degree that in the end Cambridge itself, once so hesitant about their use, now switched to computerization itself. Tun Hamdan: interview and discussion with the National Archives, *ibid.*

19. In the early years of independence when the Ministry of Education as a whole was so short-staffed, the role of the holder of the Controllers of Examinations post was crucial. In this respect the country has been well served by its Controllers, including the pioneers, Douglas Muir, the first; Daniels, his successor; K. Arianayagam, Chong Seck Chim, Hamdan and Murad Mohd Noor, and those who have followed such as Abdul Rahman Arshad, Abdul Aziz Ismail and Omar Mohd. Hashim. It can also be said that the post was inevitably a stepping stone to yet higher things, either within the Ministry or outside it.

20. Excerpt from farewell speech delivered by Dato' Haji Omar bin Mohd Hashim on 28 May 1984, on the occasion of his leaving the post of Director of Examinations to become the new Director of the EPRD.

21. Such personal contacts could be a traumatic experience for those concerned if they had been negligent or had failed to grasp his instructions properly. Hamdan himself has related to the translator of this book the

experience of an education officer in charge of the District Education Office in Kuala Krai (Kelantan), which at that time still only accessible by boat. He had received, like many other education officers in remote places, considerable stocks of books (in English) supplied for distribution by worthy institutions such as the US Lincoln Centre, the British Council and the Asia Foundation for the enlightenment of schoolteachers in the rural areas. When Hamdan arrived at the Kuala Krai Office he was proudly shown the books supplied in question neatly lining the shelves of the education officer's room, barely touched by human hand. This resulted in a stern lecture and the threat of being posted on the spot to a still yet more remote area or worse unless immediate steps were taken to get the books distributed as intended. This little episode occurred when Hamdan was already Director-General of Education, but it was characteristic of his concern to see in detail that things were done properly and his instructions were being carried out.

22. This discussion of the relative merits of the two Controllers of Examinations above is derived from notes supplied to the author and translator by Dato' Haji Omar.

23. At Leiden Roolvink showed Hamdan some very old documents written on papyrus leaves. Monetary considerations appear to have been the main cause for the rather lukewarm Dutch response to the request for lecturers and teachers. Language would have been no problem, for as Nathan and Hamdan both remarked, the Dutch proficiency in English was widespread and of very high standard.

24. The last part of this chapter is largely based on material provided by Dato' Haji Omar, as indeed is much of the other parts of this book regarding the Ministry of Education and the working of the Federal Examinations Syndicate.

25. Hamdan had first come to know the soft-spoken Aminuddin well during the Japanese Occupation when they were both in Ipoh, learning Japanese together. Their paths crossed again when Hamdan went back to Raffles, now transformed into the University of Malaya in Singapore, to take his honours degree in the 1950s. Aminuddin Baki was born at Chemor, near Ipoh, Perak in 1926; he attended the Anderson School, Ipoh, and immediately after the Japanese Occupation he took his Senior Cambridge and joined Raffles College where he got his diploma. Then he won a Queen's Scholarship to the University of London for an honours degree. On his return in 1951, he was the best qualified Malay Education Officer in the country and destined for prominence. His first posting was to the Sultan Idris Training College as lecturer. Whilst there he was appointed a member of the Commission on Education set up in 1951 which produced the Barnes Report, and he was also a member of the committee which produced the Razak Report of 1956. He was appointed the first Malayan Chief Education Adviser in 1961.

26. i.e. especially political pressure. A few months before he died, Aminuddin had in an address to a teachers' conference called for a moratorium

on public discussion regarding educational policy, so that the Ministry could get on with its work!

27. This particular task ended up in the lap of Omar Mohd. Hashim, who was made Secretary of the Joint Examination Board and was made to run it as a one man show.

28. Aminuddin's sudden and unexpected demise came as a great shock to everybody, but for no-one more than Hamdan himself who only that morning had been to see him in his office in the Ministry in order to hand over the details of the results of that year's SPM and Cambridge School Certificate examinations.



NINE  
*Professional Head - 1:  
Setting Priorities*

**A Question of Succession**

**T**he six-month long hiatus in the appointing of a successor to Aminuddin Baki as Chief Education Adviser was the consequence of a combination of factors. The basic problem was a political one, which might be described as forming part of the silent 'social contract' between the nation's major ethnic groups, on the basis of which they had agreed to work together in order to secure independence from the British. In other words, in the context of the Ministry of Education, the holder of the politically strategic and highly sensitive position of its administrative head had to be a Malay, all the more so since the National Education Policy promulgated in 1956 was still in the process of being put in place and its implementation was far from complete. However, there was hardly anybody amongst the senior Malay officers of the Ministry who was sufficiently qualified or experienced for the post, while ten of its most senior education officers were non-Malays.

Aminuddin had been well aware of this problem, and for that reason he had always done what he could to encourage promising Malay students to take up the teaching profession, but in 1966 it was still too early to see the fruit of his labours<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, for most promising young Malays the teaching profession was a long way down their scale of priorities, their primary preference being for the glamour and prestige of the Civil Service.

One way of increasing the number of Malays in the teaching profession, of course, was by encouraging college-trained teachers to

continue with their studies up to university degree level. This was also done. Nevertheless, as this scheme had only recently come into operation, it was only towards the end of the 1960s that dozens of college-trained Malay teachers studying at the University of Malaya had acquired their university degrees and so become available to resume their service with the Ministry.

This vacuum in the Malay educational establishment gave rise to another problem. There was a certain school of thought, popular in MCS (now styled Administrative and Diplomatic Service<sup>2</sup>) circles, which argued that the post of Chief Education Adviser<sup>3</sup> need not necessarily be confined to an educationist but could be handled equally well by any senior government officer with suitably high educational qualifications and experience in administration. This point of view was actually voiced somewhat loudly in public at the late Aminuddin Baki's wake by the then holder of the (civil service) post of Permanent Secretary to the Ministry, who obviously fancied himself for the job.

However, Aminuddin Baki had always been strongly opposed in principle to the admission of administrative officers into the education service. He was of the opinion that only education officers could really understand the minds and problems of those in their profession, whose numbers were even greater than those in the Police or the Army. Apart from that, it was only professional educationists who knew the ins and outs of teaching and learning in the classroom, because the training that they received had prepared them to handle these things effectively.

So, at the end of the day, after the claims of other senior education officers had been considered and set to one side<sup>4</sup>, the choice fell on Hamdan. Although he was young and ranked comparatively junior in the higher echelons of the Ministry, he had already made a name for himself as a forceful, determined and tireless worker, and in this respect represented a reasonable choice. No-one doubted that he would be relentless in the pursuit of his mission to complete the structure of the national educational system, the foundations of which had been laid by Aminuddin Baki himself. In general, teachers and political leaders accepted Hamdan's appointment as being the most appropriate in the circumstances<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, as Hamdan himself was later able to observe with some pride, 'Many other education officers who were more senior than



myself showed themselves willing to accept me as their head', although at first he tended to find himself somewhat isolated.

Hamdan took on his new responsibilities as Chief Education Adviser in July 1966. The appointment was made in the proper constitutional manner by the Minister of Education after having received the approval of the Yang diPertuan Agong (Malaysia's King or Paramount Ruler). With this, the campaign to secure the admission of non-professional officers into the higher professional echelons of the education service abated for a while<sup>6</sup>.

### The Legacy of Aminuddin Baki

Nevertheless, it was not easy to take the place of Aminuddin Baki, who had been not only a renowned activist in nationalist politics and in the field of education but also a thinker with a wide perspective. The slim volume entitled *The National Schools of Malaya: Their Problems, Proposed Curriculum and Activities*, which he wrote in April 1953 suffices to show how advanced his thinking was with regard to the problem of how to fit a multi-racial society into a common mould<sup>7</sup>. Education was the vehicle, the greatest use of which should be made towards achieving this goal, wrote Aminuddin four years before Malaya achieved its independence. The proposals which he put forward were pertinent to the times and a number of them were to be adopted by the government<sup>8</sup>. His vision was finally to become reality in that the supreme importance of mutual understanding and cooperation between the various races in the national system of education is now generally recognized.

Nevertheless, five years was all too brief a period for putting a new integrated national system of education into place, even if the guidelines had already been provided in the form of the Razak Report. There had been false starts<sup>9</sup>, and heavy additional demands had been placed upon the system by the expansion of the Malayan federation to embrace Sabah and Sarawak so as to form Malaysia in 1963, along with Indonesian Confrontation which came in its train<sup>10</sup>.

Apart from all this there were a host of other problems which demanded early attention. One major issue concerned the effective conversion of the main medium of instruction in schools to Malay, the

National Language. Other issues were related to the serious imbalances in the educational system in terms of student participation on an ethnic basis, the grave shortage of trained teachers, and of courses and subjects available, especially in the technical field. On top of all this, there was the relentless rise in student enrolment each year which had to be catered for from every aspect – classrooms, teachers, finance.

### **The National Language Issue**

One of the most pressing problems which Hamdan had to tackle was the language issue, which pivoted on the Government's declared policy of making Malay the main medium of instruction in Malaysian schools. He was, of course, fully aware of the professional complexities involved in carrying out this exercise. Amongst them came the setting of examination papers in Malay, training enough teachers who could teach in the language, and making provision for the use of the Malay-medium at the levels of higher education, including the university. But there were also other problems linked with the issue of which Hamdan was equally well aware, and the most serious of which from the educational standpoint and from the perspective of 'the Malay Agenda'<sup>11</sup> concerned the future status of English as a medium of instruction in the education system, and the mounting demand for the recognition of Chinese as one of the official languages.

The increasing politicization of these issues did not help. By the time Hamdan took over at the Ministry in mid-1966 Malay protagonists of the National Language, amongst whom schoolteachers and writers were very vocal, were campaigning with increasing ardour for the establishment of Malay as the sole, official language of the nation (as promised)<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, equally ardent Chinese champions of their own culture, amongst whom Chinese schoolteachers were particularly prominent, were conducting an increasingly intense campaign for the recognition of Chinese as an official language<sup>13</sup>.

The problem was made all the more urgent in that 1967 (i.e. ten years after the achievement of Malayan Merdeka) was the year which had been set for redeeming the pledge to make Malay the official language of the country<sup>14</sup>.

As far as the political aspects of the National Language issue were concerned, Hamdan was content to leave this to the politicians<sup>15</sup>. However, there was one political aspect which stuck in Hamdan's throat – the campaign to emasculate the use of English in the normal education system. He, along with most serious educationists, was totally opposed to this idea, because he knew only too well how important English was for the future progress of the Malay race in seeking opportunities and taking their place in the modern world<sup>16</sup>.

On the other hand, at the same time Hamdan was equally strongly convinced that Malay as the National Language was essential for developing national unity and an integrated Malaysian culture. He made it very clear that the Ministry would fully implement the introduction of Malay as medium of instruction as scheduled, and followed words by deeds by conducting a personal propaganda campaign explaining the rationale for the policy. He toured every corner of the country, making speeches wherever he went, laying stress on the importance of the national education policy, with its prime aim of bringing about national unity amongst all races, and of Malay, as the National Language, forming the foundation on which that policy was to be built<sup>17</sup>.

Hamdan's 'road-show' was very necessary if the role of the National Language in the national system of education was to be properly understood. For only in this way could the the Ministry hope to get all sectors of the nation's multi-racial society to accept their share of the responsibility in accepting and implementing it.

### **Modern Science and Mathematics for Malaysians: A Revolution in Teaching and Learning**

Another aspect of national education policy which commanded Hamdan's attention right from the beginning was the problem of Malay weakness in science and mathematics. It was generally taken for granted that Malay students had no aptitude for either of these two fields, despite the fact that these was already in existence solid evidence exposing this for the fallacy that it was<sup>18</sup>. If the Malays were to progress and take their place in the modern world, the general Malay failure to go in for science and mathematics had to be overcome. Hamdan, for one, did not believe

that weakness in science and mathematics was an in-born Malay trait, nor that Malays could not be trained to become competent doctors and engineers, etc. if given the proper opportunity. He was convinced that it was all a question of approach, or of how these subjects were taught. The fruit of this conviction was the introduction within a couple of years of his taking over as Chief Education Adviser of special science and mathematics programmes at both primary and secondary school levels, at first focussed on the rural areas. This initiative was probably the boldest and most significant of all the manifold contributions to the development of Malaysian education that Hamdan was destined to make.

Hamdan gave much thought about the ways and means by which students, especially Malay ones, could be encouraged and motivated to take up science. One obvious necessity was to multiply the number of effective Malay science and mathematics teachers, but this by itself would be insufficient. Equally important was to introduce a new approach to the teaching and learning of these subjects, particularly in science. Hamdan became a convert to the concept of the 'discovery method' of learning, that is, learning through observation and enquiry, supplemented by practical experiments conducted both inside and outside the classroom. As will be seen below, this was largely the result of the contacts he had made and by what he had seen during educational tours abroad which chimed in with his own experience of the pragmatic educational techniques of the Japanese which he underwent during the Japanese Occupation. In short, the discovery approach represented the practical application of basic scientific method to classroom learning. It also represented a stimulating replacement of the prevailing mode in Malaysian schools which was 'very much content-based and teacher centred with practical work confined largely to demonstration experiments by the teacher'<sup>19</sup>.

### **The Special Project (Projek Khas): Learning by Discovery at Primary Level**

Between 1968 and the year of his retirement as professional head of the Ministry of Education in 1976, Hamdan was instrumental in introducing four programmes involving the teaching of science and mathematics by

the discovery method into Malaysian schools<sup>20</sup>. Though distinct from one another, all four programmes formed part of a single scheme for reforming the approach to the teaching of mathematics and science subjects in the classroom, with the aim of creating – by the 1980s – a body of students (male and female), liberated from the authoritarian teaching methods of the past and who with a sound grounding in mathematics and science subjects would be equipped to qualify for entry into these fields at university level. The starting point was at primary school level because Hamdan, in particular, firmly believed that the foundations for both science and mathematics had to be laid as early as possible in the education process. For, if there were weaknesses in teaching these subjects at primary level, their effect would surely be compounded and carried forward into the middle and higher levels<sup>21</sup>.

As Abu Hassan bin Ali, who was to play a key role in the development of the Special Project from 1970 onwards, has written:

...the new Director-General of Education (actually, still Chief Education Advisor at the time) was a very pro-active and visionary personality (with) a compulsive obsession of bringing greater educational opportunities to children from the rural areas who were not only deprived but were also insufficiently motivated towards higher studies, especially in the sciences. He was visualizing a scenario in which these children could be helped with chances of pursuing science studies and preparing themselves to fit in with technocracy and industrialization as the country moved forwards towards the twenty-first century<sup>22</sup>.

Accordingly, in late 1968 a start was made at primary school level with the introduction of the discovery approach to the teaching of science and mathematics. The experiment was simply called the 'Special Project' (*Projek Khas*). It was the brainchild of Mohd Ali bin Ibrahim, a young and dedicated science graduate from Negeri Sembilan, who was also responsible for introducing another brilliant young educationist onto the scene, an American called Richard Salinger<sup>23</sup>. The acquisition of the services of Salinger right at the outset was a great boon for the Ministry, because at that time there was no Malaysian educationist who could be spared to set up such a programme, while Salinger himself, as his background and experience indicate<sup>24</sup>, was particularly well equipped to lay down the guidelines for the new project.



32a. Hamdan, STAR's first Headmaster, addressing a Monday morning assembly in the open at its first location in a former army camp, Bazaar Avenue, Ipoh, 1957.



32b. STAR's pioneer hand-picked teaching staff, 1957: Hamdan, suitably robed, seated centre; seated (L-R): R. Sundrakaran, Lau Hut Yee, Abdul Aziz Wok, Mohd Perdaus Badiozzaman, Kamaruddin Hashim, Anthony Marshall, Ruslan Ahmad, Joseph Tan Chiew Kang; standing (L-R): Abdul Latif Shamsuddin, Idris Sudin, Choong Swee Chin, Harbhajan Lal Sharma, Michael Liau Tet Loke, Chan Teng Hong, M.R. Baskaran.



33. Visit of the last British High Commissioner to Malaya, Sir Donald MacGillivray, to STAR on 26 July 1957 when the school was still in Baeza Avenue.

a. Arrival, walking with Hamdan to see the School, Mohd Perdaus on the extreme left.

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b. The High Commissioner addressing the boys, standing on a table as a makeshift platform.





34. The Official Opening and Renaming of STAR by Tunku Abdul Rahman, 14 May, 1958

- a. The Tunku delivering his speech, with Hamdan listening dutifully

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- b. The Tunku inspecting the school's Red Cross Unit. Two years later, the STAR Red Cross were the champion first aid team in Perak and represented the State in the Red Cross Centenary celebrations. Hamdan, partly obscured, is standing on his left, while Lau Hut Yee, the teacher i/c Red Cross Society, invites the Tunku to inspect the parade. Chan Teng Hon, teacher i/c Scouts, on Hamdan's left.





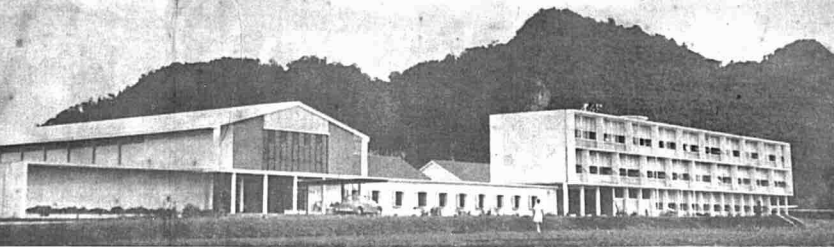


35. The official visit of Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the first Yang DiPertuan Agong, in whose honour the school was named, on 23 September 1958.
- a. The arrival of Tuanku Abdul Rahman, flanked by Sultan Yussuff Izuddin Shah of Perak and Hamdan. Siti Zainab can be seen behind and between the Agong and the Sultan, while on the Sultan's left is (R-L) the Raja Perempuan of Perak, Raja Ta'ayah, Raja Muzwin, the consort of the Raja Muda and the Raja Muda of Perak, Raja Idris.

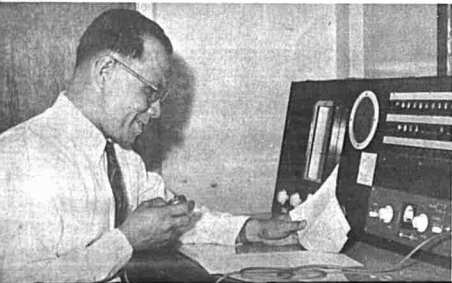


- b. The Agong on the saluting base (a carpet); on his right, the Raja Permaisuri Agong, Tengku Kurshiah; the Raja Perempuan Perak, Raja Ta'ayah; and Siti Zainab: on the Agong's left, Sultan Yussuff Izuddin Shah, Sultan of Perak, Hamdan (looking somewhat anxious). On the extreme right (standing) is the Menteri Besar Perak, Muhammad Ghazali bin Haji Jawi.
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- c. The Agong planting a fir tree (which is still standing) near the Commemorative Stone in front of the main school building; standing in the fore-ground, L-R: Raja Muda Perak, Raja Idris; Sultan Yussuff; the Agong; the Raja Permaisuri Agong; Siti Zainab; the Menteri Besar, and Hamdan.





36a. A panoramic view of the main school buildings of STAR, with the School Hall on the left, the main classroom block on the right, and the administrative buildings in between, with Gunung Lang in the background.



36b. Hamdan with a favourite piece of electronic equipment, the public address system which could reach every corner of the school.



35c. STAR students satisfying their appetites in the school dining-hall. The food was wholesome and balanced but also in the opinion of some – somewhat monotonous, though 'Sunday lunches were always good...'



37a. STAR Scouts, 1959 with Hamdan, centre, and, on his left, H.R. Hertslet, an ex-British Royal Navy type who was a dedicated scouter and has given his name to Hertslet Camp, a popular Boy Scouts camping site next door to the school. Two of the School's five qualified scoutmasters flank Hamdan and Hertslet - Chan Teng Hong next to Hamdan and M.R. Baskaran next to Hertslet.

37b. An expedition in 1959 to Gunung Lang, Ipoh (at the back of the school, the site of some of the oldest Stone Age rock paintings found in the region - one of the many led by Hamdan to various places of interest at the weekends. Hamdan is seen 3rd front left, with Anthony Marshall (Sports Master) on his right.





38. At the UNESCO Regional Seminar of Education held in New Delhi in 1958, which Hamdan attended on his first official trip as a Malaysian representative abroad.

a. Group photograph, with Hamdan standing 2nd from left in the 2nd row, with his colleague, Chang Min Kee, standing 3rd. Ryoji Ito who became one of Hamdan's life-long friends is 4th from left in the same row. Dr. K.L. Sharimali, then India's Minister for Education, is seated in the front row centre.

b. Informal gathering at night in the presence of the Indian Prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (seated centre in white). Hamdan in black Malay *baju* and *songkok* is in the 3rd row, 5th from right, while Chang Min Kee is sitting on the ground near Nehru, 5th from left.





39. A 7-week visit to Britain in 1960. Hamdan, one of the four principals invited, seen with (L-R), Elena Cooke (Bukit Bintang Secondary Girls School, Kuala Lumpur; Waung Yoon Hian (Chung Ling High School, Penang); the British Commonwealth Relations Office representative, Fatimah Ahmad (Tengku Mahmood School, Besut, Terengganu) and Hamdan, at Edinburgh Castle, Scotland. Hamdan was invited as Principal of STAR, but when he went he was already in the Ministry in Kuala Lumpur.



40. The New Delhi Commonwealth Conference on Education, 1960.

- a. Group photograph: the Malayan delegation included Abdul Rahman Talib, Minister of Education (front row, 4th from left) and in 3rd row, starting 4th from left: A. Raman, Rahman Talib's private secretary; Paul Chang, Chief Inspector of Schools; A.K. Arianayagam, Deputy Chief Education Adviser; Professor Oppenheim, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya; and John Richards, Director of Technical and Vocational Training, one removed from Oppenheim. Hamdan is in 2nd row, in front of Paul Chang. Jawaharlal Nhrhu, Prime Minister, seated plum centre, front row.





40b. Attending a Conference session (L-R): Paul Chang, Hamdan, Alexander Oppenheim, and John Richards.

40c. The Malaysian team at the Conference: (L-R) Abdul Rahman Talib; A.K. Arianayagam; A. Raman; J.J. Richards; Hamdan; and Oppenheim.





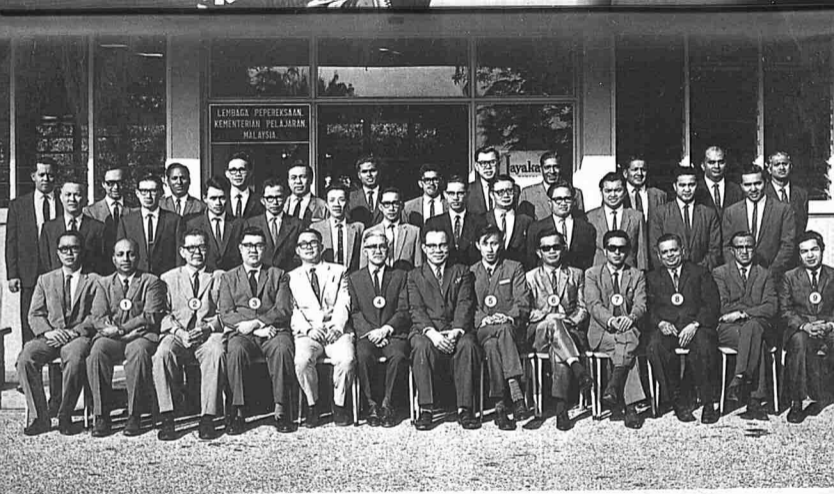
41. Hamdan at Harvard on his first American tour, 1962; group photo of those attending the International Harvard Seminar. Hamdan (x); Henry Kissinger, then Professor of Government at Harvard University and future Secretary of State in the Nixon Administration fourth from right, front row.



42a. Hamdan on one of his first tours of the country, ca. 1960: in Trengganu with the Minister, Rahman Talib, at Sultan Sulaiman Secondary School, Kuala Terengganu. The Minister centre, talking to the Principal, with Chang Min Kee, State Director of Education, standing behind. Hamdan on extreme left.

42b. Hamdan accompanying Datuk Haji Mohamed bin Yaacob, Minister of Education, on the occasion of the official opening of the Specialist Teachers' Training College, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, 1964: (L-R): Lokman Musa, Director of Teacher Training; the Minister; Hamdan on extreme right.





43. Hamdan as Controller of Examinations, with his staff outside the Federal Examinations Syndicate, ca. 1964. L-R, front row: (1) Arulandum, (2) Tan Teik Teong, (3) Poon Poh Kong (later Director of RECSAM), (4) Foo Sze Juak (Sarawak), Hamdan, (5) Sabah representative, (6) Latiff Saham, (7) Omar Hashim, (8) A.P. John, (9) Mohd. Perdaus Badiuzzaman.



44a. The end of Indonesian Confrontation: successful negotiations for recruiting Indonesian teachers for science maths subjects in Malaysian schools (Malay medium) and for sending Malaysian students for degree courses in Indonesia: Hamdan on behalf of the Ministry of Education shaking hands with Bapak Soemantri, his counterpart, in the Indonesian Ministry of Education, at Puncak, Java, 1967.

44b. Visit to Indian universities, 1968. Members of the Malaysian mission who wanted to see Indian progress in various fields of higher learning included L-R (marked by x): Mohd Yusof, Director-General, PWD; Hamdan, Chief Education Adviser; Mohamed Jamil, Director-General of Agriculture; and Dr. Noordin Keling, Director, Veterinary Services.





45a. Hamdan addressing a headmasters' function at Segamat in 1970; seated on the extreme left are Kum Boo, Director of Schools, and S.K. Nayagam, State Director of Education, Johor, along with local headmasters and senior education officers.

45b. Visiting the Sultan Ibrahim Secondary School, Johor Bahru, in 1970, accompanied by the Chairman of the Board of Governors and Dawn Perry, the School's Principal.





46. Hamdan (x) in this group photograph with participants from all over the region in a SEAMEOO-RECSAM course held in Penang in March 1971. Course subjects covered included Elementary Science, Primary Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The establishment of the RECSAM Centre at Penang was one of Hamdan's most cherished achievements.



- 47a. Hamdan at a meeting chaired ca. 1972 by Dato' Ghazali Shafie, Minister of Information, (2nd from left) to discuss the setting up of an Education Media Service Division of the Ministry of Education for handling educational broadcasts through TV and Radio. The Minister is flanked by Hamdan on his right and a Ministry of Information representative on his left. Addressing the meeting is the new Division's first Director-to-be, Chong Seck Chim. Looking on approvingly from his place on the wall is Tun Dr Ismail bin Dato' Abdul Rahman, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs.

- 47b. The Ministry of Education's Curriculum Committee - the fore-runner of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) - at work under the chairmanship of Hamdan, ca. 1972. (L-R): Kum Boo (Director of Schools Division); Hamdan, Dato' Murad Mohd Nor, Director of Planning and Research; Professor Fatimah Hamidon, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya; Asiah bt Abu Samah (a future Director-General of Education), and a Ministry Administrative Division representative.







48a. Giving a speech at the National Primary School(2), Batu Pahat during a visit to Johor in the mid-1970s. Seated are seen Ahmad Salleh, then Director of Education, Johor (with dark glasses, centre front), the Headmaster (to his left), and members of the local Parent-Teacher's Association.

48b. Inspecting the guard of honour during an official visit to the High School, Melaka, 1974, accompanied by the Chairman of the Board of Governors on Hamdan's left, and the Principal (behind).





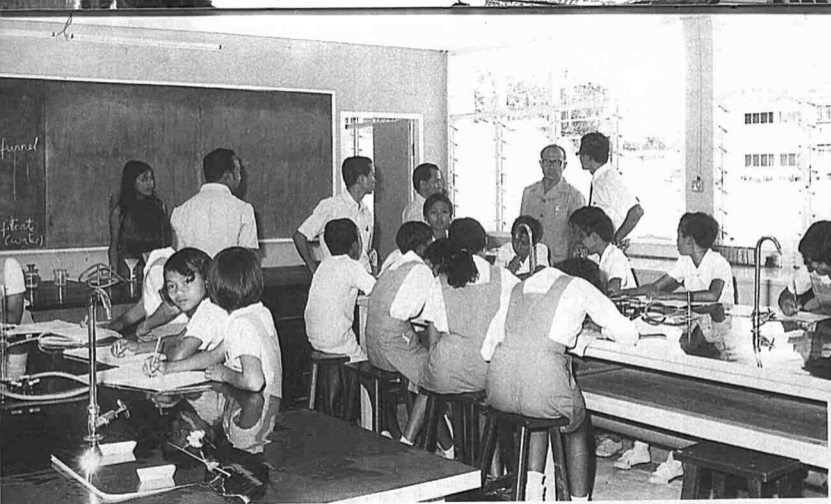
49. The opening of the Sixth Commonwealth Education Conference at Kingston, Jamaica, June 1974; which Hamdan attended as a representative of Malaysia. On stage is Hamdan (second from left), with Mr. Michael Norman Manley, the Jamaican prime minister delivering his speech. The Malaysian delegation seated in the audience included Abdul Rahman Arshad, Kum Boo, Ainnuddin Wahid and Chong Seck Chim, the latter coming from London where he was attached to the Commonwealth Education Secretariat at the time.



50a. Arriving at a reception in Kuching in his honour ca. 1974 as Director-General of Education, with Mohd Diah, the State Director of Education Sarawak in attendance, being greeted by teachers in training at the Batu Lintang Teachers' Training College. Siti Zainab also seen being greeted in the background.

50b. Visiting schools at Bario in the Kelabit Highlands, Sarawak, after getting there by helicopter. Accompanying Hamdan is Director of Education, Sarawak, while Siti Zainab and their son, Tahiruddin, (the small boy with hands in pockets) are in the right foreground. The people of Bario were very grateful to Hamdan because it was through his agency that the timber school building (seen in the background) came to be built with sawn logs flown in from Miri.



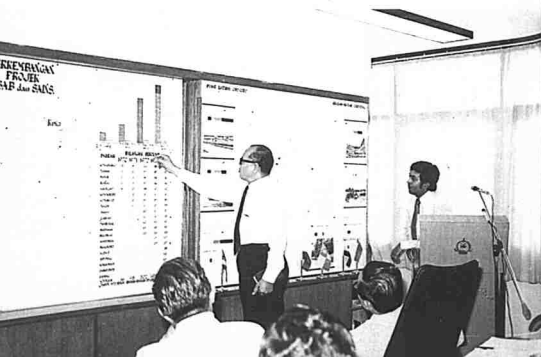


51. Seeing for himself work in the classroom; Hamdan visiting the Rosli Dhobie Secondary School, Sibul, Sarawak, named after the youthful revolutionary nationalist, hanged for assassinating Duncan Stewart, the British Governor, at Sibul in 1949.



52a. Arriving for an official visit in Sabah, March 1974, accompanied by the State Director of Education, Sabah, Omar Mohd. Hashim. This was one of several visits to the State to look into the progress of education there.

52b. Participating in a briefing given by Omar Mohd. Hashim on the development of education in the State, March 1974. Omar is standing on the extreme right.





53a. Emerging, with Omar Mohd. Hashim just behind, from a primitive but adequate temporary 'hostel' erected by local villagers for 'boarders' at the local school at Tambunan, Sabah in 1974. Such 'hostels' have long been replaced by more substantial structures.

53b. Attending the launching ceremony of the UNICEF Project in Sabah at the Gaya Teachers' Training College, Kota Kinabalu, May 1974. Seated on the extreme left of picture is Mohd Nor Long, the author of this book, then Assistant Director of Education, Sabah, under Omar Mohd. Hashim who is sitting between him and Hamdan. On Hamdan's left is the Sabahan Deputy Director of Education.





54. The Mahathir Visit to Sabah and Sarawak, 1974-5

- a. Accompanying Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Minister of Education, to an exhibition on education in Sabah, during his visit to that State, 1974

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- b. With Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on a visit to a rural school at Sipitang, near Brunei Bay, 1974. Seen in the picture (L-R) are (1) Omar Mohd. Hashim; (2) Dr. Mahathir; (3) Hamdan.





- c. Dr. Mahathir visiting a school in Lawas, Sarawak, 1975. (1) Mahathir; (2) Mohd. Diah, State Director of Education; (3) Hamdan. Mahathir is (presumably) quizzing the headmaster of the school (in batik shirt).
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- d. With Dr. Mahathir on a visit to the longhouse of Datu Alfred Jabu (now Deputy Chief Minister, Sarawak) at Bau, near Kuching, Sarawak, 1975. Jabu is next to Dr. Mahathir on his right, and Hamdan on the extreme right of the picture. A medicine man is displaying his wares.







55a. Hamdan inspecting the vegetable garden of the National Primary School, Ulu Gali, Pahang ca. 1975. Talking to Hamdan is the school's headmaster. On the 2nd right of the picture is Tan Boon Lin, State Director of Education, Pahang, and a future Head of the Federal Inspectorate, talking to Annuar Ayub, then Tan Boon Lin's Deputy, and a staunch member of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia to this day.

55b. Hamdan examining a rare old Quran in a kampung along the Perak River during one of his visits to schools in the area; with him and Siti Zainab on the right of the picture is Tuan Syed Abu Bakar Barakhbah, the State Director Education, Perak.





56a. Hamdan in Kelantan: greeting Tuanku Sultan Yahya Petra on a royal visit to the Sultan Ismail College, Kota Bahru, 1975. On the left by the wall are Saw Chee Leng (State Director of Education, Kelantan) and his wife

56b. In Kelantan going into the heart of the countryside: Hamdan, with Abdul Rahman Arshad, then Director of Education, Kelantan, immediately behind, heading the trek to the National Primary School at Kuala Balah, Jeli, with half a kampung following in their wake.





57a. At the ceremony held to lay the foundation stone of the new Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) Building off Jalan Duta, 16 August 1975: Asiah Abu Samah, first substantive Director of the CDC (left foreground); Hamdan (centre); Murad, Director of the Ministry's Planning and Research Division (on right) their hands raised in prayer, M.P. Prabhakar, long associated with the CDC, in dark glasses between Hamdan and Murad.



57b. The staff of the CDC gathered on the occasion of one of Hamdan's last visits as Director-General of Education in February 1976. Amongst the crowd are to be seen (1) Richard Salinger, then US Peace Corps Consultant for the project; and (2) Asiah Abu Samah.



58. Farewell to the Chief: Hamdan at the farewell dinner given by the staff of the Federal Examinations Syndicate on his retirement as Director-General of Education, April 1976.

a. Hamdan making his farewell speech.

b. Hamdan and Siti Zainab as guests of honour making the most of their meal, flanked (left and right respectively) by Omar Mohd Hashim, newly appointed as Director of the Examinations Syndicate, and his wife.



c. The poignant moments of goodbye: Omar Mohd. Hashim on the left.

The actual planning had begun the previous year with a small unit in a large room in the Ministry of Education<sup>25</sup>. It consisted of four persons headed by Peter Chen, a brilliant biology teacher who had previously taught at the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, along with two Peace Corps members, Peggy Kaufman and Hugh Donovan, and Salinger himself, now attached to the Ministry on a three year contract, styled Peace Corps' Education Specialist and serving as its Deputy Director for Education in Malaysia.

Since no change in the actual syllabus was involved, their job was focussed on designing techniques which would assist in re-orientating classroom teaching to the 'discovery method'<sup>26</sup>. This involved providing the teachers with guides and workbooks, together with guidelines on how to improvise simple equipment from local materials for conducting experiments, and instructions as to how to adapt classroom arrangements for group activities. At a later stage, when this preliminary work had been done, in-service courses for teachers would be held and local 'Centres of Excellence' (*Pusat Kecemerlangan*)<sup>27</sup> established where workshops could be conducted on a regular basis and where teachers could be motivated into making improvements on their own to their teaching techniques. The funding came from the Asia Foundation and the Ministry of Education itself. The Ministry was also responsible for staffing, while teaching material came from UNESCO, the US Peace Corps and the British Council<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, the task of the pioneer four was daunting enough. Up to this point rural schools lacked everything as far as the teaching of science and mathematics were concerned, from teaching aides and textbooks to properly qualified teachers. In particular, the teachers involved were quite inadequately trained, some not even having got beyond primary school education themselves. In Abu Hassan's words, 'there was no such person as a properly qualified primary science or mathematics teacher...' and lessons in the classroom simply revolved around reading from unsuitable texts and rote learning, supplemented by blackboard and chalk.

The first task of Peter Chen, Salinger and their two Peace Corps assistants was to write a teacher's guide for Year One. Preparing the outlines in English presented no problems; the difficulty lay in translating

from English into Malay, which was not made any easier by frequent variations in the use of technical terms coined by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Furthermore, Peter Chen a few weeks after the 13 May Incident of 1969 decamped with his Italian wife and baby to Canada<sup>9</sup>, and the vacuum was filled by Anton Jenain, who with the best will in the world was not at home with the job. As a result the Project got off to a rather slow start, and the translation problem was not successfully overcome until about eighteen months later when Abu Hassan Ali arrived on the scene in early 1970.

Abu Hassan who now took over as head of the Special Project, with Salinger as his principal consultant, was obviously the right choice for the task, for not only had he had experience as a lecturer in the disciplines concerned but had already established a reputation for himself as a successful writer of science textbooks for primary school level<sup>10</sup>. By this time, incidentally, the Project was no longer located in Federal House, but had moved to its own quarters in a building which used to house the Kuala Lumpur Technical College before the Japanese Occupation, and had accommodated the Malay Girls College (founded in 1946) after it until that school was transferred to Seremban to become Tengku Kurshiah College.

As a result of the combination of Abu Hassan's enthusiasm and enterprise and Salinger's experienced guidance, the Special Project at last got truly under way. The first priority was to complete the translation of the teachers' guide sheets. The next step was the selection of key personnel who would be trained to conduct in-service courses for teachers explaining the new syllabus and the contents of the guide sheets, followed up by the provision of the teaching aids and equipment in the rural schools themselves<sup>11</sup>. In doing all this they relied a lot on the cooperation which they received from the Schools Division of the Ministry.

By this time, the Special Project unit's headquarters at Damansara had been converted into a Science Centre, to serve as the focal point for the Project's implementation, and as a resource centre for the teaching of science and mathematics in all primary schools in the country. Finally, as the whole scheme evolved its various parts were coordinated through the medium of all those involved in the project in one way or the other,

including teachers, headmasters and key personnel from the Ministry. Not only did Abu Hassan, Salinger and their team succeed in working out this comprehensive and complex schedule, but they also succeeded in getting it launched within the first six months of 1970.

By May of that year, according to Abu Hassan, more than 3,000 rural schools all over the country had already received the first materials for science and mathematics (i.e. in two separate booklets) and in June the first Special Project workshop was conducted in Kuala Lumpur, attended by 28 key personnel, 2 from each State including Sabah and Sarawak, which together with the 14 key personnel already attached to State Education Offices came to 42 members in all<sup>12</sup>.

In the meantime Hamdan, ever anxious to reinforce all these efforts and to ensure that they produced results, had summoned a special meeting of all the State Directors of Education at Kuala Lumpur in order to acquaint them with the Project and its concept, and to make sure that it was effectively carried out<sup>13</sup>. Finally, Hamdan himself, Kum Boo as Director of Schools, Salinger and Abu Hassan went around the whole country to monitor the progress of the project and to see that it was running smoothly.

By the end of 1970 it had become obvious that the Special Project was becoming a great success, and with Hamdan's direct encouragement the scheme was extended to all primary schools in the country – urban as well as rural, Chinese and Tamil as well as Malay and English. To enforce this programme lecturers selected from the 25 teacher training colleges in the country at the time were briefed on the discovery approach at the Science Centre in Kuala Lumpur prior to the courses for key personnel being held. In this way, teachers sent to the schools to launch the project would have been exposed to both the rationale as well as to the practical application of science and maths learning by discovery.

### **Integrated & Nuffield Science and Modern Maths: The Revolution at Secondary Level**

In the meantime, while the introduction of the discovery method was being essayed at primary level, Hamdan also saw to it that complementary programmes were also being put in place at secondary



level. The first two of these, the Integrated Science and Modern Mathematics programmes, were introduced on a trial basis in 1969. Then, in 1972, they were supplemented with the introduction of the Nuffield Science programme for the furtherance of the discovery approach to upper secondary school levels.

The Integrated Science and Modern Mathematics programmes for Forms One to Three at lower secondary level were designed to serve as the continuation of the Special Project. But if the Project was based on an American input (i.e. through the Peace Corps and Richard Salinger), the discovery method for secondary level was based on British models<sup>54</sup>. Given the long connection between Britain and Malaysia in education, particularly with regard to the examination system, Hamdan's own personal experience of the British system of education, and the fact that sweeping reforms in science education were taking place in that country at the time, it was quite natural that on seeking to implement this new approach in Malaysian schools he should turn to the British for guidance<sup>55</sup>.

For this purpose Hamdan and a group of his staff made a special journey to Britain in 1967. Hamdan was particularly interested in visiting CREDO, a newly established organization for promoting the latest British curricula and teaching methods overseas<sup>56</sup>. It was at the CREDO headquarters that he met Gordon van Praagh, its Assistant Director (Science), a pioneer in the development of the discovery approach in Britain<sup>57</sup>. Hamdan and his party then travelled north to Scotland where they met Alex 'Sandy' Jeffrey, then a member of the Scottish Schools Inspectorate, through whom they were able to see the Scottish scheme of Integrated Science in action, and were also duly impressed. The upshot of all this was that both van Praagh and Jeffrey were co-opted into the Hamdan's science teaching revolution for Malaysian secondary schools.

This developed into a major curriculum development project. Under agreements reached between the Ministry of Education and CREDO the details of the implementation of a ten year programme for establishing a completely reformed system for the teaching of Science and Maths in Malaysian secondary schools was devised. There were to be three main stages. The first consisted of exposure courses led by British teams of teachers organized by CREDO for the Malaysian teachers who would be

implementing the new system in their respective schools. The next stage was for writing sessions to produce course materials for the students and guides for the teachers. These sessions were to be under the supervision of British teachers, but the actual writing teams would be made up of both British and Malaysian teachers. The third stage was that of implementation, a process started on a trial basis at certain selected schools and gradually expanded as other schools acquired the necessary trained staff and equipment. It was also to be accompanied by in-service courses for key personnel which would provide opportunities for feedback as to progress made and the introduction of modifications if thought desirable<sup>39</sup>. The British end of the operation was to be led by Jeffrey for the Integrated Science and Mathematics, and by van Praagh for the adapted Nuffield courses. At the Malaysian end the whole operation was made the responsibility of the Ministry's Schools Division under its head, Kum Boo (now Dato')<sup>40</sup>. The science courses were placed under the general charge of Mohd Ali bin Ibrahim (also now Dato'), the progenitor of the 'Special Project', while Wahidullah Khan, who succeeded Mohd. Ali, was made responsible for the Modern Mathematics programme and put in overall charge of these programmes at a later stage. Two other experienced science teachers, Chang Kwai and M.P. Prabhakar<sup>40</sup> were put in charge specifically of the Integrated Science and Nuffield Science courses respectively.

In 1969 the Integrated Science scheme was launched at lower secondary level on a trial basis in twenty-two specially selected schools. The scheme proceeded reasonably smoothly, and other schools were added to the list each year when they could show that they had adequate facilities and had acquired the appropriate equipment and teachers trained for the job, supplied by the Ministry of Education. By 1972 those who had embarked on the Integrated Science and Modern Maths courses in Form One were now ready to enter on the Nuffield Science and Modern Maths courses in Form Four. At the start of the same year those pupils in Primary School who had been the pioneers of the discovery method under the Special Project from Standard IV onwards (i.e. since 1969) were now joining Form One at secondary level and starting upon the Integrated Science and Modern Maths courses. By 1975 this batch of original Special Project students had reached the Nuffield Science (and Modern

Maths) stage at Form Four, so that in 1976, when they had completed their fifth year in upper secondary, they took their new SPM science papers. In the meantime a discovery approach adaptation, called Modern General Science, of the General Science course for the Arts Stream was also created along similar lines and introduced in 1974. Therefore, by 1976 the first cycle of innovations from primary to upper secondary (Form Five) had been completed. By the early 1980s, the discovery approach to the teaching and learning of science and mathematics was being carried out in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools<sup>41</sup>.

Needless to say, preparing each course progressively as the scheme as a whole evolved and keeping to the scheduled dates for their implementation was very hard work for all concerned, and became harder and more complex still at the more advanced levels. Furthermore, in the words of M.P. Prabhakar:

There also remained the need to continue planning for the introduction of the courses into the remaining schools, for the training of teachers, for procuring and supplying equipment to schools, for revising the course material based on the feedback obtained, and, above all, for visiting schools to get direct feedback on the progress of the courses. None of us at the Ministry of Education at that time, especially those involved in the science courses, remained idle in those days.....

Gordon van Praagh relates in his reminiscences<sup>42</sup> how initially his team consisted, besides himself, of two British Biology, Chemistry and Physics teachers each who visited Malaysia each year for eight years (i.e. 1969-76), sometimes twice in one year, for periods of from four to six weeks<sup>43</sup>. Pupils' books and teachers' guides for all three pure science subjects in forms four and five were then re-written based on feedback from the trial schools, first in English, then translated into Malay and published. The publishers, continues van Praagh:

worked hard for us - to produce these 24 books to a deadline was quite an achievement. Robert Morris, the Director of CREDO, had asked me: 'How are you going to get all these books written?' Well, it was done....by many people, working hard, British and Malaysian, working hard, often in their spare time."

This was not the end of the story. Quite apart from actually creating the course material and putting it across to Malaysian teachers, the relevant Cambridge examination papers had to be revamped to fit in with the new approach<sup>45</sup>, temporary foreign teachers had to be recruited until there were sufficient numbers of Malaysian science teachers available, and new schools built to cater, in particular, for the rural areas<sup>46</sup>.

By any standard, the conversion of science and maths teaching in Malaysia from the old to the new was a remarkable achievement. All those involved were in no doubt that the driving force behind its implementation was one particular man, Hamdan. 'The DG was so committed to science education', Prabhakar tells us:

that he made it his business to know what was happening at each stage of the programme. He had the broad picture always in his mind and I could see that he was already thinking far ahead and trying to connect the present to a possible future scenario, while the rest of us struggled with the details of the present..... (He) put science education on its present course in the sixties at a time when the Ministry of Education faced a number of constraints. It was his sheer drive and initiative that, with a minimum of full time staff, facilities, and funds, he was able to see through a programme of this magnitude, meeting stringent deadlines in the face of considerable opposition.....

Gordon van Praagh, a foreigner, saw Hamdan from a different angle but drew the same conclusions:

A key figure behind 'the grand plan' to advance the education of the Bumiputera was Datuk Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir.... Hamdan had vision, a friendly personality, the ability to get on well with people and an excellent memory for names; he was a very hard worker and a first class organiser. The Ministry...(was) fortunate to have such a man at the top.<sup>47</sup>

1. As a result of Aminuddin Baki's coaxing, a small band of Malay MCS officers switched over to the teaching profession to become teachers themselves, and ended up by becoming thoroughly committed leaders in educational affairs. One of those so persuaded was Abdul Rahman bin Arshad (now Tan Sri), who forsook a career in the MCS in order to join the Education Service. In his case this proved a most fortunate decision since he rose to the very top to become one of Hamdan's successors as Director-General of Education.

2. i.e. Perkhidmatan Tadbir Diplomatik (PTD)

3. It has to be borne in mind that under the 'Integrated Ministry concept' the most senior appointment in the Ministry of Education was the Permanent Secretary, a civil service post directly responsible with regard to administrative matters to the Minister of Education himself. Next to the Permanent Secretary came the Chief Education Adviser, who advised the Minister on all professional matters connected with education, and in this function was the professional head of the national education system. Incidentally, the title of 'Chief Education Adviser' was changed to that of 'Director-General of Education' in 1970 (see Chapter 10 below).

4. *Pendidik Istimewa*, op.cit. p.33.

5. A typical reaction was that of Long Heng Hua, a senior education officer who at that time was Principal of King Edward VII School, Taiping. He unhesitatingly expressed the opinion that the national education system with all its complexities must be headed by a Malay, as there was no other way if that policy was to be carried out effectively.

6. However, it did not disappear. It was only in the 1990s, when Tan Sri Dr. Wan Zahid bin Nordin was Director-General of Education and Dato' Seri Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak was its Minister, that a tacit understanding was reached by which certain specific top posts in the Ministry were recognized as being the purview of professional education officers. An obvious reason for the MCS/PTD interest in laying claim to professional posts in the various Ministries – it was not confined only to the Ministry of Education – was that by doing so the number of top superscale posts at their disposal would increase, along with the higher emoluments that they carried with them.

7. Aminuddin Baki, *The National Schools – Their Problems, Proposed Curriculum, and Activities*, Kuala Lumpur, April 1953; reprinted by Arkib Negara Malaysia, 1981. p.1.

8. *ibid.* Some of Aminuddin's proposals were incorporated into the Razak Report of 1957 and others in the Rahman Talib Report of 1960. They also received careful consideration and a number of them adopted by various other official Ministry committees.

9. For instance, the attempt to introduce a Malayan equivalent at secondary school level to the secondary modern school system of England, started in 1960, was abandoned in 1964 and comprehensive schools then planned to take their place; likewise, the attempt to put the various State Education Departments directly in charge of their own construction programmes in place of the Public Works Department did not work out.

10. The addition of Sabah and Sarawak to the educational scene created new problems because of the general backwardness of education in those two states when compared to the position in Peninsular Malaysia. By the time Hamdan took over in the Ministry, Indonesian Confrontation was virtually at an end – the Bangkok Accord between Malaysia and Indonesia for this purpose was signed in August 1966 – but the financial impact remained.

11. i.e. a loose term to denote priorities given to the Malays in certain fields, including particularly in education, in order to help redress the social and economic imbalances between them and the non-bumiputera communities.

12. Malay nationalists harboured a strong suspicion that the Government would not carry out its pledge to make Malay 'the sole and official language' of the country when the time came. Their suspicions were not in any way diminished by the terms of the National Language Act of 1967 which made provision for the continued use of English in certain areas.

13. The system of education under the British before the Japanese Occupation with its division into four distinct language streams – English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil – has already been alluded to (see Chapter Five above). The Chinese, especially, had inherited a strong tradition of educational autonomy from the colonial era. Chinese schools were run by boards chosen by their local communities, on which parents were strongly represented. How seriously they took the education of their children is indicated by the great number of Chinese schools throughout the country, the building and maintenance costs of which were borne in most cases without any support from government. Although the national educational system devised by the Razak Report guaranteed the preservation of both Chinese and Tamil-medium education, its implementation aroused strong opposition from amongst the Chinese, particularly on the eve of independence. Things quietened down for a while afterwards, but in the mid-1960s, partly in reaction to the National Language campaign, there were fresh calls for Chinese to be made an official language, and also for the setting up a Chinese-medium university. Hamdan staunchly subscribed to the view of the Razak Report, shared by virtually all Malays, that the pre-war colonial system of schools divided into separate language streams had to go and be replaced by a more integrated one in line with the aspirations of a nation which had achieved its independence and sought to foster national unity.

14. The introduction of Malay as the medium of instruction, which was one of the main recommendations of the Razak Report, had up to this point proceeded rather slowly. Although the first Malay-medium secondary schools had been started in 1958, they still consisted two years later of Malay-medium classes housed in English-medium schools. The first Malay-medium candidates for the Malay version of the Lower Certificate of Education (i.e. Sijil Rendah Pelajaran) had sat for the exam in 1960, which meant that the Sijil Pelajaran Persekutuan Tanah Melayu (SPM) examination (i.e. the Malay-medium equivalent of the Cambridge School Certificate exam) was to be held for the first time in 1962. The most often heard excuse given for this slow progress was the shortage of teachers able to teach subjects in the language which hitherto had always been taught in English. This and some other problems associated with the implementation of the Razak Report led to the setting up in 1960 of an Education Review Committee chaired by Abdul Rahman Talib, then Minister of Education. The Rahman Talib Report recommended that all public (i.e. official and national) examinations at secondary level be carried out in the National Language.

Incidentally, in 1967 out of a total of 1.3 million primary school students in Peninsular Malaysia, just under half were in Malay-medium primary schools, but out of 290,000 students in the Peninsula attending secondary schools, only one third were in Malay-medium schools.

15. Hamdan's well-known antipathy for politics stood him in good stead and carried considerable weight at this juncture, because he was seen to speak on the issue in terms of educational principles and from a detached, professional point of view. On the other hand, it must be said that both Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister and Khir Johari as Minister of Education spoke out on the issue in a manner which pacified tensions and made most people feel that their interests were being taken into account. As the *Far Eastern Economic Review Asia Yearbook 1966* admiringly put it, '...dissimulating with practised skill - and in the way that any multi-racial leader must - the Tunku managed in 1965 to convince the non-Malays that compromises would be made, and to convince the Malays that the concept of *Bahasa Kebangsaan* would suffer neither delay nor dilution'.

16. In this regard, Hamdan found himself pitted against Syed Nasir Ismail then Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, and one of the leading spokesmen for establishing the primacy of the National Language. While Hamdan always remained on good terms personally with Syed Nasir, recognizing the great contribution Syed Nasir was making towards promoting the National Language, and enjoyed Syed Nasir's respect as well\*, he regarded the latter's hostility towards the role of English as misplaced and harmful to the long-term interests of the Malays. A powerful justification of the role of English in Malaysian education was provided by a 1964 survey of Malaysian students at tertiary level, which revealed that there were five times as many Malaysian students studying in tertiary institutions overseas (the great majority of whom were non-Malays) as there were studying in tertiary institutions in Malaysia itself. In the meanwhile, the Tunku and Khir Johari continued to play their part in pointing out the importance of English. In a memorable speech in Penang in October 1966 the Tunku argued the case for English and the liberal use of other languages, 'provided that the right attitude is taken by all concerned and a sensible and right approach is taken'. Khir Johari was still more forthright, declaring in one of his speeches at the time that 'even when Malay become the sole official language in 1967 English will still play an important part in the national education system and that in order that Malaysia will remain in the forefront of world affairs, secondary and higher education in this country will be provided both in the National Language and English'.

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\* In fact, Syed Nasir was instrumental in getting Hamdan appointed to the DBP as a member (and ultimately Chairman) of the Board of Controllers in 1965, a position he held up till 1976. See below.

17. Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, *Pendidikan Hari Ini Untuk Esok*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1975. pp.1-11. Incidentally, Hamdan also always gave his full support to the campaigns conducted by the Dewan Bahasa

dan Pustaka under Syed Nasir's leadership for the promotion of the National Language, and whenever possible attended all functions and gatherings organised by the Dewan towards this end.

18. i.e., by the existence of a handful of Malays who had received the opportunity before the Second World War to take up careers requiring science and mathematics and had become successful doctors, engineers, etc. Amongst them, for example, were Mohamad Said bin Mohamed from Negeri Sembilan, and Megat Khas of Perak, two fully pre-war qualified medical practitioners, and Raja Zainal bin Raja Sulaiman of Selangor, who was the first (but not the only) Malay to become a fully qualified electrical engineer in the 1930s. The reason why the numbers of these Malay professionals were limited was a matter of lack of opportunity, not of lack of aptitude.

19. Quoted from a Memo dated 9 June 1998, entitled 'TYT Tun Datuk Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir and the Ministry of Education Science Programmes' supplied to Dato Kum Boo by M.P. Prabhakar, one time Deputy Director at the Curriculum Development Centre of the Ministry at Kuala Lumpur. Much of the content of this section dealing with science and mathematics programmes introduced on the initiative of Hamdan is based on Prabhakar's Memo.

20. namely, (1) the Special Project (*Projek Khas*) for primary schools; and the Integrated Science and Modern Mathematics projects for secondary schools, all three of which commenced in 1969; the fourth project, Nuffield Science (also at secondary level), came later in 1972. As will be seen below, each programme was placed under the charge of a key personnel, while the implementation of all these projects as a whole was overseen by (later Datuk) Kum Boo, Director of Schools, and (later Datuk) Mohd Ali bin Ibrahim – the latter in charge of the new Science and Maths Unit in the Schools Division of the Ministry. Finally, a special Central Curriculum Committee was also set up under the chairmanship of Hamdan himself 'to plan, initiate, coordinate and implement curricula reforms and modernisation of the whole school system'. Nothing was left to chance.

21. This is, of course, looking at things from the perspective of the 'Malay Agenda'. At that time there abounded plenty of examples of the paucity of Malays in the science and technical fields, of which here two will suffice. In one particular year of the early 1960s out of 210 teacher trainees in their second year at the Teachers' Training College at Kuala Lumpur, only 19 were Malays, and out of 115 trainees in their first year there were only 8 Malays. Similarly, at the University of Malaya in 1966, only 2 Malays obtained an ordinary degree in Agricultural Science and 5 others honours degrees in Science.

22. Memo to Dato' Kum Boo, dated 10 June 1998. In fact, a good deal of this section on the *Projek Khas* is based on Haji Abu Hassan's memo just cited.

23. Mohd Ali (now Dato'), studied at the Victoria Institution, Kuala Lumpur, and got his science degree in Physics from Queensland University, Australia. He started the first science classes in the Malay-medium at Sultan Ismail College, Kota Bahru, Kelantan in the early 1960s, soon after his return from Australia, followed by a spell as Senior Science Master at the newly opened Alam Shah Residential School at Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. Immediately prior to



his appointment to the Schools Division to supervise the implementation of the new science programme, he had been (for one year) headmaster of Sekolah Tuanku Abdul Rahman (STAR) where despite his heavy administrative responsibilities, he had taught Physics in one of the Fifth Form science classes. Soon after his transfer to the Schools Division in the Ministry in 1968, he helped set up the Science and Maths Unit for the purpose of supervising and coordinating the general curricular reform programme, and became its first head. Ali, when attending a course at the East-West Center in Hawaii, had met Salinger on the island where the latter was engaged on instructing Peace Corps volunteers in the 'discovery method' for the teaching of science and agricultural science in Malaysia. Ali was immediately attracted by this approach, particularly in view of the fact that a recent report by the Federal Inspectorate had shown that the teaching of science in Malaysian primary schools was very poor, and that he himself was already thinking of developing new materials for the teaching of science subjects. Ali's ideas chimed in with those of Salinger who offered to assist in the development of Ali's project when he arrived in Malaysia.

24. Born 1930, Salinger sat at the age of 18 for his first degree in Zoology, at the University of California. However, his first job was as 'a flavour chemist' at Boston, Massachusetts. From this, he got a commission to set up a science course for a leading Connecticut school on lines which he was later to help introduce in Malaysia. New approaches and methods in science teaching became his forte during a period when a revolution was taking place in this field in the United States. In the mid-1950s he was at Ohio State University, first as Research Assistant, then suddenly as Director (the incumbent died unexpectedly) for a school science curriculum project. He by now had acquired a Master's degree in Chemistry (from the Wesleyan University, Connecticut) and a Ph.D. in Physics from Ohio itself. He then went on to the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, where he joined the School Science Curriculum Project and stayed for six years. The University of Illinois was a leader in curriculum reform, running simultaneously three projects inspired by the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) of the National Science Foundation. In the 1960s Salinger embarked on his role as the apostle of the discovery method outside the USA, moving first under Peace Corps auspices to Hawaii, Western Samoa and Tonga, though mostly at the College of Agricultural Science at Hilo, Hawaii, where he met Ali Ibrahim, who was attending a course in Honolulu, and as a result was all the more motivated to come to Malaysia. A six day visit to Kuala Lumpur became a six year stay during which he became deeply involved in Hamdan's initiatives to revolutionize the teaching of science and mathematics in Malaysian schools.

25. At this time the Ministry of Education was still housed in Federal House, almost opposite to the Dayabumi Complex in Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin in Kuala Lumpur.

26. In Salinger's own words, 'we discussed Ali Ibrahim's proposals over lunch in his small bungalow at the 6th Mile, Gombak (i.e. behind the old Lee Rubber Factory, now demolished and replaced by shop lots), - he was the first Malaysian I visited here. I introduced the idea of doing one standard at a time,

and armed with my analysis (i.e of current Malaysian science syllabi) of developing materials for teachers to better teach the materials they had, minus the errors, rather than introduce new materials to teachers who could not properly implement the existing curriculum. The *Projek Khas* was born. What were new were Teachers Guides directed towards classroom teaching and activities, and supporting apparatus.' (Comments to translator, dated April 2001.)

27. Originally these places were called 'Activity Centres' (*Pusat Kegiatan*), but their name was changed at the suggestion of Salinger in order to provide 'psychological support'; for similar reasons Salinger coined the term 'key personnel' for the US Peace Corps volunteers engaged on the Project – a term that was later extended to the Malaysian teachers who took over their place.

28. The Asia Foundation also provided an offset press which was put in the Science Centre (*Pusat Sains*) as well as training for its use, while the Ministry bore the operating and maintenance costs. The Asia Foundation, through its very supportive director in Kuala Lumpur, Larry Foreman, gave free copies of books at the Foundation, usually over-runs by major publishers. The Science Centre had Ali Yaakub, one of the team of science writers, as its librarian. This library eventually became the nucleus of the CDC Library when the CDC took over the Science Centre Building in Damansara in the 1970s. (Information from notes to the translator provided by Dato' Haji Rudin Salinger.)

29. They eventually landed up in England, where he successfully resumed his career as a teacher.

30. Haji Abu Hassan bin Ali, born in Perak, and in his thirties when he joined the Special Project, was a college-trained teacher. Prior to his appointment to the Project he had been head of science and mathematics at a local teachers' training college and already had written a number of science text books for primary and lower secondary schools\*. Salinger, who was virtually his mentor during the early days of the Project, found him an excellent colleague, creative, open-minded and receptive to ideas, and it was through Salinger's agency that Abu Hassan got the opportunity to go to the United States in the mid-1970s in order to spend one year taking his Master's degree. On his return, Abu Hassan returned to the Special Project, or more precisely to the now expanded Science Centre which he had helped establish in 1970. However, when the Special Project came to an end, he no longer continued at the CDC but was transferred to the Teacher Training Division under Ali Ibrahim who was now its Director, and remained in that Division until he retired in the late 1980s. In retirement, he has remained active – not only as a writer but also as a publisher of text books.

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\* A couple of these were *Nature Study in Malaya*, and *Sains Am* (i.e. 'General Science') written for lower secondary schools; the latter-named was published by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1962.

31. The Key Personnel were selected after the first three courses had been given by the writers of the courses themselves. After having received intensive training, the Key Personnel then conducted the courses on their own during weekends and during the school vacations. These courses became known as

'boarding school' courses (*kursus asrama penuh*), because they were held at selected schools around the country which had hostel accommodaion, which was used to house the ordinary school teachers attending the course.

32. The first courses were held at the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (STTI), Cheras, all of which were videoed by Salinger. The first course was 'all talk. No materials and no activities'. On the second course 'the materials appeared and were shown, but never touched by the participants'. After that, in each subsequent course general instructions were given, 'and then the participants were turned loose on the activities, everything needed being on the table.' (Comments, Salinger, op.cit.)

33. Abu Hassan surmises that prior to this meeting, which he addressed personally, a good number of the State Directors were somewhat sceptical of the feasibility of the whole scheme. However, at this special meeting practical steps were taken to make sure that things would work. Two key personnel for each State were identified for the next and subsequent workshops, and certain schools were selected to serve as the 'Centres of Excellence/*Pusat Kecermelangan* where local courses and lesson demonstrations were to be held and sample materials and equipment stored. The State Directors were also made to appoint coordinators in each of their respective States who would attend all workshops held and supervise the overall implementation of the scheme.

34. Salinger claims that the British experiments in devising 'discovery' techniques for teaching science were inspired by the work of the Physical Science Study Committee of the National Science Foundation of the USA. Van Praagh (see below) on the other hand, argues that the source of this new approach in science in Britain came from the stimulus of the great emphasis on and advances in scientific research during the Second World War. Be that as it may, the differences between the British and American approaches were ones of detail, not of principle.

35. In fact, the 'discovery method' had by this time become something of a buzz-word in educational circles, with a whole host of new science syllabi based on the approach emerging from various centres in the USA, Canada and Great Britain, so that there was an abundance of choice. The background to this sudden spurt in scientific education was the launching of Sputnik, the first manned craft to go into outer space, a Soviet (Russian) achievement which shook up scientific and technological circles in the West.

36. CREDO = Curriculum Renewal and Educational Development Overseas, set up in 1967 under the British Ministry of Overseas Development. In 1971 its name was changed to CEDO or Centre for Educational Development Overseas, after being merged with two similar bodies.

37. Born in 1909, van Praagh, a brilliant science teacher with a Ph.D, from Cambridge and a Diploma in Education from London, spent the first 28 years of his schoolmastering career at the prestigious English public school of Christ's Hospital, with some wartime service doing research work for the British Royal Navy in between. His interest in teaching was combined with an interest in research, and after the end of the Second World War he became (rather like

Salinger) an apostle of the 'discovery approach' to learning. Perhaps the first textbook based on the discovery approach ever to be written was produced by him at the instance of a publisher friend of his. Titled *Chemistry by Discovery*, it was first published in 1948. Incidentally, the Nuffield Science Teaching project, based on the discovery method, was launched in Britain in 1963. In this way he became involved from the early 1960s in the Nuffield Science Project, which led to his becoming a global traveller pushing his wares. But of the 18 countries where he operated, he liked Malaysia the best.

38. M.P. Prabhakar (see fn 40 below) comments that the planned visits to the trial schools did enable valuable feed-back to be obtained at grassroots level, which was then used to overcome local problems and further strengthen the programme. (note to the translator, dated 9 March 2001).

39. Kum Boo was born in 1924 in Kuala Lumpur and had his education at the Victoria Institution there. He was member of the batch of post-war scholar to attend the re-opened Raffles College in 1946, graduating with a Diploma in Science in 1949, and went back there for his Honours Degree in 1952. The following year he successfully graduated and was one of the seven new Education Officers appointed in that year. His first posting was as Senior Science Master and then Headmaster at the English College, Johor Bahru; in 1959 he was transferred as Headmaster to Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Setar, where he remained till 1961. In the 1960s he held the post of State Director, one after the other in Kedah, Johor, Penang and Sarawak until 1969, with a break in 1963-4 to go to the North-West University, Chicago to take a course in Educational Administration. In 1969, Kum Boo was appointed Director of Schools, a post he held until his retirement in 1978. In that capacity he worked very closely with Hamdan, who reposed great trust in him and who used him as a 'trouble-shooter' in coping with the multitude of problems which arose in dealing with postings in general and the handling of expatriate teachers in particular.

40. Born in Johor Bahru, Johor in 1934, the son of a schoolmaster, Prabhakar took his degree in Zoology at the Chelsea School of Science and Technology (now part of the University of London) in 1958 and took a Postgraduate Certificate in Education at Hull the following year; his first posting was in 1959 as science teacher, Anderson School, Ipoh; headmaster of Tengku Bahriah School, Terengganu, 1968-70; posted to the new science and maths unit of the Schools Division in 1970; principal of the Secondary Science School, Cheras (Sekolah Menengah Sains, Cheras) 1973-6; then to the Curriculum Development Centre/CDC (*Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum*), till his retirement as Deputy Director in 1989. He was also concurrently State Science Supervisor in Perak and Terengganu when serving in schools in those two states respectively. He worked closely with van Praagh on the Nuffield Science Project and has received very complimentary mention in van Praagh's autobiography, *Seeing It Through: Travels of a Science Teacher*, Crawley, Frogmal Publishers, 1988.

41. Despite the formidable obstacles of inadequate facilities, scarcity of local science teachers and escalating costs, Modern Science and Maths was also

introduced into Sabah and Sarawak during this period. In these two states conditions were very different to those in the Peninsula in terms of infrastructure, facilities and personnel. To begin with, there were very few secondary schools in Sarawak and even fewer in Sabah. In Sabah, a way around this problem was found by Joseph, the State Science Supervisor (a science graduate from India) by setting up mobile science laboratories which toured the primary schools.

42. van Praagh, op.cit.

43. For the first three years these visits were taken up by exposure courses in Nuffield Science for Malaysian teachers. These courses lasted around two weeks with about thirty teachers in each course, and held at a large Kuala Lumpur school, at the Malay Teachers College, Glugor, Penang and, subsequently, at schools in Sabah and Sarawak. After the first years they also held 'writing sessions', collaborating with selected Malaysian teachers in adapting Nuffield Science for use in the fourth and fifth forms of Malaysian schools. van Praagh, *ibid*.

44. van Praagh, *ibid*.

45. This was achieved through discussions between the Malaysian Federal Examinations Syndicate and the Cambridge University Local Examinations Syndicate.

46. Incidentally, following the 13 May Incident, from the early 1970s onwards twelve fully residential schools catering primarily for the science stream and known as Science Secondary Schools (*Sekolah Menengah Sains*) were constructed in most states of the Peninsula (*viz.* Johor (2), Kedah (1), Kelantan (2), Pahang (2), Perak (2), Perlis (1), Selangor (1) and Terengganu (1)). van Praagh was 'surprised at the speed with which they were built and established'. As for the recruitment of teachers from overseas, that is another story which is touched upon in Chapter Ten.

47. van Praagh, op.cit.



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TEN  
*Professional Head - 2:  
The Achievement*

The introduction of the revolutionary Modern Science and Mathematics syllabi into the curricula of the Malaysian schools system may be considered to have been one of Hamdan's major contributions while he held the post of professional head of the Ministry of Education. However, as Prabhakar<sup>1</sup> has correctly observed, while Hamdan :

saw science and mathematics education as crucial to any effort to produce the manpower needs of the future...yet he believed in the holistic form of education and proceeded to devote some of his energies to the other subjects and aspects of education. We realized that just as he was fully engaged with the science task force, he was just as busy with other working groups....

#### **Putting Technical and Vocational Education on the Map**

Typical of this 'holistic' approach to education was the active encouragement that Hamdan gave to the effort to expand and upgrade technical and vocational education so that it took its rightful place in the national education system. This was because, as Hamdan fully realized, with the progress being made in the planned diversification of the economy, technical and vocational education was becoming a top priority<sup>2</sup>.

In 1966, when he took over the Ministry, technical and vocational education, in the words of a foreign observer, were still 'neglected'. A Technical and Vocational Unit of the Schools Division had been set up in

the Ministry in 1964, headed by John Richards, a civil engineer borrowed from the teaching staff of the Technical College, Kuala Lumpur. The Technical College itself was the only institution of its kind in the Peninsula at the time<sup>5</sup>. In 1966 it had a total enrolment of 680 students, a figure which it was hoped would rise to 1,000 over the next couple of years. Apart from this, the provision for technical and vocational education in the Peninsula in general was confined to about a dozen junior technical or trade schools and one secondary technical school - all legacies of the colonial era - plus, as a result of the recommendations of the Razak and Rahman Talib Reports, about a dozen rural trade schools known as 'continuation' schools, and classes in technical subjects in certain secondary schools. Provision for the continuation of technical and vocational education at higher levels still barely existed at all in the national system of education<sup>6</sup>. In short, the state of technical and vocational education in the country was nothing to write home about, and lagged woefully behind national needs, actual and potential. Indeed, despite a long history in the Peninsula going back to the last decade of the nineteenth century, technical and vocational education had always been the cinderella of the educational establishment<sup>7</sup>.

The importance of technical and vocational education for meeting the human resource needs of manufacturing and industry, commerce and handicrafts was fully recognized in the Razak Report, which laid down the guidelines for its future growth and expansion. However, during the first decade of independence, the progress made was slow. This was mainly because of shortage of properly qualified teachers, resources, facilities and funds. As a result, on a rather *ad hoc* basis the management of existing technical and vocational institutions came mainly to depend on the support provided by the Colombo Plan<sup>8</sup>, through which a great quantity of books and workshop equipment were supplied, and teachers recruited from Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Nevertheless, the first steps towards broadening and raising the status of technical and vocational education were already under way. The establishment of the Technical and Vocational Unit in the Ministry in 1964, as already noted, was one of them. The introduction at the start of the following year in all secondary schools of the new comprehensive curriculum, also based on one of the recommendations of the Rahman

Talib Report, was another<sup>7</sup>. As the term implies, the comprehensive curriculum, both in Britain where the concept originated and the schools using it were known as comprehensive schools. In the Malaysian context, they provided a broad range of subjects (academic, vocational and technical)<sup>8</sup>, and with flexible options, designed to cater for the diverse aptitudes and abilities of the students attending them. Their introduction coincided with the implementation of the nine years of continuous education (i.e. six years in primary and three years in lower secondary) to which every Malaysian boy and girl was now entitled by law.

This new system obviously affected the role of the trade schools, in particular that of the continuation schools at *kampung* level which, designed to offer three years training in handicrafts and the industrial arts, catered for rural Malay students who had completed their basic education at primary level. With the introduction of the comprehensive school concept, they now became absorbed into the regular school system and converted into normal lower secondary schools.

By 1968, the first batch of schoolchildren to have completed their first three years under the comprehensive syllabus and to have passed the LCE/SRP, were ready to continue their education up to Fifth Form level. Now, for the first time, they had a choice between joining the academic or vocational streams<sup>9</sup>. Those who were selected for the vocational stream were able to join the new secondary vocational schools which prepared them for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokesyenal (SPMV), while those in the academic stream took the normal MCE/SPM examinations. Having taken the SPMV which was held for the first time in 1969, they could then proceed either into a five year apprenticeship in various industries or (if their results were good enough) continue with their studies at a yet higher level, at the technical colleges and polytechnics for diploma courses which slowly emerged, or go to the new University of Technology for their degrees<sup>10</sup>. In tandem with this great extension of its responsibilities, the Ministry's Technical and Vocational Unit was now upgraded to a Division.

In any case, the development of technical and vocational education received a powerful impetus as a result of the promulgation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in early 1971 in the wake of the tragic Thirteenth of May Incident two years previously, and was to receive a still greater



boost with the fresh emphasis on science and technology following Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's accession to power as Prime Minister in 1981.

The prime aim of the NEP was to abolish poverty and restructure society so as to break the identification of race with economic function in order that the distribution of the resources of the country could be enjoyed by all.

This process involves the modernization of rural life, a rapid and balanced growth of urban activities and the creation of a Malay commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation, so that Malays and other indigenous peoples will become full partners in all aspects of the economic life of the nation.<sup>11</sup>

Within the context of the NEP, one of the Ministry's most pressing tasks was clearly to expedite the creation of more facilities for the provision of technical and vocational education, particularly at the higher levels where no such provision had hitherto existed. The need for this expansion had already been felt when in 1969 a first batch of 1,329 candidates sat for the new SPMV examination. This marked the start of an increasing demand at upper secondary level for the technical and vocational streams, leading to a crash programme to build more secondary vocational and secondary technical schools. As a result, by 1974 there were already eighteen secondary vocational schools in existence in the Peninsula with a student population of 7,440, including two for agriculture and five for domestic science<sup>12</sup>. By this time, too, a start had been made in Sabah where there were two secondary vocational schools, one at Likas, Kota Kinabalu, (funded by the New Zealand Government under the Colombo Plan), and the other at Sandakan, and in Sarawak where there was a secondary vocational school at Kuching and a school catering for commercial studies at Sibul. As for secondary technical schools by the end of 1974 there were six, all of which – apart from the original Technical School in Kuala Lumpur – were established between 1972 and 1974<sup>13</sup>.

This progress in the expansion of technical and vocational education was enhanced yet further by the establishment of the first polytechnics in the country. The pioneer was the Ungku Omar at Ipoh opened in 1969, followed by the Kuantan Polytechnic in 1976. Finally, the process of

upgrading technical and technological education in the country was capped by the foundation of the University of Technology, Malaysia in 1972<sup>14</sup>.

By 1976, therefore, the year which saw Hamdan's retirement as Director-General of Education<sup>15</sup>, technical and vocational education had come into its own and was set to assume a still greater importance in the ensuing decades. Hamdan's own role in relation to this development and expansion was somewhat different to the part he played in the launching of the Modern Science and Mathematics scheme. In the case of the latter, this had been introduced very much as a result of his own initiative and drive in the face of a considerable amount of scepticism and opposition from various quarters. As far as the upgrading of technical and vocational education was concerned, on the other hand, the need for this had long been acknowledged and plans had already been long laid. In these circumstances, the importance of Hamdan's role was that of the facilitator. He gave it his enthusiastic and unstinted support, without which things might well have been allowed to proceed at a much more leisurely pace.

Incidentally, Hamdan was characteristically quick off the mark to turn the new emphasis on technical and vocational education to the Ministry's advantage by persuading a considerable number of engineers – construction, survey and the like – to join the teaching profession. This move was expedient in the light of the dearth of professionals in these fields who were employed as teachers. As was the case with the MCS officers recruited by Aminuddin, it provided similar benefits for a number of those who joined at an early stage, because they came to hold high positions in the educational hierarchy<sup>16</sup>.

### **A Matter of Logistics**

Despite his involvement in the Modern Science and Mathematics Programme and in the expansion and upgrading of technical and vocational education, described above, these two areas still represented only a portion of Hamdan's responsibilities as (from 1970) Director-General of Education. For he was in professional charge of the largest and most complex of all the Ministries of the Government, whose

activities touched the lives of almost half the nation's total population<sup>17</sup>. As Director-General he presided over twelve Divisions of the Ministry<sup>18</sup>. Two of these, the Educational Planning and Research Development (EPRD) and the Technical and Vocational Divisions, had their origins in the early 1960s but only came into their own during his tenure of office as Chief Education Adviser/Director-General of Education, while three other important units, including the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), the Textbook Bureau and the Committee for Schoolchildrens' Health, also came into being within that same period.

Hamdan obviously was not able to play the same immediate and intensive role in the affairs of all the departments of the Ministry that he did in some, although by means of a system of co-ordinating committees such as the Central Curriculum Committee, he was able to keep a watch over them all<sup>19</sup>. His main attention was naturally focussed on the professional side – service matters came under the purview of the Ministry's Secretary-General (formerly styled Permanent Secretary) – of the Ministry's work, and his particular interest was in those aspects which affected the Malay Agenda. Hamdan was also active where professional help from overseas was required, because he had already gained a reputation as being the Ministry's most effective diplomat where handling foreign cultural and educational organizations were concerned<sup>20</sup>.

### **The Gestation of the CDC and Other Special Concerns**

The most significant of the new additions to the Ministry during Hamdan's tenure of office was no doubt the establishment of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) already alluded to above. It was also the one in which he was most personally involved. This involvement was a direct consequence of his interest in the Special Project at primary school level and the Modern Malaysian Science and Mathematics programmes discussed in the previous chapter, which he had done so much to incorporate into the national system of education. The link was reinforced in the person of the CDC's Chief Technical Adviser, Richard Salinger, who was appointed to this new post in an *ad hoc* manner by Hamdan himself<sup>21</sup>.

As its name indicates, the CDC's main function was to deal with curriculum development<sup>22</sup>. Its scope was not confined merely to science and mathematics but was extended to all fields. However, in their approach and methodology used in the formulation of new curricula, Salinger and his Malaysian associates<sup>23</sup> drew heavily on the experience gained and the techniques employed during the fashioning the Special Project and Modern Science and Mathematics courses. One area of the CDC's operations which was close to Hamdan's heart included the units of the CDC that was set up to develop the methodology and content of language courses, especially for the teaching of the National Language and English, which in the Malay context really represented the two sides of the same coin<sup>24</sup>.

The CDC's inception can be traced to that day in 1971 when Salinger was appointed its Chief Technical Adviser and started to work on the blue-print under Murad Mohd Noor at the EPRD<sup>25</sup>. Its planning took up two years of discussion and deliberation at the highest levels of the Ministry as well as with outside bodies, in particular UNESCO and the World Bank<sup>26</sup> and with other relevant bodies as the objectives, role and *modus operandi* of the new centre were worked out. Establishing these criteria was not so simple as it sounds, because different departments had different approaches as to what the role of the CDC should be, and great care had to be taken to avoid the overlapping or duplication of functions.

Finally, at the beginning of 1973 the CDC formally came into being and was housed in what was now the Science Centre and the site of the original Special Project in the increasingly dilapidated wooden premises of the old Kuala Lumpur Technical School. These quarters were barely adequate at the beginning and three years later, by which time the new headquarters nearby off Jalan Duta were supposed to be ready, they had become unbearably cramped. As it transpired, the new buildings were not ready on schedule for Merdeka Day in 1976 for reasons described by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, then Deputy Prime Minister, as 'being unrealistic' in a testy minute on the subject. However, as a result of his minute, bureaucratic bumbling was dramatically cured and the CDC was housed in its new headquarters by the end of the same year<sup>27</sup>.

### **Handling Problems of Health and and Making Use of the Media**

Two other aspects of the Ministry's work which aroused Hamdan's close interest lay in the somewhat disparate fields of health and nutrition on the one hand, and of education through the media on the other. Hamdan was a great believer in the old adage that a healthy mind resides in a healthy body, a conviction for which there was ample evidence in support provided by the generally poor conditions of health prevalent amongst schoolchildren in rural areas, and the obvious correlation between this and their poor performance in their studies at school. So whenever Hamdan paid visits to rural schools, he always stressed the great importance of health in the classroom, for:

poor health, poverty and backwardness in learning are three important matters which are closely related to one another, which form a vicious circle which paralyses all attempts to progress. If health is poor, a person cannot do well in his studies, and if he is not well educated, he will definitely end up by being poor.

Given his concern with the health issue, Hamdan gave every encouragement to the moves which were being made to tackle the problem amongst students in a systematic, scientific manner. In 1967, a Joint Committee for Schoolchildren's Health was set up to overcome the lack of vitamin-rich foods available to needy primary and secondary school students age<sup>28</sup>. This was followed in 1968 with the incorporation into the primary school syllabus of a School Health Programme, to which teachers were exposed through in-service courses. The reason for its introduction at primary school level was because it was considered essential to instruct students at an early stage in the hope that when they grew up they would have an awareness of the importance of good hygienic habits later on<sup>29</sup>.

In 1969 the Committee launched its Applied Food and Nutrition Programme, aimed at disseminating information and at building up a sensible attitude to food and eating habits. This programme was successfully implemented through classroom teaching, the keeping of school gardens and the carrying out of a scheme for supplyig additional nutrients to their daily diet. Then, in 1976 a School Supplementary

Feeding Programme was also introduced, aimed at providing a balanced supplementary daily diet for needy primary school pupils<sup>30</sup>. In other words, by the time that Hamdan left the Ministry a good health and nutrition programme had been put in place.

As for education through the media, Hamdan's interest in this field was derived from his own direct involvement in the radio campaign against illiteracy when he was headmaster at Parit in the mid-1950s. The first steps to start a schools education service through the media had been taken in 1966<sup>31</sup>, but Malaysian TV was only established in 1973 and nation-wide coverage was not achieved until the late 1970s.

A proposal to establish a regular educational TV service was raised in 1969, based on the results of two pioneer projects which had been carried out in 1965 and 1966, in which Chong Seck Chim had been involved, but because of economic pressures the proposal lapsed. Nevertheless, at Hamdan's specific request in 1970, another study was carried out by Alan Hancock of the Centre of Educational Television Overseas in London. Hancock's Report proposed that an educational TV service be established by merging the existing TV, radio and the Ministry's Audio-Visual Aid Unit (i.e. Unit Pandang Dengar/APD) systems. On 19 June 1972 the TV Education Service for schools in Peninsular Malaysia was officially launched by the Prime Minister, Tun Haji Abdul Razak. On Hancock's advice, radio broadcasts to schools and TV Education (i.e. TV Pendidikan), as well as the Audio-Visual Aids Unit of the Ministry which had been in existence since the 1950s, were combined under one administration by the Education Media Service Division (i.e. Bahagian Perkhidmatan Sebaran Pendidikan/PSP) which had also been established in 1972 with the redoubtable Chong Seck Chim as its first Director. The PSP developed rapidly and by 1975 5,500 television and 2,200 electricity generators (for rural schools which did not have electricity supply) had been distributed to the schools concerned. The number of programmes and of staff involved steadily increased and on 30 August 1976, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Minister of Education, officially launched TV Pendidikan broadcasts to Sabah and Sarawak<sup>32</sup>.

Once again the successful launching and swift evolution of the services provided by the Education Media Division owed much to Hamdan's persistent prodding, pressure, and personal interest.

## **Head-hunting for Teachers**

Two basic problems facing any system of education and its organizers are those of finding the money and the teachers. Hamdan, as Director-General of Education, faced both, but the most difficult one from his point of view was that of finding the teachers. Inevitably, as school enrolments and facilities, etc. expanded each year, so did the costs. Nevertheless, where money was concerned, Hamdan was completely philosophical, and like royalty left it to the appropriate quarters to find and handle the funds. He was fortunate in that the nation's founding fathers never questioned the over-riding importance of education for national development, and therefore in successive five year plans the Ministry of Education received the lion's share of the national Budget allocations<sup>33</sup>.

However, when it came to meeting the ever-increasing demand for teachers of all sorts to keep pace with the rapid expansion of new schools and courses in all fields and at all levels, such an off-hands style was impossible. On the other hand, Hamdan had been a teacher himself, and had always been aware of the importance of ensuring an adequate supply of teachers of good quality and of constantly upgrading their quality and effectiveness. So this was another area in which he showed the keenest interest, and in some instances was able to play a direct role.

Finding and recruiting teachers for ordinary posts at primary and secondary level was basically no problem for the Ministry, even though the demand grew larger each year. It was just a matter of making sure that adequate training facilities were available, and this was successfully done<sup>34</sup>. The real problem was to find enough teachers who could teach all subjects in the National Language as it became the sole medium of instruction in all save Chinese and Tamil primary schools from 1970 onwards, especially where the new courses in intergrated science and modern mathematics were concerned. In these particular fields in the late 1960s and 1970s there were simply not enough suitably-trained Malaysian teachers available, and recourse had to be had once more to recruiting teachers in these subjects from overseas.

Provisionally, overcoming this problem was made easier by a combination of favourable circumstances at the time. Hamdan's own

experience in the Scholarships and Training Division in the earlier days, and the contacts that he had variously made during his trips abroad also stood him in good stead. As a result the classrooms of many Malaysian schools from the late 1960s to the early 1980s harboured teachers of a wide range of nationalities – Americans, Australians, British, Canadians, Germans, New Zealanders, Indonesians and Japanese.

The favourable circumstances alluded to lay in the fact that the 1960s saw the birth of a rash of officially-sponsored organizations in developed countries, designed to provide selected volunteers as teachers and technicians in educational and other developmental projects in the Third World. The pace-maker amongst all these, associated with the Kennedy era, was the US Peace Corps which was to provide the largest number of teachers for use in Malaysian schools as stand-ins especially for English, science and mathematics, until the shortfall in local teachers could be overcome. There were similar organizations such as the Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) of Britain, which played very much the same role, the Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA), the Japanese Volunteer Association, and so on. The establishment of links with these bodies and negotiating their services in Malaysian schools was made all the easier in many cases because of contacts that Hamdan had established earlier in the USA, Canada, Japan and Great Britain.

Two other political circumstances also yielded educational dividends. The first of these was the ending of Confrontation with Indonesia in 1966, which immediately paved the way for the re-forging of relations and enhanced co-operation between Malaysia and Indonesia. In fact, Hamdan himself participated in a three-man mission which went to Jakarta in 1967 in the wake of the signing by the two countries of the Bangkok Accord of August the previous year. Hamdan's role, of course, was to explore avenues of co-operation in the educational and cultural fields with his Indonesian opposite number, Bapa H. Soemantri, the Secretary-General of the Indonesian Ministry of Education. Out of this meeting and subsequent discussions, a good number of Malaysian students got the opportunity to take their degrees in medicine, engineering and other professional fields at well-established Indonesian universities. On the other hand, Malaysia was given a free hand to recruit



Indonesian teachers in science and mathematics who could fill the many posts vacant for Malay-medium teachers in Malaysian schools<sup>35</sup>.

The other chance of fate which turned out to the good advantage of the Ministry was the British decision, announced in 1968, to withdraw all its armed forces from Malaysian soil by 1970 – a decision brought about primarily by economic circumstances but most welcome for political reasons in UMNO circles. To soften the blow of the economic repercussions of this withdrawal<sup>36</sup>, a programme of economic aid under the heading of the Anglo-Malaysian Economic Cooperation (AMEC) was set up. Under this scheme, the Ministry of Education was able to recruit British teachers in Science and Mathematics to help tide over the shortage of properly qualified local teachers to teach the new Modern Science and Mathematics in Malaysian schools.

While Hamdan played his usual role as facilitator, the brunt of the work fell on the Schools Division of the Ministry, in particular on its Head, Kum Boo, who was to become very adept at handling the often complicated requirements of the expatriate teachers<sup>37</sup>.

Another invaluable source of input into the Malaysian system came through the regional grouping known as the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) under whose auspices a programme for providing centres of education in different fields was organized and worked out between the participating member states (i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand). Malaysia was given the responsibility of establishing a centre for the teaching of Science and Mathematics, which became known as RECSAM (i.e. the Regional Educational Centre for Science and Mathematics) and was established at the old Teachers' Training College, at Glugor, Penang<sup>38</sup>.

### **RECSAM and May the Thirteenth, 1969**

The establishment of RECSAM in Malaysia did not come about without a little bit of drama. By May 1969, it had already been agreed in principle that RECSAM should be set up in Penang. All that was left to be done was for Dr. Jacob, the chief of USAID, to come to Kuala Lumpur to meet the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and get through him the formal approval of the Malaysian Government for the

establishment of RECSAM at Penang. This involved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a contract by the Malaysian Government before USAID in Washington could disburse its financial assistance for the project which amounted to the tidy sum of half a million US dollars.

Accordingly, in mid-May 1969 Dr. Jacob arrived in Singapore on his way to Kuala Lumpur, and took the opportunity to attend a seminar on education organised by INNOTECH (one of the SEAMEO centres) in Singapore, to which leading educationists from the region had been invited to attend. The same seminar also brought Hamdan, Kum Boo and Khoo Eng Choon to Singapore as the Malaysian delegates appointed to attend it. Hamdan's party arrived on 12 May, and as fate would have it the INNOTECH Seminar began on the next day which witnessed the start of the notorious 13 May Incident. Nevertheless, despite the mayhem in Kuala Lumpur, the seminar carried on its business for its full three days without interruption, each delegation, including the very worried Malaysian one, presenting their respective country reports related to their experiences, successes and failures in implementing various aspects of educational technology. On the third day, at the end of it all, as Hamdan describes it, 'all the participants left for home with lots of new ideas and proposals for action and implementation...', except, of course, for the three Malaysians and Dr. Jacob, who found themselves stranded in Singapore, unable to get back to Kuala Lumpur because all road, rail and air links with the Peninsula were cut off.

For Hamdan and his two colleagues this enforced prolongation of their stay was trying – what was happening back home? – inconvenient and uncomfortable<sup>19</sup>. For Dr. Jacob the delay threatened to be a disaster for his mission. He feared that unless the Malaysian Government signed the relevant documents before the end of the month, so that he could return to Washington on time to obtain the vital US\$500,000/-, Malaysia might forfeit this financial aid from Washington, and so kill the RECSAM Project.

This is where Kum Boo demonstrated his trouble-shooting skills. He persuaded Dr. Jacob that Hamdan had the authority to sign the necessary documents on behalf of the Permanent Secretary (and the Malaysian Government), and then succeeded in persuading Hamdan that in the

circumstances Hamdan, as the most senior Malaysian official on the spot, had the authority to do so. Hamdan, not for the first time ignored the possible consequences, took the plunge, and RECSAM was saved.

In all, Hamdan was very grateful to the foreign experts from many lands who not only gave their full commitment to any project that had been planned but who were also sensitive to the situation in the country and to all the problems which had accumulated since Independence. He was very conscious of the fact that until such time that this country could produce its own experts, it would also have to depend on foreign help and expertise in order to raise the standard of Malaysian education, and he was grateful that there were those who were available and willing to do so.

### **Problems, Resolved and Unresolved**

Traumatic though it was for the nation, the 13 May Incident of 1969<sup>40</sup> turned out to be little more than a hiccough in the affairs of the Ministry of Education and did nothing to deflect the implementation of the national education policy as already laid down. In fact, if anything it made the implementation smoother, since 'sensitive issues'<sup>41</sup> were no longer open to public discussion and extremist views were thereby excluded.

A problem which Hamdan found more difficult to overcome were negative reactions amongst a good number of parents and students alike to the implementation of the new approaches to the teaching of science and mathematics. While the Special Project at primary level had been a great success from the very beginning, it was not such plain sailing when it came to the implementation of Modern Science and Mathematics at secondary level. With such a large-scale exercise, there were bound to be shortcomings and inadequacies – sometimes unsuitable locations, sometimes inadequate funds, sometimes the problem of trained teachers who had not mastered the content of their training.

More basic and harder to rectify was the general attitude shared by teachers, parents and students alike that it was the examinations that mattered, and that established teaching methods (including rote learning) were reliable and should not be interfered with. Some students whose

progress with Nuffield Science he was checking on, told van Praagh that they felt that they were being treated like guinea-pigs<sup>42</sup>. Many parents felt uneasy with the new approach because they feared lest it would cause their children to fare badly in their tests.

Hamdan also encountered similar attitudes expressed in different form amongst many rural Malay students towards their subjects now that the National Language had become the main medium of instruction. On more than one occasion he felt constrained to warn Malay students in his speeches not to take things for granted:

It is necessary to stress here that the implementation of Malay as the medium of instruction does not alter to the slightest degree the contents of the school syllabus. We are still placing our emphasis on the teaching of science, mathematics and technical subjects. Malay students continue to face difficulty and display certain weaknesses in these subjects and the way round these difficulties depends on command of language only to a very limited extent. A person who has a good command of Malay is not necessarily a person who is good in science and mathematics, even though both these subjects are taught in Malay. This must always be borne in mind to avoid losing all you possess merely to win the prize.

Nevertheless, despite all the efforts, planning and strategies which were essayed, Malay students continued to lag far behind in the fields of science and mathematics, and right up till his last day at the Ministry Hamdan never ceased to exhort both parents and pupils to change their mind-sets, overcome their lack of self-confidence, and take full advantage of the facilities and opportunities to progress that the Government (through the Ministry) was offering them. As he put it to the parents gathered at the National Secondary School at Kuala Besut, Terengganu in 1973:

While Ministry officials and State Education Department officers, heads of schools and teachers are going all out to improve the Malay performance in that subject [i.e. science], the success rate achieved satisfies no-one. I feel that the time has arrived for parents and students, besides blaming the Ministry of Education, to pause and think for a moment as to what steps you should all take in order to enable your children to do well in science and mathematics.

He always made a point of harping on this theme whenever he toured the rural areas because that was where Malay students performed worst, particularly in science and mathematics.

Another source of great concern to Hamdan was the weakness of Malay students in English. Although Malay itself had been the medium of instruction in all except Chinese and Tamil schools from Form One upwards since 1970, English remained as the most important second language at both primary and secondary levels. The problem had its roots at primary school level. Ineffective teaching methods, the use of teachers with inadequate command of English and their inability to make proper use of the resources supplied were among the factors involved. Nevertheless, these and other factors such as shortage of teachers, etc. were not insurmountable.

The real problem was, as it so often is, one of attitudes. The negative attitude of students and parents who did not take English seriously could not be changed overnight. In his campaign to drive home the importance of English for their own future Hamdan frequently pointed out the consequences of neglecting that language. In an address delivered pointedly enough at the Sultan Idris Training College, Tanjong Malim in November 1970 on the occasion of the first anniversary of Malay becoming the medium of instruction in primary English-medium schools, Hamdan stressed that:

...with the implementation of measures to change the medium of instruction in English-medium schools, [it is supposed] that we have thereby given notice that English is no longer of any importance. But this interpretation is not only mistaken, but also harmful to the progress and development of our education. English will continue to occupy an important place in this country as the second language and as the tool for exploring new fields of knowledge.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, Hamdan ordered his officers to go all out to improve the teaching and learning of English, especially in national (i.e. Malay-medium) schools. New approaches and methods for achieving this end were first put into operation in 1969 and 1970, the strategy being to ensure that the standard of English taught in former English-medium schools was maintained and that at the same time the

standard of the teaching and learning of English in the national schools was raised. A special committee consisting of experts in the teaching of English as a second language was set up with the prime task of checking and revising the syllabi for the teaching of English at primary and secondary school levels. One of the proposals made by this committee was that English language teachers should attend refresher courses at the end of each school term. Starting in 1970 regular courses of this kind were held, while senior lecturers were sent for training at the Regional English Language Training Centre (RELC) in Singapore. Another move was to increase the number of teaching hours for English, starting with the lower standards taking between 300 to 360 minutes a week. Hamdan hoped that by increasing the amount of time allocated for the subject with other measures besides, English would not be neglected. 'I want to see more students from the national stream sitting for English Language Paper 2 or English Syllabus X in the SPM', he told those present at the Speech and Prize-giving Day of the Bukit Mertajam Science Secondary School in July 1975.

The difficulties associated with encouraging Malay students to take English seriously formed part of a larger syndrome of backwardness amongst rural Malays in particular which was a source of great concern to Hamdan. The problem became very apparent in the wake of the abolition of the MSSEE in 1964. At the same time, automatic promotion into secondary schools which was its corollary led to a distinct slackening of teaching standards in the primary schools, since there was no longer any formal examination to serve as a hurdle to be overcome at the end of the primary school level.

As Director-General of Education, Hamdan felt that this new culture of irresponsibility and lack of commitment had to be curbed as quickly as possible. After a protracted period of brainstorming through discussions, workshops, proposals and input from parents and the general public as well, the conclusion reached was that remedial teaching was essential for students who were weak in the basics (i.e. in reading, writing and arithmetic), and that it was vital to have some means of assessment of the progress being made by primary school students in their studies as a replacement for the late MSSEE. Accordingly in 1967 the Standard Five Assessment Test (*Ujian Penilaian Darjah Lima*) came into being for all

schools. On the basis of its results, schools were expected to carry out additional classes where necessary in order to correct student weaknesses while they were still at primary level<sup>11</sup>.

Another side-effect of automatic promotion was that a number of students who could neither read nor write now got admitted into secondary schools. Alongside this, there was an alarming increase in the number of schoolchildren who dropped out of the schools system altogether before they had completed their nine years under the comprehensive system. This problem was serious enough for an official enquiry to be held to go into its causes and propose remedies. This resulted in the setting up of a Committee to go into the drop-out problem, which was chaired by Dato' Murad Mohd Noor. The findings of the Murad Report which came out in 1973, confirmed some of Hamdan's worst fears. Almost one third (i.e. 30%) of primary school students never reached Form One in secondary school, and identified poverty and teachers' attitudes as being the two main factors involved<sup>12</sup>. Apart from coming out with these home-truths, the Report was of seminal importance in terms of the recommendations it made, which had far-reaching and generally beneficial consequences. More effective measures to promote the health of rural school-children was one of them. The massive textbook loans schemes which ensured that the poorest pupils in the lands would be able to obtain the complete range of textbook materials that they required was another. The policy of closing down small schools in isolated areas and opening local residential schools at strategic district centres, thus saving funds and securing better quality teaching, was a third. In all, the Report powerfully reinforced the policies which the Ministry was already pursuing with regard to allocating greater resources to primary and rural schools and on mounting literacy campaigns aimed at covering all students, not just the brilliant few.

### **Trips Abroad**

Busy enough as Hamdan was at home in Malaysia, one of his duties as head of the professional educational service was to accompany the Minister whenever he went overseas to attend international conferences on educational and cultural matters, especially those organized by

UNESCO and the Commonwealth Education Commission (CEC). As a result, not a year went by in which Hamdan did not go abroad to visit some country or another in connection with his official duties. For instance, between 1966 and 1970, quite apart from the visits to Africa described below, Hamdan went to Jakarta (twice) in 1967; to India and Pago-Pago (US Samoa) in 1968; to Tokyo, Manila and New Delhi in 1969; and to Tokyo again in 1970. All these trips abroad were made at the tax payers expense, but tax-payers could rest assured that they got their money's worth, because given Hamdan's dedicated and workaholic temperament, he did not waste a minute of his time on frivolity when he was overseas.

Amongst these various sallies abroad, Hamdan found two trips which he made to Africa during his first couple of years as Chief Education Adviser as being particularly memorable. The first, in fact, took place when he had hardly been in office for more than a few months. This was when he was obliged to form part of a Ministry delegation to travel to Egypt, led by the Minister of the day, Mohd. Khir Johari. Hamdan found the visit to Egypt particularly interesting because of its Islamic, cultural and personal associations (i.e. as the scene of his father's religious education in the 1890s), besides its importance from the educational point of view. The purpose of the visit was to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding between the Malaysian and Egyptian Ministries of Education by which Malaysian students in secondary schools would be enabled to take tertiary level courses at the famous Al-Azhar University, the University of Cairo and other recognized institutions of higher learning in Egypt. There were also provisions for other types of educational and cultural cooperation, including of lecturers and teachers. The visit took two weeks, during which the delegation – which included Walter Ayathurai from the Ministry of External Affairs, and (Now Dato' Paduka) Wan Mahmood of the Selangor State Secretariat, along with Tan Sri Yaacob bin Abdul Latif, the Malaysian Ambassador to Egypt at the time – saw all the sights in and around Cairo, including the Pyramids, Al-Azhar University and the capital's principal museums and antiquities, and also were taken up the Nile to Luxor (with its famous temples and tombs) and the controversial Aswan Dam, then in process of construction.



Two years later Hamdan had the opportunity to visit West Africa in order to attend the Commonwealth Education Commission Conference which was held at Lagos, Nigeria that year (1968). The Malaysian delegation, once again led by Khir Johari as Minister, was quite large, though the official contingents from Australia, Britain, Canada, India, and Pakistan were yet larger. The Malaysian delegation comprised the cream of the educational establishment, including (besides Hamdan himself) Murad Mohd Noor, Chang Min Kee, Paul Chang, John Richards, Alexander Oppenheim (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya) and Chong Seck Chim, now at the London office of the CEC. It was during this visit that Hamdan made his abortive attempt to go to Ibadan to meet his former mentor, Professor E.H.G. Dobby. (see Chapter 5) Hamdan found the conference a stimulating one since it was a gathering of educational leaders, all very articulate and competent in their respective specialities.

### **Hamdan's Contribution**

After a decade during which he served as the Ministry's professional head, inasfar as any one man could bring about change it can be said that Hamdan had made a great impact. He had presided for ten years over a period when great changes were taking place in the nation as a whole. It was a period of unparalleled expansion in terms of student enrolment and educational facilities. In Peninsular Malaysia alone the number of students attending all types of schools had increased by 70 percent. It was a period of great political, social and economic stress, but the Ministry outrode the tempest and also succeeded in modernizing itself and keeping up with the times. This was the work of many very capable hands. However, if the man at the top had not only been firm and strong-willed but had not also instilled a sense of mission and purpose, all those efforts might have been of no avail. As M.P. Prabhakar has movingly put it:

To us in those heady days, he was the true CHIEF and we hailed him without reservation. We expected to be admonished for oversights, knowing full well that he would not stand for shoddy work. He could be very blunt with unsatisfactory performance and would not hesitate to take disciplinary action against anyone after fair warning. Yet praise

was given where it was due. He gave a lot and demanded in equal measure<sup>45</sup>.

As Hamdan himself is ever willing to admit, throughout his period as Chief Education Adviser/Director-General of Education, he never had time off for himself but every day was a working day. Murad bin Mohd Noor summed up Hamdan's contribution in this way:

...for the eight years that Tan Sri Haji Hamdan held the post of Director-General of Education, he has been highly successful in bringing about a number of reforms in the field of education. Besides policy changes, he is also responsible for the success of the Ministry in implementing the education policy entrusted to it by Parliament. As the professional head of the Ministry, he has through his dedication and inspiration, also succeeded in reforming the curriculum in use in schools. He believes that educational progress has its basis at primary level and with this conviction he has revised the primary school curriculum, particularly with regard to science and mathematics.

Another observation which comes from the heart is that made by Omar Mohd Hashim, who was his right-hand man at the Federal Examinations Syndicate and in many other respects in his subsequent career in the Ministry, and remains a close friend:

....a leader of men, a source of inspiration, a planner and a builder and the implementer of a system of education, which is the gift of a great will to work and which made the education service for him an uplifting mission. He had the gift of being able to mobilize resources and talents, and the ability to make education an uplifting mission<sup>46</sup>.

### **Postscript: Working with Six Ministers**

During his years of service at the Ministry of Education, Hamdan served under six different Ministers of Education<sup>47</sup>. On the whole his relations with them all were cordial, although he got on better with some than others. The Ministers whom he came to know best were Khir Johari<sup>48</sup> and Hussein Onn, because he worked with them longest. These were two people with very different personalities. Although Hamdan could not compete with Khir Johari's life-style, he had great respect for the Kedah politician as a pragmatic administrator, with flexible attitudes and as a

good public relations man who could get things done. Hamdan's relations with Hussein Onn form a different story, and by and large whilst he was at the Ministry they did not get on too well together. Hussein Onn was far less sure of himself than Khir Johari and his lawyer's mind tended to be very particular, even pedantic over details. He used to get ruffled when Hamdan was not available – which was quite often – for consultation in his office at the Ministry, going so far as to complain that Hamdan spent too much time 'gallivanting' around the country-side instead of sitting at his desk in Kuala Lumpur<sup>1</sup>. At one stage, Hussein's barbed criticisms almost led to Hamdan tendering his resignation. Part of the problem was domestic politics in the higher echelons of the Ministry; it was also due to differences of personality and style.

As for the other four Ministers, their terms of office were too brief for him to form more than superficial relationships with them, though the last of them, Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad made, perhaps, the greatest impression of them all. Hamdan found Mahathir wholly professional in his approach, with a quick grasp of the situation and an instinct for the essence of the matter. In dealing with a new proposal or in weighing up a given course of action, Mahathir's interest was primarily focussed on two things – its feasibility and its political repercussions.

Being Director-General of Education was the nearest that Hamdan ever got to being involved in active politics, even if only as far as these impinged on his professional duties.

1. *op.cit.*

2. The main thrust of Malay(si)an economic development, as mirrored in successive Malayan and Malaysian Five-Year Plans ever since their inception shortly before the achievement of independence, was to liberate the nation from its traditional dependence on the export of staple raw materials such as rubber, tin, timber, etc. and to have a more balanced and diversified economy, in which local industries – at first catering for local needs – would play a significant role.

3. *i.e.* see fn.5 below. Needless to say, the situation from the point of view of technical and vocational education in Sabah and Sarawak was far worse.

4. Only when in 1959 the University of Malaya was divided into two sections - one in Singapore and the other in Kuala Lumpur did a Faculty of Engineering come into existence, in Kuala Lumpur. The two divisions of the University of Malaya formally separated in 1962, and the Singapore branch now

became the University of Singapore. Courses in Engineering had been carried out in Singapore prior to the separation.

5. Technical and vocational education which formerly came under the classification of 'trade schools' goes back to 1897 when the colonial administration of the newly-formed Federated Malay States (FMS) started training Malay youths as mechanics or fitters for work on the maintenance of the new railway lines. In 1906, the Treacher Technical School was founded in Kuala Lumpur and was placed under the supervision of the FMS Public Works Department. Its job was to train junior technical assistants for the Railways, Public Works and Survey Departments. The School did not attract a big response from amongst Malay youth who were more interested in getting better paid clerical jobs, but was popular with Chinese traders who had supported its establishment from the very beginning.\* The School was closed on the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, and reopened in 1918 under the new name of the Technical Training School, Kuala Lumpur, and was now placed under the management of the Engineering Department, FMS Railways. On the eve of the 1930s the colonial administration started to take technical education more seriously, as a result of which in January 1931 the administration of the School was transferred to the Education Department. This opened opportunities for private students to learn there on condition that they were willing to pay fees. The medium of instruction at the School was English, and the subjects taught included civil, mechanical and electrical engineering. The School was upgraded to a College in 1940, placing it on par with Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. The number of Malay students attending the school was disappointing, as can be seen from the Table below:

Students Registered at the Technical School, Kuala Lumpur		
Year	Total Registered	Malay Students
1935	77	44
1936	78	42
1937	83	33
1938	154	57

Source: Boudville (see reference below), p.236.

At the same time it was decided to provide trade education for Malay school leavers. The first trade school was founded in 1926 in Kuala Lumpur, followed by one at Ipoh in 1930, at Johor Bahru in 1931, and at Penang in 1932; other schools were started subsequently at Bagan Serai, Perak, and at Malacca. These schools offered proficiency in the fields of electricity, carpentry, joinery (furniture), sewing and masonry. An Agricultural School was also founded at Serdang, Selangor, in 1931. This school was run by the Department of Agriculture with the intention of providing a supply of junior agricultural officers both for the FMS and the non-FMS. The establishment of the Agricultural School

aroused considerable criticism amongst Malaysians because, as an agricultural country in the 1930s, Malaya stood in great need of agricultural expertise. However, the new school was the only one in existence to cater for the needs of the whole Peninsula, and its establishment was seen as locking the stable after the horse had bolted.

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\*Abdul Malek bin Mohamed, 'Perkembangan Pelajaran Teknikal dan Vokasional 1957-74', in *Pendidikan di Malaysia, Dahulu dan Sekarang*, Kuala Lumpur, Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1981, p.249; and S.E. Boudville, 'Development of the Technical College, Kuala Lumpur, 1906-57', in *Jurnal Pendidikan*, Kuala Lumpur, Fakulti Pendidikan, Universiti Malaya, 1970.

6. The Colombo Plan was a scheme for financial and technical assistance in all fields, including the awarding of scholarships in technical and other subjects. It was initiated by Britain and other 'white' members of the (British) Commonwealth, especially Australia, New Zealand and Canada, to assist in the economic development of its poorer members.

7. i.e. in the context of providing education up to form three, see chapter 7.

8. i.e. including such subjects as carpentry, metalwork, electrical and motor mechanics, agriculture, commerce and domestic science. The guiding principle of the system was to cater for the abilities and aptitudes of the individual student and to let him or her develop at his own speed.

9. The LCE/SRP examination had been adjusted so as to do that by grading the students into two streams - academic and vocational - based on its results..

10. For this sudden expansion of higher institutions of technology, see below.

11. *Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975*, Kuala Lumpur, Government Press, 1971, p.1.

12. The two secondary vocational schools devoted exclusively to agriculture were opened at Rembau, Negeri Sembilan (1969) and at Chenor, Temerloh, Pahang (1970).

13. The Secondary Technical School in Kuala Lumpur was formed in 1948 by merging three existing trade schools. The Sekolah Menengah Teknik/SMT, Alor Star was opened in 1972, the SMT Ipoh and SMT Seremban in 1973, and two more at Melaka and Johor Bahru respectively in 1974. All these schools offered technical education. However, the technical schools at Alor Setar, Melaka and Johor Bahru also offered courses in agriculture, while the school at Seremban provided a course in commerce. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this expansion in facilities, many Malaysians for some time still preferred to go to the Technical School at Jurong in Singapore for their training, as it was easier to get employment after graduating from there.

14. The University of Technology emerged from the embryo of the Technical College in Kuala Lumpur. (see fns 2 and 5 above).

15. The title of Chief Education Adviser was changed in 1970 to that of Director-General of Education so as to fall in line with the titles of other

professional heads in the government service. The new title marked a significant alteration which enhanced the holder's role in implementing as far as the national system of education was concerned the reforms considered appropriate under the NEP.

16. Abdul Rahim bin Busu, a civil engineer who joined the Ministry and played a key role (along with the late John Richards) in organizing and developing the Technical and Vocational Education Division, is a case in point. Later on, he held the post of Director of Education successively in several States.

17. i.e. according to the figures of the 1980 Census Report, the number of Malaysians of between under five and twenty-four years of age – which would account for all those who had been exposed at one level or other to the schools system – formed 46 per cent of the total population of Malaysia in that year.

18. This does not include those special departments which came under the Minister's direct control, such as the Federal Examinations Syndicate and the Federal Inspectorate of Schools.

19. For a summary of educational management and the committee system of the Ministry of Education, see Omar Mohd. Hashim, op.cit.

20. In this respect, Hamdan was particularly involved in the affairs of the External Affairs Division, which came under the authority of the Secretary-General of the Ministry. The prime function of this Division was handling the relations between the Ministry and regional and international organizations, such as UNESCO, in the field of culture and education.

21. Salinger held this position on behalf of UNESCO (which funded the initial five years of its development). As already noted, the multi-talented Salinger in his capacity as a Peace Corps volunteer consultant had been involved with the Special Project (*Projek Khas*). This assignment came to an end for him in 1971, but when he was about to leave for the USA, he was summoned by Hamdan to the Ministry of Education. In Hamdan's office, the following exchange then took place: H: 'I don't want you to go home yet' S: 'I don't mind, I like Malaysia but what will I do?' H: 'We have a UNESCO Project and we don't want to recruit anybody.' S: 'Why?' H: 'Because you are our candidate, and you will hear from me.' End of interview. The next thing that Salinger received was an air-letter from Paris (to where unknown to him Hamdan had gone) simply stating: 'Set up a curriculum development centre as an example to the world. Report to the EPRD straight away' - signed 'Hamdan Tahir'. For the next eight years Salinger served as UNESCO's principal consultant in setting up the CDC, during which time he underwent a personal transformation - becoming a Muslim, then marrying Roziah Munira bt Mansor, one of his colleagues who had been engaged on the Modern Maths Project, and in the fulness of time performing the pilgrimage. Once his CDC stint was over, he went to Indonesia on another UNESCO mission, and on his return to Malaysia in the mid-1980s joined the National University of Malaya (i.e. Universiti Kebangsaan) at Bangi as a lecturer. Dato' Dr Haji Rudin Salinger now lives and works in Kuala Lumpur as an educational consultant.

22. According to Salinger a curriculum in 'its modern sense' is not only a

syllabus which sets out what is to be examined, but involves both the syllabus and method – i.e. defining what the contents of the subject are and how they are to be taught. Seen from this angle, a curriculum in the Malaysian education system did not exist until 1968, when the Special Project was introduced.

23. At the initial planning stage, Salinger's only associate was Arfah bt Abdul Aziz of the EPRD, but was joined later by Chiew Tow You who was to become its first Director (on an acting basis) before being transferred in the same capacity to head the new Teachers' Training Institute (MESTI), and who on retirement became a pastor. Murad Mohd Noor, the (first) Director of the EPRD, was directly involved. Others who took part at at one stage or another in the early days were Asiah Abu Samah, who became the first substantive Director of the CDC (i.e. taking over from Chiew), and destined to become Director-General of Education; Chang Kwai; Wahidullah Khan; Saw Chu Tong; Roziah Munira Mansor; and M.P. Prabhakar. Prabhakar joined in 1976 and stayed longest, finally becoming its Deputy Director, a post he held for 13 years until his retirement in 1989. Incidentally, Salinger, who also served on the Fullbright Commission (for scholarships), was able to arrange for a series of world-wide study tours, either on a group basis or individually, for senior education personnel in the Ministry so as to acquaint them with what was going on in other countries. In arranging these awards, Salinger was truly global and included the USSR. This admirable apolitical approach resulted in Arfah becoming temporarily suspected of subversive activities as a result of paying a visit to the Soviet Cultural Centre in Jalan Ampang to collect information on educational institutions in the USSR. This visit prompted Special Branch to phone up the CDC to find out what she had been up to! Salinger was also instrumental in securing Fullbright scholarships for eight of his Malaysian colleagues for graduate and higher level studies in the United States.

24. Provision was also made for the development of Chinese and Tamil in teaching. It might be added in passing that the setting up of the CDC took a great load off the EPRD which had been established in 1963 and had been directly concerned with curriculum development along with its manifold other responsibilities.

25. While Murad was the first director of the EPRD itself, its origins lay in the work of Rajan and his colleague, S.V.J. Ponniah, who were both Educational Planning and Research Officers at the Ministry. As Director of the EPRD, Murad took a keen interest in the planning of the CDC by Salinger, Arfah and Chiew.

26. Both these organizations were contributors to the funding of the project, UNESCO in terms of the provision of expertise (e.g. Salinger) and of technical aid, and the World Bank more especially, for the money to pay for the construction of the CDC's new headquarters. As it happened, this resulted in some conflict of interest between these two organizations.

27. Dr. Mahathir's attention to the issue was drawn by a letter signed by Murad Mohd Noor, who had recently taken over from Hamdan as Director-General of Education. The letter appealed for help in resolving the bureaucratic

obstacles that had brought all work on the construction to a complete halt for several months.

28. The setting up of this Committee involved both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.

29. The School Health Programme consists of four main components, namely school health instruction, school health services, healthy school living and school community cooperation for health.

30. This later initiative owed much to the recommendations of the Murad Report on Dropouts of 1973. See below, MS p.26.

31. The origins of schools broadcasting in the Peninsula\* lay in Singapore during the post-war colonial period where the broadcasts to schools were first made through a service associated with such eminent figures as Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba), his daughter, Zaharah Za'ba, and Ade Bisyen. The first Malayan radio broadcasts in four languages – viz. Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil – were made to primary schools, although the following year they were extended to secondary level as well. The operation was managed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education which provided the pioneer staff of four teachers. In 1970 the Schools Broadcasting Service was placed under the sole charge of the Ministry of Education, although the Ministry of Information still supplied the technical personnel. By 1972 over half of the 5,200 primary and secondary schools in the Peninsula were reported to be following the Schools Broadcasts. (The information contained in this segment has been derived from notes dated 12 June 1998, supplied by courtesy of Datin Aishah bt Mohd Zahir, Director of the Educational Technology Division of the Ministry of Education to Dato' Kum Boo.)

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\*It is worth noting that with regard to educational broadcasts by radio, Sarawak and Sabah were well ahead of the Peninsula; Sarawak, in particular, was a pioneer in radio broadcasting in the whole region, a consequence of the vast expanse of the country and its scattered population.

32. Datin Aishah Mohd Zahir, *ibid*.

33. For instance, development expenditure (i.e. not including maintenance costs, etc.) throughout the decade of the 1960s stood at 5% of the GNP, a figure that even the conservative and strict Tan Siew Sin, as Finance Minister, was prepared to accept. The Ministry also received the largest general budget allocation during this period – i.e. in 1967 expenditure on education stood at more than one fifth of the total budget, while during the 1970s the same ratios prevailed.

34. However, between 1965 and 1967 a crash programme in teacher training was necessary in order to cater for the great upsurge in school enrolment caused by the raising of the school leaving age to 15 under the comprehensive schools scheme. As it was, the existing teachers' training colleges could not cope with this sudden increase in numbers. The crash programme was operated by



means of establishing Regional Training Centres (RTC) in districts which had been identified as having the resources for the job. During this period the intake of trainees in teacher training colleges in general rose by almost one fifth.

35. This programme was remarkably successful. It overcame the problem caused by the temporary lack of Malaysian teachers able to teach in Malay in these subjects, enabling them to fill the gap until a new generation of Malaysians adequately trained could take over. Most of the Indonesian teachers who came were of very high quality and motivated to give of their best, all the more so since their terms of service were so much better compared with what they received at home. Naturally, a good number of them planned to stay on and become Malaysian citizens - which in many cases they succeeded in doing, a good number obtaining posts at university lecturers, particularly at the National University at Bangi. One outstanding example of this is the case of Hassan Lanulang, who not only became a Malaysian citizen, but obtained a doctorate in Education, joined the Education Faculty of the National University and became the first member of that Faculty to become a full professor.

36. The British withdrawal had a serious impact on the Malaysian economy because of the loss of revenue derived from local British spending and large-scale local unemployment caused by the closing down of the big military bases at Terendak in Melaka, and at Butterworth, Penang.

37. In general, all foreign teachers recruited were given special training in teaching in Malay before being sent to the secondary Malay-medium schools. Their recruitment served to give Malaysians confidence that the Malay language could be used for teaching science to Malay students who supposedly in general found the subject difficult. Meanwhile local teachers, including quite a few trained at Kirkby and Brinsford Lodge in England who had an aptitude for science, were also given special training in teacher training colleges. Kum Boo's main task, apart from coordinating the posting of the right teachers to the right places was to ensure that their various requirements as laid down in their contracts were met. This was sometimes difficult, as in the case, for example, of finding the class of accommodation specified in their agreements, which was often not available in smaller centres in the country. A lot of diplomacy was required.

38. The allocation of the other centres was as follows: Regional English Language Centre (RELC) at Singapore; South-East Asia Research Centre for Agriculture (SEARCRA) at Manila; Biology and Tropical Centre for Medicine (BIOTROP) at Bandung, Indonesia; South-East Asian Ministers' Engineering Centre (SEAMEC) at Bangkok; and a Centre for Innovations in Technical Education (INNOTECH) at Saigon, then the capital of South Vietnam. Each Centre was supported by grants from the USAID Fund at Washington and also from the governments of the respective host countries in which they were situated.

39. Khoo had insisted that Geylang was the best place for them to stay, being near to the venue of the Seminar and economical. But the accommodation he found was very basic and the district not the most attractive on Singapore

Island, so that their extended stay was an uncomfortable one!

40. For the modern generation the details of the 13 May Incident and its circumstances may not be very familiar. Suffice it here to say that the ethnic rioting in Kuala Lumpur which broke out on the date in question on a scale never experienced either before or since, resulted in the loss of several hundreds of lives and in the temporary suspension of Malaysia's parliamentary democracy. However, law and order were quickly restored and the outbreak did not spread to other parts of the nation. Commonsense and goodwill under a National Operations Council headed by Tun Abdul Razak led to the gradual but progressive restoration of political stability and parliamentary democracy in 1971.

41. i.e. discussion of issues concerning the constitutional provisions regarding citizenship, the National Language, the special privileges of the Malays and the *pribumi* of Sabah and Sarawak, and the constitutional position of the Malay Rulers

42. In his book, *Seeing It Through* (op.cit.) van Praagh describes how the 'experienced teachers' in writing sessions (of the new science syllabus) 'seldom wanted to change anything. They would say "the students need it for their examinations"'. When on another occasion he asked a boy why he did not like the Nuffield Science course, the boy replied: "Well, we're supposed to UNDERSTAND it - there isn't enough to MEMORIZE". (emphasis, van Praagh's).

43. The introduction of the Test was received with dismay by a number of educationists who saw it as reinforcing the traditional examination culture which had dogged Malaysian education since its very beginnings and which, from the educationist's point of view, it seemed so desirable to remove. The most devastating consequence, which completely undermined the whole rationale of the 'discovery approach' to learning, was the appearance on the market within one month of the announcement of its introduction, of revision books on 'How to Pass the Standard Five Assessment Test'.

44. The Report pointed out that at lower secondary level the drop-out rate was a comparatively mild 10 per cent amongst the offspring of the rich, but a devastating 87 per cent amongst those from families of the poor. The Report characterized the existing educational system as one in which 'the State was subsidizing the rich'.

45. Prabhakar, op.cit. Prabhakar, whose work at the CDC brought him into close contact with Hamdan, also observed: 'His working hours were very long, stretching well into the night. We used to wonder where he got all the energy from. Some insights into this mystery were gained when, in a relaxed moment, he would admit to having had rigorous training in his youth, especially during the Japanese Occupation. There were remarkable similarities between what is understood now as the Japanese work ethic and his work style. He worked tirelessly, met deadlines, sought counsel, made quick decisions, did not hesitate to admit to a mistake and to take measured risks.'

46. Omar Mohd Hashim, op.cit. Dedication.

47. i.e. Mohd Khir Johari, Abdul Rahman Talib, Abdul Rahman Ya'cob, Mohamed Yaacob, Hussein Onn, and Mahathir Mohamad.

48. Mohd Khir Johari was Minister of Education at two critical periods in its history. The first was from 1957 to 1960 when the Ministry was going through severe teething problems in the first years of Independence; the second was between 1965 and 1979 when the implementation of Malay as the medium of instruction in schools had become a hotly debated issue. Born in 1923 in Alor Star, Kedah, and educated at the Sultan Abdul Hamid College there, Khir was involved in nationalist politics from his student days, and was one of the founder members of Seberkas, a pre-UMNO Malay nationalist party founded in Kedah in 1945. He subsequently joined UMNO itself, won a seat to the Federal Council in Malaya's first general election held in 1955, and took over his first ministerial appointment the following year. Apart from Education, he held a couple of other portfolios during the course of his long political career, in particular that of Commerce and Industry. When Khir retired as Malaysia's Permanent Representative at the United Nations in 1976, he left active politics. However, he has remained active in many other fields, especially as a patron of sports (badminton, tennis, self-defence of various kinds, and sepak takraw) besides maintaining an abiding association with the National Zoo and an interest in the welfare of the handicapped, especially the deaf. At the time of writing he is still hale and hearty, although touching eighty years of age.

49. Of course, Hamdan could never be described as a gallivanter. His frequent journeys to all corners of the Peninsula and to Sabah and Sarawak as well were all part of his characteristic desire to go into the field and see for himself that things were working properly, as well as a reflection of his conviction of the importance of explaining the Ministry's policies to teachers, parents and students at large.



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ELEVEN  
*In The Service Of Others*

### **Saying Farewell**

**I**n a world of rapidly increasing technology and sophistication, many people consider that retirement for government servants fixed at the age of fifty-five is too low, because it comes at a stage when the average person is still productive and alert. In several Asian countries including Japan, the retiring age for leaders is sixty or above. In this country, too, there are many politicians, judges, academics and other professional people who are still capable of making significant and effective contributions to the nation, even though they have already attained the retirement age of fifty-five.

Hamdan, who as Director-General of Education had built up the country's name and fame in the field of education after it had achieved independence, said his farewells to the staff of the Ministry of Education and to the other occupants of Federal House which had been part of his life for almost ten years. Who could not be moved by the spectacle of this dedicated, experienced leader of his profession, a bulldozer of sorts, but at the same time a legend for his warmth, sincerity and openness of mind, as he moved slowly along the long line of those who had served under him at the Ministry, shaking hands with each one of them, in his last moments in government service. On that morning of 27 April 1976 the faces of all those present betrayed the depth of their emotion and feeling for their Head as each in turn murmured, 'Happy retirement, Tan Sri' - the gentle, formal phrase of farewell itself laced with the sentiment of sorrow and regret at his departure. For is it not said: 'The place where you

stumble and fall you will never forget; yet how much less the place of your triumphs?' Problems to be resolved sharpen the mind. For Hamdan and his colleagues, their workplace at the Ministry had provided them all with the motivation and strength to act decisively throughout their time together in pursuit of the noble goal of raising the standards of education.

Nevertheless, Hamdan was at least satisfied that he was now passing on his heavy responsibilities to a person in whom he had the greatest confidence, namely Murad Mohd. Noor, his close associate for so many years in the profession. As if history was repeating itself, Murad was fated to be Hamdan's successor on three occasions - the first as Principal of the Tuanku Abdul Rahman School, Ipoh, in April 1960, then as Controller of Examinations and now as Director-General of Education, Malaysia, in April 1976. Hamdan reposed all his hopes on Murad as an officer capable of carrying on with the great task of ensuring that the standard of education continued to improve as the nation entered into the last quarter of the twentieth century.

### **Service in Semi-Retirement: Catching Up with the NGOs**

Throughout his career in public service, there have been only three occasions when Hamdan was not in actual official employ. The first was a brief period of only just over five months between his retirement as Director-General of Education in April 1976 and his appointment as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Science in Penang in October the same year. The second was the gap of barely three months between leaving the University of Science and going to Paris as Malaysian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UNESCO. The third and longest period was that of the four years between his return from Paris in 1985 and his elevation to Head of State of Penang in 1989.

Nevertheless, these bouts of 'unemployment' were trying times for Hamdan, who could never tolerate the thought of having free time on his hands that could not be fully utilized for some worthy purpose, and at times he felt almost lost without carrying the burden of official responsibility. As Siti Zainab remarked about the period after they had returned from Paris and settled down to a few years of suburban life, Hamdan 'was forever looking out for something to keep himself occupied

with, that is, when not absorbed in poring over his books for hours on end, at day and night' - although she harboured a secret pride in her husband's commitment to the common weal.

However, there were compensations. One of them, of course, was having enough leisure to deal with domestic matters and spend quality time with his family, a luxury that his official duties, especially when he was at the Ministry of Education, so frequently denied him. Another was the opportunity to give his whole-hearted attention to voluntary activities, in particular those connected with certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with which he had had long associations.

Hamdan's involvement in such voluntary activities goes back to his days when he was Headmaster of the Iskandar Shah School, Parit where he not only took part in the local Boys' Scout Movement<sup>2</sup>, but also played a modest though significant role locally in the national campaign against illiteracy. His links with the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia also go back to his school-mastering days at Parit and Ipoh, while his long connection with the Life-Saving Society of Malaysia (i.e. RLSSM or Persatuan Penyelamat Kelemasan Malaysia/PPKM) started in the 1960s.

### **The Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia and Its Role**

There can be no denying of the fact that Hamdan's favourite amongst all the NGOs with which he has had dealings, has always been the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia/PSM which he had led ever since 1966 when he took over as Chairman from the late Aminuddin Baki. Hamdan's interest in History budded when he was at Raffles College before the Japanese Occupation, even though his specialization was in Geography. His interest in the subject was greatly enhanced when he became a teacher at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, and was put in charge of the school's Historical Society. His greatest contributions to the field, however, were to be made through the agency of the PSM.

For Hamdan, history is nothing more nor less than the heritage of the culture of a national community which must needs be preserved to provide a model for future generations. Therefore history can, and should, be used as a source of guidance from which lessons can be learned and from which invaluable examples can be taken, because past

events help provide an understanding of the present. At the same time, of course, as the pundits warn, the examples provided by past events must be assessed with caution because the factors involved in past and present circumstances tend to differ from one another considerably<sup>3</sup>.

Whilst in government service, the time Hamdan could spare for NGO activities in general was extremely limited; in fact, almost invariably his contributions were restricted to the weekends. Nevertheless, in the midst of all his official duties as Director-General of Education, he was successful, as the PSM's Chairman, in getting the Society to pioneer a major academic project in the form of the compilation of the histories of individual schools. Needless to say, he had no qualms in exerting a little bit of benign pressure in order to ensure the full support and cooperation of all his lieutenants in the Ministry for the Society's activities, particularly the State Directors of Education, most of whom found themselves ending up as chairmen of the branches of the Persatuan in their own states.

### ***The School Histories Project***

Under their direction, studies were carried out into the histories of local schools and education in each state. This project had its beginning around 1971 based on a uniform format to be followed by each State so as to facilitate the compilation of the relevant documentation. Accordingly, all the relevant material was collected, sorted out and arranged based on a certain formula and then in 1974 was scrutinized by the Ministry of Education. The studies covered national and national-type primary and secondary schools and were written in two languages, Malay and English. The intention was that the project, by providing in broad outline the background of the nation's schools, would contribute to a general study of the evolution of the national system of education, in which is embedded the nation's identity<sup>4</sup>. As a result of Hamdan's commitment to this effort and the vigorous work carried out at State level, several States, including Johor, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Penang, Selangor and Terengganu succeeded in publishing the results of their research in book form between 1974 and 1975. As for the other States, similar research was also carried on after Hamdan was no longer

Director-General of Education, though he still remained at the helm of the PSM. This contribution to the study of the development of education at State and local level was very significant and valuable in that it enabled students of the subject to get a picture of the development of education throughout the whole country<sup>5</sup>.

In welcoming the first issue of the series, which was entitled '*Sejarah Sekolah-sekolah Malaysia*' (i.e. 'The History of Malaysian Schools'), Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, then Minister of Education, declared:

...many are the sponsors of our education, and they come from a range of sources – the Government, the promoters of Islam, Christian missionaries, community leaders and wealthy donors. If Hutchings, Wilkinson and Winstedt represent the leading names in the development of education during colonial times, we today also have our Abdul Razak, Rahman Talib and Aminuddin Baki who are to be remembered because of the reforms which they have brought about since we gained our independence.

I am very pleased that the history of our schools has succeeded in tracing the development of schools in each State, and with there being books on the history of schools for all States of Malaysia, we shall be increasing the wealth of historical materials regarding the history of education in our country for future study.

The attempt to produce a book on the history of the schools in Malaysia, I think, is a task out of the ordinary.... I am very attracted by the efforts and hard work of all those educationists who have embarked on and are carrying out the tough and difficult task of supervising this project, and I hope that the future generation of educators will also continue with and improve on this undertaking by producing other historical documents concerning schools and the development of education<sup>6</sup>.

On the same occasion, Hamdan, in his capacity as Director-General of Education and Chairman of the PSM, also welcomed the maiden issue of the '*Sejarah Sekolah-sekolah Malaysia*' in his speech on the evolution of the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.

As has already been noted<sup>6</sup>, the PSM is amongst one of the oldest voluntary organizations in this country. Its English name was changed to its present Malay one by the Annual General Meeting of 1965. The successful acquisition a decade later of a former government officer's



quarters at No.598, Jalan Hose, Kuala Lumpur for conversion into the Society's new headquarters was the fruit of the labours of Hamdan as Chairman and the members of the Society's Executive Committee. The headquarters was officially opened by Dato' Hussein Onn, the Prime Minister, on 31 August 1976 (i.e., on the occasion of the country's nineteenth *Merdeka* Day celebrations), four months after Hamdan's retirement from the Ministry. Prior to this the PSM had been lodged, first at the National Museum, and then at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (National Language and Literature Agency).

Hamdan had played an important role in the development of the PSM ever since 1961 when he was made a member of its Council. After the formation of the PSM, a number of branches at State and district level were set up under the leadership of prominent local figures such as the State Secretary, District Officer, the local *Orang Besar Jajahan* (i.e. traditional Territorial Chief) and the like. Their members generally consisted of teachers, government officers, and interested individuals, in line with Templer's hope that the PSM would become an effective popular organization.

The PSM's first step was to publish a history magazine, called *The Malayan Historical Journal* in 1954. Its chief editor was J.C. Bottoms, an MCS officer, with a deep interest in Malaysian history. However, Bottoms was only to edit three issues of the journal before he went on retirement back to England. His place was then taken over by the late M.C.ff. Sheppard (later, Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard<sup>9</sup>) who straightaway gave the journal a new title, namely *Malaya in History*. Sheppard was its chief editor for thirteen years. At the beginning of 1972 the leadership of the editorial board was taken over by Professor Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid, and the journal's title changed once more to *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah*. The PSM's journal has appeared every year ever since.

### ***PSM Occasions, 1976-1991***

From 1976, now that he had retired from the Ministry, Hamdan threw himself with his customary zest into actively promoting the PSM's affairs. The first thing to which he gave top priority was its membership campaign at State and Branch level all over the country. The other main

activities carried out by the Society included the publication of historical materials in a variety of different forms, the organization of activities amongst schoolchildren to encourage their interest and awareness of history, the identification of places of historical interest, and the provision of support for the initiatives of the National Museum in the field<sup>10</sup>.

A national committee for the establishment of a National History Museum was set up in July 1974 under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. Dato' Hussein Onn, who in a speech at the PSM's Annual General Meeting that year, explained the rationale for this project:

The proposed National History Museum will take into its view the history of our country from ancient times until the present, century by century and based on certain themes. An up-to-date and attractive scheme will be employed for each division of the Museum so that the general public will be able easily to understand every aspect of our nation's history. Knowledge of Malaysia's history from the political, cultural, social and economic angles should be made known to the peoples of our country as well as to the thousands of visitors who come here.<sup>11</sup>

Two members of the PSM's Executive Committee were sent to visit history museums in the USSR (Russia), the USA, and Indonesia in order to study their organization and to prepare a working paper on the project which was to be on a large scale and would require careful planning. To bring the project to realization, an Action Committee was appointed<sup>12</sup>, which set about acquiring a piece of land for the construction of the Museum buildings from the Federal Land Office, Kuala Lumpur.

Another of the PSM's projects which was carried out with great energy and purpose was the Malaysian History Congress held at the Universiti Kebangsaan (National University) in April 1978. Preparations for the holding of this Congress were already under way before Hamdan retired from the Ministry. With his usual charisma and leadership, he succeeded in getting together all the academicians available and the support of several higher institutions of learning in the country for the implementation of the plans, and the Congress was held with great panache in conjunction with the PSM's Silver Jubilee. Amongst those who attended the occasion was the Prime Minister himself (Dato' Hussein Onn) and his wife. In his welcoming address Dato' Hussein described the

holding of the Congress as a landmark in the campaign of nation-building by encouraging all Malaysian historians to discuss the nation's history from their own perspective and point of view, and not being dependent on the writings of foreigners, most of which were found wanting from a national standpoint.

In his speech the Prime Minister also congratulated the PSM under the inspired leadership of Tan Sri Hamdan, for being not an organization that was more dead than alive<sup>11</sup> but one that was progressive and was making a positive contribution to society and the nation, and which had succeeded in establishing thirteen State branches and eleven more at local level. He then went on to enumerate a number of ways in which the Society could nurture an interest in history. He advocated that the start should be made amongst schoolchildren at primary level where, through learning History as a subject, a sense of love for and loyalty to the country and the growth of a spirit of service and sacrifice for it could be fostered. He also stressed the importance of historical writing which was comprehensive, balanced, and of high quality, and of the need to exploit research material stored away in private collections. He pointed out the value of oral as well as of written records and urged that research be carried out into historical sources to be found in foreign lands such as Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain and Japan. Tun Hussein Onn then went on to say that:

History is a field of knowledge that is important in the building up and development of a nation, all the more so in a nation such as ours which consists of various ethnic groups. Through history we will come to know what it is to be Malaysian... and will be able to arouse a sense of pride and greatness, and of belonging to and love for Malaysia....it is important that a Malaysian attitude is impregnated and flourishes in the heart of each and every citizen....indeed, a high level of knowledge alone is not enough without a feeling of love and loyalty to your country, for as men say: we all help one another, whether in good times or the bad<sup>12</sup>; and what we do not want is the attitude of enjoying all the benefits that the country has to offer, but being unwilling to make sacrifices for it.<sup>13</sup>

The State Government of Sabah through the Sabah Foundation sought the cooperation of the PSM in celebrating the centenary of the creation of the State which had been founded in 1881 by the British North

Borneo Chartered Company, an English commercial enterprise permitted under a charter granted by the British Parliament to do so. However, although this marked the birth of Sabah as a political entity, there are those who maintain that since in 1881 the name 'Sabah' was never used and that the territory was merely another British colonial appendage, to take 1981 as marking the State's centenary was inappropriate. For after all, Sabah as an independent state of that name only came into existence in 1963 when British rule came to an end and the State joined the Malaysian federation.

Nevertheless, the PSM decided to participate in the 'centenary' celebrations by holding between 12 and 16 August 1981 scholarly discussions and a seminar on Sabah's history and make a major contribution to it by producing a monograph entitled *Sabah: History and Society*. For three days in Kota Kinabalu, Hamdan together with a number of members of the Society's Executive Committee from Kuala Lumpur served as a managing committee to ensure the success of the 'Sabah Seminar'. By this time Hamdan was holding the post of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Science, Malaysia at Penang. He regarded the management of the Sabah Seminar as a great responsibility, because this was the first time that the PSM had conducted a seminar on such a large scale, apart from the History and Development Congress held in 1978.

### ***PSM Publications and Studies on Islam 1976-1991***

The total number of books or monographs of the PSM published since 1976 amounts to almost twenty. Amongst these, apart from the articles to be found in the issues of *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah*, are *Historia*, *Lembaran Akhbar Melayu* (i.e. 'Leaves from Malay Newspapers'), *Tombstones in Southern Thailand*, and *Changi: The Lost Years*, as well as volumes containing the pick of the essays from the annual History Essay Competition. In marking the start of the fifteenth century AH (i.e. of the Muslim calendar), the PSM made a major contribution in highlighting the significance of the new century for Muslims by publishing a monograph entitled *Tamadun Islam di Malaysia* (i.e. 'Islamic Civilization in Malaysia') in 1980. This, and the earlier monograph, *Islam in Malaysia*,

published in the previous year, marked the on-going research into Islam in this part of the world<sup>16</sup>.

As a keen student of history, Hamdan was of the opinion that Islam played an important role in Malaysian history, a role which could not be separated from the political struggle of the Malays. In fact, Islam served as a barrier that checked the wholesale penetration of foreign culture brought about by the flood of Western influence. The Muslims actually constituted a well-knit community held together by well-entrenched traditions, which was the product of the efforts of generations of Islamic scholars and teachers (i.e. *ulama*) through the medium of the religious schools known as *pondok* schools<sup>17</sup>. The zeal to acquire all knowledge related to Islam was seen at full flood towards the end of the nineteenth century (AD). The *pondok* schools, as a result of undergoing modernization, evolved into a system of religious high schools or colleges (i.e. *madrasah*) under the leadership of Islamic scholars who had received their education overseas, in particular in Egypt. The *madrasah* sprouted like mushrooms in every corner of the Peninsula, and the religious scholars acted as catalysts in a mass movement that influenced ordinary Muslims to reject the imposition of Western-style government, which they stigmatized as *kafir* rule. An example of this popular reaction was the unrest in Terengganu which culminated in the peasant uprising of 1928<sup>18</sup>.

These two monographs on Islam published by the PSM highlighted the roles of individual leaders, religious organizations, religious affairs departments, and other institutions. The articles they contained were written in Malay and English by graduates of institutes of higher learning. The positive response of academics and history graduates to the production of the two monographs reflected the effectiveness of Hamdan's leadership of the PSM. The mustering of the energies of these scholars and their input played an essential role in raising the PSM to a level worthy of pride because their contribution was the product of their researches and would prove to be of great benefit to future generations of historians.

One article of particular interest was Saman bin Shariff's 'Madrasah al-Haji Thaib, Kampung Parit Jamil, Muar', for, as we have seen, Hamdan himself along with his twin brother had received his early education there when his father was its Headmaster<sup>19</sup>. Another distin-

guished teacher at the Madrasah was Ishak Haji Muhammad, who taught Malay there after he had resigned from the Malay Administrative Service (MAS) in 1935<sup>20</sup>. Although Malay was the prime medium of instruction at the Madrasah, Arabic and English were also taught. Most of those who graduated with a command of English continued their studies at the Muar High School, a government secondary school, while those who were proficient in Arabic had the opportunity of furthering their studies in Western Asia. When they returned, many of them became religious officials such as *kadi*, *imam*, and *ustaz*<sup>21</sup>. Some of them, however, joined government service as minor officials or clerks<sup>22</sup>. For obvious reasons, the article on the Madrasah al-Haji Thaib was of great sentimental interest to Hamdan.

### **The Saga of The Life-Saving Society of Malaysia**

Another NGO in which Hamdan developed a keen interest and with which he was to become very closely connected throughout his career is the Life-Saving Society of Malaysia, (LSSM) an organization which was completely different in character and function to the PSM, but which in its own field had a very important role to play.

Like the PSM, the LSSM can trace its origins back to the 1950s<sup>23</sup> and like the PSM acquired very distinguished patronage. But there the similarity ends, for while the PSM was launched with due pomp and circumstance in Kuala Lumpur by the High Commissioner (then Sir Gerald Templer) himself, the Life-Saving Society existed as a concept in the mind of one man, the debonair (now Datuk) Teoh Teik Lee, who at the time was a normal-trained teacher of Geography and English at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar. But Teik Lee's interests outside the classroom were in scouting and swimming, and because of his related interest in promoting the safety of children involved in aquatic activities, he had got himself qualified as an instructor in life-saving and subsequently had been made the Malaysian representative of the Royal Life-Saving Society of the United Kingdom<sup>24</sup>.

Teik Lee's moment came somewhat unexpectedly in 1961, by which time he had been promoted (i.e. in 1960) to Head of Physical Education at the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (STTI) at Cheras, Kuala

Lumpur. To his very great surprise, one day in April 1961 he was summoned to Carcosa and was ushered into the presence of Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma, uncle of the British Queen, the last British Viceroy of India and the Grand President of the RLSS of the Commonwealth. Despite his august position, Mountbatten quickly made Teik Lee feel at home, and simply told him that since Malaya was now an independent country he wanted to start a Malayan branch of the RLSS, and had been informed that Teik Lee was the right man for the job. Would he do it? Of course, Teik Lee said 'Yes'.

From that point on, things moved swiftly and merrily along. An inaugural meeting of the new Branch was held in May 1961, followed by its first AGM when Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, became its Patron, and Teoh Teik Lee was elected its first President in December the same year. Teik Lee has remained at the centre of the Malaysian Society's affairs ever since<sup>27</sup>.

Nevertheless, at first the going was tough. Public awareness of the importance of water safety was lacking and those who were committed to the cause were small in number. At first the Society depended a lot on the amount of support that Mountbatten and the Tunku could lend to their activities, and in the early days the Society even had to make use of the services of the British Royal Navy for trainers and courses. Nevertheless, Teik Lee along with members of his committee at Cheras trained their flock with great zeal at the STTI's Olympic-sized swimming pool, and converted them into first-class swimmers and learned all the methods involved in life-saving. The new project also evoked a response from students at other teacher training colleges as well as from boys and girls in secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Taiping, Malacca, Johor Bahru and Penang itself. As a result swimming exhibitions and contests and life-saving demonstrations came to be held on a large-scale and the standard of the performances achieved proved highly satisfactory.

### ***The Hamdan Connection***

Hamdan first came to know Teoh Teik Lee when they were teaching together at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar. Their friendship continued and ripened in the years that followed, especially during the

1960s when Teik Lee was posted to Cheras and Hamdan was also in Kuala Lumpur at the Ministry. Once he had become Chief Education Adviser, Hamdan found himself frequently invited to attend swimming galas and competitions and life-saving demonstrations at schools all over the country, either officially to launch them or to enhance the significance of the occasion by his presence. This deepened his own appreciation and interest in the LSSM's life-saving activities. In response, when in 1976 Hamdan retired as Director-General of Education, the LSSM showed its appreciation of his efforts on their behalf by electing him President, with Teik Lee as his Deputy. In fact, it was only after he had left the Ministry that Hamdan found the time and the opportunity to play a more active role in encouraging support for the activities of the Society.

As one would suppose, under his leadership the Society expanded its activities<sup>26</sup> to all corners of the nation and became well-known both at national and international levels. It also acquired in 1988 – largely by dint of the persistent lobbying of the appropriate quarters by Hamdan himself – a permanent if modest headquarters in Old Klang Road, Kuala Lumpur, which was officially opened by the Chief Commonwealth Secretary of the RLSS. By the end of the millenium, the Society can boast a membership of some 15,000 who are qualified in various aspects of life-saving techniques. It goes without saying that the Society continues to expand and disseminate information, knowledge, skills and techniques regarding life-saving and to keep alive public interest in its activities to save the lives of those in danger of drowning.

However, Hamdan and Teik Lee have found that many people fail to understand the LSSM's role. For this reason the Society is for ever engaged in efforts to make its activities known to the general public and to encourage their participation. By means of instilling a deeper understanding and a greater awareness regarding what is involved in the saving of people's lives, the Society's activities will acquire a greater significance and will always receive public support. As Hamdan pointed out at a luncheon address to the Penang Rotary Club Host Branch, at the Hotel Merlin, Penang, on 19 September 1979:

Many of us do not think of the dangers involved when we are enjoying ourselves swimming in the the river or in the sea, or are engaged in other



water activities. It is therefore of the greatest importance that we learn how to save people from drowning so that such tragedies can be avoided. To these issues the Society has all the answers.

In recent times, with the flood of tourists to popular beaches of the Island such as at those at Batu Feringgi and Tanjung Bungah, the need for a life-guard corps and the construction of watch towers at strategic points became obvious. Need was translated into reality through the efforts of the committee members of the LSSM under Hamdan's leadership, who went all out to demonstrate to the public at large and even more so to foreign tourists that there could be no compromise in the matter of instituting life-saving measures, regardless of cost in terms of the use of human resources and money.

In this connection the Penang branch of the Society was asked to sponsor its first international conference, the 2nd Annual Asia-Pacific Conference, which included a life-saving competition and seminar, in April 1979. The occasion was a great success, with a good attendance and participation in a variety of workshops and competitions. The LSSM also hosted in 1990 – in conjunction with its Silver Jubilee – the 7th Annual Asia-Pacific Life-Saving Conference and Competition in Penang, an indication of how far the LSSM had progressed from its lean, early years. Hamdan attended both, the first in his capacity as the President of the host society, and the second in his capacity as Head of the host State, Penang. For on his appointment as Head of State, Penang in the previous year, he had to relinquish his post as President of the LSSM, as he also had to for all other voluntary organizations. His place was taken over by Datuk Haji Mohamed Yeop Abdul Raof.

In recognition of Hamdan's own contribution to the LSSM's cause, he was made Honorary President for Life of the LSSM on 30 May 1992. In May 2001, shortly after his retirement as Head of State, Penang, Hamdan was accorded another signal honour by the movement, when he was nominated as one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commonwealth body (RLSS of the Commonwealth)<sup>27</sup>

### **Hamdan and the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP)**

Meanwhile, in yet another field of both voluntary and official activity, Hamdan's involvement in the development of the National

Language never waned. As already noted, while he was still Director-General of Education, Hamdan frequently stressed the importance of promoting the status of Malay as a language of scholarship for the purpose of exploring a variety of fields of modern learning, such as literature, philosophy, science and technology. So he reckoned that every devotee of Malay should strive to restore its role as an international tongue, as it had once been during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Western imperialist powers, in particular the English and the Dutch, first arrived on their quest for riches.

Therefore, Hamdan's appointment in August 1975, that is a year before his retirement from the Ministry, as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), was highly appropriate. He was to hold this position for seven years (i.e up till February 1983, during which period he led, built up and sustained the National Language movement.

Of course, even before he took up this appointment, Hamdan had already had dealings with the DBP through his seat on the DBP's Board while he was still serving in the Ministry of Education<sup>28</sup>. Therefore he did not face any problems in guiding the DBP along the desired lines because he was well primed as to its history, policies and objectives. As he said in one of his speeches:

The DBP was born in a period of political upheaval when the nation was ablaze with the spirit of the struggle for freedom. It is therefore not surprising that writers and all lovers of the Malay language and literature placed high hopes on the DBP...to become a receptacle for all their literary productions. Parents and teachers also placed their hopes on the DPB becoming the publisher of educational books for all levels.<sup>29</sup>

The DPB had been inaugurated on 22 June 1956 for the purpose of realising the Malay desire to overcome the perceived shortcomings of their language, to preserve Malay literature, and to serve as the arena for the struggle to establish the proper status of Malay as the National Language and the medium of education.<sup>30</sup>

Once established as Chairman of the DBP's Board, Hamdan wasted no time in giving his full cooperation and guidance to the Dewan's Director and Staff so that the Agency would continue to function in line

with official policy. In assuming the chairmanship of this twenty-year old organization, Hamdan never overlooked the role of Hassan Ahmad (now Dato'), who was the DBP's Director at the time, as the driving force of the Agency. It was Hassan's untiring efforts that were directly responsible for the DBP's successes and for having brought the Dewan to what Hamdan came to regard as the peak period of the DBP's efficiency, effective administration and productivity. However, in the words of Dato' Haji Jumaat bin Dato' Mohd. Noor<sup>1</sup>, a later Director of the Dewan, Hamdan was the man who stood behind him and showed:

his sincerity of purpose, style of leadership, hard work and concern for his staff at all levels... For this reason, recorded in the pages of the history of the development of the DBP is the role of Tun Hamdan, highly esteemed as the man who bore the burden and was the master-builder<sup>2</sup>.

Among the achievements in the field of publication and related projects made by the DBP during Hamdan's tenure of office, were three major languages guides, the computerization of terminologies in certain fields and the establishment of a data-base system for the National Language, a scheme for the encouragement of new writers, and the extension of the infra-structural facilities of the Dewan<sup>3</sup>.

1. i.e. the Malay saying: *tempat jatuh lagikan dikenang, inikan pula tempat berwacana.*

2. Of course, Hamdan's association with the Boy Scouts started when he became one himself as a student at Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar before the Second World War. Later on, in 1997, when he was already Penang's Head of State, Hamdan was given the highest honour of the Malaysian Boy Scouts by being awarded the Pingat Semangat Padi.

3. Jack R. Nyan, *Teaching History with a Purpose*, Broadmeadow, New South Wales, Australia, Newey & Beath Printers, Pte. Ltd., 1990. p.11.

4. Dato' Omar Mohd Hashim, 'Pergerakan Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia: Mengisar ke Arah Kemantapan', in *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah*, no. 22, PSM, 1994. p.6.

5. *ibid.* p.vii.

6. Welcoming address, launch of *Sejarah Perkembangan Sekolah-sekolah Negeri Terengganu*, PSM, Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1975. p.iii.

7. Incidentally, another aspect of Hamdan's role in promoting the encouraging the study of History in schools and the effective teaching of it was

the interest that he showed in the development of the History syllabus at both primary and secondary level in his official capacity in the Ministry. As has been pointed out by Asiah binti Abu Samah, one time Director of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), in a working paper on the subject, a number of significant developments in the history syllabus at primary and secondary levels took place while Hamdan was Director-General of Education.

8. refer Chapter 5, esp. p. 135, fns 21 and 22.

9. Sheppard was an MCS officer who first came to this country in 1928 as a colonial cadet and retired from the government service in 1956 as the last holder of the post of British Resident in Negeri Sembilan. But he stayed on and became an authority on various aspects of Malay culture and history. He played a major role in setting up the Muzium Negara in Kuala Lumpur. He died in 1995.

10. Among the outstanding written publications issued by the Society were its journal, *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah*, and also *Tempat-tempat Bersejarah di Semenanjung Malaysia* (i.e. Historical Sites in Peninsula Malaysia); *Sejarah Malaysia Sepintas Lalu* and its English version, *Glimpses of Malaysian History* (edited by Professor Zainal Abidin Wahid); the School Histories (by State); a History series on TV entitled *Warisan* (Heritage); and a Film Strip entitled 'Warisan Bumiputera' (The Malay Heritage), produced with the assistance of Filem Negara. For schoolgoers, the Society organized on a regular basis a Malaysian History Essay Competition (annual), and a History Week, including a history exhibition. Of great importance was the PSM's work in erecting signboards and stone memorials with the cooperation of the various State authorities to mark various historical sites such as royal tombstones, Malay forts and other significant remains. These included, for instance, the tombs of Dol Said of Naning (Malacca), a nineteenth century patriot who defied the British; of Bendahara Abdul Jalil, a powerful notable of the old Johor-Riau Empire, at Kota Tinggi, Johor; and at Telok Bakong, Perak, of Sultan Muzaffar Shah I, the first Sultan of that State. Also included were the Malay forts at Lukut, Negeri Sembilan and at Kuala Selangor. The Society, largely through the efforts of the late Tan Sri Haji Mubin Sheppard, was also responsible for moving the famous Kampung Laut Mosque, one of the oldest in the Peninsula, from its original flood-prone site on the banks of the Kelantan River to its present site at Nilam Puri, just outside Kota Bharu, Kelantan. The PSM also was involved in the projected 'Illustrated History of Malaysia' in cooperation with the National Museum and the National Archives.

11. Speech by the Hon. Dato' Hussein Onn, Prime Minister of Malaysia, at the PSM's Annual General Meeting, 16 March 1974.

12. The Action Committee was assisted by three planning sub-committees with the following specific tasks, based on a chronological approach, viz., (1) Committee A: from 10,000 BC till 1300 AD; (2) Committee B: from 1300 till 1824; (3) Committee C: from 1825 till the present time.

13. Or as the Malays say: *hidup segan, mati tak mahu*.

14. i.e. the Malay adage, *berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing*.

15. i.e. the Malay maxim, *bunga disunting, perdu ditandang*, also see; Khoo

Kay Kim and Jamaluddin Baharuddin, *Malaysia: Sejarah dan Proses Pembangunan*, Kuala Lumpur, PSM, 1979. pp.6.7.

16. The titles of most of these volumes are self-explanatory. *Changi: The Lost Years* is based on a diary kept by T.P.M. Lewis, Hamdan's former Headmaster at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, during his internment in the Japanese Occupation. *Historia*, along with *Malaysia Masakini* (2 vols, 1984 & 1985) consists of a pot-pourri of articles on historical topics. The PSM has also published monographs on Education, Literature and Economic Development (from a historical perspective).

17. refer to Chapter 1, p.22., fn 28.

18. Editorial, *Islam in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, PSM, 1980. p.2.

19. refer Chapter 1, pp.15-16.

20. Saman bin Shariff, 'Madrasah al-Haji Thaib, Kampung Parit Jamil, Muar', in *Islam di Malaysia*, op.cit. p.91.

21. i.e. *kadi* = a religious magistrate/administrator; *imam* = leader of the prayer/congregation in the mosque; *ustaz* = title of a religious teacher.

22. *ibid.* p.91.

23. In fact, the Society could trace its ancestry back to the 1920s when a group of trained life-savers, officially recognized by the Royal Life-Saving Society of Great Britain, came into existence in Penang (at the Penang Chinese Swimming Club) in 1927. It was led by Lee Fong Chin, a teacher of English at the Northam Road English School in Georgetown, where he had started to train some of his colleagues in orthodox life-saving techniques for use in swimming events and water polo. Penang was also one of the first places in Malaysia to have a public swimming pool, which helped to bring about a realization of the importance of spreading a knowledge of life-saving techniques.

24. Ipoh-born Teoh had started off his teaching career at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, soon after the end of the Japanese Occupation, in 1946. He took up a course in PE in 1953, specializing in life-saving at the request of the Royal Life-Saving Society in England, and consequently was appointed their representative in Malaya.

25. The 'Instrument of Membership' of the Malaysian Branch of the RLSS was formally handed over at a ceremony held at Carcosa by Lord Louis Mountbatten on 14 February 1987. Its name was changed officially to that of the 'Life-Saving Society Malaysia' in 1964.

26. The six main programmes and activities of the Society which brought pride to the country were (1) its Aquanaut Programme – a life-saving programme for children; (2) its Publicity Campaign aimed at the general public regarding the precautions to be taken when involved in water activities and how to prevent cases of drowning; (3) its Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) drill which encompassed the basic techniques for dealing with cases of heart failure; (4) its professional courses in life-saving for those engaged in aquatic sports and recreational activities; (5) its Awards System – for life-saving programmes, etc. organized by schools and local communities; and (6) its general pressure to get life-saving activities recognized as a legitimate form of sports.

27. This honour was bestowed upon him on the occasion of the quinquennial conference of the RLSS held at Buckingham Palace, London. Tun was represented by Datuk Teoh Teik Lee who accepted the nomination on his behalf.

28. i.e. the DBP is one of the portfolios of the Minister of Education.

29. 'Souvenir Booklet on the Occasion of the Official Visit of TYT Tun Dato' Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, the Head of State, Penang, to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Sarawak Branch, on 25 June 1992'.

30. Special Souvenir Booklet to mark the Fortieth Anniversary of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 22 June 1996.

31. Born at Batu Pahat, Johor in 1936, Dato' Jumaat was a graduate of Brinsford Lodge in Britain, followed by a degree at the University of Malaya (1963), complemented by being awarded a UNICEF fellowship for post-graduate studies in teacher education at the College of Education/Asian Institute of Teachers' Educators at Manila (1967-70). Meanwhile professionally Jumaat rapidly rose from schoolteacher to headmaster to a handful of senior posts in the Ministry itself, including in the EPRD, Teacher Training Division and as Assistant Director of Residential Schools. He also has had experience as Deputy Director and Director of Education in Selangor and Kedah. On retirement in 1991 he was holding the post of Director-General of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He has long been a very active member of the PSM and his involvement in its affairs continues. At the time of writing he is its Hon. Treasurer. Apart from this, Dato' Jumaat has long been very active in the cause of checking drug abuse, and is at present the Secretary-General of the National Anti-Dadah Council.

32. Jumaat's welcoming address on the occasion of Hamdan's sentimental visit to the Sarawak Branch in June 1992.

33. The three publications were (1) *Pedoman Umum Ejaan Bahasa Malaysia* (General Guide to Spelling in Bahasa Malaysia); (2) *Pedoman Umum Pembentukan Istilah Bahasa Malaysia* (General Guide to the Construction of Terms in Bahasa Malaysia); (3) *Kamus Bahasa Inggeris-Bahasa Melayu* (English-Malay Dictionary). The computer was used for terminology, business and administration plus the provision of a data base for the National Language and Terminology. The scheme to encourage new writers, called the Support Scheme for Outside Writers, subsequently inspired the establishment of both the National Literary and the Guest Writer Awards. The infra-structural work comprised the construction of the buildings of the Sarawak and Sabah Branches of the DPB, and also the construction of the DPB Store and Printing Works at Ulu Kelang, Kuala Lumpur. The building up of the Sabah and Sarawak branches of the DBP was Hamdan's major contribution as Chairman.



TWELVE  
*Vice-Chancellor*  
*Minden, Penang, 1976-1982*

**The Appointment**

Just over five months after his retirement from the Ministry of Education, Hamdan was suddenly invited to accept the post of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Science, Penang (USM). Once again, history was repeating itself. This was an appointment which he had never expected, of which he was informed at very short notice and which at first he was quite reluctant to accept. The news of the appointment came from Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the Minister of Education, and the moment that he received it, Hamdan went to see the Minister with a dozen reasons as to why he was not suitable for the post. The most obvious one to his mind was that he did not possess a Ph.D. and that his highest academic qualification was that of a BA (Hons) Degree in Geography, which in academic ranking would put him on par with the newest lecturer at the University. But Mahathir had an answer for each one from the list of five or six persons whom Hamdan (in his own mind) considered more suitable and better qualified, and flatly told Hamdan that he had made up his mind that he (Hamdan) was the right man for the post. Above all, Mahathir knew that he could rely on Hamdan to push through the National Language Policy through the University<sup>1</sup>. So it came to pass that Hamdan was officially appointed to the post of Vice-Chancellor of the University of Science Malaysia (USM) at Penang on 4 October 1976. He was taking the place of Tan Sri Hamzah Sendut who was going on retirement. Hamdan was the first man from the teaching profession to be appointed as a Vice-Chancellor of a Malaysian university, a post usually

reserved for a university professor. The University itself at that time was only seven years old.

### **The USM Set-up**

The USM which was generally held to be the second foremost university in the country after the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, was at first named the University of Penang, and in the early stages it made use of the facilities of the Teachers' Training Institute at Bukit Gelugor. Then in 1971 it was moved to its present 240 ha. site at Minden (a former army barracks) about 10 km from the centre of Georgetown. Situated on a low plateau with a backdrop of hills and looking out over the sea not far to its east, the University in its peaceful, garden-like setting was as ideal and conducive a place for the pursuit and extension of higher studies as one could wish for. When Hamdan took up the appointment, the University already had about 3,000 students and an establishment of almost 500, including the academic staff, administrative personnel ancillary workers and other technical employees. It offered first degrees, diplomas, post-graduate studies, matriculation courses and an off-campus study scheme.

On its establishment, the University was given the mandate 'to offer, encourage and expand higher education in pure and applied sciences, pharmacy, building science and technology, the social sciences, the humanities and education. In addition, the USM was authorized to facilitate the effective implementation of these subjects through the provision of amenities and staff for promoting research and further studies in these fields'.

The USM also made the goal of individual character-development the lodestone of all its activities. For this purpose, an innovative approach was adopted throughout its academic organization which differed from the traditional faculty system. In place of faculties, the USM introduced a system of study centres, which formed the nuclei of groups of related disciplines. These centres functioned in the same way as the faculty system – but basically each centre integrated the disciplines concerned and structured courses in a similar manner up to the highest level of specialization possible for the subject selected'.



## **New Initiatives**

In July 1977, at his first Convocation after having been appointed Vice-Chancellor, Hamdan outlined several novel policy initiatives. Amongst these was that for the first time the University would produce graduates who had passed in both the Humanities and Education, thereby equipping them to be multi-purpose teachers of the arts – geography, history, literature and language. At the same time hopefully as a result of this system, graduates would support the efforts of administrators to deal with some of the problems which confronted society, such as subversive influences, drug abuse, moral decline (amongst youth), housing and the squatter problem, and a host of other social ills besides.

With Malay becoming in 1980 the sole medium of instruction throughout the whole educational system, Hamdan pushed through well-planned and intensive training courses in the language for the academic staff so that they would be able to deliver their lectures, tutorials and practicals fluently and effectively in Malay. A Publishing Committee was appointed to publish books in Malay and to step up translations. Every encouragement and inducement was given to academics who were proficient in Malay to write themselves or to translate into Malay their books, lecture notes, and so on<sup>4</sup>.

One lecturer who gave his full support to the Vice-Chancellor's campaign to accelerate the use of Malay as the medium of instruction was Dr. Koh Tsu Koon (now Tan Sri and the Chief Minister of Penang), a young academic in the USM's School of Educational Studies and a Ph.D. holder in the economics of education from the University of Chicago, USA. Dr Koh, who has always been interested in languages and was fluent in three – Malay, English and Chinese Mandarin – received his early education at the Chung Ling High School, Penang, and thereafter pursued his undergraduate education in the USA at Princeton University before proceeding to Chicago.

On his return to Malaysia, Koh joined the USM in mid-1975. Realizing the importance of Malay as the National Language and the seriousness with which the Government was attempting to establish it as the medium of instruction for tertiary education, he was soon inspired by Hamdan's sense of purpose and commitment. So he quickly set about to

master the Malay language and to ensure that it became the effective language of learning for the benefit of students majoring in education, for they would be teaching in Malay in Malaysian schools after their graduation. Because of Koh's commitment as a lecturer, in teaching and in research, and also because of his good rapport and relations with students from all racial backgrounds, Hamdan appointed him Deputy Dean of Education in June 1978, immediately after Koh had completed his initial three years tenure. The close relations established between Hamdan and Koh at the USM continued and were further reinforced when Koh was Penang's Chief Minister and Hamdan was Head of State<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Kelantan Campus**

Hamdan's experience at the Ministry of Education stimulated him in 1979 to establish a branch campus in Kelantan exclusively for a School of Medical Science in order to meet the manpower needs in the national medical and health services in that part of the country. As a result, the first intake of medical students took place in the academic session for 1981/2 under an integrated five year programme which was conducted at the Penang School of Medical Sciences Campus while waiting for the new campus at Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, to be ready. The School was eventually transferred to Kubang Kerian for the academic session of 1990/1.

The scheme, once in operation, represented a personal triumph for Hamdan because although there was an obvious and dire need for more such centres, especially on the East Coast of the Peninsula, it had been a hard battle to convince the Ministry of Education of its importance - all the more so since both the University of Malaya (from 1949) and the National University at Bangi (from 1970) were already offering similar courses. In fact, he had had to pull all his rank as Vice-Chancellor to win the day. As Hamdan pointedly remarked, 'Australia whose population is more or less the same in numbers as that of Malaysia, has a medical faculty at each university in each State, because the health of the people is the top priority of the Government'<sup>6</sup>. Kelantan and the East Coast in general lagged far behind in medical and health facilities so that something had to be done in order to raise the standard of public health

in that region. With the setting up of a local centre for medical studies, the diseases which commonly afflicted the East Coast States, such as diabetes, yaws, scabies, etc., could be subject to closer investigation. Furthermore, new discoveries in the field of medicine would benefit not only the people of the country but also those in other lands.

### **Other Innovations and Student Affairs**

In the meantime, the USM, which was undergoing rapid change, introduced the two seminar unit system, with the aim of helping students generally in their studies. By this system a student who failed in any one particular course was required to repeat only that course, without having to take all the other courses for that year all over again. The advantage of this system was that it was flexible, enabling weaker students to have more time to get their degrees while the better students would be able to complete their course within a shorter period. The University also established a Teaching and Learning Advisory Unit in 1980 for the purpose of raising the standard of teaching and learning amongst lecturers and students alike. Foreign experts in education were frequently invited to conduct workshops focussed on more effective techniques or methods in the interests of the students<sup>7</sup>.

Another new study unit, the Centre for Drug and Pharmaceutical Research, was also to prove very successful in carrying out research into drug abuse<sup>8</sup>. The Centre got encouragement and support from the Government, along with assistance from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the cooperation of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Narcotics Bureau of the UN. The Applied Sciences Centre produced specialist studies in such fields as the technologies of rubber, plastics, paint and weaving as well as in the food industry and electronics. All the study courses conducted at the USM were directly related to real national needs. In the meantime, the Off-Campus Studies Programme was revised because while the programme had greatly expanded, the University could not cope with an intake in excess of the current 200 to 300 participants a year.

One problem which always worried Hamdan was that concerning student welfare, particularly with respect to their accommodation. Out of

this concern, the concept of creating a 'student village' (Desasiswa) which would cater for at least half the number of students on campus was born. Once it had taken shape, there were three sections. Section A consisted of longhouses made of wood. Most of the students who stayed there were males and the room rent was low by comparison with Sections B and C, which were more up-to-date. All the buildings were put up by lecturers who were experts in architecture, while the planning was headed by Professors Shen and Faizah Lucas. All this was carried out to the University's benefit without incurring heavy expenditure<sup>9</sup>.

Hamdan did not neglect the sports side of student life, for as we have already seen, he was a firm believer in the adage of 'a healthy mind in a healthy body'. So a number of sports amenities were made available, so that students were able to practise and take part in a whole variety of sports and games activities including sepak takraw<sup>10</sup>, football, netball, hockey, badminton, tennis, rugby, squash, and athletics, etc. The broad, open grounds of the Minden Campus were well adapted for games and could be used at any time. Because of the great importance attached to these activities, a special officer for Sports was appointed to arrange, carry out and coordinate sports programmes.

Cultural activities were also promoted, especially those which were based on the national culture. The calm and peaceful atmosphere of the Campus was most conducive for the fostering and honing of talent in dance, drama and traditional arts such as the *wayang kulit* (shadow play), the *makyung* and *kuda kepang* (traditional performances) and kite-flying, which were held at certain times. Activities such as these required a suitable infra-structure so as to stimulate the interest of student and lecturer alike in these things.

Meanwhile, at the time of the wave of university student protests against the Government<sup>11</sup>, which finally led to the formulation of the Universities Act of 1971, Hamdan was still with Hussein Onn at the Ministry and gave his input to the framing of that piece of legislation. As a result, he was well informed regarding its background and rationale. Moreover, he himself had had experience of a 'student revolt' when he was Director-General of Education. This, combined with his strong sense of discipline, was reflected in his firmness in seeing that the Act was effectively implemented. For Hamdan, student discipline and student

success in their studies were part and parcel of the same thing and anything that smelt of opposition to the establishment should be handled promptly before it got out of control. The Act spelt out clearly all the 'do's' and 'don'ts' regarding the rules that should be followed, and its provisions were not only confined to the students but were applicable to lecturers as well. With regard to foreign lecturers, Hamdan expected them to be alive to Malaysian sensitivities and pride about their way of life and to be properly informed in all aspects of Malaysian history and culture so that they could avoid practising certain aspects of their own life-styles which might clash with local Malaysian norms.

In the Ministry of Education's view, the aims of the University Act were benevolent. They were not designed to obstruct the healthy activities of the campus community or to create a generation of students who were dumb and insensitive to current issues. Students were simply required to keep within the bounds of the law. The Act was to be seen in a positive light. It was intended to 'control' but not to 'suppress'. In this connection, the Ministry considered that the maximum manageable number of students was within the region of between 10,000 to 12,000 persons<sup>12</sup>, and should never be allowed to reach the numbers found in certain other countries such as India or Japan where student bodies reached up to a figure of 150,000. Such high numbers as these are not only hard to control but also result in a sacrifice in the quality of teaching and learning<sup>13</sup>.

### **Implementing the National Language Policy**

Hamdan worked hard to establish Malay as the language of learning in an institution of higher learning, but he continued to be confronted with a series of problems. In the first place, it is not easy to translate not merely hundreds but thousands of reference books into another language, in particular from English into Malay. In this connection, it was an eye-opener for Hamdan, on one of his visits to Indonesian universities, to find that – especially at their faculties of medicine – many reference books being used by the Indonesian students were still in foreign languages, even though Indonesia had achieved its independence well over a decade earlier than Malaysia.

Nevertheless, the campaign to translate as many books as possible into Malay had to be carried on, and lecturers had to achieve a working knowledge of the language. On the other hand, at the same time the University could not ignore the importance of English as an effective second language in order to safeguard the standards of teaching and learning and provide access to the latest developments in knowledge at the international level.

Ultimately, the implementation of Malay as the sole medium of instruction was brought about through the effective planning and assistance of the Bahasa Malaysia Implementation Committee, and starting with the 1980/1 session for Arts and the 1982/3 session for Science, was put into effect, on the lines laid down in Hamdan's speech at nineteenth meeting of the University Senate in December 1978:

The Bahasa Malaysia policy has been confirmed by Parliament, and it is incumbent upon the University and in particular the University Senate to carry out that policy properly and completely until it has been fulfilled within the period established, satisfactorily both professionally and from the academic point of view. Apart from this, the University also has the responsibility for developing Bahasa Malaysia as a language of science in keeping with scientific standards<sup>4</sup>.

This speech clearly showed Hamdan's determination to carry out the language medium policy without further compromise. Its implementation in a pragmatic way gave birth to many professionally qualified non-Malays giving their lectures in Malay by the time Hamdan left the USM in 1982. In this regard, the experience Hamdan gained while Chairman of the DBP's Board of Governors between 1975 and 1982 was of the greatest possible use for organizing a strategy to reinforce Malay so as to make it more effective as a language for higher studies on par with other languages.

### **The Islamic Ethos and Social Problems**

The blood of the staunch Muslim which coursed through Hamdan's veins has always inspired him at all the centres of higher learning where he himself was in a position of influence, to foster and facilitate all activities which had a connection with Islam. When it came to the

provision of basic amenities for the Campus, all Hamdan's plans were almost invariably translated into reality whenever he injected his 'sense of urgency' into each request made to the higher authorities. However, material progress needed to be balanced with spiritual development, and so here too Hamdan made sure that this was given priority. Two of his requests were for the provision of an Islamic hall (*Balai Islam*) and of a university mosque. As a result, these two religious institutions were built and thereafter served to foster an awareness of the obligations of worship and an awareness of how the rise of Islamic civilization was based on the acquisition of knowledge. Through the institution of the mosque as a source of education, an Islamic perspective spread its light.

### **USM and the Struggle against Drug Abuse<sup>15</sup>**

On the other hand, while the spiritual side of character development commanded attention, so did certain pressing social problems which posed a serious threat to student progress and welfare. The most serious amongst these was, as mentioned above, the menace of drug abuse.

Providentially, the introduction of Clinical Pharmacy and Clinical Pharmacology as new major subjects in the University, made it possible for the USM to develop into a leading centre of research into this serious social illness. In 1978 the Drug Abuse Research Centre, already mentioned above, was established under the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, and placed under the charge of Dr. V. Navaratnam, who has been there overseeing its development and expansion ever since<sup>16</sup>. The Centre was designated as a 'national centre' for undertaking research with a view to developing guidelines for on-going and future drug abuse programmes. The Centre worked very closely with various Government agencies, and under Hamdan's guidance very quickly gained the recognition of world bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations itself.

The scientific quality and relevance of the work carried out into drug abuse at the USM led to the WHO designating it as a WHO Research and Training Centre in April 1979. The University was also given the additional responsibility by the WHO of acting as an International Data Centre on the Epidemiology of Drug Addiction. The services of recognized

researchers, whether from the University, the Ministry of Education, or from the WHO, were made available to the region<sup>17</sup>.

The establishment and recognition of the National Centre for Drug Research as a regional centre was undoubtedly a very significant step, especially at a time when the 'disease' of drug abuse was rapidly spreading among the youth of South-East Asian countries. As a result of Hamdan's constant reminders for the need to remain relevant to the social needs of the country and the region, many unique and critical studies were carried out that led to a better understanding of the issues concerning drug abuse and to the development of appropriate policies and programmes. Notable among these were the first national and regional studies of drug use amongst schoolchildren; assessments of treatment approaches; including traditional ones; the evaluation of education programmes; and the establishment of a regional network for drug abuse surveillance.

Moreover, during this same period, the University provided training, in the form of short courses as well as hands-on training, for nearly 500 persons from this country as well as from the region as a whole. Through the vision and missionary endeavour of leading figures, professional and academic, amongst whom Hamdan was an outstanding example, many Asian countries have benefited directly from the various studies carried out at the Drug Abuse Research Centre, which has helped them plan more effective measures to reduce, or at the very least, to contain this social illness.

### **Beyond Campus Walls: 'INSPIRE' and 'NIDAS'**

Apart from the Drug Abuse Research Centre, there were a couple of other projects that were set up under Hamdan's hand and spilt over the campus walls into the world outside. The first of these, his 'INSPIRE' Project, was of great interest to Hamdan because in essence it represented a kind of continuation of his work in developing new approaches to teaching and learning in the school classroom which had been a hallmark of his activities in the Ministry of Education. In fact, the INSPIRE Project<sup>18</sup>, which was to benefit many rural schools in Penang, Perak, Kedah and Sabah, was a research exercise designed to develop and test



scientific approaches in order to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning in rural primary schools. The Project was developed in close collaboration with the CDC for the development of instructional materials as well as in the actual carrying out of research at primary school level. It was set up in November 1977 by the University's School of Educational Studies, along with assistance provided by the International Development and Research Centre, Canada (IDRC)<sup>19</sup>. Selected members of the staff of the School of Educational Studies worked very closely with the CDC in Kuala Lumpur and succeeded in producing several monographs based on the various studies carried out in the ordinary school curriculum<sup>20</sup>.

The other project which made a significant contribution to the work of the Ministry of Education was the National Integrated Data System or NIDAS Project, whose purpose and function are self-explanatory from its title. This was another instance of Hamdan's aim to make the USM an institution of higher learning whose activities were directly in line with national needs. NIDAS was in particular appreciated by the Socio-economic Research and General Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department because it was successful in reinforcing the progress of planning and administration from the point of view of collecting data.

### **Yet Another Farewell**

There is a time when all good things come to an end, and for Hamdan, the news of a fresh appointment, this time overseas as the Malaysian Permanent Representative at UNESCO in Paris, came in the usual sudden manner in 1982<sup>21</sup>.

On looking back on his contribution during his six years as Vice-Chancellor of the USM, Hamdan felt satisfied, as he also had when he retired from the Ministry of Education several years previously, that the legacy he had left behind – be it in terms of physical and intellectual development or of his work ethic – would not easily be forgotten by the campus community of USM.

In 1984 the USM awarded Hamdan an honorary doctorate of literature two years after he had left the post of Vice-Chancellor in recognition of his contribution and dedication which constituted an

example for future generations to follow. The impression that Hamdan left behind him was virtually the same as that which he left behind with any institution or organization with which he had had dealings. He was remembered by his staff and students at the USM as a tireless organizer who was never satisfied with less than the best. He was also remembered for that special quality of going down to the workplace and talking to anyone on the job, from the highest official to the humblest employee, so that his wishes should be properly attended to. He was in verity a 'human dynamo', as Adibah Amin has pertinently expressed it<sup>22</sup>. Dato' M.A. Ogle, the USM Registrar of the day, summed up best in the eulogy which he delivered on Hamdan's departure from the USM in 1982. He said:

Tan Sri, as Tun Hamdan was affectionately referred to then, took Universiti Sains by storm when he took over the reins from Tan Sri Professor Hamzah Sendut in 1976. Right from the start, Tan Sri embarked on a policy to retain the main academic and development philosophies of his predecessors while making vigorous plans to improve on these policies and to expand the University rapidly in fresh directions.

Tan Sri was a man of tremendous vigour and seemed to thrive on hard work. Almost bordering on workaholicism, Tan Sri drove all his staff to accomplish tasks in the shortest possible time. He never took "NO" for an answer, and it is often said that Tan Sri always got his way, especially in getting extra financial grants from the Ministry of Education by literally out-staying the opposition. He never left the office of an official until he got an affirmative answer. A most useful tactic when employed near lunch time!

For those who have worked closely with Tan Sri, they will always remember that he walked fast and very often forgot that there was such a thing as a clock. Time stood still where Tan Sri was concerned. He made business calls in the middle of the night and wanted results by the morning.

With a zest for life and a pace of work which normally left his younger colleagues gasping for breath, Tan Sri is best remembered for the tremendous physical development he achieved at USM. His outstanding contributions include the establishment of the School of Medicine, the Matriculation Studies Unit, the Balai Islam and the Mosque, the Swimming Pool Complex, the National Drug Research Centre, Project

'INSPIRE', the Teaching and Learning Advisory Unit, the implementation of the two semester credit unit academic system, and the introduction of extra-mural activities into the regular academic programme at the University.

Though fully dedicated to his work, Tan Sri always had time for his wife and children, to whom he was devoted. He is also well-remembered for his fatherly image and attitude and genuine interest in the welfare of those who worked with him. Slow to reprimand, Tan Sri was always quick to praise and never forgot those who gave of their best to the University. He went out of his way to ensure that they obtained public recognition for their services to what he calls to this day, 'our University'.

When Tan Sri left the University, he left a part of himself with USM. Till today Tun Hamdan still has a soft spot for the Institution that he helped to develop and nurse through its adolescent years. And indeed he will always be a part of USM.

1. Hamdan, no doubt quite rightly, credits Mahathir with being responsible for his appointment as Vice-Chancellor, but presumably the appointment would not have been made unless it had the approval of the Prime Minister, Tun Hussein Onn, which indicates that Hussein was big enough to overlook his differences with Hamdan in the past.

2. Source: the *USM Calendar*.

3. The various 'study centres' established included (in alphabetical order) Arts; Physics, Chemistry and Biology; Education; Education Technology and Media; Engineering and Industrial Technology; Housing, Building and Planning; Humanities; Languages; Linguistics and Translation; Mathematics and Computer Science; Matriculation; Medical Sciences and Research; Off-Campus Courses; Pharmacy and Pharmacological Studies and Research; Policy Research Centre; and Social Sciences.

4. Speech by Vice-Chancellor Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir at the USM Convention of July 1977.

5. In view of their close relationship, Hamdan will never forget the anxiety he suffered when in April 1982 Koh resigned from his university post in order to contest in the general election of that year. Since it was fixed University policy that a member of its staff who resigned for personal reasons would not be permitted to apply to rejoin the staff ever again, Koh had taken a grave risk with his future, a risk compounded by the fact that he was standing as the Party Gerakan candidate for the Barisan Nasional (National Front/BN) in the Tanjung

State constituency, which was an Opposition stronghold. Hamdan, of course, was only too well aware of the risks that Koh was taking with his career, but he had no choice but to accept Koh's resignation. Hamdan therefore followed Koh's election campaign with bated breath. It was only when Koh's narrow victory was announced over Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) at 3 o'clock in the morning following the polls that Hamdan felt great relief. From a strictly personal point of view, he was happy that one of his former right-hand men at the USM had won the day.

6. Record of discussion with Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir at the National Archives, 13 May 1987.

7. Speech by Vice-Chancellor Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir at the USM Convention of July 1977., *op.cit.*

8. see below.

9. Interview with Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir at the National Archives on 13 May 1987.

10. sepak takraw: a traditional game familiar to the region involving kicking a light ball of rattan either around a circle of players or over a net as in other net games such as badminton, volleyball, etc.

11. i.e. especially during the mid and late 1960s.

12. The actual limit for each university was 10,000, but in certain circumstances, such as in the case of off-campus courses, a university could apply for a small extension.

13. Discussion of 13 May 1987 at the DBP., *op.cit.*

14. Speech by the Chairman of the Senate, Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir at its nineteenth meeting, December, 1978.

15. The whole of this section on drug abuse control, etc. is derived from material kindly supplied by Professor Visvanathan Navaratnam, one-time officer in charge of the University's Drug Abuse Research Centre.

16. Professor Navaratnam's career has been exclusively devoted to the study of the pharmacology of drugs and the problems of drug addiction and abuse. He received his basic medical degrees in Britain (London and Bath) and started off his career as a tutor, then research fellow, at the University of Bath. He joined the USM as lecturer in clinical pharmacy in 1974, and was appointed associate professor in charge of the new University's new Drug Research Centre in 1980 and has remained (now a full-blown Professor) at the USM in virtually the same capacity up till today. But in the meantime he has become a leading expert in the field and has won widespread international recognition.

17. The support given by the WHO and other United Agencies was substantial, and was designed to enable the Centre to play a more pivotal regional and international role by expanding its research and training capacity. For this purpose in the early 1980s Professor Bror Rexed, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC), the UN agency most directly involved, made available a five year 'Institutional Strengthening and Research Support Grant' of more than US\$ 1 million. The project received full support from the Mahathir

administration and such drug-related NGOs such as PEMADAM. Amongst the foreign researchers who arrived to assist in the setting up of the Centre was George Ling (later 'Sir'), a pharmacological expert from Canada, who was to become one of Hamdan's favourite people (and vice-versa). Ling was born in Trinidad (of African stock) but became a naturalized Canadian, facts which would only be apparent by meeting him in the flesh and hearing him speak - for on the basis of his name many presumed a Chinese origin. Brilliant in his field, he became enamoured of Malaysia, the USM and Hamdan. He had joined the USM as lecturer, but as soon as Hamdan became Vice-Chancellor in 1976, he was made External Professor of Pharmacy and remained at the University till Hamdan's retirement six years later. Subsequently Professor Sir George Ling became Director of the UN Narcotics Bureau at Geneva, and later at Vienna. He is now retired.

18. INSPIRE is the acronym for Integrated System of Programmed Instruction for Rural Environment. Sources for the material on INSPIRE were provided by Datuk Siti Mazenah Saad one time Registrar, USM.

19. INSPIRE's four main objectives were to study problems of educational innovation in Malaysia; to diagnose systematically problems of learning and teaching in rural primary schools; to search for, design and test alternative approaches to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning; and to develop and strengthen a local corps of experts in relevant educational research.

20. As always, the development of this Project was brought about by Hamdan's masterful exploitation (in the kindest sense of the word) of his colleagues and past contacts. Hence, when he arrived to take up his appointment as Vice-Chancellor at USM in October 1977, he was still obsessed by the conviction that the key to raising the standards of work and results amongst students (particularly Malay students from the rural areas) in secondary schools was by concentrating on effective teaching and learning processes at primary school level. So he set out to convince the academic staff, and found ready converts to his theory in the then Dean of the School of Educational Studies, Professor Tunku Ismail bin Mat Jawa, and one of the senior lecturers in Education, Dr. Hulman Sinaga. On this basis the School of Educational Studies started a series of action-research projects in rural areas which were generally neglected or remote but near enough to be reached from the USM - i.e. areas in Penang, Seberang Perai, South Kedah and North Perak. These action-research projects were also worked out in tandem with Murad Mohd. Noor, Hamdan's successor as Director-General of Education in Kuala Lumpur, and with Dato' Asiah Abu Samah, Director of the CDC - both his old and trusted colleagues and friends. Networking also secured the active and willing participation of the IDRC of Canada as mentioned above, and also from the Yayasan Sabah which provided a very needful financial shot in the arm.

21. However, in this instance there was a different twist. Hamdan, instead of having been informed three months in advance as was prescribed procedure for the holder of university vice-chancellorships, was only given short notice of his appointment to UNESCO headquarters in Paris. As a result of this, he lost

three months of tenure of office to which he was properly entitled. This happened because Datuk Dr. Sulaiman bin Haji Daud, as Minister of Education, being responsible for making the necessary arrangements, was at the time not altogether familiar with the procedures required in such cases. The anomaly was finally discovered and matters set right.

22. i.e. in her article, *New Sunday Times*, 15 February 1976, marking Hamdan's retirement from the education service. (see back cover).



*THIRTEEN*  
*On The World Stage:*  
*UNESCO, Paris: 1983-1985*

**Ambassador to UNESCO: The Move to Paris**

**H**aving moved out of the official Vice-Chancellor's residence in the USM's grounds, Hamdan, Siti Zainab and the children went for the next three months until it was time for him to take up his appointment in Paris, to stay in the new house that he had bought at Bandar Bayan Baru (4, Solok Kampung Jawa 4). This enabled his two children to finish off their studies in Penang – Siti Aishah at the USM and Tahiruddin at the Penang Free School. For although they had a house in Kuala Lumpur, the family felt it more convenient to stay in Penang, particularly for the well-being of their children.

One room in the house was turned into Hamdan's private library, where all his personal collection – books on Islam, bulky tomes on general knowledge and philosophy, reports in manuscripts and magazines, working papers, collections of speeches, and much else besides – were housed for the benefit of whosoever might be interested for purposes of research in time to come. In all, Siti Zainab says, thinking back of the time when they first moved in:

We felt comfortable staying here because there were so many close friends of ours around. When we first occupied this semi-detached house in Kampung Jawa, we were just the second family to stay in that neighbourhood, but not long after many other houses were occupied, most of them by Chinese. However, despite differences of religion, race and culture, we all got along very well with one another.

However, if Siti Zainab, like any proud house-wife welcomed the change to the quieter atmosphere of a suburban dwelling, Hamdan waited impatiently for the day when he would take up his appointment as Malaysia's Permanent Representative and Ambassador to UNESCO in Paris, to replace Dato' Lokman Musa who had gone on retirement. In doing so, Hamdan was the fourth in the succession of holders of the post, following the path that had been trodden by a three of his colleagues at the Ministry of Education.

Lokman Musa was one of them<sup>1</sup>. When Hamdan was at the Ministry of Education, Lokman had been his right-hand man responsible for managing the Teachers' Training Division. In that capacity Lokman had proved of great assistance to him in planning how to improve the quality of teacher training all over the country. Then, prior to his retirement, Lokman had been sent to Paris to take up the post which Hamdan was now about to assume. Their long association in the Ministry made the take-over all the easier when this took place in early 1983.

Hamdan, of course, was no stranger to the world of UNESCO<sup>2</sup>, because, as we have seen, he had had close connections with this important agency of the United Nations since his early days in the Ministry in the 1960s. He had participated in various UNESCO conferences from the time he was a secondary school principal, when he attended the conference on 'Reforms in Education' at New Delhi in 1958. Later on, in his capacity as Director-General of Education, Hamdan was *ipso facto* the Secretary-General of the Malaysian National Commission for UNESCO<sup>3</sup> for ten years, so that almost every time the biennial UNESCO meeting was held at Paris, he had to accompany the Minister of Education of the day (i.e. from Mohd Khir Johari to Dr. Mahathir) as one of his official duties. Nevertheless, his dealings with UNESCO in the past had been mainly on its periphery. Now, for the first time he was going to be working at its very centre, in its headquarters in Paris, the capital of France.

Hamdan took up his appointment with UNESCO in Paris at an interesting juncture in its history when its chief (i.e. Director-General) was Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, a colourful and controversial statesman and politician from Senegal<sup>4</sup>. Amadou-Mahtar was profoundly critical of the obvious Western hegemony over UNESCO's affairs and programmes,



and set out to redress the imbalance by pushing for the interests of the Third World. As a result, during the three years that Hamdan was serving in Paris, matters inexorably moved towards a confrontation. The climax came in 1984, only a few months before Hamdan was due to complete his tour of duty in Paris, when the USA decided to withdraw from the organization<sup>5</sup>. The following year both the United Kingdom and Singapore followed in the American footsteps, for reasons best known to themselves<sup>6</sup>.

Hamdan, as usual, was not really interested in political issues *per se*, but he naturally enough sympathized with the stand of the Third World, which the Malaysian Government strongly supported, against Western domination in the affairs of UNO and its agencies. After the American departure from UNESCO, he noted, 'this international organization was freer to draft its policies and select its programmes without the influence and interference of the United States'.

### UNESCO's *Modus Operandi* and Malaysian Participation

Of UNESCO's five primary functions as laid down in its policy guide-lines<sup>7</sup>, the purely educational aspects are those which Hamdan took up in Paris with relish. His former position as Secretary-General of the Malaysian National Commission for UNESCO had provided him with sufficient background and experience to be able to fit in with the *modus operandi* at the UNESCO Headquarters<sup>8</sup>. At the practical level, UNESCO's input which is of direct benefit to member states takes the form of expert advice and assistance under its 'participatory' and 'ordinary' programmes in whatever is connected with its basic functions. In other words, UNESCO is not a financial aid agency, but an intellectual body in the UN system, serving as a catalyst or prime mover, stimulator and adviser. Its programmes, projects and advice are impartially distributed to all member nations<sup>9</sup>.

Nearly all aspects of human life are covered by the functions of UNESCO – that is, everything that has to do with human affairs all over the world both in the present and for the future, especially in the spheres of education, science, culture and communication. These matters are discussed, planned and launched from Paris by means of a system of

cooperation which includes all member-states, big and small, communist and non-communist, developed and undeveloped, rich and poor. All are subject to the same standards, to the same thinking, to the same inputs and are carried out with the sole aim of achieving the same goal – ‘peace and international understanding’.

Incidentally, of considerable relief to Hamdan personally, as he mingled with UNESCO’s cosmopolitan community in the heart of the French capital, was that in great contrast to the Parisian world outside where English was seldom heard, English was widely, in fact predominantly used amongst the delegates. Similarly, the hundreds of books, journals and pamphlets published every year appeared in English as well as in French. For general reading purposes, a knowledge of English was also sufficient.

Malaysia never failed to play its part in UNESCO’s manifold activities. In this connection, it might be noted that two of the UNESCO projects which were closest to Hamdan’s heart were the UNESCO-RECSAM workshop held at Penang in 1972, and the UNESCO cultural project for Malaysia which was focussed on Malay culture in the region at large as well as within Malaysia itself. In other words, with UNESCO’s assistance, South-East Asian countries were carrying out research into their own rich cultures. Speaking of the UNESCO cultural project in his capacity as the Chief Malaysian Representative before the 17th General Assembly of UNESCO in Paris in November 1972, Dato’ Hussein Onn, Minister of Education, observed that ‘Once launched, the inhabitants of the region would be able to revive their own values, cultural traditions and reveal the roots of their own civilization’<sup>30</sup>. These are only two out of the dozens of UNESCO projects which have been carried out in this region.

### **Hamdan: the Multi-Purpose Malaysian Delegate**

Hamdan’s involvement in the management of projects and his attendance at the biennial conferences as a member of the Malaysian delegation gave him the opportunity to get to know UNESCO at close quarters. Therefore his comment, when he accepted his new appointment in Paris, that it represented the ‘crowning glory’ of his career in education

is understandable. It was a spontaneous reaction which underlined his personal devotion and unwavering commitment to the cause of education. His attitude towards education also fell in line with what René Maheu, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow's predecessor as Director-General of UNESCO, himself emphasized at the UNESCO General Assembly in Paris in November 1972. Maheu on that occasion declared: 'The task of UNESCO is basically a cultural one, and its centre of gravity, as has been expected, will shift in time to come from the field of education where it rests now to that of science, and then to that of culture'<sup>11</sup>.

The Permanent Representative of a member-state is expected to accomplish at least three important tasks for his own country. In the first place, he has to represent the interests of his nation in relation to UNESCO projects and at the same time to maximize the direct advantages that UNESCO can offer. Second, he is expected to make use of his presence at UNESCO headquarters to meet members of the international community who usually are not accessible by means of bi-lateral diplomatic relations. Thirdly, also by his presence, he is expected to give his support and the fruits of his ideas, intellectual and moral, to the international community by the processes of multi-lateralism which UNESCO provides so that the basic aims enshrined in its constitution can be met.

In this context, Hamdan saw one of his main roles as being to 'sell' Malaysia to the members of the world community gathered at Paris, a role which was encouraged and reinforced by the high profile approach adopted by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in international relations since taking over the helm as Prime Minister.

In fact, Malaysia has always been a strong supporter of the efforts to realize the aims and aspirations of UNESO, as expressed in all the proposals, suggestions and assistance it has given, and as witnessed by the presence of its Minister of Education at every biennial conference. As Dato' Hussein Onn said during the debate on the Director-General's Report at the UNESCO General Assembly in Paris in November 1972:

I believe that I am voicing the opinion of all developing countries when I say that we place the highest hopes on the activities of this Organization. As member states, it is our duty to give our fullest cooperation and our responsibility to ensure that they fulfil the role and aims of UNESCO.

Usually the Minister of Education, when he came for these meetings, did not stay long – at the most one week. In the absence of the Minister, the Director-General of Education served as his alternate and led the delegation until the conference was over. Now, as Permanent Representative and Ambassador, and with a decade of experience behind him, Hamdan was better equipped to handle the problems that arose in connection with UNESCO's affairs. He had already come to know dozens of heads of delegations and their right-hand men from other countries, especially those who came from the countries of the Commonwealth. Hamdan soon adjusted himself to the daily work at the UNESCO headquarters, which enabled him at once to attend a variety of discussions, forums, seminars, workshops, etc. On one occasion he was invited to attend a session of the International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) in the heart of Paris. There he renewed acquaintance with experts from South-East Asia who had come there for training. When he attended a meeting of the International Bureau of Education (IBE), whose Director at the time was Chong Seck Chim, his old colleague at the Ministry of Education, Hamdan was made chairman of several workshops in his capacity as chief Malaysian representative.

Hamdan always made the most of these opportunities, such as when he managed to visit the UNESCO Institute of Education at Cologne in West Germany, so as to extract the maximum benefit from them. By meeting with numbers of experts in education from all over the world, he was able to discuss and exchange views on educational matters, in which of particular interest was the concept of education as a life-long process. With the wealth of workshops or seminars organized by UNESCO, only time restricted his involvement in them<sup>12</sup>.

Each of the educational issues discussed were divided up between several aspects that were considered to have either universal application or to have a bearing on regional needs, with strategies and measures appropriate for use in the areas concerned, of which the Regional Office for Primary Education (ROEAP) at Bangkok serves as one example. Close relations with the other national representatives made it easier for Hamdan to lobby for assistance regarding UNESCO's programmes for Malaysia. Indeed, lobbying was one of the functions of the Permanent Representative, for by this means the work of obtaining the assistance

required was made all the easier, and Hamdan was a skilled lobbyist. In this way he succeeded in getting the appropriate expertise for improving the curriculum and syllabi for science, mathematics and vocational education in Malaysia

### **Life in Paris**

When Hamdan and Siti Zainab went to Paris they did not take the children with them for the time being, because they still had to complete their studies at university and school respectively. Hamdan and Siti Zainab arrived at the French capital when it was covered with the snows of winter, the trees bare and leafless, the days short and the nights long - all of which gave them a gloomy impression.

They leased a flat at 16, Avenue Paul Doumer, on the banks of the Seine near the Eiffel Tower. Although they were both used to cold weather, with its damp and dreariness, which they had experienced during their respective sojourns in England thirty years previously, this time the situation was very different. They were now a family and they missed their children. 'God only knows my feelings when I thought about our children, all on their own so far away', says Siti Zainab about their early days in Paris at the beginning of 1983.

However, they had to put up with all these trials and tribulations and their worries about their children because Hamdan was in Paris to represent the interests of his country. The first priority was to adapt themselves to their new environment, for as the saying goes, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'<sup>13</sup> Given the well-known French pride in their language which manifested itself in their refusal to speak in any language other than their own - particularly English, even if they know it<sup>14</sup> - Hamdan and Siti Zainab made a point of mastering certain key phrases in French in order to be able to communicate with Parisians in their daily affairs. They also set out to learn essential everyday words such as numbers (up to ten), the names of the days and the months, and normal greetings and various other words and phrases which they thought would be useful.

Although I tried my best to learn French, it was difficult to put into my head all these new words that I had never heard back home.

Nevertheless, while I was there, I went all out to learn, and as far as speaking in the market was concerned, i could get just about by',

remarks Siti Zainab.

It certainly was no easy task to get the tongue round those French sounds. While Hamdan was busy with his official duties, whether in the office or at all manner of meetings, Siti Zainab had also been quick to accustom herself to life in Paris. Missing the children was from time to time alleviated when they came there during the school holidays. Making friends with fellow-Malaysians was at the top of their list of priorities when they were in a foreign land. This was a matter of course when abroad, for their compatriots became 'family' regardless of status or position. Osman, their official driver, and his family became very close to them and they were ready to help whenever help was required. Osman, who was fluent in French, was always invited to go with them to the market to buy their necessities for the week or whenever they went around the city.

All sorts of food could be found in the Paris market, from rice to mee, from all kinds of spices to lemon-grass and ginger, and even *petai*<sup>15</sup> and prawn paste (*belacan*). Asian foods are not difficult to come by, and therefore the traveller to Europe need not bring his own supplies on first going there. Spices and aromatics, etc. can be obtained in shops run by Vietnamese, Thais and Indians. Meat and chicken, prepared in the authorized Muslim way, can be bought from shops owned by Arabs. In short, in Paris everything can be got provided you know where to get it. However, unlike in London, there are no Malay restaurants in Paris. Most commonly found are the restaurants of the Chinese which are to be found in almost every place where there are foodshops.

Other Asian restaurants which are available include Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian and Pakistani. The apartment in which Hamdan and Siti Zainab stayed in Avenue Paul Doumer was in the heart of Paris. Situated on the second floor, it was of moderate size, with two bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining-room and lounge. In the basement there was a room for a housemaid or a chauffeur. The modest dimensions of the apartment made it easy to keep clean without outside help, although sometimes Siti Zainab was aided by Osman, especially when entertaining guests, such as

during the *Hari Raya* season. Siti Zainab was astonished at the proficiency of Osman and his family in speaking French. Other Malaysian staff working at UNESCO were also very close to them - Yusof bin Jusoh and his wife, Aishah, and their children, always exchanged visits; Puan Wan Hua, Hamdan's interpreter and private secretary; Noraishah, Daing, Shamsuddin and Mustapha, each with their families, were their close friends who helped relieve their loneliness and nostalgia for home when they paid visits to one another.

At weekends, if Hamdan did not have any official appointments, they would go around Paris to see the sights of that lovely city. Paris is famous as a city rich in history and legend, as a leader of fashion, and as a place of great elegance and charm - a fame which has served to lure foreign visitors and make it an important tourist centre. Indeed, it is one of the most beautiful cities in the world with its well-planned and well laid-out streets. Most of its buildings are greyish - the colour of cement - while many of its streets are cobbled, a reminder of days gone by when they were thoroughfares for horse-drawn vehicles. The streets are also narrow, most convenient for pedestrians in this modern age. However, for pedestrians there are special pavements or walkways. Where such walkways do not exist, pedestrians have to take responsibility for their own safety, because the drivers of Paris are aggressive, rude and liable to let off a string of oaths at those who get in their way. According to Siti Zainab:

It would be true to say that about 90 per cent of the cars here have dents all over them, because car owners don't mind if they collide with another vehicle. They don't bother to repair these dents because repair costs are so high. As long as the car can go, that's good enough. Such is the French way of life!

Most Parisians like keeping dogs as pets, even though they live in high-rise apartments. Before going to work and on returning back home, they will take their dogs out for a walk and give them a chance to do their business. Because of this there is a group of workers whose particular job it is to clear up the dog stools and wash down the pavement with water. Hassan Ahmad has made the following observations on the subject of the dogs of Paris:

I remember someone saying that not only people but also dogs may not be scolded. Do you know how many dogs there are in Paris? There are more than two million of them in the whole of France, of which about forty per cent live in Paris. Dogs walk the streets of Paris by the side of their owners, scattering their excreta and filth wherever they go. When walking abroad in Paris, take great care not to step on this French 'chocolate' – that's the word my children use. I am too scared to shout at a dog which tries to rub its body against my trousers in a cafe or in the market-place, or which urinates in front of me, for its owner will be sure to tell me off. One of my friends was once told: 'Don't do that: it's not an animal!'. Fortunately, these dogs never, or very rarely, bark. Parisians do not like noise."

There are many interesting places to visit and see in Paris, including parks, monuments, buildings, museums, places of entertainment and much else besides, according to one's taste. Lovers of culture certainly will not miss the opportunity to go and look at historical landmarks which form part of the French national legacy and, associated with traditions and stories that go back for centuries, form an integral part of the ethos of Paris – and of France. The Latin Quarter is considered to be the focal point of intellectual life, because this is where the University, colleges, libraries and bookshops are found. It is also the scene of a great range of activities carried out by students and professors, painters and art-lovers, and others who like the bohemian life.

Then there is the Arc de Triomphe, commemorating Napoleon's victories, and after the great arch in North Korea, the highest in the world. Twelve avenues radiate from the Arc de Triomphe, while below its broad span lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier – one of the thousands of unidentified French soldiers who fell defending their country during the First World War now representing the rest. The Eiffel Tower, a bold, steel structure which has stood now for over a hundred years old, is an architectural wonder. Special attention is given to its constant renovation because it was constructed in a period when engineering technology was not so sophisticated as it is today. The Eiffel Tower is crowded by visitors night and day, and it gives Paris its identity. It is the creation of one of its famous citizens, called Eiffel. At night, when illuminated, it looks like a giant candle of gold.



Notre Dame, a cathedral on which work was first started in 1163 and was only completed two centuries later, is famous for the magnificence of its architecture, and in particular for the intricacy of the sculpture of its facade. The cathedral and its sculpture provided the inspiration for the classic tale, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, written by Victor Hugo, one of France's great authors. When construction works were being carried out in its vicinity to make room for a new carpark, a priceless historical treasure was discovered, consisting of a tomb dating back to the 3rd century AD and the remains of a fort belonging to the European Middle Ages.

The Catacombs of Paris were the place where the headquarters of the French Resistance Movement against the Nazi German occupiers of their country during the Second World War was located. At the end of the eighteenth century, thousands of human skeletons were transferred to its underground labyrinth of tunnels, because the original cemetery (the Cemetery of the Innocents) was already overcrowded. It made an ideal place for an underground resistance movement, as, for example, during the Second World War. The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart (Sacre Coeur) is set on the top of Montmartre, the highest piece of ground in Paris. At its centre is an alcove of white marble surrounded by other smaller alcoves, also white, giving the appearance of a wedding cake. The Cathedral is visible from all over Paris.

The Hotel des Invalides was built during the reign of Louis XIV as a military hospital. It has now been converted into a military museum, where are on display all the flags and banners, swords, medallions, and coats of mail, in fact everything to do with the history of the French military forces, including those associated with the Napoleonic era. A major centre of interest is the Pantheon, where Napoleon's tomb is laid. The Pantheon is the final resting place of the most illustrious leaders of France, including philosophers, men of literature, revolutionary heroes, and great soldiers. Amongst those buried here are the famous eighteenth century philosophers, Voltaire and Rousseau; the nineteenth century writers, Victor Hugo and Emil Zola, and the scientists, Pierre and Marie Curie.

There are many other national monuments and memorials, including those that belong to the great and violent French Revolution which shook Europe some two centuries ago.

Hamdan made sure that he and his family saw all these sights. He looked upon visits to such places as part of informal education whenever he took his family there. Visits such as these – to the Louvre Museum, for instance, a building 800 years old whose contents could not possibly all be viewed within the span of a single day – offered profound insights into the past. As such, all these historical treasures which form part of the French legacy serve as a lesson for the modern generation of the importance of an awareness of history. For, as Hamdan reminded himself when he was promoting the cause of history in the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia:

...we can compare the history of the glories and decline of a nation with that of other nations by studying the historical factors involved, and then use all the positive elements as a guide for the future... In this way historical elements which are of such great value and significance will not simply disappear, but can be extracted and preserved as living pearls to be investigated, studied and be made of use to the present and future generations<sup>17</sup>.

### **Looking Back**

For the two years and two months that he served as Malaysia's Permanent Representative and Ambassador to UNESCO, Hamdan witnessed how the organization dealt with various challenges, problems and demands from its member states. Indeed, it was not easy to meet the wishes of 153 different countries unless the UNESCO leadership itself possessed the necessary will and patience to meet them. UNESCO was now almost forty years old and had already a rich history of its own. For over the past two decades it had succeeded in settling current issues with address in its mission to achieve universal understanding amongst its member states in the interests of education, culture, science and communication. 'Just imagine the experience and lessons that we can derive from 158 countries at one place alone – UNESCO,' Dato' Hassan Ahmad has remarked. 'There's no more need for us to send groups around the world to see and learn or to obtain whatever we want to know about any particular country'<sup>18</sup>.

The experience that Hamdan gained in Paris was invaluable, even though his time there was short. That experience enriched and

strengthened his knowledge, especially in the ins and outs of diplomacy in international relations. Furthermore, interacting with people of high intellect and culture drawn from the four corners of the globe sharpened his own intellectual skills, and added stature to his efforts as Malaysia's Permanent Representative. Great reserves of personal endurance, scholarship, thought, experience and stamina were necessary in order to read the scores of documents which came from all sides, but particularly from the UNESCO Secretariat, besides dealing with hundreds of issues, topics, and projects related to education, culture, science and communication which were handled by UNESCO<sup>19</sup>. The wealth of reading and the wealth of culture that his stay in Paris had bestowed upon him was a gift beyond all compare.

Hamdan and Siti Zainab said *au revoir* to the UNESCO community in Paris at the end of March 1985.

1. i.e. the other three being A.K. Arianayagam, Chang Min Kee, and Lokman Musa himself.

2. UNESCO is a specialized agency of the United Nations Organization (UNO), based in Paris. Its basic aims are to promote international collaboration in education, science, culture and communication. With regard to education, its main thrust is to support the spread of literacy, universal primary education and continuing education for adults. In science it aims to assist developing countries to enlarge their programmes and to encourage the growth of contacts and exchange of information between scientists on a global scale. UNESCO also encourages the preservation of historical monuments and sites, and other aspects of culture such as oral folk traditions, music and dance. By 1989 there were some 315 sites in 67 countries entered on UNESCO's 'World Heritage List', designed to protect landmarks of 'outstanding universal value'. Regarding 'communication', UNESCO is committed to the free flow of information, which, as seen below, became something of a sensitive issue amongst members in the organization in the 1980s when Hamdan was in Paris.

UNESCO was established in November 1945 when its constitution, drafted by 20 founder members, was endorsed by a total of 37 states. However, its antecedents go back to the International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation (CICI) founded in Geneva in 1922, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IICI) set up in Paris in 1925, and the International Bureau of Education (IBE) established at Geneva also in 1925, in the wake of the First World War (1914-18). These bodies, with the exception of the IBE, were dissolved on the establishment of UNESCO.

UNESCO's administration consists of three bodies: (1) The General Assembly of the Member States. This is its governing body and meets twice a year. Based on the principle of one vote for each country, the Assembly sanctions programmes and approves the organization's budget; (2) The Executive Board with 58 representatives from member states. It meets twice a year, functioning as an administrative body, responsible for preparing the General Assembly's agenda and for the effective implementation of all its decisions; (3) The Secretariat forms UNESCO's executive under the direct authority of the Director-General, who is chosen for a term of 6 years by member-states. UNESCO's membership stood at 153 countries, a total which remained unchanged during Hamdan's term in Paris.

3. The Malaysian National UNESCO Commission was formed in 1966, the year in which Hamdan became Director-General of Education, its objectives being to promote the programmes and activities of UNESCO in the country., viz. by advising the Government on all matters relating to UNESCO policies and its activities; by encouraging and increasing the participation of the nation's educational institutions in UNESCO programmes and activities; by cooperating with national commissions for UNESCO in other countries so as to enhance knowledge and mutual understanding; by adapting and implementing at national level UNESCO programmes and activities related to specialist fields; and by disseminating information regarding UNESCO and its objectives, etc. to the Malaysian public at large and assisting in the implementation of activities related to them. (Memo on UNESCO, Foreign Affairs Division of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, dated January 1992, p.2.)

Needless to say, right from the start Hamdan had involved himself in the National UNESCO Commission's work. Amongst various UNESCO programmes and projects essayed were the Associated Schools Project and others which involved teacher training, the publication of educational guide-books, education outside the classroom and informal education, and the East-West Education Project. As Hamdan told his audience with reference to UNESCO in his speech at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 12 April 1967:

'Malaysians must learn to live together with all the other peoples of the world and learn from the experience, knowledge and skills of these other nations in order to achieve greater successes. In implementing education under the First Malaysia Plan, we are dependent on outside help, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels which are now the focus of immediate attention. We in Malaysia are aware that until our own people have overcome the problem of local resources, we have to place our hopes on other more developed countries to acquire the necessary expertise'.

4. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow served from 1974 till 1987. Incidentally, there were (in Hamdan's time), some 2,200 administrative, professional and general staff who formed the Secretariat's work force, and 500 others who served outside the headquarters.

5. The Americans accused UNESCO of politicizing its programmes, squandering funds and inefficiency, and of encouraging a public relations policy which they regarded as being 'against Press freedom'. The USA was also not happy with the principle of 'one country, one vote', although this had been accepted from the very beginning of UNESCO's existence. What the Americans wanted was for big countries (or countries that made large financial contributions to the organization) to be given a greater say in UNESCO in order to ensure that all its policies and programmes were effectively carried out – along the lines of the arrangements that prevailed in the UN Security Council, whose permanent members had a veto which could override majority decisions. Of course, it could not be denied that the US financial contributions far exceeded those of other countries – amounting, for example, in 1970 to 29.73 per cent and in 1980 to 25 per cent of all contributions received. Subsequently (i.e. after 1985) there were several attempts to coax the Americans to rejoin the organization. Nevertheless all these efforts were in vain. The USA (and Britain) only maintained their position as permanent observers, which entitled them to attend meetings of UNESCO, but not to participate or vote.

6. With the withdrawal of these three nations, the percentage contributions of other states increased proportionately, with Japan becoming the single largest contributor, see *About UNESCO: Contributions of Member States*, <http://www.unesco>, 7 April 1998.

7. i.e. (1) Feasibility studies: to determine what form the educational, scientific, cultural and communicational aspects of its work should take; (2) Upgrading, transferring and sharing of knowledge, this basically being dependent on research, training and instruction; (3) Establishing uniformity of measures taken: preparing and securing agreement on international regulations/systems and statutory proposals; (4) Expertise: the establishment of technical cooperation amongst member states for formulating development policies and projects; (5) Exchange of specialist information.

8. The *modus operandi* of UNESCO is based on international norms: conventions, agreements, proposals, declarations; conferences and meetings; studies and research; publications, such as books, periodicals, reports and documents; technical services and advice to member states; representation by members of the various delegations, meeting guide-notes, supplies and equipment; training courses, seminars, and workshops; support to NGOs; financial contributions, fellowships; scholarships and travelling expenses; and other activities besides. (see 'About UNESCO', <http://www>, 1998.)

9. For instance, in the case of the UNESCO project 'Learning to be: the world of education today and tomorrow', which was implemented in 1972, all member states were requested to organize reviews, seminars and workshops. Some of the outstanding programmes and projects sponsored by UNESCO between 1948 and 1984 included the UNESCO Fellowships Programme, 1948; the UNESCO Coupon Programme, 1948 (coupons issued by UNESCO to meet the problem of foreign currency exchange in buying books and other cultural materials); Research studies into oceans and shore zone management, 1961;

International Programme for the Development of Communications (IPDC), 1980; and 'Education for All', 1984. Amongst significant conferences, etc. sponsored by UNESCO over the same period were (1) the International Conferences on Education in 1947 at the International Bureau of Education, Geneva; (2) Regional Conference of Ministers of Education, 1960; (3) World Book Congress, London, 1982; and (4) World Conference on Cultural Policy, Mexico, 1982. These and many other such meetings were held either in Paris or in leading cities in other parts of the world.

10. The UNESCO Malay Culture Project was actually launched in January 1972 at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Language and Literature Agency headquarters), Kuala Lumpur by Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein, the Prime Minister, in the presence of 57 participants from 18 member states and 37 specialists. See *Final Report, International Meeting of Experts for the launching of the Malay Culture Project*, Kuala Lumpur, 21-28 January, 1972.

11. *Final Report*, *ibid.*

12. Amongst the seminars which he was able to attend were: (1) Education and Society; (2) UNESCO in the World of Education; (3) Towards Lifelong Education; (4) Raising the Quality and Standards of Education; (5) Assistance for Education; (6) The Dissemination of Information; (7) Education for Justice, Freedom and Peace. (Source: *Fifty Years For Education*, UNESCO, 1997).

13. Or as the Malays more picturesquely put it, 'In the cowshed, moo; in the sheep's pen, bleat' (*Masuk kandang lembu menguak, masuk kandang kambing mengebek*).

14. There is the well-known (and possibly apocryphal) story of a Malay couple who were stranded at an underground railway station (i.e. on the Metro) in Paris, and asked a Frenchman in English when the next train was due. The Frenchman, pretending not to understand, merely shook his head. Then the husband in his frustration started talking in Malay to his wife. At this point, the Frenchman they had just spoken to suddenly came up to them, apparently out of sympathy, and explained to them in fluent English as to why the train was delayed! Dato' Hassan Ahmad put the French attitude down to the great role that France has played as the cultural leader of Europe for centuries, to the extent that up till recent times the language of diplomacy was French. 'What is obvious is that the French are very proud of their language. They consider that French has given birth to the richest culture in terms of history, the arts and civilized values in all Europe and they are most reluctant to 'modernize' the structure of their language or its spelling.' Notes from Hassan Ahmad in Paris: 'Kaca di Jendela', *Dewan Masyarakat*, May 1989. Dato' Hassan is also a former Malaysian Permanent Representative and Ambassador to UNESCO, (1988-91).

15. defined in Winstedt's *Malay-English Dictionary* as a 'stinking, edible pod'.

16. Hassan Ahmad, *op.cit.*, May 1989.

17. Speech by Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, as Chairman of the Working Committee of the PSM, at the Dewan Hang Tuah, Malacca, on the

occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Malacca Branch, on 9 September 1980.

18. Hassan., op.cit.

19. For the record, some 8,500 publications had, by Hamdan's time, been issued by UNESCO in the form of primary source books, periodical documents, journals, magazines, bulletins, news commentaries, and so forth. *Fundamental Education* (1947), *History of Mankind* (6 vols., 1963-76) and *Learning To Be* (1972) are merely three examples from this long list.



*FOURTEEN*  
*Head Of State, Penang:*  
*1989-2001*

**On Becoming a Head of State**

**O**n a Wednesday afternoon in the middle of Ramadan, the Fasting Month for all Muslims, 1409 AH (i.e. in April 1989), when Siti Zainab was frying her husband's favourite dish for breaking the fast, came the sound of the 'phone ringing in the lounge of their home in Bandar Bayan Baru, Penang. As was his wont, Hamdan was sitting in the room reading while waiting for the break fast hour. Siti Zainab took no notice of the 'phone because she was busy with her cooking; in any case she knew that Hamdan would answer it. Then, as soon as the telephone conversation was over, Hamdan rushed into the kitchen and exclaimed: 'I've just received some great news from Anwar Ibrahim!'

'What did he say?', asked Siti Zainab. It's not just great – it's marvellous, exclaimed Hamdan. 'Anwar conveyed the Prime Minister's compliments and informed me that I am to take over from Tun Dato' Dr, Haji Awang as Governor of Penang with effect from May the First!'

In this way Siti Zainab was the first to learn of her husband's new and high appointment. Coming from Anwar Ibrahim, who was not only, as Minister of Education, a member of the Cabinet but also Chief UMNO Liaison Officer for Penang, there could be no doubt as to its authenticity.

'What do you think? Should I accept?', for Hamdan always discussed all matters of importance with his wife for her opinion. 'As long as holding that office will not create any problems for us as a family, I agree. Why not?', Siti Zainab replied to give him encouragement. However, she



was also well aware of the great changes to their lives which his appointment to the highest office in Penang would bring in its train. It was as if the moon had fallen into their laps.

'There are, of course a number of implications that arise from this appointment', continued Hamdan. 'You'll no longer be able to go wherever you want, or do whatever you like; all our movements will be watched by security personnel because the dignity of the office has to be scrupulously maintained', and went on to mention a number of other things that they must be prepared to face from 1 May onwards.

Listening to Hamdan's remarks aroused some rather mixed feelings in Siti Zainab's mind. On the one hand, of course, she was delighted that the Government had not overlooked her husband's contributions to the nation, for to be made Head of one of the States of the Federation of Malaysia would mark the zenith of Hamdan's career. She could also look forward to a more comfortable life. Ever since their return from Paris, they had been living as ordinary citizens, helping one another with the daily chores – cooking, keeping the house tidy, looking after the compound, and so on. Siti Zainab had also acquired another function – as her husband's driver, whether to go just around the corner or to travel to and fro between Penang and Kuala Lumpur. The long trips to Kuala Lumpur took place at least twice a month in order to see their house there, because Hamdan 'had not held the steering wheel of a car since 1976'. She thanked God that she was still in good health and could carry on with her various household duties, all the more so since the children were no longer around to help her.

Their lives became simpler when their three children had grown up. Siti Khadijah, the eldest, had got her MD, was married, and now was working as a lecturer at the Science Study Centre of the USM at its Kubang Kerian campus in Kelantan. Their second-born, Siti Aishah, had obtained a degree in computer science and was also now a lecturer at the USM (in Penang) while their youngest, and their only son, Tahiruddin, was taking a course in electrical engineering at the USM campus at Tronoh, Perak, although he commuted between the Tronoh campus and their Penang home at Bayan Baru. Tahiruddin's presence always alleviated their loneliness, and he was especially useful as an extra driver. Hamdan and Siti Zainab always looked forward to his visits. On one

occasion he was able to be at home for some time because he was carrying out his practicals with an international company which produced electronic components for the computer industry. So, given this settled family situation, Siti Zainab was confident that she would be able to assist her husband effectively in coping with any situation, good or bad, in his new position?

Nevertheless, as the future occupant of Seri Mutiara, the official residence and symbol of the dignity of the Head of State, Siti Zainab had some gnawing doubts. The building, which was like a palace and stood imposingly along the side of Jalan Utama (formerly Residency Road) was too big for the two of them, even if all their children and grandchildren joined them there. Living in their own homes, whether in Kuala Lumpur or Penang, they had been comfortable enough. The houses were easy to look after and they could move around without missing one another, and they were easily accessible as well. The splendours of Seri Mutiara, which was almost a century old, with its spacious views, railed in and closely guarded by security personnel, gave rise to all kinds of thoughts in Siti Zainab's mind. She had already been to the residence at the invitation of the State Government for official functions when Hamdan was Vice-Chancellor of the USM. What worried her now was how difficult it would be for their close relatives and friends to come and visit them there. They would also be leaving behind – for a while – all their neighbours, Chinese, Indian, Malay, at their Bandar Baru home. She could not help brooding over all these thoughts which started crowding into her head the moment she learned that Hamdan was going to become Governor of the State of Penang and that she was going to be the First Lady.

'Come on, now! Stop fussing yourself over these minor matters! By God's good Grace we have enjoyed so many benefits all these years and we should now be all the more grateful for His Beneficence towards us', Hamdan told her whenever he caught her brooding about the shape of things to come.

In fact, when in March 1985 Hamdan was nearing the end of his term at UNESCO in Paris, he had received a personal letter from someone whose word could be relied upon, saying that he would be appointed as the next Governor of Penang when he returned home. However, Hamdan

found this hard to believe and took it as a mere rumour because the actual incumbent of that post had another four years to go. Nevertheless, when Hamdan arrived at the Penang International Airport at Bayan Lepas on 1 April 1985 he and Siti Zainab got a big surprise. Their home-coming was welcomed not only by their close relatives but also by a number of VIPs in the State. One of them was Datuk Teh Ewe Lin (now Tan Sri), the Speaker of the Penang State Legislature and a leader of Gerakan. There were also Dato' Tan Ghim Keng, former Chief Police Officer, Penang; Dato' Shahrom Ahmat, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the USM; and the late Dato' Loh Boon Siew, the well-known Penang millionaire. 'Has their presence to welcome us at the airport anything to do with the rumours I heard in Paris?', Hamdan asked himself. 'They must have made a mistake', his heart told him. That incident four years ago had quickly faded from memory, but now rumour had become reality.

### **Breaking with the Past: Farewell to the PSM**

It had immediately occurred to Hamdan on receiving confirmation of his appointment that one of the first things he had to do was to go down to KL and call a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Malaysian Historical Society to let them know so that they could start looking around for a suitable replacement - someone committed and who could be relied upon to carry on promoting its activities. At the same time, Hamdan was also thinking of various other voluntary activities which he would have to give up so that his whole attention would be concentrated on his duties as State Governor. But the first organization that had crossed his mind was naturally the PSM which he had headed for almost twenty years.

For the trip to Kuala Lumpur, made by car, for the PSM meeting, Siti Zainab as usual was the driver. They reached Kuala Lumpur without hardly realizing it, immersed as they were in their thoughts of the future that lay ahead of them. The meeting of the PSM's Executive Committee was to be held on the following afternoon (18 April 1989) starting at 4 o'clock. At the meeting, Hamdan would not only announce the good news of his appointment but would also resign from the chairmanship at one and the same time.

He felt very sad at having to leave an organization which he had reared, cherished and led for over three decades (save for the three years when he was in Paris) until it had reached maturity and could stand on its own feet. What saddened him still further was the thought of having to part company with his friends in the Society who shared with him the same desire and interest in raising the status of History as a symbol of the national heritage and when there was still so much waiting to be done. The friends in question consisted of leading academics, retired civil servants, and other individuals who had an active interest in history, all of whom had played their part without thinking of personal gain or of the effort spent in working towards the desired goal.

As the prime motivator in the Society, all things being equal Hamdan had no desire to be parted from his friends and their activities in common. Indeed, he had expressed that sentiment on the occasion of a farewell party held in his honour on 21 January 1983 on the eve of his departure for Paris: '... I have no intention of leaving the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia which is of all the voluntary activities in which I am involved the one which I hold closest to my heart'. Those words still echoed in the memories of all those present that evening seven years later.

The meeting began as soon as everyone had completed their afternoon (*asar*) prayer. After some introductory words of welcome, Hamdan called the meeting to order, and straight away proceeded with the discussion of the items on the agenda, all of which were carefully considered in turn and decided upon<sup>4</sup>, along with certain other important matters. Hardly any committee member present had any idea of the surprise that awaited them at the meeting's end. It was now almost 6.45 p.m., close to the time for breaking the fast. When there were no further matters for discussion raised by the committee members, it was Hamdan's turn as Chairman to sum up what had been discussed and decided upon. Then in firm, deliberate but emotionally-laden tones, Hamdan said:

Perhaps this is my last meeting with you all. It is with a heavy heart that I have to depart from an organization with which I have been associated for so long, but fate has decreed that part I must from you, albeit physically but never in my heart.

From the moment Hamdan started speaking, all present were dumbfounded and in the ensuing silence you could have heard a pin drop as everyone hung on to his every word, even though there were one or two who had known what was to come. 'With effect from May the First', Hamdan continued,

I shall assume the office of Head of State of Penang. As the Head of a state in the Federation I shall have to be impartial in all things and give my support to all voluntary organizations. Therefore I have to vacate my post as Chairman of this Society, and I propose that my place should be taken over by our Vice-Chairman, Dato Omar Mohd Hashim' who has already held the post for three years when I was temporarily out of the country. I hope that all of you will give your full support to him and I shall always pray that the Society will succeed in achieving the goals which it has cherished all this while.

With these few brief but meaningful words Hamdan ended his direct involvement with the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.

### **The Installation**

The most significant moment that Hamdan had ever experienced in his whole life had now arrived. He was instructed to present himself on 15 April 1989 at the Istana Negara<sup>6</sup> in Kuala Lumpur in order to receive his letter of appointment as Head of State of Penang from the Yang DiPertuan Agung and to take the oath of secrecy before His Majesty. This ceremony took place fifteen days before his official installation as Head of State which was to be held in Penang itself. That date happened to fall on the last day of the Sultan of Johor's term as Yang DiPertuan Agung, to be replaced by the Sultan of Perak as his successor'.

For the whole of that week, all the members of Hamdan's and Siti Zainab's respective families, who had come to offer their congratulations and to pray for their continued happiness, were lodged in their house at Bayan Baru. Their relatives were all naturally overjoyed that one of their own should have risen from being an ordinary member of society to such an exalted position. Furthermore, Hamdan himself was a son of Penang. 'The people of Penang, of course, feel proud', commented the author of *The Governors of Penang*, a publication of the State Government,

to have such a shining example to emulate. He is an ordinary person who with his whole body and soul has dedicated himself to his personal education, to that of his family and to a large number of other members of society as well. He knows full well the supreme importance and value of knowledge and has never faltered in pursuit of this goal.... He is a kampung boy made good. His many achievements have been accorded due recognition, awards and accolades. To many of us his greatest recognition is to have been appointed Head of State.

From the moment that the news of Hamdan's appointment broke, the area around Solok Kampung Jawa 4, Bandar Bayan Baru became the scene of frequent visits by workers from the Penang Municipality to tidy up and repair its roads and drains. Most of the neighbours were astonished at this latest development, mixed, of course, with pleasure at seeing the improvement in their environment. One of their Chinese neighbours actually broke down when Siti Zainab told her that all this sudden activity by the municipal authorities was connected with her husband's new appointment and their imminent removal to another place. The Chinese lady sorely felt the loss because of the close ties that had been formed between them, now so suddenly to be broken, for she often used to come to the house to ask for advice concerning her own problems. However, she faced up to the fact that it is the way of the world that nothing in it can last for ever. 'I am still living in Penang,' Siti Zainab told her by way of reassurance, 'and I shall always come here from time to time to have a look at our house'.

On Sunday, 1 May 1989 the sun rose and shone brightly, but Penang was quiet for it was the week-end and the traffic was not so busy as on weekdays. At sharp 8.30 in the morning came the sound of a number of vehicles, including that of a limousine marked with the coat of arms of the Head of State of Penang and of other cars in escort, preceded by five police outriders on their motorbikes, approaching Hamdan's house at Solok Kampung Jawa 4. Heading the delegation to invite the Head of State-elect to follow them to his new residence for installation were two senior members of the State Executive Council, Dato' Haji Abdul Rahman Abbas (now Dato' Seri) and his wife\*, and Dato' Khoo Kay Por (now Tan Sri), and the State Secretary, Dato' Kamaruzaman Sharif (now Tan Sri), their wives and several others, including a police aide-de-camp. Without delay,

Hamdan and Siti Zainab got into the Governor's car and went straight to Seri Mutiara. The delegation arrived there at 8.45 a.m. on the dot for the glittering ceremony of his installation as Head of State.

On arrival at Seri Mutiara they were welcomed by the Chief Minister of Penang, Dr. Lim Chong Eu (now Tun) and his wife. After shaking hands, Hamdan and Siti Zainab were invited to go up onto the special dais in order to take the salute from the military guard of honour provided by soldiers of the Royal Malay Regiment. Waiting for their arrival were the heads of government departments, political leaders, prominent members of society and other VIPs. Having inspected the guard of honour they were then ushered into a waiting room while the guests, who included close members of their own family, took their places on the upper floor of Seri Mutiara. When everything was ready, Hamdan and Siti Zainab came out of the room where they had been waiting, escorted by their aides, and mounted the rostrum like a bridal pair so that the ceremony could begin.

The master of ceremonies asked permission for proceedings to begin and invited the State Secretary to proclaim Hamdan's appointment as Head of State, followed by his taking the Oath of Office. The Oath having been taken, Hamdan was asked to sign the Oath in the presence of his old friend, now Chief Justice of Malaya, Tan Sri Hashim Yeop Sani. Then it was the turn of the Chief Minister to make his address of congratulations and loyalty and to welcome Hamdan's appointment as the new Head of State. The Chief Minister's speech was replied to by Hamdan who expressed himself as being greatly moved by the confidence that the State and Federal governments had reposed in him and solemnly swore to maintain the high standards of devoted service performed by his predecessors. The ceremony concluded with a benediction delivered by the *Mufti* of Penang<sup>9</sup>. Since it was the fasting month, this short but solemn ceremony ended without any refreshments being served. However, all the guests present were specifically invited to the official breaking of the fast later that day and the performance of the evening prayer (*maghrib*), followed by the *tahlil*<sup>10</sup>. On this same occasion, the Chief Minister bestowed upon Hamdan and Siti Zainab the State Order of Pangkuan Negeri (First Class), which carried with it the titles of Dato' Seri and Datin Seri.

## **Seri Mutiara**

Once the ceremony was over all the guests and their families went back home, leaving Hamdan and Siti Zainab alone in their new environment. Siti Zainab, now First Lady, comments:

My family had all gone back to Bayan Baru after having talked with us in this huge building, leaving us behind like newly-weds holding court at our in-laws. Only God knows how I felt at that moment. For all the time that I had lived in Penang, from 1977 until May 1989, I had been to Seri Mutiara very rarely unless there was an invitation. On the evening of 1 May 1989 I felt as if I had completely lost my bearings because this building was twenty times the size of our house at Bayan Baru. I frequently got lost inside the building and that night I could not sleep soundly for the bed was old and uncomfortable. However, whatever it was, I forced myself to adjust to the new situation. For the first time in my life, I was woken up by a servant for breakfast; indeed her presence made me aware that now I had a house-servant, because ever since 1977 I had done everything in the house by myself without any outside help<sup>11</sup>.

If Washington has its White House and Kuala Lumpur its Istana Negara, Penang also has its icon – Seri Mutiara, the symbol of the dignity of His Excellency the Head of State. It is set in 12 ha of grounds. The grounds themselves, which with Bukit Bendera rising as a stately backdrop and graced by a dense foliage of tropical flowers, form a garden that compels the eye's attention, presenting a carefully arranged bed for a jewel in a velvet-green setting, sparkling like a pearl in the middle of the ocean. Seri Mutiara was built in 1890.

Those responsible for selecting the site of what was in colonial days known as 'The Residency', namely the official residence of the Resident Councillor – the top colonial official in the Settlement – certainly knew what they were doing. Its first occupant was A.M. Skinner, Penang's sixth Resident Councillor<sup>12</sup>.

After the nation achieved its independence in 1957, Penang's top post was once again styled 'Governor' (see fn 12 above) and the first Malaysian to hold this high office was Raja Tun Uda Al-Haj bin Raja Muhammad, who retired in 1975. In that year the term 'Governor' was replaced by the Malay title, *Tuan Yang Terutama Negeri* (Head of State)



so as to be in line with the titles of the Heads of State of Malacca, Sabah and Sarawak in the Malaysian Federation. The first Yang Dipertua Negeri of Penang was Tun Dato' Haji Sardon bin Haji Jubir.

Raja Tun Uda made a number of adjustments in order to remove traces of the colonial past, such as was reflected in the interior decoration of the building, and to give Seri Mutiara a more Malaysian flavour. It was also at this time that its name was changed to that of Seri Mutiara. For Seri Mutiara was not only the residence of the Head of State, but also the place where important personages from within and outside the country were received when they visited Penang. This is where State receptions and banquets are held, with Their Excellencies playing the role of host. For this reason every corner of the residence had to kept spotlessly clean and tidy.

Everything inside the building – the hallways, flower urns, the furniture, the internal fittings and the paintwork, inside and out – had to be carefully seen to, looked after, repaired, and if need be, replaced so that no flaws could be detected. Likewise, Seri Mutiara's staff were given special training in all aspects of etiquette so as to reflect the high standard of hospitality which the Head of State always bestowed on all his visitors.

### **The Role of a Head of State: the Official Round**

Hamdan himself made history both by virtue of being a son of Penang and also of being the first ever teacher to be raised to the highest position within a State of the Federation. Of his five Malaysian predecessors, two were retired civil servants (Raja Tun Uda of Selangor and Tun Syed Sheh bin Syed Abdullah Shahbuddin of Kedah), one a retired judge (Tun Syed Sheh al-Haj bin Syed Hassan Barakbah of Kedah), one a former lawyer and Cabinet Minister (Tun Dato' Haji Sardon bin Haji Jubir of Johor), and one a qualified doctor of medicine and also politician (Tun Datuk Dr. Haji Awang bin Hassan, also of Johor). All five had been born into greatness, and also had achieved greatness in their own right.

Hamdan, on the other hand, had had 'greatness thrust upon him', as step by step he had mounted the ladder of education. In the words of Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, then Minister of Education, in his Foreword to

*Pendidik Istimewa*, Tun Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, published by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in February 1991:

If we think of the best and most excellent kind of education that we wish to achieve, we will be at one with Tun. For he has shown us the way, whether as a teacher, as an administrator of education, as our nation's representative for learning and culture, or as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, and by his involvement in who knows how many voluntary and social organizations; he is a man who possesses the will to create what is the best, not only through his intellectual honesty and moral courage, but yet more important through his willingness to put into practice leadership by example. We owe a great debt to that leadership and that example, to his wisdom and sense of fellowship, and to his faith and his great spirit.

Now that he was Head of State, a tight schedule awaited him. Occasions, official and unofficial, formed a never-ending round of duty. First and foremost came his function to open a new session of the State Legislature, and to dissolve it when the time arrived. He was also responsible for appointing the Chief Minister from amongst the elected representatives of the party which had the majority of seats in the Assembly. Besides this crucial appointment, Hamdan as Head of State was also responsible for the appointment, based on the same principle, of the members of the State Executive Council. The opening of the State Legislative Assembly was carried out with due pomp and circumstance, including the provision of a military guard of honour, so as to emphasize the status of the legislature as the supreme law-making body in the State, as well as for the drawing up of the budget and other more mundane functions in order to ensure the prosperity of Penang and its inhabitants.

In his address when opening the Assembly, the Head of State outlines the policies of the State Government with regard to the economy, technological development, socio-economic issues, tourism, agriculture, the environment, human resources, sports facilities, housing, health, spiritual matters, inter-communal relations and various other aspects of concern to the general public. The message is to promote the prosperity of the State so that it can become one of the leading States of Malaysia in the years to come.

One of the Head of State's busiest periods comes at the time of his official birthday celebrations which fall in the second week of June each year. Amongst the official programmes for these is the investiture of State honours upon those who have merited them, including leaders in various fields – philanthropists, academics, government officers and individuals who have made substantial contributions to the welfare and prosperity of both State and Nation. In carrying out their functions, Hamdan and Siti Zainab made a point of visiting social welfare organizations and homes in the State, including both those publicly and privately run. Apart from holding tea parties or dinners at Seri Mutiara they also had to attend public banquets in each district.

Another of the Head of State's duties is the observance of National Day on 31 August every year and the Yang DiPertuan's Birthday Celebrations every June. For the National Day celebrations, the Head of State has to inspect the guard of honour and take the salute at the parade in which members of the Armed Forces, the Police and voluntary organizations all take part, while on the Yang DiPertuan Agung's Birthday he acts as host of a garden-party held at Seri Mutiara.

On the occasion of public prayers being held at the State Mosque to mark the birthday of the Yang DiPertuan Agung in June 1989, one month after his installation as State Governor, Hamdan was bestowed with the nation's highest Order, the Seri Maharaja Mangku Negara which carries the title of Tun for himself and that of Toh Puan for his consort. The Yang DiPertuan Agung in that year was Sultan Azlan Shah who had been a classmate of Siti Zainab's at the Sultan Yussuf Secondary School at Batu Gajah, while the Raja Permaisuri Agong, Tuanku Bainun had been her college mate when she was studying at Kirkby Teachers' Training College in England in the 1950s<sup>11</sup>.

### **Sustaining the Cause of Education**

As for non-State occasions, Hamdan and Siti Zainab attended as guests of honour a whole host of ceremonies, including school speech days, university convocations, the opening of new buildings, dinners, etc., at the invitation of voluntary bodies, educational institutions, mosques, associations and the like.

All these functions require great powers of endurance, mental and physical, so that those who invite them are not disappointed. It is the job of their private secretary to vet all invitations so that the daily schedule does not become overloaded and interfere with their official duties. At most of these functions, it is usually not just a matter of being present, but also of making a speech.

Other equally important duties include receiving visits from foreign dignitaries who visit Penang. Once again, it is the job of Hamdan's private secretary to list out the arrivals of these people. They have, of course, to be accorded the best treatment, for they represent a long term investment from the point of view of maintaining good relations between Penang, and Malaysia in general, with other countries, especially those with whom friendly ties already exist.

As Head of State there were various other functions that Hamdan and Siti Zainab had to carry out. As a teacher by profession, the functions that Hamdan enjoyed most were those connected with the world of learning and scholarship, and he rarely turned down such invitations. On these occasions, Hamdan took the opportunity to put across his special message about the supreme importance of knowledge, which as the English philosopher, Francis Bacon, put it, is 'as a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator and the relief of Man's estate'<sup>14</sup>, and as expressed in the thirty-ninth chapter of the Quran: 'There can be no comparison between he who has knowledge and he who has not'<sup>15</sup>. In fact, out of all the engagements in which Hamdan participated, those connected with education topped the list. Apart from the school speech days and university convocations already mentioned, these included meetings of Parent-Teacher Associations, language and literature forums, *ulama* conferences, and the like.

Hamdan has always been deeply conscious of the benefits that education can bring, enabling a man to take his place in the concourse of his fellow men. In this, of course, schools play an essential part and for this reason Hamdan has always been mindful of his debt to his old school in Kuala Kangsar and has never turned down any invitation to visit it. Hamdan's pride in his old school is reflected in the words he wrote in the Foreword to its history published in 1997:

...I truly owe a great debt of gratitude to the school which gave me my education and training before the War. So, whenever I am requested to write about my alma mater I find that my love and affection for it has never faded and that it still commands my highest respect; and I am reminded that it is because of my old school that I am where I am today. For all the great benefits it has bestowed upon me, I shall be eternally grateful<sup>16</sup>.

In recognition of his contribution and of his deep commitment to his alma mater, the school itself has perpetuated his name there by naming the school hall after him.

Two other schools – the Iskandar Shah Secondary School, Parit, and the Sekolah Tuanku Abdul Rahman (STAR), Ipoh – also remain enshrined in his heart. The invitations which came from the Old Boys Associations (i.e. the Iskandarians and STAR Old Boys Association/STAROBA) of these two schools always received top priority. In fact, Hamdan went out of his way to make sure that he was able to attend these functions and mix informally with the old boys. Many of them had been very successful in their careers, including some who were now Dato's, government ministers, university professors, leading businessmen, or prominent officials in the civil service, etc. but had started off in life as mere kampung kids.

Hamdan always stressed the importance of these associations having large memberships so that they could be strong. The members of an old boys' association are often likened to the capital of a bank, the bank itself being the association and the members forming the capital, so that the greater the number of members, the greater the amount of capital and assets which bring prosperity to the association. When recalling the pioneering days of STAR at the presentation of the school's top academic awards in 1992, Hamdan declared:

....naturally at first there was considerable doubt and unease regarding myself and my fellow pioneer teachers who were all young, because this project brought together students from Malay rural schools to obtain their education, based on a system and syllabus that was English. Nevertheless, as the months passed by, we became more convinced that with all our efforts we could do it, and with determination, a sense of unity of purpose, and a proper pride in ourselves, students and teachers did achieve all that we had aimed for<sup>17</sup>.

This particular occasion was attended by Dato' Annuar Musa, Minister for Rural Development and President of STAROBA at the time. Hamdan, in his address, went on to suggest that they accept change because through change and positive response an individual was able to free himself from the chrysalis of outmoded ways.

In Penang itself there were three schools which always attracted Hamdan's interest, and in the activities of which he and Siti Zainab participated. First was the Penang Free School, Malaysia's oldest and premier secondary school, which was founded in 1816. Next came St. George's Secondary School for Girls, which was started by Christian missionaries and today is the leading girls' school in Penang. Third was the Abdullah Munshi Secondary School, the first Malay-medium secondary school in Penang to adopt the national system of education after independence. Hamdan made these three schools serve as representatives for all the schools in the State and visits to them became a regular feature of his annual schedule.

Nearly all Hamdan's speeches to students, teachers and parents on the importance of education harped on its role as an on-going process from the cradle to the grave, whose basic goal is to produce citizens who are creative and innovative in their thinking so as to be able to cope with the challenges of the modern world with all its sophistication. He also liked to stress the importance of never wasting time which was the hobby of Satan, the virtues of love for the alma mater, the lessons of history in nation-building, and the evils of drug abuse, crime, corruption, and moral decay. He would remind parents of their proper role in the education of their children, and reminded all members of society of the need to remember God Almighty, who is the Creator of the world and all that is in it.

These and scores of other pearls of wisdom from Hamdan in his speeches and addresses reflected his lifelong commitment to education.

### **A Distillation of Hamdan's Maxims**

Hamdan always peppered his speeches with moral caveats, quotations from the *Hadith* (i.e. the Sayings of the Prophet), and the sayings of famous philosophers in order to drive him his point. For instance, he was fond of quoting as is written in the Quran:

Men are for ever beset with problems except for those who are firm in their belief in God, who perform good works and who pray regularly, and who always plead for truth, and who are for ever steadfast in the faith<sup>19</sup>.

Similarly, he often quoted from the *Hadith* regarding knowledge that has been handed down over the generations, 'Study wherever you may be, even if it is in China', and again:

If you desire things of this world, acquire knowledge to achieve your aim. If you desire to live in the world hereafter, knowledge is the key. If you desire both, once again knowledge provides the key.

Hamdan was also wont to resort to simple philosophy in his utterances. When giving fresh confidence, for instance, to students who felt that they were failures, his message was:

A failure the first time does not mean failure for ever. People who have been truly successful in life are those who having failed once have the courage to get up and try again and keep on trying until in the end they meet with complete success.

His advice to students who were hampered by the negative attitudes of some of their classmates was, to quote the Malay maxim:

Pay no heed to the instigations of other, for this could bring down trouble onto your own head<sup>19</sup>.

Hamdan frequently reminded his listeners that 'what is important is not what lies beneath your feet but in what you have in your head', in this instance borrowing from the imagery of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the Malaysian Prime Minister<sup>20</sup>, who believes that ideas and vision enable a nation to progress even though it lacks in natural resources, as is the case with South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

Hamdan also often enough quoted from various Western writers such as the famous nineteenth century American poet, W.H.Longfellow, the author of the following well-known lines:

The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not obtained by sudden flight;

For they while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upwards in the night.

in order to inspire students to strive hard for success.

If they are given every encouragement in their lessons, they will acquire a high degree of self-confidence. If, on the other hand, they are constantly subject to criticism and scolding, it will be difficult for them to evaluate what is good. If they are always treated with affection, they will come to understand what is the meaning of pure love.

was his message to parents and teachers regarding the best way to bringing up the children in their care.

Another of Hamdan's quotes came from Emily Durkheim, a prominent anthropologist, who in advising communities not to get caught up in the grip of hedonism, observed that 'Swift development enjoyed by a country is usually followed by social imbalances'.

In short, Hamdan went out of his way to seek out suitable maxims whenever he met students and teachers, so that his presence on such occasions made an impact that was not merely a ceremonial one.

### **Talking to the Educated**

When invited to occasions organized by institutions of higher learning, Hamdan always selected a theme appropriate to the intellectual level of his audience. In 1993 he was made Chancellor of the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (University of Agriculture (now renamed Universiti Putra Malaysia/UPM) at Serdang in place of the Sultan of Selangor, a position usually occupied by a member of Malay royalty. Thereafter, it became one of his prime functions to attend the annual convocation of the UPM in order to give an address and to present the new graduates with their degrees or diplomas.

At the first UPM convocation after he had been appointed its Chancellor, Hamdan uttered his thanks to the Creator and recorded his appreciation of the grace of the Yang DiPertuan Agong for appointing him to this exalted position. He also vowed that he would devote his attention to the continued progress and development of the University



and strive to increase still further the effectiveness of its contribution to society and the nation. He then went on to say:

It is the hope of the nation that scholars and intellectuals will generate new ideas in the effort to create a better life for the people in general. The nation's achievements up to this point have been the product of the mobilization of all those who have received higher education, regardless of the different posts that they may hold. The Government's aim of basing Malaysia's future progress on industry requires the bringing together of the ideas of academicians, professionals in both the public and private spheres and also political leaders in order to create a new strategy which will lead to the people enjoying the benefits of this development in line with the Vision of the Year 2020<sup>21</sup>. It will be a loss to the nation if petty issues become munition for those who are opposed to the mobilization of the intellectual resources in their midst. There is no limit to what a man can do, if he does not care who gets the credit<sup>22</sup>.

When officiating at the opening of the Tun Dr Ismail College at the UPM on 23 March 1995, Hamdan was attracted by the University's scheme to introduce the collegiate system, whereby each residential college managed its own affairs and activities based on its own needs and planning. Hamdan also took this opportunity to acknowledge the great debt which he owed to the late Tun Dr Ismail bin Abdul Rahman:

...thinking back of the time when I was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Science, Malaysia, Tun Dr. Ismail was a man who saw far ahead and was responsible for handing over the site of the former British garrison to the Ministry of Education for conversion into a university in Penang, a place where the youth of our nation from the various communities could study, practise, and play.

Hamdan has received honorary degrees from local universities, including the Doctorate of Law (LLD) from the University of Malaya (1976) and the Doctorate of Letters (D.Litt) from the USM (1984). He has also received an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters (*Honoris Causa*) from Deakin University, Australia. On that occasion, when the degree was conferred upon him at Seri Mutiara, Hamdan made a lengthy speech which touched on a numbers of matters of local and international concern, such as the emergence of the 'global village' which was making the world a smaller and more complex place to manage, and where all

countries were becoming more and more interdependent. As he made clear:

Key issues will continue to confront the world community, and these will include issues on population growth, trade and economic development, changes in the environment, advances in science and technology, rapidity of growth in knowledge and information, and vagaries in socio-cultural behaviour and patterns. At the same time, the production, dissemination and exchange of knowledge and information becomes an even more vital element in the chain of human development. It is perhaps pertinent to take some of these aspects in Malaysia and the South-East Asian region<sup>23</sup>.

Deakin University, which is located at Warrnambool, to the west of Geelong in Victoria, Australia, has carried out a twinning programme with Disted College in Penang. Warrnambool is the Aborigine term for 'much water', and is of easy access as it is a port town with a total population of 22,706 (1990 census). The Disted College administration became interested in Deakin University because it had made its name in the field of distance learning. It was this form of specialization which distinguished Deakin University from other universities, and led to Disted College establishing a twinning programme with it<sup>24</sup>.

### **The Japanese Connection**

At the official opening ceremony of an Exhibition of Paintings by Japanese Students of Malaysia held at the Dewan Sri Pinang, everyone was taken by surprise when Hamdan delivered a part of his speech in Japanese. Present at this occasion was Sachiro Nanami, the Japanese Consul-General. The translation of what he said in Japanese is as follows:

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to welcome the arrival from Japan of this delegation of 24 members, including 19 students and 5 escorts who have already paid a call at my residence. I am especially grateful to them because they entertained us with a concert of music and songs which were most captivating. I thank them from the bottom of my heart and I shall certainly never forget their performance.

On another occasion held in honour of Nagasu Kazuji, the Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, all the speeches were delivered in Japanese. That Hamdan still had a command of the language some four decades after the Japanese Occupation was remarkable enough. Naturally he seized this rare opportunity to speak in Japanese which came his way, using it in order to put across a particular message.

The meeting with the Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture took place when Hamdan, accompanied by the Chief Minister of Penang, Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, visited Japan in 1991 in order to inaugurate officially the twinning between the State of Penang with Kanagawa Prefecture, the capital of which is the city of Yokohama. Hamdan had electrified those present at the ceremony held on 3 October 1991 at the Hotel New Grand, Yokohama, held to invest the Governor with the State Order of the *Darjah Utama Pangkuan Negeri/DUPN* (First Grade), by making his speech in Japanese. Part of his speech was as follows:

His Excellency (the Governor, Kazuji Nagazu) visited Penang for the first time in November 1980. He had then proposed the idea of twinning the Prefecture of Kanagawa with the State of Penang. The ties of friendship have rapidly grown stronger for over a decade in various fields, through an assortment of programmes in the spirit of diplomacy 'between people and people' in its true sense. As a token of appreciation of the sincerity, commitment and hard work of His Excellency in promoting international understanding and universal peace, and above all in pioneering and establishing the 'twinning' of our two States, I as Governor of Penang with the deepest respect and esteem now invest His Excellency, the Governor of the Kanagawa Prefecture, with the highest Order of Penang, the DUPN.

According to Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, as a result of this visit, and in particular because of Hamdan's speech which so impressed the Japanese, Japanese investments poured into Penang. The Emperor Akihito himself who also marvelled at Hamdan's competence in Japanese so many years after the Occupation, conferred the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun upon him on 5 November 1993. Hamdan was also appointed Honorary Adviser to the Malaysia-Japan Society which has its headquarters in Tokyo, an office which he still holds.

### **The Ties that Bind: Honorary Fellow of the PSM and 'Educator Extraordinary'**

Hamdan received many titles and awards from both within the country and from abroad after becoming the Governor of Penang. Amongst those which he treasures most and which he keeps as a personal memento are those of Fellow of the Malaysian Historical Society which was bestowed upon him by its President, Ghafar Baba, in September 1989, and of the title of '*Pendidik Istimewa*' [i.e. Educator Extraordinary] conferred on him by Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, then Minister of Education, on 18 February 1991.

The Fellowship of the Malaysian Historical Society is awarded as a token of appreciation, respect and commemoration of the significant role, achievements and contributions made to society and the nation in the context of the promotion of the study of history<sup>22</sup>. Hamdan is the first person to have been made a Fellow of the Society in the four and a half decades of its existence. In view of his prominence in the field, Hamdan was invited to participate in the National Conference on Issues of Historiography held at the USM in Penang on 17 August 1992. In his introductory speech on this occasion, Hamdan expressed his feeling of relief that History had been made a compulsory subject in secondary schools in the Science as well as in the Arts streams. This was the culmination of the long campaign that had been conducted to place this subject on a plane which could stimulate a deeper interest in the nation's history and at the same time sow the seeds of love of country, race and heritage amongst the citizens of Malaysia at large. In local universities, taking the USM as an example, the number of students specializing in history had increased. 'Nowadays', according to Hamdan, 'most of the history courses there were being followed not by students from the Arts stream, but by students taking non-Arts courses such as Pure Science, Mathematics, Management or Housing and Development. Therefore the time has come,' Hamdan continued, 'for us all to do some nation-building through History, not merely to provide a guide for effective teaching, but also to make Malaysia a great nation in terms of the mental and physical progress of its people.'

The ceremony to award Hamdan the title of 'Educator Extraordinary', held at the Hotel Equatorial, Penang, on 18 February 1991, was attended by a number of prominent persons, including amongst others the Minister of Education (Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim) and his two Deputies, the Chief Secretary to the Government, Members of the State Executive Council, the Director-General of Education, the Chief Secretary to the Ministry of Education, and university vice-chancellors. Hamdan, on seeing the presence of this gathering of distinguished individuals from the Federal and State governments, who had come from both near and far for the sole purpose of witnessing Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim bestow this title upon him – the first man ever to receive it – felt both humble and deeply moved. In his address, he argued that this high mark of respect was not merely in his honour but was a sign of public recognition of the contributions and achievements which educationists and teachers had made and of the role that they had played in the cause of education in this country. Nor did he omit to express his appreciation of the pioneering role of the late Aminuddin Baki, who despite his early death had laid down solid educational foundations, appropriate to the needs of an independent country and whose successors had carried on the tradition which he had established. Hamdan also supposed that had the Almighty extended Aminuddin's years, he would have been the one best qualified to receive such an award.

As a person interested in history, Hamdan went on in his address to recall his experiences in the 1930s, the impact of the war and Japanese Occupation and the lessons that he had learned from these events. Then, coming to the years when he was serving in the Ministry of Education, Hamdan nostalgically remarked:

Since serving in the Ministry of Education from the early 1960s onwards, I have felt truly fortunate because I got to meet and interact with a very large number of leaders in education and education officers from the most senior to the most junior of both sexes in the educational hierarchy, as well as officers in the Administrative and Diplomatic Service and other branches of government service. It was also my good fortune that amongst these leaders, including those who became Chief Secretaries to the Ministry of Education and also Chief Secretaries to other ministries, were those who had been my friends from the time we

were young, in fact whom I had known in pre-war days, during the war, and after the war. With these close personal ties our official relations were also close, so that all my work could get done smoothly and efficiently<sup>26</sup>.

As the first teacher to be resident at Seri Mutiara, Hamdan felt it incumbent upon him to share his experiences with members of the teaching profession, and so arranged for the annual Teachers' Day for 1991 to be held in its grounds. He and Siti Zainab mingled easily with the members of their former profession, exchanging memories about the old days when they were all involved together in the cause of educating the children of the nation. Hamdan, of course, did not miss the opportunity to advise his guests to uphold the dignity of their profession, for as role models they functioned as the pivot on which the whole system of education turned. A good educationist was one who was friendly and caring. Even though there were times when it was necessary to be firm and forbidding, they could still be friends with their pupils, regardless of race and culture. Hamdan also urged them to raise the level of their knowledge, observing that:

...the teaching profession means that you are always under pressure to provide knowledge and new ideas, especially with the need to raise the standard of education in schools. In this age of technology we have to follow the currents of change and equip ourselves with broad ideas or concepts in the field of the technology of education which will facilitate our daily tasks, besides increasing the motivation of our students in the learning process so as to move towards excellence in education<sup>27</sup>.

### **In the Service of Islam**

Unlike the Malay Rulers in their respective States, the Head of State of Penang does not play the role of State head of Islam, because that role in the States of the Malaysian Federation which do not have royal figureheads is taken by the Yang DiPertuan Agong. Nevertheless, activities connected with the religion form part of his top priorities. As a practising Muslim, it was perfectly normal for Hamdan to attend various Islamic functions. First and foremost amongst these comes the Friday Prayers, which he attended in turn at all the mosques, big and small,

throughout the State. It is the duty of the Head of State's secretariat to make the necessary arrangements and prepare the timetable for this to be carried out in every corner of Penang. The local congregations always welcome the presence of the Head of State in their particular mosques because it provides them with the opportunity to meet him on an informal basis after the prayers are over. There were also times when Hamdan was requested to open a new mosque or *surau*.

Other Muslim festivals such as the Prophet's Birthday, the Islamic New Year and the annual Quran Reading Competition, etc., also form a regular part of the yearly schedule. In most of his speeches on these occasions, Hamdan would invite the Muslim community to feel and understand the theme of the particular celebration. In other words, he encouraged Muslims not merely to listen to homilies and to shout slogans but to examine the philosophy and meaning that lie behind them. Muslim scholars are, of course, adept at choosing appropriate themes or calls for action but, as Hamdan never tired of pointing out, these themes need to be understood and put into practice<sup>28</sup>.

With respect to these Islamic themes and slogans, Hamdan argued that they embrace almost all the good features or universal human values that are acceptable to all communities throughout the world. In order to be able to absorb them all, an individual must have a good education. For is it not written in the Quran, 'You must make haste to seek goodness and excellence....'<sup>29</sup>, but the goodness and excellence demanded by Islam must be in equal measure, or, in the words of the Prophet himself – 'let the work be in equal proportions'.

In Hamdan's view, the culture of excellence is derived from the character-building process wherein education forms the most fundamental aspect. In the Malaysian context, the development of race and nation go hand in hand in order to ensure that the process of striving for excellence is an ongoing one in society. Hamdan linked this concept with the National Development Policy (*Dasar Pembangunan Nasional/DPN*) 2000. Amongst other things, he has on occasion pointed out:

The efforts in the field of education to create citizens who possess a suitable balance of skills and knowledge, with an emphasis on science and technology, spiritual values and a positive morality, and who are responsible, creative, flexible, and with the capacity to make an

effective contribution to the development of a nation that is harmonious, prosperous and united – all this will continue to be pursued.

On almost any occasion or event, educational issues would be infiltrated into the context of Hamdan's speeches because education is his life-blood. In recognition of his well-attested attitude towards and concern for education, which of course is in keeping with the Islamic concept of coming closer to God (*tasawuf*) through spiritual study, Hamdan was awarded the title of *Tokoh Maal Hijrah 1416* (Leader for the Year of the Hijrah 1416) in Education. He received this award from the Yang DiPertuan Agong on 31 May 1995 in a ceremony distinguished by its atmosphere of gratitude and humility.

Hamdan regards the *Hijrah*<sup>30</sup> as a day of awareness and renewal which clears the way to the understanding of Islam. It also forms, as he told his audience in another of his speeches,

an important foundation for education, as an attempt to raise up man and mankind based on true spiritual values. This kind of education has been carried on smoothly and on a large scale, embracing all kinds of people, regardless of position or status... The Pilgrimage [as an institution] provides an education which gets rid of all traces of ignorance and at the same time bears witness to the authority and leadership of the Prophet (May the Blessings of Allah be with him), who as the supreme teacher of Islam has no compare in the whole world<sup>31</sup>.

In this context, Hamdan expressed his strong conviction that the theme of *Maal Hijrah 1995*, namely 'The Pilgrimage creates Pure Values' had a close connection with the National Philosophy of Education, which evinces the role that education plays in creating human beings who are well balanced from the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual points of view and who are able to think in a logical, fair and just manner.

### **A Return to his Roots<sup>32</sup>**

One part of the official duties of the Head of State is to make visits abroad as an ambassador of goodwill, especially to friendly countries so as to strengthen still further regional and international bonds which have already existed for a long time. Hamdan's first visit overseas was to



Indonesia, not only one of Malaysia's nearest neighbours but also with inhabitants of the same stock, for did not his own father come from the land of the Minangkabaus? His keen desire to go and see the homeland of his father was realized in a series of visits to North Sumatra and West Sumatra in December 1991 at the invitation of both of the Governors of those two Provinces. Hamdan's party on such occasions usually included the Chief Minister, on the look out for investment opportunities in the places they visited. Despite a crowded schedule, Hamdan never neglected to visit local schools and universities. At the Sri Andalas University of Padang he gave a talk to the students and lecturers whom he met there.

In his talk, he touched on development in Malaysia, including the concept of 'Vision 2020' as part of the concerted effort to raise the nation to fully-developed status in the economic, political and social fields, without however leaving out of account spiritual, psychological and cultural angles. Hamdan also did not fail to mention the rapid development which was taking place in Penang itself in various aspects including group visit and learn projects, and he invited Sumatran industrialists to establish ties of friendship and participate in investment programmes including the Penang Trade Fair. In noting the large number of artists and religious figures who had come from Sumatra, in particular from Minangkabau, Hamdan said:

The Province of West Sumatra, the homeland of the Minangkabau, with their traditional love of roaming abroad, have made themselves known wherever they have settled down in other lands. In this connection, the State of Penang has named the first centre of astrology in Malaysia after Sheikh Tahir. This was in order to commemorate the contributions of my father in that field in Malaysia. The recognition that has been bestowed upon him is also a recognition of the role of all the sons of the soil of West Sumatra, of which we can all be proud".

During his visit to Sumatra which lasted one week, Hamdan was conferred with the title of *Datuk Bagindo Sati* by the Minangkabau community and had the opportunity of visiting the tombs of his ancestors at Koto Tuo, Balai Gurah, Kecamatan Empat Angkat, Candung and Bukit Tinggi. He also gave a talk on 'Islamic Education in Malaysia' when he

visited the Diniyah Puteri School at Padang Panjang, which had once had Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, one time head of Wanita UMNO (UMNO Women's Branch) and Cabinet Minister in the Malaysian government), as one of its students. Having explained about the four different streams of Islamic education in Malaysia<sup>24</sup>, Hamdan expressed his optimism regarding the future of Islamic schools in Malaysia which were now in the process of being standardized<sup>25</sup>.

### **Other Official Visits Abroad**

As an ambassador of goodwill, Hamdan made tours of several other countries in East and West. One of those tours which merits mention here was his visit to Canada during which he received an invitation to come to the University of Manitoba at Winnipeg. This unscheduled invitation from the President of the University, couched in flattering terms<sup>26</sup>, was irresistible to Hamdan, who has never allowed himself to be cut off from his interest in education, even though now he was a Head of State. Dr Koh Tsu Koon was also in favour of Hamdan's accepting the invitation to Winnipeg because of the platform that it provided for his ideas on education, while the actual expenses of the visit were borne by the Canadian university itself. So at the University of Manitoba between 27 and 30 September 1991, Hamdan took part in a Global Forum on the Management of Post-Secondary School Education in Developing Countries, alongside participants from five continents. Another participant from Malaysia was Datuk Noel Ogle, the Registrar of the USM. Hamdan took an active part in the Forum as was to be expected of a leading educationist on the world stage. Only after the Forum was over did he and Siti Zainab begin on their official visit to Canada.

Another of Hamdan's official visits took him to China, though this was also not for the first time. He had been there in 1981, when Vice-Chancellor of the USM, as a member of the Malaysian delegation of vice-chancellors who went at the invitation of the University of East Asia. His visit this time was to return the visit of the President of China, Ziang Jemin in 1994 and of former President Yang Shangkun in 1991 to Penang. Koh also went along with Hamdan's party to Beijing. The visit, from 18 to 13 October 1995, encompassed several Chinese cities, including

Shanghai, Kunming, Quanzhou and Xiamen. The party was also able to visit the Nuijie Mosque in Beijing and the Ashab Mosque at Quanzhou besides touring the Great Wall of China.

Whilst on this visit, Hamdan was invited to give a lecture on the Malay Language, Education and National Development at the Malay Studies Department of the Foreign Studies University at Beijing. With his past experience in the Ministry of Education and with the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Hamdan had no difficulty in talking about the development of Malay, starting from the period before the Sultanate of Malacca to colonial times and the rise of Malay nationalism, culminating in the achievement of independence and the establishment of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, which has provided the impetus and has been the catalyst in the movement to strengthen the language<sup>17</sup>. Hamdan rounded off his lecture on a very confident note, declaring:

...the development of the Malay language is remarkable from two aspects, quantitatively and qualitatively. This is to a large extent due to the positive and progressive attitude and the constructive and pro-active approach of Government which has had the support of intellectuals and the general public. I am sure that the Malay language will continue to develop and progress, and that it will emerge not only as the regional language of South-East Asia, but also as a leading world language, which possesses a high economic value and is of significant academic and cultural standing.

Incidentally, Hamdan was very impressed by the thoroughness with which the Malay Studies Department of the University prepared its students for understanding Malay culture as well as speaking the language. He was astonished to find all the students wearing Malay dress and having, each one of them, assumed a Malay name!

In April 2001 Hamdan made his two last visits abroad as Head of State of Penang. Both of them, which followed hard one upon the other, were of great personal meaning to him. The first was to Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, which had been twinned with Georgetown, Penang since the 1980s, and where special festivities were being held to mark the anniversary. The second, from Hamdan's point of view, was particularly poignant. It was to Japan where he was able to meet a handful of his old friends who still survived, and address a meeting in

Japanese, perhaps for the last time.

### **The Last Farewell**

When Hamdan returned home from Japan in the third week of May, his writ as Head of State had barely two more weeks to run. His termination as Head of State was by no means unexpected because he had already served for twelve years, the longest of any person to hold that exalted position. However, the actual notification had come somewhat late, for he and Siti Zainab had only been informed a few days before their departure on their official trips abroad, that his term of office would end on 1 May. As a result, as soon as they got back, there was a lot of packing to do. In fact, despite his robust appearance and ceaseless activity, Hamdan's heart was beginning to feel the strain. He had been warded for a heart problem at the National Heart Institute (IJN), Kuala Lumpur in 1994 and in March 2001 had had a pace-maker inserted in his body. The two journeys abroad and the unexpected pressure of having to get ready to move immediately on his return (24 days) imposed a great strain on him, and he had to be warded once more at the IJN<sup>38</sup>. As a result, the arrangements made to honour his departure as Head of State of Penang could not be carried out as scheduled, but had to be postponed till a later date.

However, Hamdan did have the opportunity in his capacity as Head of State to make his final address to the Penang Legislative Assembly on the occasion of the opening of the first meeting of its third session for its tenth term on 23 April 2001. In announcing that this was the last time that he would appear before them as Head of State, Hamdan told the State legislators that:

Over the last twelve years, along with the people of this State, I have witnessed and experienced important development and changes both in our State and in the nation as a whole. Among these important events include efforts to invigorate the economy in 1988-1989 after the recession of the previous two years; the launching of the Vision 2020, the implementation of the National Development Policy (Dasar Pembangunan Negara) and the very vigorous economic growth of the 1990s; the financial crisis and economic recession which affected Asia and our own country in 1997-1998, followed by the success of more

recent efforts to revive our economy for the second time. Now our nation is ready to move forward into the second phase of our advance towards attaining the target of the Vision 2020. This process is guided by the National Vision Policy (*Dasar Wawasan Negara*) as contained in the Third Outline Perspective Plan for the next ten years and which is being implemented through the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

Hamdan then went on to review the specific achievements made by Penang during his twelve years as Head of State from the economic, environmental, social and administrative aspects. It was an impressive record which did justice to all concerned. Hamdan concluded his historic address thanking all those who had served him so faithfully and well during his tenure of office, stressing:

...the necessity for each individual and group to give their complete commitment to their roles and duties in their respective organizations. With the existence of these commitments, the interests of the nation, its people and its organizations will always take priority over those of oneself and one's own family. Proper pride, competence and integrity of both organizations and individuals will always be safeguarded, based on sound values and a vision to work towards. With the existence of these commitments, a man will feel grateful that he has been vouchsafed the opportunity to be of use and will always strive for excellence, and set out to achieve greater productivity and sustained effort. I am, needless to say, extremely grateful myself for the commitment and the strong desire to achieve, of the leaders and people of Penang which has enabled us to meet and overcome one challenge after another since achieving independence at both national and State levels”.

The words of the speaker were directed to his audience, but they just as much reflected his own lifetime of dedication and service to the nation.

1. When relating the episode of Hamdan's appointment to her friends, Siti Zainab liked to joke that she was willing for Hamdan to accept the post because it would mean an end to her having to do the ironing for the next five years, and Hamdan would also be able to pension her off as his driver! In passing, it should be remarked that she was a good driver and they had never had a single serious accident. Even in Paris when they went around the city by car, it was Siti Zainab who did the driving.



59a. Hamdan, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Science, Malaysia (USM); showing keen interest in a solar energy project being carried out by students of the Physics Studies Centre.

59b. Giving a rare demonstration of his skills as a singer: Hamdan at the annual "Sounding of the Drum" (*Malam Gendang Gendut*) Night organized by the USM Security Guards.



59c. Receiving the Chancellor of the University, Tuanku Syed Putra, the Raja of Perlis, on the USM campus.



60. The first batch of medical students (1981-6), in front of the Medical Science Studies Centre, University of Science, Penang, 1981; seated in front are (1) the Dean of the Centre, Dr. Roslani Majid; and (2) his Deputy, Dr. Mohd. Tahir.



61a. Hamdan as Director-General of Education accompanying Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, then Minister of Education at the 1974 UNESCO General Conference in Paris in 1974; in 2nd row are Kum Boo (left) and Chang Min Kee (right).

61b. Hamdan ten years later, at the 1984 General Conference of UNESCO in his capacity as Malaysian Permanent Representative to UNESCO, with Datuk Dr. Sulaiman Haji Daud, Minister of Education; seated behind them Dato' Abdul Rahman Arshad, Deputy Director-General of Education (left).





# LEMBAGA PENGELOLA 1980



62a. Hamdan as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1980: L-R seated: Prof. Abu Bakar Hamid, (Tan Sri) Elyas Omar; (Dato') Hassan Ahmad (Director); Hamdan (chairman); Dato' Latiff Sahan; Abdul Aziz Japin; Prof. Zainal Abidin Wahid; standing, extreme left (Dato) Jumaat bin Dato' Haji Mohd Nor. (a future chairman of the DBP); 2nd from right, Mazlan Nordin; extreme right, Professor Mohamad Haji Salleh.

62b. Hamdan, now Head of State, Penang, paying an official visit in 1991 to the Sarawak Branch of the DBP in Kuching, which he did so much to establish: signing the visitor's book with Dato Jumaat (now Director-General of the DBP Board) in attendance, and Datuk Abdul Rahim bin Abu Bakar (Chairman, DBP Board) looking on (right).





63a. Remembering the past in November 1969: Sultan Idris II of Perak at the unveiling of a Memorial Board erected by the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia (PSM) at Telok Bakong, the site of the tomb of Sultan Muzaffar Shah I, the first Ruler of Perak (d.1549). The Sultan is speaking to Hamdan, the PSM Executive Committee's chairman. Also in the picture are (1) Osman Khairuddin, DO Kuala Kangsar; (2) Brigadier Raja Lope, (Raja Kechil Muda) Territorial Chief, Kuala Kangsar; (3) Omar Mohd Hashim; (4) Professor Zainal-Abidin Wahid.

*courtesy: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.*

63b. Hamdan as Chairman of the PSM's Exco speaking at the ceremony of handing back the Kampong Laut Mosque, reputedly the oldest mosque in Malaysia, after it had been transferred from its eroded site on the banks of the Sungai Kelantan to safer ground at Nilam Puri, Kota Bharu, on the initiative and at the expense of the PSM, May 1970. An important part in the restoration work was played by Tan Sri Hj. Mubin Sheppard.

*courtesy: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.*





64. PSM: Group Photo at its 26th AGM, 1974; amongst those present were: L-R seated: Datuk Zakiah Hanum (Director, National Archives); Abdul Ghani Othman; Dato' Omar Ong Yoke Lim; Hamdan; Tun Hussein Onn (President); Syed Nasir (Chairman, DBP); Mrs Ong Yoke Lim; Hassan Ahmad (Director, DBP); Asiah Abu Samah (future DG, Education); Professor Khoo Kay Kim; elsewhere (numbered): (1) Mahmud Yaacob; (2) Jumaat Mohd Nor; (3) Omar Mohd Hashim; (4) Muzaffar Tate; (5) Tan Mutalib; (6) Kamal Bahrin Mohamad; (7) Muhd Yusof Harun; (8) Kum Boo; (9) Badriah Manan; (10) Ahmad Hj Salleh.

*courtesy: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.*



65a. The PSM'S Executive Council at work: Hamdan chairing one of its meetings, in its old room in the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka; recognizable in the picture besides Hamdan are (1) Ahmad Saleh; (2) Mahmud Yaacob (Hon.Sec.); (3) Sujak Rahiman (DG, DBP); (4) Tan Teik Beng; (5) H.S. Henry (long-time Hon. Sec. PSM); (6) Asiah Abu Samah.

*courtesy: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.*

65b. The PSM's Executive Council outside its new HQ at 658, Jalan Hose, Kuala Lumpur, officially opened by Datuk Hussein Onn, the Prime Minister, on 31 August, 1976: L-R seated: Mahmud Yaacob, Ahmad Saleh, Hamdan, Sujak Rahiman, Asiah Abu Samah, Kum Boo, Tan Teik Beng. L-R standing: (1) Zainal Abidin Wahid, (2) George Verghese, (3) Othman Yatim, (4) H.S. Henry, (5) Jazamuddin Baharuddin.

*courtesy: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.*





66a. Datuk Musa Hitam greeting two famous local historians on the occasion of the prize-giving ceremony for winners of the PSM's annual essay competition 1980 - namely (on left) the late Datuk Haji Salleh bin Haji Awang ('Misbaha') of Terengganu; and Yusof Harun of Malacca. On the extreme right is PSM Exco member, Dato' Zahari bin Abdul Rashid.

*courtesy:* Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.

66b. Admiring the PSM book exhibition on the occasion noted above: L-R: Tan Boon Lin; Tan Sri Haji Mubin Sheppard, one-time British Adviser and long a pillar of the PSM; Misbaha; and Datuk Aziz Ismail, Deputy Director-General of Education.

*courtesy:* Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.



66c. Presenting the PSM's Patron, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, with a portrait to mark his 77th birthday, 1980. L-R: the Tunku; Hussein Onn; Hamdan.

*courtesy:* Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia.



67a. On a visit of representatives of the Life-Saving Society of Malaysia to Australia: Siti Zainab and Hamdan (2nd and 3rd from left resp.) visiting the home of Douglas Plaister, Lord Mayor of Hobart and Deputy Vice President of the Australian Life-Saving Society in 1981: Teoh Teik Lee (president of the LSSM) and Mrs Teoh on Plaister's left, and Mrs Fumiko Plaister on his right.

*courtesy: Dato' Teoh Teik Lee,  
Kuala Lumpur.*

67b. Hamdan, Hon. Life President of the LSSM, unveiling a plaque to commemorate the official opening of the LSSM HQ in Jalan Kelang Lama, Kuala Lumpur on 7 November 1988. Behind Hamdan is Siti Zainab; standing third in line is Datuk Mohamed Yeop Abdul Raof, Hamdan's successor as LSSM President, while the tall figure of Teoh is visible 3rd left.

*courtesy: Dato' Teoh Teik Lee,  
Kuala Lumpur.*



67c. Hamdan launching the Aquanaut Programme (a water safety and life-saving programme for children) at the Swimwell Swimming Centre, Seberang Prai, Penang, in October 1989.

*courtesy: Dato' Teoh Teik Lee,  
Kuala Lumpur.*





68. H a m d a n ' s  
appointment as Head  
of State, Penang:  
receiving his Letters  
of Appointment from:

a. the Eighth Yang Di-  
Pertuan Agong (Sultan  
Mahmood Iskandar of  
Johor) at the Istana  
Negara, Kuala  
Lumpur, April 1989.



b. the Ninth Yang Di-  
Pertuan Agong (Sultan  
Azlan Shah of Perak)  
at the Istana Negara,  
Kuala Lumpur, May  
1993 for a second  
term of four years.



c. the Tenth Yang Di-  
Pertuan Agong  
(Yang Di-Pertua  
Tuanku Ja'afar of  
Negeri Sembilan) at  
the Istana Negara,  
Kuala Lumpur, for a  
third term of two  
years, May 1997.



69a Hamdan and Siti Zainab making their official entrance to Seri Mutiara, the home of Penang's Head of State, 1 May 1989. Note the thick ivy on the walls, which Hamdan quickly had removed. This checked the invasion of white ants and mosquitoes, upsetting some people on aesthetic grounds, but seen as a change for the better by others.

69b. Hamdan receiving the congratulations of well-wishers at Seri Mutiara; behind him (largely obscured) is Siti Zainab and next to her, Lim Chong Eu, Penang's Chief Minister. Also in the picture are (1) Toh Puan Lim; (2) Dato Dr. Sak Cheng Lam (local MCA leader); (3) Dato' Ibrahim Saad; (4) Dato' Kwong; and (5) Mohd. Noraini Kamarun, who edited a booklet on the history of Seri Mutiara, compiled by Joceline Tan.







70a. Attending the Installation of the Ninth Yang Di-Pertuan Agong (Sultan Azlan Shah) at the Istana Negara, Kuala Lumpur, September 1989, flanked by the Head of State, Sarawak (Tun Datuk Patinggi Haji Ahmad Zaidi Adruce) and consort (left); and by the Raja Muda of Brunei and his consort.

70b. Attending the 157th Rulers' Conference, held at Kuching, June 1992; L-R: Hamdan, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Utama Syed Ahmad al-Haj (Melacca); Tan Sri Haji Mohamed Said bin Keruak (Sabah); the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong (Sultan Azlan Shah); Sultan Mahmud al-Muktafi Billal Shah (Terengganu); Tuanku Haji Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (Kedah) and Raja Nazrin Shah (Regent, Perak).





71. Hamdan, as Head of State, with members of the Ninth State Legislative Assembly, at the opening of its first session for 1995. L-R (front row) YB. Dr. Rajapathy a/l Kuppusamy, YB. Tuan Hj. Dr. Hilmi Hj. Yahaya, YB. Puan Kee Phaik Cheen, YB. Dato' Hj. Mohd Shariff Hj. Omar (Deputy Chief Minister), YB. Dato' Ahmad Zaki Hussin (State Legal Adviser), YAB. Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon (Chief Minister), TYT Tun Dato' Seri (Dr.) Hj Hamdan Sheikh Tahir (Head of State), YB. Dato' Hj Yahaya Abdul Hamid (Speaker), YB. Puan Chong Eng, YB. Dr. Sak Cheng Lum, YB. Dr. Kang Chin Seng dan YB. En. Abdul Latiff S. Mirasa.

*courtesy: Penang State Government*



72a. After inspecting the Guard of Honour on the Esplanade, Penang, before opening a new session of the State Legislative Assembly; with the Chief Minister, Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, and Siti Zainab a few steps behind.

72b. State Dinner on the occasion of the official visit of Tuanku Ja'afar, the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong of Penang, August 1998: L-R: Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamed (Prime Minister); Hamdan; the Agong; the Raja Permaisuri Agong, Siti Zainab, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (Deputy Prime Minister) and wife (Datin Seri Wan Azizah).





73a. Hamdan exchanging greetings with his subjects, at a birthday tea party in his honour at Penaga, North Seberang Perai, July 1997: Siti Zainab bringing up the rear.

73b. A *tahlil* (Muslim prayer session) at the District Mosque, Seberang Prai, on the occasion of Hamdan's 77th birthday, 1998. On Hamdan's right is Dato' Shariff Omar, and on his right, Dato' Hassan Ahmad, the State Mufti.





74a. Presenting the winning prize to the champion Quran reader at the Jawi Mosque, Penang, October 1996. Looking on is the Deputy Chief Minister, Penang, Dato' Shariff Omar.

74b. Presenting a champion cup to its winner at the Penang Free School Speech and Prize-giving Day, October 1996. Standing on the left is the Principal, Encik Ismail Ibrahim.





75a. Handing over *zakat* (Muslim tithes) to the Girls Orphanage, Scotland Road, Penang, 1998; in attendance, Dato' Shariff Omar (left) and Dato' Yusoff Latiff, businessman and philanthropist.



75b. Siti Zainab visiting the General Hospital, Penang (Hamdan was also around doing something very similar).



75c. Visiting the Hitachi Semi-conductor (M) Sdn Bhd. plant on the occasion of its 25th anniversary in Penang, accompanied by the Chief Minister, Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon, and the Japanese top managers, November 1998.

*courtesy:* Penang State Government.



76a. Entertaining members of the Penang Executive Council on 'Open House' at the State Guest House, Chinese New Year, 1997. L-R seated: Dato' Jamaluddin Damanhuri (State Secretary); Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon; Hamdan; Dato' Shariff Omar; Dato' Dr. Hilmi Yahya; L-R standing: Dato' K. Rajapathy (Health); Dato' Khalid Ramli; Dato' Khoo Khong Por (Sports/Youth); Dr. Toh Kim Woon (Education); Dato' Teng Hock Nam (Municipality) - the two standing at either end unidentified.

76b. Attending - enrobed for the occasion - a Deepavali Open House in 'Little India' (Penang and Market Streets), Georgetown, organized by the Penang Indian Chamber of Commerce, November 1999. Behind Hamdan are Koh Tsu Koon, also similarly enrobed and (in white dhoti) Dato' Markend Joshi, President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce. Major Jury Tasripan, Hamdan's, tireless AD, extreme right below.

*courtesy: Penang State Government.*





77a. Distributing medallions to the winning team, USM Penang Hockey Carnival, August 1998.

77b. Taking part in the Annual Jamboree of Scout Cubs at Wisma Pengakap, Georgetown, Penang, along with Koh Tsu Koon.

*courtesy:* Penang State Government.



77c. Together with under-privileged children on Water Fun Day at One Stop Midland Park, organized by the Lion Club, Georgetown, August 1999.

*courtesy:* Penang State Government.





78a. 1991 group photograph of Hamdan and Siti Zainab with DISTED College Board of Directors, taken on the occasion of Hamdan receiving the honorary Doctorate of Letters from Deakin University. L-R: Dato' Saleema Isa (Counsellor); the Librarian; Professor Sharom Ahmat; Hamdan and Siti Zainab; Datin Fakhitah Darus; Dato' Mohd. Yeop Abdul Raof.

78b. Hamdan with his letter of appointment as Chancellor of the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (now Universiti Putra Malaysia), just given by Datuk Mohd Noordin Hassan at Seri Mutiara in July 1993. In picture L-R: Sahdon (Registrar, UPM); Tan Sri Professor Nayan (Vice-Chancellor, UPM); Datuk Mohd Noordin Hassan (Secretary-General, Ministry of Education); Hamdan, Siti Zainab and Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon.





79a. Hamdan at the climax of his official visit to the land of his forefathers: seen in this picture after having been invested with the Minangkabau Order of Dato Bagindo Sati by Dato' Haji Hassan Durin, (Orangkayo Mulia Nan Kuning), who was also the Governor of the province of West Sumatra, December 1991.

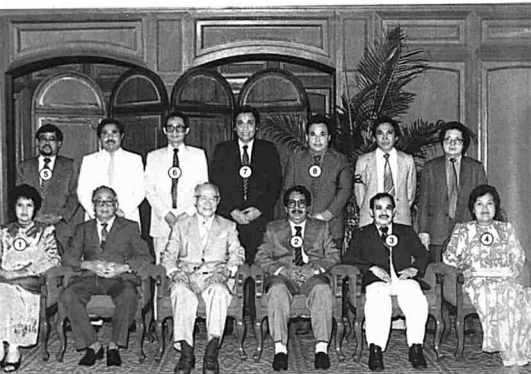
79b. Hamdan staggering everybody by making his speech in Japanese when visiting Japan in 1993. Picture taken at the Shoman Village Centre, Hayama-Machi, Kanagawa, where he and his party were welcomed as members of the 'Penang Friendship Delegation'. The Centre's Director was Dato' Seri Kazuji Nagasu, then Governor of Yokohama Prefecture.





80a. Hamdan with a group of distinguished Old Cliffordians, including (1) Tan Sri Sabki Jahidin; (2) Dr. Ajit Kaur; (3) Mohd Ibrahim Samad; (4) Dato' Shaari Harun; (5) Dato' Mohd. Yeop Abdul Raof; (6) Dato' Mustapha Mansor; (7) Tan Sri Musa Mohamed (now Minister of Education).

80b. Hamdan (their Patron) with the chairman and committee members of the Ex-Iskandarians Association in Ipoh in 1986, including (1) Sharifah Zainab; (2) Zahari Basri; (3) Aziz Shamsuddin (now Dato and Deputy Minister of Education); (4) Hafsa Baharom; (5) Ahmad Fauzi; (6) Dato' Ahmad Hassan Osman; (7) Zahudi Jalil; (8) Muhyin.





81a. A reunion of the School's past principals on Star's Silver Jubilee Day, 1982: L-R: Tan Sri Hamdan, Datuk Murad Mohd Noor, Datuk Dr Sulaiman Haji Daud (Minister of Education), Tuan Haji Hussein Salleh (Principal), Datuk Abdul Aziz Ismail, and Dato' Mohd. Ali Ibrahim.

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81b. A reunion of some graduates from Kirkby Teachers' Training College, England, being entertained at Seri Mutiara, May 1998, with Hamdan and Siti Zainab (marked x) in the middle.





82. Photo of a group of ex-hostelites celebrating the 65th anniversary of Raffles College, June 1993, taken in front of the hostel where Hamdan stayed when taking his degree. Amongst those seen here are (1) Khoo Seang Hoe (GM, Malayawata Steel); (2) Tan Leng Hai; (3) Dato' Oh Bak Kim; (4) Peter Lim (Secretary-General NUS Graduates Development Centre); (5) Lee Guan Meng, (6) & (7) Dato' and Datin N.S. Selvamany; (8) Stanley Padman; (9) James Vaniasingam - all distinguished educationists; (10) & (11) Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan (former Minister of Health) and Puan Sri Chong; (12) H.F.G. Leembruggen (one time diplomat & GM, MIDF); (13) K. Yogaratnam (a teacher who also became a diplomat), and (14) Chong Seck Chin, Hamdan, 2nd from right, 2nd row.



83. Hamdan, with Siti Zainab, after his appointment as Khalifah of the Seni Silat Gayong (one of the leading societies of the Malay art of self-defence) conferred upon him by Dato' Haji Meor Abdul Rahman, *Mahaguru* (Grand Master), at his headquarters at Ayer Kuning, near Taiping, Perak (see inset) in 1975.



84a. Hamdan being invested with the Order of Chivalry (2nd Class) or *Darjah Panglima Mangku Negara* (DMPN) which carries the title of 'Tan Sri' by Tun Sardon Jubir, Head of State, Penang, in 1977.



84b. Hamdan being invested with the Order of Chivalry (1st Class) or *Darjah Seri Maharaja Mangku Negara* (SMN) which carries the title of 'Tun' by the Tenth Agong, Sultan Azlan Shah, in 1989.



85a. Hamdan after having received an honorary doctorate in Law from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, at a ceremony held at Seri Mutiara in 1991.

85b. Hamdan with Siti Zainab, after having been conferred with an honorary degree in Letters from the University of Deakin, South Australia, at a ceremony held at Seri Mutiara in 1991.







86a. Hamdan and Siti Zainab being given an official welcome on arriving at Kuching, Sarawak in 1991 to receive the award of the title of 'Datu Patinggi': on Hamdan's left is Tun Datuk Patinggi (Dr) Haji Ahmad Zaidi Addrucce, Sarawak Head of State. In the background between Hamdan and Siti Zainab, Datu Patinggi Taib Mahmud, Chief Minister of Sarawak, and Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon.

86b. Hamdan receiving the "Pingat Semangat Padi", the Malaysian Scouts' Association highest award, from the Chief Scout, Malaysia, Datuk Amar Dr. Haji Sulaiman Daud, September 1997.





87. The three recipients of the Tun Abdul Razak Award presented on behalf of Tun Hajjah Raha bt Tun Sri Haji Mohammad Noah by Dato' Seri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak in Kuala Lumpur on 11 March 2000: L-R: Tan Sri Abdullah Mohd Salleh (Chairman of Awards Committee); Tan Sri Datuk Dr Omar Abdul Rahman (International Award); Dato Seri Mohd Najib; Hamdan (National Award); and Datuk Professor Ir. Dr. Ahmad Zaidee Laidin on behalf of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UTM) (Organization Award).

第一〇九六七号

総理府賞典局長 石出宗秀



内閣総理大臣 細川護熙



平成五年十一月二日

明仁



日本国天皇はマレイシア国人  
トウシグトリーヌリハジハムダーン・  
ピン・シエーク・ターヒルを  
勲一等に叙し旭日大紋章を贈与する  
平成五年十一月二日 皇居において  
みすから名を署し夏をおさせらる

88a. Hamdan's Patent of Decoration (see translation opposite) of the conferment by Emperor Akihito of the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun. 1992.

88b. Hamdan's Certificate of Election as a Commonwealth Vice-President of the Royal Commonwealth Life-Saving Society, under the patronage of its Head, Queen Elizabeth II, bestowed upon him on in May 2001.



Patron: Her Majesty The Queen  
Commonwealth President: H.E. Prince Michael of Kent KG

The Royal Life Saving Society  
Commonwealth Council

Tun Dato' Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan Sheikh Johir SMN FSA DULPN DP DPMN KUN

has been appointed

Commonwealth Vice President

in recognition of valuable services rendered to the Society

Commonwealth Secretary General

2001

Commonwealth President

PATENT OF DECORATION

We, the Emperor of Japan, do hereby confer upon.....

Tun Dato' Seri Dr. Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir,

a citizen of Malaysia

the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun.

In witness thereof, We have caused the Seal of State affixed to these presents, which We have signed with Our own hand at .....

This Day, the Second of the Eleventh Month of the 15th Year of Heisei (1993)

L. S. AKIHITO

Seal of State

L. S. Morihiro Hosokawa

Prime Minister

Seal of Office

L. S. Sosyo Ishida

Director-General of  
Decoration Bureau,  
Prime Minister's Office

Seal of Office

The 2nd day, the 11th month, the 15th year of Heisei.

88c. Translation of the Patent of Decoration

88d. Hamdan, with Siti Zainab, receiving the Grand Cordon from Tsutomu Hata, then Japanese Foreign Minister, at a ceremony held in Tokyo, 1993





89. Hamdan's family, June 1998: L-R sitting: Mohamed Ariff Mohd. Ali; Mohamed Ashraff Mohd. Ali; Hamdan and Siti Zainab; Mohamed Amin Mohd. Ali; and Siti Aishah Hamdan; LR standing: Farizah Othman; Tahiruddin Hamdan; Dr. Mohamed Ali Abdul Kadir; Dr. Siti Khadijah Hamdan; squatting in front, Intan Amalina Mohd. Ali.

2. In fact, Hamdan was well aware of and deeply appreciated the support he always received from Siti Zainab. He felt blessed in having as his wife a teacher like himself who thought very much the same way as he did. He was also aware of how much he depended on her in whatever he had done throughout his career. But when Siti Zainab was not free, he was reluctant to ask the help of others, even though he had so many staff at his beck and call. He sometimes would walk to the USM campus, which was not far from their house, in order to do some business at the University post office when Siti Zainab was tied up with her house-keeping, rather than bother any of his staff.

3. *Annual Report* of the PSM 1982/83, p. 16.

4. i.e. including the issue of developing the PSM's piece of land on Jalan Tun Razak in Kuala Lumpur, financial affairs, and the forthcoming AGM of the Society. Also mentioned was the translation of *Changi: The Lost Years*, the book written by T.P.M. Lewis, Hamdan's former headmaster at the Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar, recounting his experiences as a detainee in the Changi Gaol during the Japanese Occupation (refer Chapter 2).

5. Dato' Omar who was now Deputy Director-General of Education was eminently suitable to be Hamdan's successor. He was not only a long-standing and loyal member of the Society but also possessed a keen interest in history which had developed during his student days at the University of Malaya in Singapore. 'In my opinion', Hamdan declared with reference to his confidence in Omar's ability to carry on with the PSM's work, 'the course of his career has gone hand in hand with the main channel of his interest as a writer and student of history, because he has also held a number of important posts closely related to education, language, literature and history'. *ibid.* p. xvii.

6. i.e. the National Palace, the official residence of the Yang DiPertuan Agong.

7. The Malaysian monarchy is unique in that the office of Yang DiPertuan Agong (King or Paramount Ruler) of the federation is held successively by each of the Malay Rulers of the nine member states of the Federation headed by hereditary monarchs. The term of each Yang DiPertuan Agong is five years.

8. At that time Dato' Haji Abdul Rahman Abbas could not have imagined that on the same day twelve years later, he would be taking the Oath of office as Hamdan's successor as Head of State of Penang.

9. *Mufti*, in this instance, the most senior Islamic official in the State.

10. a formal recitation of the Muslim creed performed to mark certain religious and ceremonial occasions, such as this one in question.

11. note from Toh Puan Datin Seri Hajjah Siti Zainab by Haji Baharuddin to the author dated 24 December 1997.

12. Skinner also could claim educational links, because he was the first Inspector of Schools, a post newly-created by the colonial regime of the Straits Settlements in 1872. Skinner, incidentally, was a pioneer champion of primary education for the Malays, arguing for 'the extension of vernacular education as the chief concern of the government', a point he made in the *Annual Report on Education in the Straits Settlements for 1872*, the first report on education in

British Malaya ever to be published. Incidentally, the title of the most senior official in Penang has been changed several times since Francis Light assumed the post as Superintendent in 1786. A few years later the most senior official was styled Lieutenant-Governor, and when in 1805 Penang was raised to the status of a Presidency under the British dispensation the title changed to Governor. Then in 1832 when the capital of the Straits Settlements was transferred from Penang to Singapore, the top Penang official was called Resident Councillor. After the Second World War the term Resident Commissioner replaced that of Resident Councillor.

13. refer Chapter 6.

14. Francis Bacon (1561-1626).

15. *Surah sa-Zumar, ayat 9* (Chapter 39: The Companies)

16. *Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar*, op.cit. Foreword, p.2.

17. 'STAR's Trail-blazing through the Years Night', held at the Holiday Villa, Subang Jaya on 12 December 1992.

18. *surah al-Asr*.

19. i.e. the Malay proverb: *Ikut kata enggang, makan buah belolok; ikut kata orang, terjun masuk lubang*.

20. Dr. Mahathir became prime minister in 1981, and at the time of the publication of this book, (i.e. July 2001) was still in office.

21. The 'Vision of the Year 2020' is an outline projection for the development of Malaysia over the next two decades up till the year 2020, encompassing the economic, social, political and spiritual perspectives, drawn up by the Malaysian Government and officially published in 1992.

22. The speech of the Chancellor of the USM, H.E. Tun Dato' Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, at the first session of the 17th Convocation of the University on 28 August 1993.

23. The full text of the speech of H.E. Tun Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir delivered on the occasion of his being conferred with an honorary degree in letters by Deakin University on 20 August 1991 is to be found in Appendix 3.

24. Disted College was actually founded in 1986 on the initiative of a group of professors and lecturers at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, including Sharom Ahmat, Kamal Salleh, and Dr.G. Dhanarajan who was the moving force behind the whole project. The College is based on the concept of distance learning, which might be considered an updated and more sophisticated version of Hamdan's pioneer Gaya Pos scheme of the 1950s. In this case Disted College (Disted stands for 'Distance Education') was based on a twinning programme with Deakin University at Melbourne in Australia, by which Malaysian students took the first part of their degree course in Penang at the College and then completed it at Melbourne. In fact, it was a pioneer of the twinning concept. However, the College was founded in an era when private higher institutions of learning were still frowned upon by the Ministry of Education – the incumbent Director-General was quite opposed to the whole idea – and it was only through the active intervention of Hamdan who saw the advantages of the scheme that a local sponsor was found and premises in Penang obtained. Hamdan's own

involvement in the College came about in 1985, when he was approached by Dhanarajan, who had the backing of all the other professors of the College, and was asked to become member of the Board of Advisors as well as (honorary) chairman of the Board of Directors and Governors. Hamdan naturally accepted this invitation with pleasure, for not only did it bring him back to the mainstream of education, from which he had ceased to be directly involved when he retired as Director-General of Education, but also – as he made clear in his speech of 1989 (see Appendix 2) – because he clearly saw the need for the rapid expansion of opportunities in the field of higher learning. The names of the other members of the Board of Advisors shows what distinguished company he was keeping – i.e. Tun Mohamed Suffian, former Lord President and Pro-Chancellor, University of Malaya; Professor Datuk Sharom Ahmat, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the USM and Academic Adviser to the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brunei; Professor Datuk Kamal Salih, then Director of the Malaysian Institute for Economic Research (MIER), and now a Member of Parliament; Dr. G. Dhanarajan, Associate Profesor in Distance Education; Hulman Sinaga, Associate Professor of Education and formerly Director of the USM INSPIRE Project; and Wong Poh Kam, one-time lecturer in Housing, Building and Planning, USM. Hamdan, incidentally, played a major role, through his many influential Penang contacts, in securing the site and building for the College.

25. i.e. in one or more of the following ways according to the official citation of the PSM: by promoting and adding to knowledge of the history of the nation, state or district by means of studies, research, writings or new discoveries; through activities in any movement which attracts, fosters and increases public interest in the history of the nation, state or district; through efforts to collect and preserve remains and materials pertaining to the history of the nation, state or district which results in a substantial contribution to the nation's historical and cultural legacy; and by helping to encourage activities connected with history or studies and research concerning history in the country.

26. The full text of this speech is to be found in Appendix 2.

27. Speech by H.E. Tun Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, Head of State of Penang, at the Dinner to mark Teachers' Day at State level in Penang, held in the grounds of Seri Mutiara on 14 June 1991.

28. e.g. Typical themes are: 'Wage the Holy War for Eminence', 'The Pilgrimage to Eminence', 'The Vision is the Path of the Faithful', 'The Vision unites the Faithful', 'Make the Pilgrimage to Excellence', 'The Pilgrimage preserves the Faithful', 'Good Character promotes the Faithful', 'The Quran creates Good Character', 'The Pilgrimage creates Pure Values', 'Muslims of Quality are the Promoters of the Vision'. An example of the type of message that Hamdan tried to put across is found in his speech on the occasion of the Muslim New Year 1413 at the State Mosque, 14 June 1991. On that occasion, Hamdan asked his listeners what they understood by a given slogan such as, 'Make the Pilgrimage to Excellence', and then went on to explain that the key to the answer lay in knowing the qualities that mark a good Muslim – namely good health and physical vigour and activity; strong character and exemplary behaviour;



knowledgeableness, self-reliance, and firmness in belief; devoutness and self-control; awareness of the value of time; loyalty and selflessness; and forming a good example to others in all things.

29. *al-Baqarah* (The Cow), verse 148.

30. i.e. the day which marks the move of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina and also the start of the Muslim new year.

31. Excerpt from Speech by Tun Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, entitled 'The Malay language, education for nation-building in Malaysia: a brief observation'.

32. or as the Malays say: *Sirih Pulang ke Gagangnya; Pinang Pulang ke Tampaknya*.

33. Talk given by H.E. the Head of State of Penang on aspects of development in Malaysia and Penang at the Sri Andalas University, Padang Panjang, on 18 December 1991.

34. i.e. the *pondok* schools, the *madrasah* system, and the Government school system, plus personal tuition in the house of the ustaz.

35. i.e. with the setting up of an Advisory Board for the Coordination of Islamic Learning and Education (Lembaga Penasihat Penyelarasan Pelajaran dan Pendidikan Agama Islam/ LEPAI) with the consent of the Conference of Malay Rulers, for the purpose of coordinating the curriculum of those religious schools in the country which did not come under the Ministry of Education, so that in future they would all be uniform.

36. quoting from the written invitation from the President of the University of Manitoba, Canada, dated 23 May 1991, Hamdan was invited as one of those individuals 'known for their thoughtfulness, broad sectoral interests and keen understanding of post-secondary education and the difficulties of its effective management in developing countries'.

37. The full text of H.E. the Governor of Penang's speech at the Malay Language Department, of the Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing in October 1995 is to be found in Appendix 6.

38. In fact, his last few days as Head of State were spent in the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur. He had perforce to stay there for 36 days as a result of certain complications that arose from having undergone angioplasty, and there were moments of great anxiety for all his family and his friends and well-wishers. But Hamdan has never given up easily, and finally has made a steady and satisfactory recovery.

39. For the text of this speech, see Appendix 7 below.



## *Epilogue*

Looking back in retrospect on Hamdan's life and career, it can be seen as falling into three distinct phases. Throughout it all runs the overriding theme of 'Education', whether formal or informal, in keeping with his predilection as a child for the pursuit of knowledge, both of this world and the next. This in turn was the consequence of the subconscious ideal nurtured by his mother and father who wanted to see the rise of a new generation, erudite and able in worldly affairs, yet strong and devout in their Faith.

A great deal of Hamdan's interest in knowledge, during the first phase when he was a child and then in his adolescence, was a result of the influence of his father. Hamdan himself was always deeply impressed with those high qualities of virtue, self-discipline, grit and determination possessed by that scholar of Islam from Nusantara which had driven him to seek for knowledge to such distant lands as Arabia and Egypt; who had been willing to stay away from home for years and years until he had achieved his ambitions; so that in the end he could return and share with those whom he had left behind the fruits of his learning which at that time they so sorely lacked. His father's life-story with its twists and turns and ups and downs provided Hamdan with the legacy of a positive and liberal approach to the pursuit of knowledge as well as equipping him with a firmness of faith as an internal resource with which to face all the vicissitudes of this world.

Hamdan first became enthralled with informal education at an early stage when his father was Principal of the Madrasah Haji Thaib at Parit

Jamil, Muar, Johor, which was the starting point for his long quest in search of wisdom. He then continued in Singapore for a short while and ended up in Kuala Kangsar, Perak, to seek the foundations of his formal education in the land of his mother's birth with its strong academic traditions, until he achieved his heart's ambition. Hamdan felt to the core of his being the sweet satisfaction of acquiring education and of sensing the awareness of its importance, not only for himself as an individual but also for all those of his community. A feeling of identity with one's own race is natural to any man, and therefore there was nothing unusual if both Hamdan and his twin brother in developing their mental faculties took their parents as their model. Their feelings of affection for their own family so close to them were later transformed into an affection and love for their own race, a natural process amongst all peoples of this earth:

...ties of family are something natural amongst men. Absence of this affection between those of the same blood ties rarely occurs. Such feelings give rise to bonds of mutual love and those who possess such close bonds will never want them to be damaged in any way or for them to be converted into enmity. If, for instance, the left thigh is pinched, the right thigh will also feel the pain; and likewise if members of a man's family are oppressed or assaulted, he will certainly come to their aid. This is in truth a basic reaction found amongst all creatures, especially when they are members of the human race<sup>1</sup>.

And so it was with Hamdan. Starting with his own family, and then with his peer group at school, he was for ever coaxing and encouraging them to study until they achieved success. As he began to realize that the only way to clear the path to any branch of knowledge was through the medium of a teacher, it was obvious to him that the closest example was his own father. From this time on, Hamdan evinced a strong desire to follow in his father's footsteps, because the contribution of a teacher to his students was effective and long-lasting, for as is said in one of the Sayings of the Prophet (*Hadith*):

When a man dies, his good deeds die with him except in three matters: namely, the good deeds and charities he has given; the benefits of the learning that he leaves behind; and his own children of the Faith who pray for him.

Once Hamdan had become a teacher, his obvious mission to spread the benefits of education which lay wide open before him, inspired him to study hard through the medium of whatever language as long as it would bring benefit both to himself and the community at large. Although Hamdan's aspirations for higher learning were thwarted by the Second World War, they were revived when he was given the opportunity to learn Japanese, so enabling him to become a teacher in that language. Hamdan did not harbour any resentment against the colonial power – be it British or Japanese – from the point of view of having to learn a foreign tongue, because he believed that if he mastered it – even if it was the language of the enemy – it would be to his own ultimate benefit. English and Japanese were languages which had been enriched through the evolution of centuries of culture and civilization. Therefore, the knowledge which had been absorbed into the British and the Japanese characters could only be of the greatest value for world harmony.

The satisfaction that being a teacher gave him formed the basis on which Hamdan's built his life, whereas most of his contemporaries were attracted to better-paid careers which gave them a higher status in the eyes of society. However, he remained strictly loyal to his profession to the point that he reached its summit and so entered upon the second phase of his life. As the nation moved towards independence and calls for the emancipation of the Malays were heard here and there, Hamdan also took steps towards training the future youth of the nation, acting as a patriot operating on a small scale on a limited stage, that is by means of education in the classroom and through the *Gaya Pos* correspondence courses. Hamdan strongly felt that his countrymen, especially those living in isolated kampungs, should not be left out of the main stream of development released by the political struggle for independence which would bring economic and social change.

Once he was in command of the ship, Hamdan did not look back. Straight away he tackled the problems of a huge organization in order to realize an independence which would be more meaningful and in line with the aspirations of a people who were free. Through the medium of the National Education Policy, he laid firm foundations for his campaign for the predominance of Malay as the National Language. He had long ago been convinced that Malay had the capacity to be a language of

learning, but because of the restrictions imposed upon it as a result of British colonialism which had almost completely sidelined its role as a major tongue, a number of prominent people had acquired a strong inferiority complex about its use. Hamdan was one of the principal motivators who rose and headed the psychological campaign to restore confidence in the use of Malay and the role that it could play, and raised its status to one which all could be proud of.

Some of Hamdan's tactics invited the perception in certain quarters that he was too anglophile, but the ends justify the means and worshipping the British was very far from his mind. Hamdan's motives were unsullied, and were grounded in an awareness of the need to raise the standard of education of Malay students, particularly in the rural areas. He was severely criticized, including by politicians, when he introduced the idea of reforming the teaching and learning of science and mathematics, which included recruiting key personnel from Britain, the former colonial power. Anti-British sentiments were still rife in nationalist circles and amongst those who shared similar views. They wanted to abolish completely all traces of dependency on the former colonial masters, that is in addition to preparing the agenda for the fulfilment of independence. However, as a professional who was pragmatic and realistic, Hamdan maintained that for as long as the country did not have the capacity to produce experts from amongst its own people, it would be better as a temporary measure to seek ideas and expertise from the British or from whomsoever it could be obtained, in accordance with the precept of Islam commending the search for knowledge and enlightenment. Although Hamdan almost alone had to endure all manner of criticism and complaint, the soundness of his policies became clear in the end when thousands of Malay students proved able to study these two subjects up to higher levels, thanks to the implementation of the new system of teaching and learning. Of the greatest importance in bringing this about was getting rid of the habit of giving up too easily when confronted with a subject which was supposed to be a graveyard for Malay students:

....this success was like the fruit from a small tree which had grown from the seeds planted by Tun Hamdan when he Was Director-General of

Education. At that time the Ministry's infra-structure was lacking in most things because education officers of ability were few and far between, equipment was inadequate, and the expertise available very limited. During that period as well, Tun Hamdan cleverly succeeded in overcoming all these deficiencies by putting in place a strategy which made full use of whatever was at hand so as to blaze the trail to the goal which was still so far and hard to reach. As a leader of courage he did not know the meaning of failure. Boldly he went all out to exploit all possible ways and means to move little by little towards the national goals of education....

has said Abdul Rahman Arshad (now Tan Sri Dato' Wira), a former Director-General of Education<sup>2</sup>. Another former Director-General of Education, Dato' Asiah binti Abu Samah, who frequently refers to Hamdan as her mentor, observes:

For me, Tun Hamdan is a visionary who possesses a remarkable sense of vision and mission. He almost single-handedly contributed to the content and spirit of the National Education Policy which is enshrined in the Razak and Rahman Reports, injecting meaning and purpose into those Reports. Those who came after him only had to add some fine tuning to the great reforms that he had brought about.

Hamdan's third phase has obviously been the easiest for him, because he had already been tried and tested when he weathered the tempests as head of the mammoth Ministry of Education, and now stood at the apex of his career. His courage and determination in enduring that test enriched his experience and increased his maturity so that he could make a contribution which was still bolder, more effective and more forceful, given his 'workaholic' nature at an age when usually a man is relaxing with his grandchildren. For him, there is no such word as 'relaxation' in his vocabulary, because for as long as he is sound in mind and body, contributing to his country will take precedence over all else as a call of duty. Therefore, Hamdan still crosses the oceans to other continents and travels to different climes solely in order to serve his country and to further his knowledge and capabilities as a person whose whole life has been dedicated to the calling of the teaching profession and to the service of education.

Looking out on the world of today, Hamdan may feel content as his eyes catch the rays of the rising sun on the eastern horizon chasing the fleeing shades of night, that the children of his people are now pioneering far across the face of the globe. In the words of Usman Awang, leading poet and national literary figure:

If today a prince ascends his throne  
If today a statesman holds the stage  
If today a president mounts the stand  
If today a man of God sheds his light  
If today a lawyer wins his case  
If today a scribe unfolds his tale  
If today a youth enters man's estate  
History begins with a humble teacher  
Who with patient slowness  
Instructs the child to read and write<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Introduction*.

<sup>2</sup> *Pendidik Istimewa*, op.cit. p.ix.

<sup>3</sup> Zam Ismail, *Guru, Oh Guru*, Kuala Lumpur, DBP, 1989, p.42.

## APPENDICES



*Appendix 1:*  
*The Malaysian National Education Policy*

Text of speech delivered by Tan Sri Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, Director-General of Education, Malaysia, at the National Training Centre for Government Officers (INTAN), Petaling Jaya, on 5 July 1967.

When talking about our Education Policy, it is important that we are clear what we are talking about right from the start. Only in this way will we be able to pinpoint the connections and interdependence that exist between educationists, teachers and the people of this nation as a whole. Only then can we be sure that through the elected representatives and appointed leaders of the people the implementation of education in this country is not only linked to the aim of educating clear-thinking and healthy individuals, imbued with sound spiritual values and culturally adjusted so as to carry out their duties satisfactorily in society, but that education is also linked to the need to meet national economic goals and to fulfil national aspirations in general. In Malaysia we always hold on firmly to these two aspects of education. On the one hand we strive to implant and implement the noble goals of education in the best possible way. We also – in accord with general norms today – always strive to pay fullest attention to the economic requirements of the nation whilst carrying out our duties.

The essence of Malaysia's education policy cannot be understood without knowing something about the ideas that have given birth to that policy and the process of its development up to the present time. Before 1956, when education was still in colonial hands, we simply took what



was handed out to us in the name of education. We never produced anything of our own. The policies laid down by Whitehall determined the pattern of education in our country. In this colonial policy, no thought was given to economic factors, such as education for self-reliance, for industrialization, for our own citizens to participate in the economic sector. All educational programmes were designed to equip our children to be able to read and write so as to fill subordinate positions. The first English-medium schools in this country were aimed at teaching our children to read and write sufficiently well so as to be able to become clerks. With the coming of Independence, the schools in this country have advanced beyond these original goals and our education has attained a higher level. Even a university has been established.

In the colonial period, education was not channelled to meet national needs. Its form and content bore no relation to the political, social or economic aspirations of the people. Teachers, doctors, civil servants and clerks were trained but not in order to occupy high posts in the administration. These were still held by foreigners who were not familiar with local traditions. One thing in particular which stood out very clearly was the lack of systematically planned training facilities at whatever level for government officers, or for the management of various types of industry, including agriculture. The idea of self-sufficiency and of making the fullest use of the resources of our own country was not considered worthy of discussion. The problems of how to maintain financial stability and a strong currency and how to provide sufficient work for all members of our multi-racial society were never given any thought.

However, at that time our dependence on foreign expertise and foreign resources was not seen as a serious problem. The colonial administrators were not concerned about such things as national unity and progress, the building up of a sense of patriotism among the people, or of working hard in the interests of the country. A sense or spirit of belonging and ownership which is so important in the development and advancement of original skills and in the task of planning for our future was completely lacking.

Educational programmes were merely programmes that had been transferred from somewhere else and not considered in the context of local interests. So the question of planning to meet our own

requirements did not arise. The consequence of this was that we had a situation where there was no proper balance between the types of skills that were taught nor in the social structure in general. Moreover, there was no research done regarding educational problems and requirements and no effort made to introduce a system that could meet the aspirations of the people.

Starting in 1956 with Independence on the horizon, we quickly changed our attitude from one of being consumers to one of being producers. The future of the nation was step by step placed into our own hands to fashion and to build. The time had now come for us to implement our own plans so as to fit in with our own wishes and requirements. We quickly moved forward into a period in which we became the producers of our own 'goods'.

This situation was fully understood by our leaders and a committee at ministerial level was set up with Tun Abdul Razak (then Minister for Education) as its chairman, to study and make proposals for the formulation of a policy which was appropriate for an independent nation, taking into account prevailing conditions. The Razak Committee produced the Razak Report of 1956 which put forward twenty important proposals – half of them general and the other half more specific. In my talk I shall elaborate only on the more important points.

In the past the inhabitants of this country consisted of groups of foreigners from various lands who came to live alongside the local Malays. These foreigners arrived not with the idea of planning to set up an independent state of their own, but with the intention of securing their own economic future. They settled down here, brought up their offspring and sent them to school locally. Some of them, having lived here for some time, returned to their homelands, but most stayed on, with the result that we now have with us Malaysians who have been here for several generations, although their ancestors came from abroad. Their children got their education in schools which they established themselves. Many of them saw the economic value of learning English, so that English itself became an official language of importance at the time. As a result there were many schools which used English as the medium of instruction. There were also a good number of schools which used Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction, besides the Malay-medium schools.

The important point to note here is not the coming into existence of schools which were split into four different streams based on four different media of instruction, but that prior to 1956 these four different streams followed four different curricula. Each language-stream went its own way, without there being any links with the other streams, in particular with regard to syllabi and content. Because of this a highly undesirable state of affairs prevailed in that the quality of education varied according to the language-medium used. Another grave shortcoming was that subjects taught also varied. Equally undesirable was that the organization of teacher training for English schools was superior to that for teachers in the other language streams. In consequence there were great differences in the quality of the students turned out by the four streams. Ultimately a situation arose in which the products of our system of education differed not only in quality but also in the opportunities open to school-leavers. This was a situation which was totally unsatisfactory, especially for a country on the eve of its independence, which would depend on the energies of each and everyone of its citizens.

The basic elements of the National Education Policy which are enshrined in the Razak Report of 1956 are designed to bring into being a system of education which is national in form and aim, and founded above all on the National Language, besides preserving and protecting the other major languages and cultures in this country. Since then this Policy has been put in statutory form by the Education Act of 1957 and reinforced by the Rahman Talib Report of 1960. As a result the education policy of the Government is quite clear, and the Ministry of Education has taken important measures to eliminate differences in standard, opportunity and condition that have existed between the different types of school.

One of the products of the proposals in the Razak Report was the establishment of a General Syllabus and Timetable Committee to go into curriculum problems and to reorganize them not only to get rid of the differences that exist between the various types of school but also to give all schools in the country a 'Malayan' orientation. At the time it was felt, and today it is still felt, that starting off with a common syllabus for all schools in the country, regardless of the medium of instruction, is a major

step towards the creation of a united people and nation. Without this, we would not be able to construct a system of education which was acceptable to all the peoples of this nation.

The General Syllabus and Timetable Committee was made up of politicians and educationists, and the success of its work provides an example of how important cooperation between laymen and professional educationists is in order to help create a policy which will not adversely affect the noble aims of the educationists nor the aspirations of the nation. The original task of the Committee is still being carried on by its successors, and the basic guideline is to ensure that all our people, young and old, will not feel that they are inferior in any way to their contemporaries. The wording used in any discussion of the National Education Policy are those that are acceptable to all our citizens. An educational policy which is designed to satisfy the aspirations of the people as a whole must set out to eradicate all conditions and circumstances that could invite invidious comparisons and perpetuate differences. One of the preliminary steps being taken by the Government in the reorganization of education in this country is to re-examine our system of teacher training.

As a policy statement allow me to stress here that we want all teachers to receive adequate training, whether they are teaching in primary or secondary schools, or whether they are teaching in the English-medium or in other language medium schools. We are taking steps in this direction and each step taken is not only to provide programmes which are identical for the training of teachers from all types of school, but also so as to make sure that the shortages of teachers that exist in many schools will be overcome and that the distribution in the intake of new teachers will be properly balanced. We have given special attention to make sure that teacher training not only meets our staffing requirements but also raises the standard of teaching. As is proposed in the Razak Report for speedy implementation, training for primary school teachers can be given after having completed three years of secondary education. This move has given rise to concern that teaching standards will decline still further. In general, this fear is without foundation. However, we are very encouraged that with effect from next year (i.e. 1968), candidates for primary teachers' training colleges, with a few

exceptions, will all be selected from students who have completed their full five years of secondary education.

Our education policy taken as a whole, apart from its objectives of preparing our youths intellectually, culturally and morally, is aimed at creating a united people out of a multi-racial society. In carrying out this task, the goal of creating a national identity cannot be left out of account. This is a major task which presents a variety of challenges. Common aspirations and purpose and undivided loyalty amongst our teachers and students should not be instilled by coercion, but by enforcing, on occasion, laws to create conditions that make unity possible. In the Razak Report, which provides the basis for the national model which we propose, it is pointed out that, besides having a common syllabus and timetable for all schools, a system of education that is truly national in character should be brought about by making the National Language a compulsory subject in all schools. And so, gradually, we shall move towards the final goal of creating a system of education in which the National Language will have become the primary medium of instruction.

In order to realize this basic aim, we require all Malaysians to be bound by a common allegiance, and build a nation that is united and content. This is important, particularly in the case of a country which, as history shows, possesses diverse characteristics and springs from diverse sources. We also are totally convinced that the National Language must be developed and used effectively if the struggle to create a united nation is to achieve the complete success desired. With effect from 1 September 1967 the National Language, which previously had shared the position of being the official language along with English, will become the sole official language of the country. This is a statutory requirement. At first sight, this would appear to be an arbitrary measure imposed from above. However, right from the beginning, the decision to make Malay the National Language has been enshrined in the Constitution which came into being as the fruit of discussions between all relevant parties and has been accepted by a large proportion of the representatives of the people. This is why the agreement reached has to be implemented. The National Language Act which has been passed gives legal force to the Constitution, as mentioned above.

Ten years have passed since we started to reform our system of education so that it would be acceptable to the people as a whole. After having proceeded systematically stage by stage, we are now ready to implement effectively the use of the National Language. Within that ten-year period the National Language has been made compulsory in the syllabi of all forms, both primary and secondary. A pass in Malay used to be mandatory in order to enter secondary school (i.e. until the Secondary School Entrance Examination was abolished in 1964); it was also a condition for passing the Lower Certificate of Education. As for those taking the Overseas School Certificate Examination, a candidate can get the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education) provided that he has passed in the National Language. Now, a candidate can get his School Certificate or Higher School Certificate by taking all his subjects in the National Language. Three batches of students from Malay-medium schools have been accepted for entry into the University of Malaya. All the measures that have been taken in the last few years have placed the National Language on a firm footing in our system of education.

Meanwhile, Maktab Perguruan Bahasa (the Language Teacher's College) and the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Language and Literary Agency) have been getting on with their respective functions. The Maktab has trained National Language and Malay Language teachers for Malay-medium and non Malay-medium schools. The Dewan has carried out its job of publishing textbooks, coining new technical terms, and carrying out research into various aspects of the Malay language. While all this has been going on, the Ministry of Education has been carrying on with its task of organizing studies in rural schools and, with the help of suitable objective tests, of selecting children for entry to residential secondary schools from national primary schools. If this had not been done, the talents of these schoolchildren might well have been lost, whereas by means of this opportunity they can be prepared for getting a good secondary education through the Malay-medium.

All these steps have been based on one policy, that is to make Malay our national medium of education, without doing away with other languages at all. The problem of English, for example, has had to be resolved in a sensible manner. The English language has been given a

special place in our system of education. It is a compulsory subject for all forms at both primary and secondary levels. We are fully aware of the position of English as an international language as well as its role as the language of commerce and technology. At the same time that we are planning for degree passes to be attainable through the Malay medium, we also recognize that progress depends to a great extent on the exchange of knowledge and information, and on discussions with experts from overseas. This is true not only for own own country, but for other countries as well. Because of that we need to have a second language which can be fully utilized for gaining advantage from the progress in knowledge and its applications which has been achieved all over the world, particularly in the fields of science and technology.

Our policy also ensures that there are facilities for pupils to learn their own mother-tongues in those schools where such a demand for this exists. Examinations can also be taken in these languages. A policy such as this presents no obstacle to the primary policy of making Malay as the principals language of this nation.

Mention was made at the beginning of this address of the changing circumstances that we faced when we achieved Independence in 1957. From a position of being observers with no voice in planning at that time, we have become the administrators for the future and the arbiters of our own fate. It is obvious that our activities and studies must be framed not on a day-to-day basis but from the perspective of the generations to come. It is no longer a question of simply problem solving *ad hoc*, and it is no longer a matter of leaving it to the future for making improvements. Now that we have achieved Independence, we have to initiate measures and policies which will produce results far into the future. We have to think in terms of foreign exchange, in terms of creating work opportunities for our people, in terms of making use of the talent that we have in our own country, and no longer bothering to make use of facilities and assistance from abroad.

There is also the need to make plans for mobilizing all our available resources in the most effective way. We must make sure that we distribute the resources we have by making fullest use of our own finances, so that we can make the greatest impact in the most relevant places. One of the aims of the Ministry [of Education] is to establish and frame educational

programmes in order that our human resource needs can be adequately met within a period of a few years in keeping with national economic requirements. Since Independence we have been obliged to depend upon foreign experts in various fields, above all in that of technology. Now this dependence is steadily decreasing.

We have inherited from the colonial period a system of education which primarily, if not totally, is academic in character. Those who are not suited to this type of education will fall behind, and in this way add to the number of individuals who are unsettled and without purpose: individuals who in fact could probably succeed and become useful members of society if given the chance. Giving opportunities to our young men and women to play a full part in the economic development of the country – the importance of which is seen in the growing number of factory workers – has now become part of our policy. In 1965 we revamped the school curriculum so as to multiply the range of subjects that can be taken. In the curriculum for lower secondary schools, practical subjects have been added, giving students the chance to develop their interests in new fields. These subjects include Industrial Arts, Agricultural Science, Commerce and Domestic Science, one of which each student at lower secondary level must select and take. The aim of this policy is to introduce them during their three years in lower secondary to those fields in which they have already shown interest.

The LCE/SRP Examination has been reorganized so as to enable a candidate to further his studies in technical skills or practical work at upper secondary school level. This will qualify a candidate for employment in industry whether for government or the private sector. This policy has been introduced in order to promote programmes for self-reliance in the economic field and for increasing the standard of living and work opportunities for the children of poor parents. With this technical education has begun to receive the attention it deserves.

As for the field of higher education, we are aware of how important it is for there to be programmes aimed at ensuring that our young talents are not neglected. And every Malaysian will have the opportunity, according to his individual ability and interest, to make his contribution to the nation. Only recently the Higher Education Planning Committee has completed the drafting of its programme to cover several years ahead.



This programme, which is now awaiting the approval of the Government, is based on the necessity to make plans that are sensible and productive.

Although everything that has been mentioned in this address only refers to West Malaysia, I am sure that the remarks that I have made regarding conditions here apply with equal force to East Malaysia as well. It is only logical to draw the conclusion that the education policy for West Malaysia may be equally well applied to East Malaysia. In fact, that is how it is. However, during the inter-governmental discussions preceding the formation of Malaysia, it was agreed that the policy and system of administration of education in East Malaysia would be continued as it was on Malaysia Day until such time as when the two parties involved agree on a change. It is a source of great pride that in a variety of matters we have come closer together. But there are still a number of points of detail that require joint action. We cannot go on as at present for much longer. For as long as the Malaysian Ministry of Education is responsible to Parliament for both areas, the establishment of a common policy is extremely important.

In conclusion, Malaysia's education policy sets a good example of the beneficial results of the understanding established between the educationists and the politicians. Education has its own innate values which are important, but these cannot be assessed without taking into account the material needs of this country, which when met will give rise to popular satisfaction. In the campaign to create a truly united people in all respects, we must make sure that whatever we do is acceptable to society as a whole. We must mobilize our resources in a spirit of give-and-take in order to get the best results. This is not something which is unobtainable, although there are many challenges along the way. History will be the judge as to how far we have succeeded, but that success does not depend on the Ministry of Education and the Government alone, but also on the sincerity of purpose and loyalty of each and every Malaysian.



*Appendix 2:*  
*Speech at the Official Opening of*  
*DISTED College, Penang*

**Text of speech delivered by Tan Sri Datuk (Dr) Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, Chairman of the Board of Directors and Governors of DISTED College on the occasion of the Official Opening of the DISTED College Building, Penang, on 15 April 1989.**

(nb: opening salutations have been omitted)

Ladies dan Gentlemen,

**O**n this very happy and auspicious occasion when we are gathered together to officially declare KOLEJ DISTED (Pulau Pinang) open, I stand here as the Chairman of the Board of Directors and Governors of the College, to say that I feel very much overwhelmed by the magnificent preparations that all the College staff have done to make this historic occasion so attractive and such a great success. I would like to take this opportunity of congratulating them for the excellent organization and satisfactory display of the facilities that are available in the College.

Although DISTED COLLEGE is a new institution with so many essential facilities still in short supply, the college staff have worked very hard and long hours as a team, to reduce all shortcomings to a minimum. I believe also that with the existence a very good neighbour in the International School of Penang, DISTED has been and will be able to receive full cooperation and support when problems arise. I take this opportunity also to thank Mrs Linda Wright, the Chairman of the International School, Penang, and Mr. John Churchman, the Headmaster of the School, his staff and students for their cooperation and understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me digress a little and share with you the reasons for starting a venture like a private college of this kind in Penang. In all honesty, I am proud to say that the academics who sponsored DISTED COLLEGE have clearly done so, not so much for financial gain in the short term, but out of a desire, to meet educational challenges facing the nation.

The provision of education in Malaysia depicts a situation which can challenge any educational planner. On the one hand, there is the widespread belief that reasonable access to tertiary education is the right of all who have qualified themselves for it. On the other, is the economic reality that no government, however wealthy and prosperous, can fulfil such an aspiration fully. This is certainly true in Malaysia. We now have seven universities which annually admit barely twenty-five per cent of all qualified students. In 1989, perhaps less than 10,000 students will be admitted to local universities, when some 30 to 40,000 may apply.

The issue of reasonable access to higher education can be better viewed in the light of the statistical data provided by the Ministry of Education, which indicates that over the last decade less than 2% per cent of all Malaysian children entering primary schools actually went on a local university. Perhaps about a quarter per cent went overseas. The situation does not seem to improve in the next decade. Indeed the Ministry of Education projections (1982) show that in the next decade there may be at best, a 1.5 per cent increase in tertiary educational places, with a 300 to 400 per cent increase in demand. Such an imbalance is certainly potentially socially explosive. How such a situation may be rectified under prevailing economic and other constraints is a real challenge.

This lingering chasm between demand and supply has created the necessity for people, from both the private as well as the public sectors, to look outside the country for study places. Three problems relating to this immediately become evident.

Firstly, for those who do find places overseas and have the means for paying for the high cost of study (on the average it costs about Ringgit 30,000.00 per year to study overseas, in countries like Australia, Canada, England and the United States). This means large sums of money flowing out of Malaysia. An estimate indicates that the country spends around Ringgit 1.2 - 1.8 billion annually to support our students overseas. It

perhaps should be noted that it costs three to four times as much for a student to study overseas than at a local university.

Secondly, there is the problem of deculturation. The vast majority of those who go overseas do so from their late teens, a time when they are still entirely impressionable. Furthermore, they remain away from their homes and societal environments for long periods at a time. These two factors contribute to the erosion of their cultural roots. Thirdly, the problems of lack of English Language skills for academic purposes severely retards the normal progress of our students.

There are, of course, private institutions which provide alternative avenues for getting a diploma or a degree. Yet up to this period, they have not been able to provide that "reasonable access" to tertiary education that has been hoped for. For one thing, there are not enough of these as yet, and those that do exist are normally situated in large urban areas, such as Kuala Lumpur. They can cater to only a few hundred students each, thus, they cannot serve sufficiently large numbers of students and they tend to be geographically inaccessible to many.

Clearly, the country, because of its multifarious commitments and functions, cannot be expected to fully provide the educational services needed. The strain on public financial resources has led our government to call for greater participation from the private sector in supplementing and complementing national development efforts, as well as to explore newer ideas to meet society's demands.

DISTED COLLEGE was incorporated to do just that. The College is committed to meeting the higher educational needs of those who otherwise may not be able to pursue higher studies. It commits itself to responsibly and effectively representative selected distance education institutions in such countries like Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. At the same time, it obligates itself to be sensitive to the expressed needs and requirements of both country and client. The College thus makes it a matter of policy to persistently look for fresh avenues to develop human resources, in consonance with the demands of the time. It believes that privatizing some educational services will ease the burden on taxpayers.

These, then, are some of the challenges to which the Founding Fathers of the College committed themselves to face boldly, responsibly

and innovatively. It is our view, that such challenges need to be faced collectively. DISTED is poised to do its part.

The College before its inception, entered into arrangements with the

- Adelaide College, South Australia, to offer matriculation studies.
- Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education of Victoria, Australia, to offer 'split location degree study opportunities' in B.of Business, B. of Arts and B. of Social Science.
- British Columbia Open University, to offer the same opportunity to read for a Bachelor of Arts and B. of Science, and
- Murdoch University, Western Australia to offer similar opportunities to read for B. of Science and B. of Computer Science.

May I say with all sincerity that our overseas colleagues from the British Columbia Open University, Canada, along with Murdoch University, Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education, and the Adelaide College of South Australia have continuously offered us valuable assistance by providing us good teaching and learning materials to ensure that the offshore education with both its innovative techniques and methods can work and will work efficiently with our staff and students.

The College has currently about 230 students enrolled in the various programmes. This is our second year of operation. When we started in 1988, we conducted our learning and teaching activities out of rented premises from RECSAM. Limited though the facilities were, through sheer hard work and dedicated teaching we achieved enviable success in the matriculation examinations of 1988. This success, coupled with strong encouragement from the people of Penang, Perlis, Kedah and Perak, urged us to seek and obtain a lease such as the building you see in front of you to-day.

DISTED COLLEGE is a small institution of a manageable size with a group of dedicated lecturers, full-time and part-time, and well-motivated students. The College has produced good examination results. We also appreciate very much the good attendance this morning by parents and members of the public. After all, this is a Saturday morning when offices are still open, and office staff are hard at work. They are not often free to attend ceremonies, but we welcome and appreciate the presence of so many of you, the heads of government and private

departments; and your attendance is a great honour and encouragement to all of us who are associated with the College.

We are dedicated to assist the young and not so young scholars, who aspire to improve themselves to obtain knowledge, practical skills and valuable experience from materials offered by our provider universities and colleges. Our local lecturers and teachers will ensure that the essential processes of teaching, learning and observing are carried out by our students, and that they attend to their assignments and homework in earnest. If they are keen and really motivated they have no reasons to fail their examinations.

We intend to strengthen our cooperation with these few initial institutions of Higher Learning that can provide courses of study that are more varied and may not be readily available in our own country. We believe that our people can benefit if they wish to improve themselves for the sake of the family, the nation and the country. We are constantly on the look-out for courses of studies, or certain combination of studies, that are relevant and immediately useful to our students, who will help in the development and progress of the country for the present and the future in such fields as industry, commerce, computer science and computer engineering.

In this context I am extremely pleased to inform this gathering that DISTED will in the near future be offering courses from the open University of Indonesia (Universiti Terbuka Indonesia). The University has agreed in principle to register Malaysians in five of their first degree courses. They are :-

- S1 - Bachelor of Administrative Studies
- S1 - Bachelor of Public Administration
- S1 - Bachelor of Management
- S1 - Bachelor of Economics
- S1 - Bachelor of Maths/Applied Arts

DISTED COLLEGE has submitted an application to the Ministry of Education for its approval to do this programme. These courses will be conducted in the Malay language and are expected to cost the students less than Ringgit 1,500 a term, for eight terms. This will be the first collaboration of its kind between our two countries, Malaysia and

Indonesia, and I believe it will be a boon to thousands of Malaysians. The real attraction to Universiti Terbuka Indonesia is that students can follow these programmes wherever they are, at their own pace and their own pattern of learning, and most importantly, at a cost that is within the means of most Malaysians.

As I look back at the progress we have made over the last two years, I cannot help but recollect with fondness and gratitude the immense contributions made by many of my friends and colleagues. There are so many of them, but a few names stand amongst these such as Datuk Prof. Sharom Ahmat, Dr. G. Dhanarajan, Prof. Francis Morsingh, Prof. Hulman Sinaga, Miss Sushama and several officers of the Malaysian Ministry of Education; from abroad, Mr. Robert Hart, Mr. John Bartram, Prof. Peter Boyce, Mr. Patrick Gulton, Dr. Ian Mugridge, Mr Shannon Timmers, and many more. To all of them we owe thanks, and we pledge that DISTED COLLEGE will continue to maintain the highest academic standards achievable within our capacities.

However, I wish to single out Dr. G. Dhanarajan from the list above. As the Chief Executive Officer of KOLEJ DISTED, Dr. Raj, as we fondly call him, has worked almost single-handedly most of the time to get the machinery continuously running, in spite of so much constraint and shortcomings since four years ago for DISTED Services and KOLEJ DISTED.

For the concern, farsightedness and long-term vision of this great man, I have no end of admiration. For his excellent work, selfless dedication and invaluable services to achieve the success of KOLEJ DISTED there is no equal.

So, for this occasion; Ladies and Gentlemen; suffice then for me to state that all members of the three Boards, the Advisers, the Directors and the Governors, all staff and students of KOLEJ DISTED would like to record and express our most sincere grateful thanks to the one and only Dr. Gajaraj Dhanarajan. Terima kasih and Thank You.



Appendix 3:  
*'Educator Extraordinary'*

Text of speech delivered by TYT Tun Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir, Head of State, Penang, on the occasion of accepting the conferment of the title 'Educator Extraordinary' by the Ministry of Education at the Hotel Equatorial, Penang, on 18 February 1991.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am deeply moved that you have found the time to leave your personal work and business behind in order to be here tonight on my account. I have been given to understand that this award is the result of a collective effort by the members of the family that is the Ministry of Education. I feel highly honoured because of the holding of this ceremony to mark the award of the title of 'Educator Extraordinary' which has been arranged by the Ministry of Education under the leadership of YB Dato' Sri Anwar Ibrahim, the Minister of Education, an occasion which is both significant and historic. I accept this award with thanks to *Allah* the Almighty, and with feelings of great emotion, pride and joy. I also consider that this award represents a recognition of the contributions, role and achievements which the teaching profession – administrators and teachers alike – have made for this beloved country of ours.

Before I go any further this evening, it is fitting that I recall what are the probable factors that have made it possible for this occasion of the 'Educator Extraordinary Award' to take place. I believe it highly likely to be because, to start off with, I was taken and selected to replace the late Encik Aminuddin Baki, who died suddenly on 24 December 1965 at the premature age of thirty-five. He held the post of Chief Education



Adviser, Malaysia, as a son of the soil who was gifted with a high intelligence, possessed a special flair for the field of learning, was a wise administrator and educationist, but whose term of office at the Ministry of Education was to be for only a few years. His performance in service provided a role model and he was held in high esteem by both British and local officers, because he was a thoroughly conscientious worker, had an undivided interest in his work, and was totally committed to the educational profession.

I have pleasure in stating here that I first made his acquaintance in 1942 during the Japanese Occupation, when he was undergoing teacher training at the *Kyoin Yosei Jo*, or Japanese Teachers' Institute in Ipoh. At that time I was serving as an assistant teacher at the same Institute. By the time of his death, I had known Aminuddin for around twenty-three years, and I had come to appreciate fully that he was an education officer who was extremely talented, well trained and well-equipped to lead. He succeeded in pioneering many education policies which were subsequently formulated, modified and adopted by the government for a nation which had just achieved its independence. I am indeed grateful that I had the opportunity to work and serve with the late Aminuddin Baki for several years, helping him whenever he required it.

As a head whom I greatly revered, I also held him in high regard for his leadership qualities and for his great capability as an outstanding champion of education for the Malays. He was highly respected by all education and civil service officers and I am convinced that if *Allah* had granted him a longer life and that he had continued to serve in the Ministry of Education, he would, I can predict, have been the most appropriate person as candidate for the award of the title of 'Educator Extraordinary' this evening. Therefore I take pleasure in calling upon all Muslims present here to join with me in reciting *al-Fatihah* in the name of the Prophet and his Friends and of the late Aminuddin Baki who departed this life almost twenty-six years ago... *Al-Fatihah* – *Alhamdulillah* – we all pray that *Allah* will pour his blessings on his soul. Thank you.

This evening so many words of praise and appreciation have been directed towards me that I feel truly overwhelmed. But I give thanks to *Allah* because I can in turn direct all those praises to *Allah*, the Almighty

and Omniscient, by whose Grace I have achieved success and advancement in the past. If it is thought that my service all these years has succeeded in bringing about changes for progress in the field of education, that success is in reality your success, the success of all of you; because it is each and every one of you, who have in fact carried out your duty, have given of your service, and with complete dedication and an unflinching sense of responsibility have justified the trust reposed in you.

You all have certainly heard it said by those who have succeeded in life that behind the success of any husband there is his wife who loyally backs him up. This is also true of a successful head, because his success comes from the firm and meritorious support that has been given by his officers at all levels and from all sectors. In this respect, I am no exception.

When thinking back on my life over the past decades, I feel very grateful to have passed through four or five periods of highly variegated experiences. Along with being grateful for having enjoyed a long life, *Allah*, the Almighty and Munificent, has always bestowed upon me his divine guidance, help and inspiration in an environment which has always been sound, secure and protected. I also recall that in the period before the Second World War our country was still undergoing a time of recession and decline – that is in the 1930s, a time full of impending threats which put no one at their ease, a time when our country, Malaya, was under the colonial rule of the British who themselves were confronted with rumours of imminent war in East and West.

Many shortcomings were felt in various fields – in the economy, in trade and commerce, in culture and education. Malayans were worried and uneasy, divided amongst themselves, lacking a common goal. At that time I still remember the days when I walked to school from the house with Hamid, my twin brother, carrying a handful of rice and anchovies whenever we had to finish off our school work in the afternoons, because we had no time to go back home for lunch. Because we had been drilled by our family always to be economical and try to live modestly, I did not feel upset when forced to face difficulty and privation.

Then in the 1940s, our country in 1941 was attacked by Japanese soldiers. Before the Occupation took place, I had succeeded in entering Raffles College in Singapore as a student, but my studies were interrupted

because of the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, during the turbulent period of the Anglo-Japanese conflict, that is for more or less four years, I started to learn Japanese and gave instruction and learning *a la* Japanese, so as to strengthen my resolve and will-power by means of the Japanese form of self-discipline known as *seishin ippai*, in order to survive at a time and under conditions where all kinds of needs were lacking, a time full of hardship and adversity. Fortunately I lived to tell the tale, because I was only just able to scrape together enough experience and learning to be given a certificate that enabled me to be put in charge of several institutions of education and training in Ipoh. Fortunately as a result of the motivation and experience that I gained during the Japanese Occupation, I was able to continue straight away with my tasks as an educationist once the war was over. From that time on, Malaya started to press for its independence from British control, and the pre-eminent politicians of our nation, such as the Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Al-Haj and his colleagues, boldly and forcefully applied pressure to this end until this beloved country of ours succeeded in obtaining its independence in 1957, and become a nation which was free and sovereign.

When our nation had achieved its independence in the 1950s, I felt relieved and content, for just around that time I had at last got married to Siti Zainab after an engagement which had lasted for fourteen years. It was also at about the same time that I received my degree from the University of Malaya in Dunearn Road, Singapore, and after this resumed my career in education. I served as a teacher and then as a headmaster in several schools until I was taken to work at the Ministry of Education from 1960 onwards until I retired in 1976. There is no need for me to recount what happened during the 1960s and 1970s, because it has all been compiled, written down and recorded in the souvenir book which you have been given this evening.

I would only like to make the point here that after our country had succeeded in gaining its independence, you all and I as well have been able to perform our duties with panache and to approach them in a more serious and conscientious manner. The feeling of responsibility and the spirit of self-reliance in performing our duties are very different from the time when our country was still under the yoke of a foreign power. We

have felt an exuberance of pride and joy in carrying out our activities freely and boldly, multiplying educational strategies, changing, formulating and perfecting educational policies for the benefit of all our citizens, of all communities and of all races. We continue to strive to get the support and assistance of foreign educationists in specialized fields, especially in those of language, literature, science and technology from a number of foreign countries, including nations of the Commonwealth, the United States of America, India, Indonesia and Japan. We make use of methods, curricula, remedial programmes and evaluation techniques from all available sources, and wherever we can, we adapt them to the needs of our country so that Malaysia will be master of and possess a system of education that is modern and comprehensive, systematic and effective, as befits the aspirations and needs of a country which is truly independent.

Since working in the Ministry of Education from the early 1960s, I feel very fortunate indeed to have been able to meet and inter-act with so many prominent figures and education officers, both men and women, from the senior, middle and lower echelons, as well as officers from the Administrative and Diplomatic Service and other government services. Most fortunately as well, among these professional leaders there have been permanent secretaries of the Ministry of Education and of other Ministries who have been close friends of mine since the time I was small, or whom I knew well in the pre-war period, during the war or after the war. With these personal ties of friendship and the close and warm public relations that they have engendered, all our work could be carried out smoothly and effectively.

In such circumstances, however burdensome and difficult the task, we always felt it light to implement. We all felt well satisfied when a specific undertaking had been accomplished through good team spirit and good team work; by means of being able to give and take, we were able to confront together any problem, however great, with a sense of total commitment. Working closely together at all levels of the service is the secret for creating the spirit, resolve and inspiration in each and everyone of us to achieve progress and success. I believe that collective efforts have always been the key to the peace and prosperity, the stability and progress of our nation, particularly with regard to service in the Ministry of Education.

I felt truly fortunate on going on retirement in 1976 because I knew that I was leaving behind me a system of education which had been constructed for those who would benefit from it in the face of great difficulty and at the cost of great sacrifice, but which will guarantee the perpetuation of its proper and effective functioning and aims. All its present beneficiaries are to be numbered amongst those who possess sufficient experience and are professionally commissioned to carry out work which will be ever more challenging and tough, exacting and hard in the days to come. On retirement I have been very conscious that my contribution has been only within the limitations of my own abilities.

I am very happy on this occasion to place on record my appreciation of all twelve Ministers of Education since 1955, before independence, down to the present day, a period of thirty-six years. I feel fortunate indeed that I have been able to serve under a group of men of great intellectual stature and of pre-eminent leadership, for whom I was able to carry out instructions and implement the educational policies that they had formulated. I would regard all these Ministers of Education as my distinguished heads, and at the same as my close friends. I realize that they were men who had to bear the burden of a very heavy obligation, because they had the responsibility of giving replies to all questions concerning education raised in Parliament and the State Legislatures. Education and its teaching, as we all know, is a subject which contains a great variety of problems. Ministers of Education have to be alert at all times.

1. i.e. the first sentence of the Quran, which can be likened to the recital of the 'Lord's Prayer' by Christians.



*Appendix 4:*  
*Education towards the Next Millennium*

**Text of speech delivered by TYT Tun Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir on the occasion of his receiving the Hon. Doctorate of Letters from Deakin University, Australia, at Seri Mutiara, Penang on 21 August 1991.**

**F**rom all reports received about the association of the two educational institutions, I am pleased to note the progress achieved so far with regard to student access, both in Penang and at Warrnambool, as well as the willingness of the faculty staff in Australia to share, to support, and to co-operate with us in regard to Deakin's self-instructional teaching materials and teaching methods.

It is my belief that you yourself in Deakin are just as pleased as we with this outcome. If the Disted/Deakin model is a healthy, workable one, then its application to environments outside of Penang, and in subject-areas outside of business studies, will represent yet another giant step forward with enormous potential for application elsewhere towards providing access to higher education. I am sure Deakin University will not pass over the opportunity of exploring this, in the context of seminars, forums, and organizations, such as the Commonwealth of Learning, the Pacific Forum, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and the regional institutions of Asean.

Since I have spent so much of my life in education, it would seem appropriate that this address be about education. Our children of today will live and work in the twenty-first century – a century that is witnessing a world shrinking into a smaller global village. Although such

a small world, it will be more complex, interdependent, and rapidly changing. We should be providing facilities, education, and training to meet such rapid changes. Key issues will continue to confront the community, and these will include issues on population growth, trade and economic development, changes in the environment, advances in science and technology, rapidity of growth in knowledge and information, and vagaries in socio-cultural behaviour and patterns. At the same time, the process of production, dissemination, and exchange of knowledge and information becomes an even more vital element in the chain of human development. It is perhaps pertinent to take some of these aspects and examine them carefully in the context of educational provisions, investments, and activities in Malaysia and the South-East Asian region. I am familiar with this region, and I suspect Australians have more than a passing interest in the area.

Firstly, I take the issue of population growth. South-East Asia's rapid population growth can be ascribed to three factors, namely high fertility rate, low mortality rate, and a concentration of women at the child-bearing age. By the year 2000, it is projected that Malaysia will have about 21 million people, Indonesia 208 million, Singapore 3 million, Thailand 63 million, and the Philippines 70 million, despite the fact almost all of the countries will be actively pursuing effective population control measures. A further factor in the population equation is its demography: the percentage of young children will decline generally in the region, and the proportion of prime-age adults will rise, the number of the elderly will increase, but the region as a whole will not age. To educators the message sent out is loud and clear, and that is to cater for the education of post-teenage adults and workers, to provide more places in tertiary education, to make provision for continuing education and for formulating a work-related curriculum, and to set up skills-training and job-related training.

Secondly, we have the problem of distribution of resources. Population migration from rural to urban areas is a phenomenon that will continue to plague policy-makers. In Malaysia alone, the urbanization rate is expected to increase from 43% to 50%, and this implies that the of education in terms of location will need to reflect this trend. Urban settlements will demand greater investment in terms of infrastructure to

provide learning facilities. Therefore, educators can expect competition from their counterparts in other departments for government resources (in order) to provide learning facilities. One subsequent outcome will be competition from other government departments for government resources. Where government provisions are inadequate, or perceived to be of lower quality, private schooling can play an important role in alleviating the inadequacy. However, the management and monitoring of private education, in terms of its consumer relevance, will continue to be a demanding responsibility for the private institutions. An added and important consideration would be the education of adults, providing access through open and distance learning technologies. These should be seen as an important priority for the planners.

Thirdly, we have the issue of preparing the manpower to meet national aspirations and expectations. The last decade has seen the use of science and technology for social and economic development on a greater scale than at any time before in the history of mankind. Lives of whole societies have been shaped by their ability to apply the discoveries of science, and to use of the advancement of technology. Against this very positive development is the fact that development technology and the search for new scientific know-how have been concentrated in a few industrialized countries. The number of scientists, engineers, and technologists in the richer countries constitutes a very large proportion of the total population. Similarly, the amount of financial investment in research in the development world is perhaps a hundred-fold more than in the less developed world.

All indicators relating to the discovery, development, manufacture and application of science and technology beg for a realignment of the disparities. The starting-point of this realignment has to be national educational strategies. It is predicted that Malaysia, by the year 2000, will require the services of more than 900,000 technical and scientific, and nearly 300 000 managerial and administration, graduates. However, the capacity of the nation's educational establishments to fulfil this need is still short of the required mark. The participation of friendly nations in this process will represent an important stop-gap measure to help the country achieve its proposed target. In the past, the establishment of plans such as the Colombo Plan, and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical



Co-operation (CFTC), the provision of bilateral scholarships, and the inexpensive access to tertiary education represent some important measures that went a long way towards meeting our needs. But now, times have changed. Malaysia, like other South-East Asian nations, has to look for alternative ways of providing access to education to an ever-growing number of young men and women seeking higher education, specialist knowledge, and high-technology expertise.

Next, we have the challenge of training and retraining programmes. At the lower end of the scale, training is also needed for the production of skilled man-power that is sufficiently literate and numerate to support the industries of the twenty-first century. Looking at our labour force and comparing it with that of newly industrialized nations will give substance to my anxiety over Malaysian labour force statistics, showing that our labour force is far less educated than the labour force of the industrialized nations of the world. This situation must be improved as we attempt to increase our productive capacities. For example, studies have shown that almost 55% of the labour force in Malaysia has, at most, a primary education, while in Singapore, it is about 50%, in Taiwan 45%, in Japan 35% and in the USA 15%. While these figures by themselves, represent mere statistics to sociologists, they, on the other hand, become valuable indicators of potential problems in our attempt to increase the nation's productive capacity; for example, studies have shown that less than 15% of the overall productivity of American and Japanese industries came from labour, 25% from capital investment, and no less than 60% from implementation of new technology. The desire to achieve rapid economic progress demands that retraining of the labour force be given priority. Hence the concept of continuing education cannot be forgotten or neglected.

Over the last decade, Malaysia, along with her ASEAN neighbours, has made great strides as an important player in the global market. Recently expressed optimism puts the growth rate of ASEAN economies at an average of 5-8%, up to the year 2000. Going by the present trend, and Gross National Product (GNP) of the region will amount to between 500 and 550 billion US dollars. This scenario spells out tremendous opportunities. Added to this are the optimistic prospects for the global economy. There are the potential opportunities of a unified Europe, the

reformation of the political and economic systems of Western Europe, the reformation of the political and economic systems of the eastern European states, the economic reforms catalyzed by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and other international forums, as well as the liberalization of trading behaviour by the Dragons of the East. All in all, global trading on a scale not encountered before will be a factor to contend with, and there is a need to prepare our people for this. Well-informed, better-skilled, and highly educated manpower will be the cornerstones of this new world order—an order not based on PIONEERS and SCUDS, but on exchange rates and balance of payments.

And, finally, we have the challenges imposed by changes in the environment. One must remember, too, that efforts to industrialize and increase production have other consequences, some of these are welcome, while others we can do without. Belonging to the second category is the state of the environment as a result of man's poor management of resources. While much has been done to limit the adverse impact of industrial growth on the environment, a lot more has to be accomplished before mankind can relax its vigilance over our fragile planet. Acid rain, fresh, and sea-water pollution, mining and industrial wastes, technological hazards and failure of engineering systems, deforestation, desertification, and fauna and floral depletion are all consequences of unmanaged population and economic growth. It will be naive for any of us to think that a limit on growth can be imposed in an effort to achieve universal environmental health. The environment is not a mere local worry; it is a global concern and the global community needs to act collaboratively on the matter. Imperatives in this instance will include not only the collection, analysis, and sharing of data and information but also information channelled through the educational system. These educational efforts should begin with the training of trainers and teachers as well as the training of technicians and scientists.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as an educationist, I cannot help but look at the crystal ball of the future, the future of our children, and ask myself the question, as I am asking you, whether we are delivering our share of the preparatory work to enable our children to meet these challenges. It is clear from media stories that schools, colleges, and universities around

the world and in our own countries have been targets of severe criticism. There has been concern about the relevance of curriculum, the quality of teaching, the appropriateness of training, and the returns on research investment. Members of the fourth estate do tend to sensationalize the worst aspects of the educational sector and that attitude can be regarded as normal. Anyway, while one cannot predict the future, one can at least say this for certain: the coming years for all of us will become more challenging than the ones that we have experienced. The question is, Ladies and Gentlemen, are we all adequately prepared to meet these challenges? We are aware that to the educators and the educationists, the challenge is fairly clear, and it has been carved out, and they should all collectively strive to meet that challenge. At this point, I might as well say, that in a small way, the co-operation that the educators in Deakin and Penang have worked out so far, using several modern and up-to date learning resources, to educate, to teach, and to train the students of DISTED Collge is indeed a good start.



Appendix 5:  
*The Hijrah as Builder of Sound Values*

Text of speech delivered by TYT Tub Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir on the occasion of his receiving the 'Tokoh Ma'al Hijrah' award, 1995 from his Majesty, the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, at the National Stadium, Kuala Lumpur, on 13 May 1995.

**A**t this historic and meaningful moment with full conscience and awareness I submit my thanks to *Allah* that by His Grace and Mercy we are all gathered here to mark this occasion. This assembly has its intrinsic significance, as a symbol of the supreme greatness of an historic event which is very important in the saga of the development of Islam. Today marks a pivotal moment in time from darkness to a light of great radiance, from retrogression to glory, from division to unity and from anarchy to peace and harmony. Such is the lustre of this day which we now commemorate, not only in this country but in every corner of the world of Islam.

Wherever we may be, this day will be commemorated and we will learn the lesson of a transcendent event which resulted in patterning the destiny or purpose of mankind who dwell on the soil of *Allah*. Today is the day of enlightenment. This is the day which invites us to revisit in our hearts the historic event performed by our Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him) 1,415 years ago. The celebration of the *Hijrah* or the move of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina comes and goes. The 1 *Muharam*, the first day of the Muslim calendar, is marked every year with full self-examination and introspection as to its meaning. In contrast to the other great calendar days of Islam which are celebrated

with rejoicing, the coming of Muharam is welcomed by inviting all Muslims to reflect upon and understand the significance and wisdom behind the *Hijrah*.

The *Hijrah* holds a thousand and one mysteries that have to be investigated and revealed. The way in which *Allah* wants us to investigate and learn from what exists and moves between the heavens and earth is the way we should set about studying the aspects secreted and buried in this unique event. I say 'unique', because this was an extraordinary event which did not happen by chance, but paradoxically provides a mystery that can be made a source for exploration and learning. Taken literally, *Hijrah* means a move, that is a move from one place to another. When a person makes a move, it is usually motivated by some distinct purpose related to his needs. Superficially, people move because they are influenced and motivated by the objective of finding something better, or more profitable, from the point of view of their happiness and security.

In human affairs moves are commonplace and widespread. People from the rural areas move to the towns. Those in the villages move to the urban centres. But the reverse rarely occurs. Just as often there are those who move from the land of their birth to a foreign country, usually from an undeveloped land to a more developed one. We do not have to look very far for an example of this, because before our own eyes this phenomenon is taking place, where the inhabitants of several neighbouring lands are pouring into our country. Why is this happening? We all know the answer well enough, that it is because of the wealth, prosperity, the ease of finding jobs, good pay, local facilities and law and order that exist in Malaysia. This is a picture of one dimension of the phenomenon of movement and migration as seen from outside, from the physical aspect.

But as I said just now, the move of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him) was a planned episode, one planned by the Almighty and which should not be understood in terms of the shallow explanation that it merely represented a move from one place to another.

In the context of Islam, the *Hijrah* denotes the move of the Prophet (peace be with him) from Mecca to Medina. Why did it take place? There are many answers, all of which depend on one's own interpretation, yet

must be guided by the truths found in Islam. That is to say that we can make our own arbitrary interpretations for our own reasons. The move of the Great Prophet (peace be with him), as commanded by *Allah* was clearly designed to protect Islam, but emphatically not out of fear of the Quraish clan of Mecca nor as an admission of defeat, nor in order to avoid a challenge.

There are many good object lessons that can be taken from the *Hijrah*. One of them, for example, is that in Islam a person is permitted to seek an alternative or other way to overcome a problem. In the circumstances that prevailed in Mecca, Muslims had never before encountered a dead end. As the saying goes, if there is no rattan, a tree root will serve just as well. Because at that time circumstances did not allow the Prophet Muhammad (peace be with him) to stay in Mecca, what was wrong with going to Medina? In other words, the *Hijrah* brought far greater blessings than ills, to the benefit of the followers of the Prophet (peace be with him) who took part in the move. The atmosphere in Medina was more conducive for the spread of Islam. The migrants were made welcome by the people of Medina where new links were established between the two parties and the brotherhood and community of Islam were further extended.

Indeed, it can be said that the spirit of solidarity and mutual affection found in Medina is what saved Islam. Not only did the inhabitants of Medina, a good proportion of whom consisted of the Ansar clan, welcome the arrival of the Prophet (peace be with him) and his friends and supporters, but more important still they were also very positive and firm in their support for the religion and teachings brought by our Great Exemplar, Muhammad (peace be with him). There are many hidden factors to be found in the episode of the *Hijrah* of the Great Prophet, including those that are dynamic and progressive. The dynamic elements can be linked with change and renewal. The term 'change' indicates that we change from one condition to another, different condition, from a condition of backwardness to a condition of progress, from a condition that is not good to one that is good. When this occurs, it will be followed by changes in other aspects which involve renewal.

Renewal means changes which are more substantive, more firmly established, and more important in bringing about further and more

profound consequences. For instance, these can be changes from the angle of our ideas and ways of looking at our own lives, behaviour and values. These will directly affect our lives in the society in which we live or at the place where we work, and equally important the way in which we act and inter-act with others. To sum up, in Islam all Muslims are encouraged to be dynamic in outlook as the basis for making progress.

We need to progress and be progressive if we wish to attain happiness in this world and the next. Islam itself is the fount of dynamism, in keeping with its status or position as the last of the revealed faiths, spread by the last Prophet and Messenger, which will never be replaced by any other new creed. We must accept change and renewal as a strategy for advancing towards greater progress and success.

The *Hijrah*, which paved the way for the propagation of Islam also provides an important foundation for education, as an attempt to develop men and humanity on the basis of noble spiritual values. This kind of education has proceeded effectively and widely embracing groups of people who have travelled along various different paths. Prior to the *Hijrah*, the message of Islam had made rather slow and limited progress, while its propagators had been exposed to the calumny and oppression of the infidel. The *Hijrah* provided education that was able to eradicate these infidel elements, thereby demonstrating at one blow the authority and pre-eminence of the Prophet (peace be with him) as the prime teacher of Islam who is without compare in this world.

In the early education at the start of the propagation of Islam, all disciples could learn those verses of the Quran which clarified various basic issues in the religion, namely those concerning articles of faith, the characteristics of *Allah*, things which were lawful for Muslims and those that were not, along with certain other fields.

Education is very important to cleanse the hearts and minds of Muslims of all false teachings and heresies, besides developing character through the inculcation of sound and noble values. Islamic education also succeeded in rescuing those Arabs who had lost their way, bringing them back to the start of the true path so that they came to know the basic truths of Islam.

The message of education brought by Islam which started with the *Hijrah* is vast – for it is not only addressed to matters of ritual in worship

at the mosque, but covers everything, including the administration of the state, the political system, economy and trade, leadership based on sincerity of purpose, trust and responsibility. In fact it would not be an exaggeration to say that the *Hijrah* forms an educational movement which started off based on a clever strategy. The Prophet himself, before he left for Medina, sent a blind teacher called Abdullah bin Maktum there to prepare the way for the introduction of Islam to the people of Medina. It is clear from this the importance accorded to a teacher who could be considered to have been a 'warship' in the strategy to propagate Islam.

We are aware that the theme of this year's celebration, 'The *Hijrah* as Builder of Sound Values', obviously is very pertinent to the aims of education in general, and fulfils the National Philosophy of Education, which sets out to create individuals who are balanced spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually so as to be able to produce young men and women who can think logically, judiciously and impartially.

In teaching and learning the approach of inculcating sound values runs throughout the curriculum followed by teachers in our schools, colleges and institutes of higher learning. The aim is that in each lesson, steps to integrate these values are given priority, so that throughout the teaching process, wherever most suitable, sound values are at all times to be insinuated and absorbed. With the subjects of Islamic Education, Moral Education and the process of absorbing sound values through the medium of all subjects which is being implemented nowadays, I am sure that sufficient steps and measures have been introduced into the education system and in our schools for the objective of the theme of this year's *Maal Hijrah* to be realized. I am very proud and am indeed grateful for having been chosen as this year's *Tokoh Maal Hijrah* in consonance with the theme, 'The *Hijrah* as Builder of Sound Values'.





*Appendix 6:*  
*Tun Razak as I Knew Him*

**Text of Speech delivered by Tun Dato' Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan Sheikh Tahir on the Occasion of the Conferment of the Tun Abdul Razak Award for the Year 2000 at the Hotel Mandarin Oriental, Kuala Lumpur on 11 March 2000.**

(nb. the opening salutations have been omitted)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**O**n this historic evening it gives me great pleasure to start my acceptance address by extending thanks to God the Ineffable for His Grace in allowing us to be gathered here together in order to remember the achievements of a great patriot of our beloved country, namely the Late Tun Abdul Razak.

I should like to tell you that in fact it never entered my mind that I would be considered worthy to receive this peerless and prestigious award. However, I and all my family express our thanks, praise be to God, to the family of Yang Amat Bahagia Tun Hajah Rahah bt. Tan Sri Mohd. Noah that they are with us tonight, along with such a large number of my friends in the same cause who have always been so close and loyal to us. Because of their wholehearted help and support in days gone by at both State and Federal levels I have been able to achieve satisfactory results wherever I have served.

Whenever I think back on the story of how I came to know the late Tun Abdul Razak, a number of cherished memories come to mind of the time that I was a pupil at the Clifford Secondary School in Kuala Kangsar from 1932 up till 1939. Tun Abdul Razak joined the Malay College, also

in the royal town of Kuala Kangsar, as a student in 1933. I regularly used to meet him on the sports field playing games, and also at the Ridwaniyah Mosque which is located near to both schools. I also found out that he was very brainy, worked hard and was highly self-disciplined, was put into the special class for potential 'Queen's Scholars' and also became Head Boy of the Malay College.

Tun Razak was one year younger than myself, because he was born on 1 March 1922 while I was born on 27 April 1921. While I succeeded in getting a place at Raffles College, Singapore in 1939, Tun Razak joined Raffles in 1940. And whereas I straight away took the course to become a graduate teacher, Tun Razak took the course which would enable him to qualify as a trained government servant and administrator. However, although we followed different courses we always caught glimpses of one another at various activities organized by the Muslim Society and on the playing field.

At the end of 1941 the Raffles College courses were brought to a halt and the education and training of all students were interrupted by the Japanese invasion and the fall of Malaya into Japanese hands for three years eight months. I had to repeat my studies at Raffles College in 1946 in order to complete my higher education in Singapore, while Tun Razak went off to the United Kingdom in 1947 until he finished his law studies at Lincoln's Inn of Court with brilliant results.

One incident that I shall never forget occurred in 1955 when Tun Razak had become Minister for Education in the 'Department' of Education in Kuala Lumpur. It so happened that I was a post-Raffles College graduate teacher who was in the midst of continuing his studies as an over-aged student for my honours degree in Arts at what was had now become the University of Malaya in Singapore. I got the opportunity of listening to Tun Razak giving an inspiring talk to the Malayan students at the University, in particular those who were keen on becoming teachers when they had got their degrees. In discussing the fast-approaching achievement of Malayan independence, he straight away pointed out that the country needed all its most promising students when they returned home, to be prepared to serve and make sacrifices so as to harvest the fruits of independence and to stand up for the future progress of our countrymen who had been neglected and left behind for so long.

I feel that I was most fortunate to have been present in the lecture hall to hear Tun Razak, the new Minister of Education who had just been appointed on 9 August that same year and who had come to deliver his talk in which he explained the new policies that he wanted to launch to all of us who were very interested to know what he had to say. I, of course, knew Tun Razak, and he knew that I had chosen education at school and that it was my profession for life, so for this reason I did not feel shy to raise some questions for clarification.

For example, Tun Razak had mentioned in his talk the reforms which it had been agreed should be enshrined in the forthcoming new Education Act, which were related to the development of a new single system of national education, including the reform of the existing Malayan school examination certificates. The School Certificate Examination which had long been managed by the British colonial regime would continue, but alongside this School Certificate examination there would now also be a national schools examination of equal status which would be called the 'Federation of Malaya Certificate' (FMC), which would be taken as an exam in its own right.

Students who took the two compulsory subjects, i.e. English and Malay, would be given two certificates, that is the Cambridge School Certificate and the Federation of Malaya Certificate provided that they got a simple pass in the two languages, after having sat for one and the same examination at the same time. If they only managed to get a pass in English, they would be given the Cambridge School Certificate, but if they only managed to pass in Malay but failed in English, they would get only the Federation of Malaya Certificate.

Before the introduction of these two certificates, once they had completed their exams at school certificate level, those students who only got a pass in Malay would always be left out when applying for jobs at government offices because they had not achieved a pass in English. The Malayan Government was now prepared to take in students who had got passes in Malay, but students who had failed to get a pass in Malay would now be required to pass in Malay for them to be able to get work in government departments. This signified a great step forward, in that the Malay Language had now been given priority and had been established as

a language of learning which it was compulsory for all students in an independent Malaya to take.

This firm new policy which had thus been formulated was designed to inspire all students to achieve good results in all secondary schools, so that they would take both Malay and English seriously in order to get jobs and at the same time create for the time being a dual medium system of instruction in a nation which had a multi-ethnic population so as to encourage national unity.

Tun Razak also explained that he was going to set up many more fully-residential schools in Malaya, because the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar which had been founded in 1905 and the Girls Secondary School at Damansara, Kuala Lumpur, established in 1945, were not enough to be able to produce a greater number of Malay students of calibre and competence. He mentioned various 'centres' to be established at Kota Baru, Kelantan; Kuala Lipis in Pahang; at Ipoh, Perak; at Johor Baru, Johore, and at Georgetown, Penang and in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, which would take in students with outstanding exam results from the primary schools in the rural areas, specially selected to study in the fully-residential schools all over the country. As he put it, 'I am going to pinch (students) from the primary schools in the rural areas in every state, and put them in the fully-residential secondary schools so that they will be able to get a sound education'. This new policy was truly clever, because the government would be building secondary schools which would be given much better facilities and carefully selected teachers who had been trained overseas, such as at Kirkby College and Brinsford Lodge in the United Kingdom.

What was strange was that when I had got my degree and left the University of Malaya in Singapore, I was directed to the Department of Education and taken on as Supervisor of the new fully-residential schools for the whole country, with the specific task of establishing and supervising them. This all sprang from the lecture hall of the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1955, where I had been earmarked from the very beginning by a far-sighted Minister of Education in the person of Tun Razak. The seeds of inspiration he had sown proved so fertile, convincing me that education in Malaya, and subsequently in Malaysia, was waiting and crying out for a host of leaders in education and

administration who would draft new policies which would be very different from those left behind by the British Government from a distant past.

The great contribution of Tun Razak to education is found in the Razak Report of 1956, which became the Razak Declaration or Act. For me the Razak Declaration of 1956 is the Charter of Malaysian education in terms of its historical significance, alongside the great implications it bore with it, and the spin-off of its influence on the subsequent development of education. All the Education Acts after Razak – Rahman Talib's, Mahathir's and the latest Education Act of 1996 – have all been based on the proposals and reforms made by Tun Razak, amongst which is the stress and focus on the mobilization of resources in the education system towards one great goal, that of national and ethnic unity. This has been carried out in three ways – that is, first, by the use of Malay as the medium of instruction; second, by the use of one and the same syllabus and time-table for all students; and third, by the use of the same examinations for all school streams. From another angle, Razak's Act protects Chinese and Tamil schools at primary level and permits the study of both Chinese and Tamil as well as other languages at secondary level. This was a skilful compromise by Razak regarding an old problem in education, and this formula has served as a continuing basis up till the present day. Tun Razak also paid attention to the strength of the school system and form, and of the surveillance required to ensure that the nation's education remained up to date and relevant, and reflected the aims and interests of the multi-racial inhabitants of the new Malaya. Indeed, the Razak Declaration can be described as the Magna Carta of modern Malayan Educational Policy – that is to say, a very 'Great Charter' for modernizing education in an independent Malaya.

In order to shorten my address, I should like to quote from the writing of Yg Bhg. Datuk Zainuddin Maidin in his book, entitled: *Tun Razak – Jejak Bertapak Seorang Patriot* (Tun Razak – The Footprints of a Patriot), as follows:

Without the Rural Development Programme, without the roads, bridges, community halls, maternity and other clinics, and without FELDA, FELCRA, the Farmers' Associations, the National Action Council, National Consultative Council, the National Principles (Rukunegara),

the Sensitive Issues Act, the New Economic Policy, PERNAS, PETRONAS and MAS, there would not have arisen unity, academic and professional vigour, which have reinforced stability, self-confidence and the spirit of competitiveness which has built up the self-respect of this nation today.

All this is derived from the theory and vision of Tun Abdul Razak who accomplished it through firmness, strategy and diplomacy while not leaving to one side the principles of justice and democracy'.

As a further embellishment of this address, I now quote from the thoughts of Yg Bhg Tan Sri Abdullah Salleh taken from his Foreword to Datuk Zainuddin's book:

The Late Tun Razak has made many contributions to the development, progress, prosperity and welfare of the people in various fields. He was known as the 'Father of Development' and also as 'The Founder of the New Economic Policy' which succeeded in bringing about a social transformation which has laid the foundations of political stability, success in development and the welfare of the people of Malaysia that we all now enjoy in a harmonious atmosphere. The leadership of the Late Tun Razak was not confined to initiatives in this country alone, but through an effective foreign policy he succeeded in ensuring the security of the nations of South-East Asia, and from the fruits of his ideas ASEAN came into existence based on the principles of a region that was peaceful, free and non-aligned.'

The fourteenth of January 1976 is carved in history as the date on which Malaysia lost a statesman whose whole life was devoted to his religion, race and nation. The demise of the second prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak, betokened the passing of a leader who was dynamic, not only in domestic affairs but also on the international stage, and who will be difficult to replace.



*Appendix 7:*

*Malay Language, Education and Nation Building in  
Malaysia: A Brief Account*

**Speech by the Head of State of Penang, Malaysia, H.E. Tun Dato' Seri (Dr) Haji Hamdan bin Sheikh Tahir at the Malay Language Department of the Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China.**

**Introductory Remarks**

**I** am grateful to Allah the Almighty for granting my family and me and other members of the Penang State delegation the opportunity to come to Beijing to meet with you.

I am very honoured to have been invited to give a talk to all of you at the Malay Language Department of the Beijing Foreign Studies University. I am very pleased to note that there is an ongoing and increasing interest in the study of the Malay language in this University and other institutions in Beijing.

The purpose of my talk today is to give you a brief account of the growth of the Malay language within the context of nation-building and educational development in Malaysia. I shall also make some personal observations about the future. To me personally, this is a topic very close to my heart as I have devoted my entire career to education for almost forty years.

I fully realize that in the short span of time available for my talk, I cannot do full justice to this very interesting and important topic. I can only hope that my brief account and observations will further enhance your interest and encourage you to devote more time and energy to the study of the Malay language and culture through working closely with

intellectuals and educators in Malaysia. I view this as an opportunity to further strengthen the relationship between Malaysia and the Peoples' Republic of China.

### **Historical Development of the Malay Language and Education**

I shall start with a brief account on the historical development of the Malay language and education in Malaysia by looking at three major periods, namely the Early Period up to 1785; the Colonial Period from 1786 to 1944; and the "Independence" period immediately before and after independence from 1945 to 1970.

#### ***The Early Period (up to 1785)***

As all of you are aware, the Malay language or *Bahasa Melayu* has been the mother tongue of the Malay community for centuries, even before the Malacca Sultanate which was the golden era of the Malay community in the 15th century. By that time the Malay language was already widely used as the lingua franca or common language for royal court administration, trade and social interaction within the Malay archipelago which encompasses the present-day Malaysia, Indonesia, the southern parts of the Phillipines and Thailand.

The fact that the Malay language could function as an effective lingua franca in the large archipelago of South-East Asia despite the small number of original Malay speakers is a reflection of both the linguistic strength of the language and the ease with which it can be learnt, as well as the enterprising spirit of the Malay community as sea-faring traders in the region.

However, the use of the language during this period was mainly in the oral form for communication purposes with few religious books and scanty story books as well as some poems written in the *jawi* script. Although writing, using *jawi*, was beginning to evolve and be used, a strong written literary tradition was yet to be fully developed. Education during this period focussed mainly on the learning of the Quran and a few other standard religious books. In small classes in the house of a religious teacher, young children were able to use and adapt the Arabic script to



write the Malay language in *jawi*. Therefore, the emphasis of education was mainly religious in nature, and served to transmit traditional and religious values from one generation to another. The learning of the Malay language in a systematic and sustained manner was not the main concern.

### ***The Colonial Period (1786 - 1994)***

Although the Malacca Sultanate was overrun by the Portuguese in 1511, and then subsequently by the Dutch in 1641, systematic colonization of the Malay states only began with the establishment of Penang as a British trading port in 1786, and the British intervention into the neighbouring state of Perak in 1874. For a period of almost 150 years until the Japanese Occupation, the British colonialists established direct rule over the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore and indirect rule over the other Malay states.

It was during this period that the first attempts were made to establish some form of formal education to meet the needs of both the British colonial administration, and the growing economy based on rubber, tin and trade. As the outcome of a report on education submitted to the then British governor of the Straits Settlements, Malay vernacular schools at the primary level were first established in Singapore, followed by more Malay schools in Malacca and Penang in the mid-19th century. These early Malay schools were not popular because parents, being conservative and traditional, were still more concerned with religious education. Realizing this, a change was made to the curriculum of the schools, whereby vernacular Malay education was provided in the morning and religious education in the afternoon. This change was well received and education in the Malay states started to increase sharply after the 1880s. By the 1920s, there were some 800 schools and by 1937 nearly 1,200 schools.

In these Malay vernacular schools, the students were taught to read and write in the Malay language. They were also taught Geography, Arithmetic and Physical Education. However, the goal of Malay vernacular education at that time was not to promote intellectual and professional development. The aim of the British was to enable

students to become more efficient farmers and fishermen. The British did not encourage the Malays to go beyond this elementary level because of concern that educated Malays would then demand for greater political and economic roles, as had happened in British-ruled India at that time.

However, there was a need to create an elite intermediary group as bureaucrats or "mediators" between the British colonial masters and the Malay community at large. This led to the establishment of the Malay College at Kuala Kangsar which offered public-school style education in English to children of the royal houses and to select Malay students. Most of the graduates of this college were then absorbed into the colonial administrative service.

Although the Malay vernacular schools were very limited in scope and size, the process of economic development and social change stimulated both literary works and political movement. It was during this period that the first major Malay literary works by Abdullah Munshi on early Malay history and his own travels were composed and published. Later, in the early 20th century, newspapers in the Malay language were published in the Straits Settlements which became the incubator for Malay nationalist movements and Malay literature; the Malay College, Kuala Kangsar and the Sultan Idris Teachers' College also became hotbeds for the emergence of Malay nationalism. It was during this period that Malay-educated teachers and intellectuals began to emerge and devote themselves to the promotion of the Malay language and literature.

In the meantime, Christian missionaries started to set up schools, especially in towns to provide education in the English language, mainly to the non-Malay population with the aim of converting them to the Christian faith. Although many of these schools were well-run, the number was very limited.

As a result of the large influx of immigrant workers from China and India into the tin mines and rubber plantations of Malaya, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Chinese and Indian communities also set up their own schools teaching in their respective mother tongues.

In the case of the Chinese, the traditional style of learning gave way to modern formal schools in early 1900 when the famous reformist-

educators, Kang Yu Wei and Liang Qi Chau, sought refuge in Malaya after the failure of their reform movement in China. In addition to the teaching of the Chinese language and Confucian ethics, the curriculum was expanded to include subjects such as History, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Physical Education and Arts. After the 1911 Revolution and subsequent political movement in China, the British began to impose control on Chinese schools in 1920. Many schools suspected of propagating anti-colonial and other "undesirable" ideologies were deregistered. Nonetheless, the emphasis on education by the Chinese community resulted in the building of many schools despite such control.

In the case of the Indians, Tamil vernacular schools were set up, mainly in rubber plantations or estates by the employers, by missionaries and in some cases by the government. The purpose was to retain Indian workers in the plantations as part of the requirements of the Labour Code. Nonetheless, the facilities in the Tamil vernacular schools were inferior if compared to the other schools, enrolment rate was low and the dropout rate was high.

The curricular contents of both the Chinese and Tamil schools at that time were very China-oriented and India-oriented, especially in subjects such as History and Geography, without much reference to the local environment, history and culture. On the other hand, the Malay school curriculum focussed almost solely on the local environment without offering a larger world view. The British colonial administration did not make any sincere and serious attempt to change this situation to promote a common national orientation and content in all schools, primarily because the disparate curricula of the various school systems suited the British "divide-and-rule" policy well.

Hence, before the start of World War II, four parallel school systems coexisted in Malaya, using Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil as their respective media of instruction. However, only the English and Chinese schools systems went up to the level of upper secondary schooling, while the Malay and Tamil schools were confined to only the primary level.

In fact, top students from the English schools system had access to higher education through the King Edward VII College of Medicine and Raffles College in Singapore, and through universities in Britain and Australia, while some Chinese schools students managed to pursue their

higher education in institutions in China. During the Japanese Occupation in World War II, all schools were closed and only Japanese classes were conducted.

### *The Period of Independence (1945 - 1970)*

After the end of World War II, Malaya, as in most other Asian countries, was soon engulfed in a series of political movements and social changes, fired by the rise of nationalism for independence, against colonial rule and imperial intervention. The four school systems were revived by either the government or the respective communities. Education and language, especially their roles in the context of an independent nation, became topics of political debate and controversy. The British, anxious to please all parties, appointed a number of commissions to put forth proposals for a new policy and structure for education.

The Barnes Commission on Malay education proposed the setting up of a national education system based solely on the Malay language as the medium of instruction with emphasis on intergration of all children from various communities under the same school roof.

The Chinese and Indian communities did not agree to such a proposal because they feared that their language and cultures would be discontinued. On the other hand, the Fenn-Wu Commission on Chinese education argued for the continued existence of parallel schools systems with *de facto* segregation. This was not acceptable to the Malay community who feared that this would threaten the concept of a Malayan nationhood and also continue to put Malay students at a disadvantage.

In 1956, on the eve of Independence, the Alliance which was a coalition of Malay, Chinese and Indian political parties appointed its own education commission headed by the then Minister of Education, Tun Razak, who was to become the second prime minister of independent Malaya. It was the Razak Commission which was able to put together a comprehensive policy for a national education system acceptable to all communities. This policy was in accordance with the Federal Constitution being drafted at the same time which established the Malay

language as the National Language while protecting the rights of the other communities to learn their own languages.

This was the first time in the history of the nation that an education policy was formulated in accordance with the aspirations and needs of the majority of the people of Malaya. The Razak Report was formally accepted and adopted as the basis of the Education Act 1957.

This was subsequently refined by an education review commission in 1960 whose report on the Education Act 1961 laid the framework for a comprehensive national education system until today.

The basic ingredients of the national education policy and system pertaining to language are as follows :

- (a) The acceptance and affirmation of the Malay and English languages as the main media of instruction in the school system.
- (b) The continued existence of Chinese and Tamil primary schools with Malay and English as compulsory subjects.
- (c) A common-content curriculum with emphasis on nationhood and nation-building to be used in all schools to forge common identity and loyalty.
- (d) Public examinations at the lower and upper secondary levels to be conducted in either Malay or English only.
- (e) "Pupil's own language" classes for the study of mother tongues to be provided in secondary schools based on demand.

As a result of this new policy, Malay education which was hitherto confined to only the primary level was given a major boost, with the start of the first Malay secondary classes in 1962 in the Penang Free School. Since then there has been no looking back.

However, to ensure that the Malay language could be taught well and effectively, adequate supplies of teachers and textbooks had to be produced. Several teacher training colleges and a Language and Literature Bureau were established.

The Language and Literature Bureau, set up in 1962, soon became the primary agency for the development of Malay language and literature. Subsequently renamed *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*, this agency actively promoted new terminologies for the Malay language, which were

subsequently used in basic textbooks at the secondary and tertiary levels. The Dewan also published textbooks, reference books, fiction and non-fiction in the Malay language. Some were written in the original form, while others were translations from English and other languages.

Hence the 25-year period after the end of World War II was a period in search of a national identity and a national education system acceptable to the various communities in independent Malaysia. The search culminated in the formulation and implementation of the National Language Policy, the Education Act 1961 and the national education system. After 1963 with the formation of Malaysia, the Malay language as the National Language has become widely known as *Bahasa Malaysia*.

### **Robust Growth and Planned Consolidation of the Malay Language (1970 - 1995)**

Although Malaya and subsequently Malaysia made considerable progress after Independence in 1957, inter-racial tension which led to unrest in 1969 sent a strong signal that inter-ethnic cleavages along economic lines and by social activities, remained a serious threat to the long-term unity and prosperity of the nation. Conscious of the need to intensify efforts for national unity and integration, the national leadership at that time formulated the National Ideology or *Rukun Negara*, to instil a sense of loyalty and commitment among the various races. At the same time, the New Economic Policy was formulated to eradicate poverty and to restructure society so as eliminate identification of race with economic activities and functions.

It was within the context of these new developments that the promotion of education as an important tool to forge national unity, and the Malay language as the National Language, took on an even greater sense of urgency.

#### ***The School System***

In 1970, the government decided to convert the medium of instruction in English schools to the Malay language while retaining English as a compulsory subject. This was carried out on a step-by-step basis starting with Standard One at the primary level.

The process of conversion was completed in 1982 when pre-university classes (Form 6) in English schools switched to the use of the Malay language as its medium.

The conversion brought about a significant increase in the number of national schools and students of all races, receiving education at both the primary and secondary levels, with the Malay language as the medium of instruction. As a result, younger generations of Malaysians from different ethnic backgrounds have since then become conversant in the Malay language, although many Chinese and Indians continue to study their mother tongues. Malaysians have become effectively multi-lingual. Malay students, while conversant in the Malay language as their own mother tongue, have learnt English and in some cases one other language as well. Chinese and Indian students, while retaining their mother tongue, have become conversant in the Malay language and also in some cases in the English language.

### *Institutions of Higher Learning*

The use of the Malay language as a medium of instruction in institutions of higher learning was further emphasized and accelerated during this period. Teaching in the Malay language was encouraged and increased in institutions of higher learning from the mid-70s. By 1983, courses in all fields of study were taught in the Malay language.

More significantly, not only academic papers and research papers, but full dissertations for the Master and PhD degrees were increasingly written in Malay, not only in the fields of humanities and social sciences but also in the natural and physical sciences, medicine and engineering.

Concomitant with the increasing use of the Malay language was the publication of many more text-books and reference books for tertiary level in the language, many of which were original writings. By the early 1990s, the Malay language has firmly established itself as an academic language for higher education and research.

### *Efforts in Language Development*

The last 25 years have seen a tremendous increase in efforts to develop and use the Malay language. Firstly, as more and more academics

and intellectuals used the language for academic purpose, the language itself has become further enriched by the creation and adoption of new terminologies. Of course, as expected, there were disagreements and debates over which terminologies were more proper or suitable. So far, such debates have by and large been healthy and have contributed to further enhancement of the language. What emerged as the best and the most appropriate terminologies were very often determined by usage.

Secondly, more literary works have been produced in both the fiction and non-fiction categories. Many periodicals and magazines in Malay came onto the market. Moreover, publication of Malay language books and periodicals was no longer confined to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Many private publishing firms, some of which are the subsidiaries of major international publishers, became active. Of course, variance in quality has remained an issue but again this was and will be sorted out and settled by the market forces of readership.

Thirdly, the increasing use of computers in language development and other linguistic research works have further enhanced various aspects of the Malay language. The Science University of Malaysia in Penang, for example, has a very strong and reputable research programme in the use of the computer for linguistic and language development.

### ***Greater Usage In All Fields***

The early 1970s saw a fast and firm conversion to the use of the Malay language as the sole administrative language of government at all levels. With the passage of amendments to the National Language Act by Parliament in 1983, all debates in the Federal Parliament and in all state legislative assemblies have since been conducted fully in the Malay language. The Malay language has therefore become the national language and the sole official language.

Of equal importance was the increasing use of the Malay language in the mass media, particularly TV and radio during this period, including commercials and advertisements. Besides the conscious and concerted efforts by the government to promote the use of the Malay language in trade and commerce, the increase in the number and the purchasing power of the Malay community, all helped to prompt wider usage of the



Malay language in the private sector. Undeniably, English still remains as an important language for trade and technology, especially since the Malaysian economy is very open and many multinationals have invested and are operating in Malaysia.

### **Future Perspective and Prospects for the Malay Language**

Based on the trend of development in the past half a century since 1945 as described above and based upon my experience as an educator, I would like to make some observations about the future prospects of the Malay language in the context of nation-building in Malaysia and in the context of global trends.

#### ***1. Language as an Asset for Nation-Building***

It cannot be denied that, as in many other countries, the issue of language in Malaysia has at times been a sensitive and controversial issue.

Nonetheless, through the wisdom of the country's leadership and the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance amongst the various communities in Malaysia, most of the controversies have by now been resolved to the extent that language is no longer such a controversial issue as before.

In my opinion, the Malaysian experience has shown that through a process of planned, purposeful and positive development, a language can be developed to the highest level for very wide usage within a relatively short span of time. The position, capability and capacity of the Malay language as a lingua franca and as an effective administrative and academic language have been established beyond doubt. Of equal significance is the fact that this was achieved through a moderate, liberal and progressive approach towards other languages, the learning and the use of which for other than official purpose, has been widely allowed and encouraged.

As a result, Malaysians have become increasingly multi-lingual and thus have greater and more effective access to various sources of knowledge. In fact, Malaysians have been particularly fortunate in that

we have inherited and learned from the major civilizations and cultures of the world such as the Islamic, the Chinese, the Indian and the Western civilizations. At the same time, the major world religions of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity are being practised freely in Malaysia. The multi-cultural and multi-lingual characteristics of Malaysian society have made Malaysia very rich culturally.

Moreover, it has also made Malaysians cosmopolitan in outlook and culturally very adaptive and versatile to the changing and challenging global environment. This is often cited as a great asset and strength which has made Malaysia very competitive.

For Malaysians, the progress achieved in the economic, social and political arenas over the last few decades and Vision 2020, promoted by our Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, aimed at achieving a fully developed nation status, have instilled in Malaysians a very strong sense of commitment to the nation and confidence in its future. This sense of commitment and confidence has also been reflected in the success of the Malay language.

## ***2. The Modernization of Malaysia and its Neighbours***

The future prospects of Malaysia and of the Malay language must be viewed in their regional and global contexts. The fact that speakers of the Malay language in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and other ASEAN countries today number more than 200 millions places Malay as one of the ten biggest language groups in the world.

In my opinion, two future trends will further enhance the status and capacity of the Malay language as follows :

- (a) The continuing economic progress of Malaysia and the entire ASEAN region will further enlarge the size and purchasing power of the Malay-speaking population. The use of Malay in the ASEAN common market is to be further increased.
- (b) Cooperation amongst ASEAN governments, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, in language development, publication and mass media production is expected to further increase and improve the usage of Malay as a common language for the region.

### ***3. The Impact and Potentials of the Informations Age***

Undeniably the rapid advances in information technology and the advent of the Information Age have the tendency to accentuate the use of the English language which is the dominant language in computer usage. This is the reason why many countries in Asia, including Malaysia and China, are placing emphasis on the learning of the English language.

However, in my opinion, this trend will not lead to the subjugation of the Malay language in Malaysia for the following reasons :

- (a) The current promotion of the English language is in the context of an environment where the Malay language has already been firmly established as the national language of Malaysia, unlike the colonial period and the first decade after Independence, when the Malay language was yet to be fully developed and its position fully affirmed.
- (b) The learning of the English language and other languages is for the purpose of acquiring more knowledge especially in science and technology. As long as we are clear and committed to our policy and position, the learning and the use of other languages will not threaten the position of the Malay language as the national and official language of Malaysia. Moreover, the acquisition of more knowledge and exchange with other languages and cultures will actually help to further enrich the Malay language itself.
- (c) The romanized version of the Malay language currently in wide usage enables the language to be used in the alpha-numeric format in computers. Therefore, the Malay language possesses great potential for future development as an effective computer and communication language in itself. In fact, the enhanced capacity of processor and memory chips has even lifted earlier constraints on the computer usage of languages, which are not in alphabetical form, such as Chinese and Japanese.

### ***4. International Cooperation and Exchange***

It is clear that the Information Age coupled with advanced communication technology has brought the world closer together. In this

context of the "Global Village", international and bi-lateral cooperation in various fields between nations, has been and will continue to be of increasing significance. Malaysia and China have had a long-standing historical relationship. I believe that bi-lateral cooperation in the field of language, culture and education can further enhance on-going trade and economic relations, between our two countries through the following concrete measures :

- (a) Translation of literary and other works into each other's language including the publication of bi-lingual dictionaries and reference books, such as encyclopaedia. I am happy to note that your department has over the last two or three years established a working relationship with our *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*.
- (b) Exchange and sharing of experience in language development and the promotion of literature, fine arts, performing arts, as well as dialogues, discussions and collaborative research work on philosophy, history and other subjects.
- (c) Exchange of professors and students amongst universities of the two countries through formal channels to ensure the continuity of such a programme and the achievement of desired objectives.
- (d) Exploring and exploiting the potentials of cooperation in distance education through the use of advanced telecommunication facilities.

### Concluding Remarks

It is clear from the above exposition that over the last half a century, the development of the Malay language has been phenomenal, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This is largely due to the positive and progressive attitude and the pro-active and constructive approach of the government, the academics and the people.

I am confident that the Malay language will continue to grow, and will eventually emerge not only as the regional language for South East Asia, but as a major world language of great economic value, academic standing and cultural significance.

I hope that my talk today will contribute to your contribution of the Malay language and its development in the context of Malaysia's nation-

building. More importantly, I hope our discourse today will further enhance the process of cooperation and exchange between our two countries in the area of language, literature and culture. I look forward to an era of greater understanding and mutual appreciation between our two countries.

Terima kasih and "Xie-Xie".



Appendix 8:

*Farewell Address to the Penang Legislative Assembly*

The speech of His Excellency, the Head of State of Penang on the occasion of the official opening of the first session of the Third Term of the Tenth State Legislative Assembly on Monday, 23rd. April 2001, at nine o'clock of the morning.

(nb: Opening Salutations Are Omitted)

**Introductory**

I give thanks that by the Grace of Almighty God and his Blessings I deliver this Address today at the First Meeting of the Third Session of the Tenth State Legislative Assembly.

My Address today to this distinguished Assembly will be my last as Head of State of Penang. I and my wife and our family feel most grateful that I have been granted the opportunity and the honour to serve for twelve years as the Sixth Head of State of Penang. My experience as Head of State represents the apex of my career of fifty-five years in the public service of our nation and it will, of course, always remain as a very special memory for my family and me during my retirement.

Over the last twelve years, together with the people of this State, I have witnessed and experienced important development and changes both in our State and in the nation as a whole. Among these important events are included efforts to invigorate the economy in 1988-1989 after the recession of the previous two years; the launching of the Vision 2020, the implementation of the National Development Policy (*Dasar Pembangunan Negara*) and the very vigorous economic growth of the

1990s; the financial crisis and economic recession which affected Asia and our own country in 1997-1998, followed by the success of our more recent efforts to stimulate and invigorate our economy for the second time. Now our nation is ready to move forward into the second phase of our advance towards attaining the target of the Vision 2020. This process is guided by the National Vision Policy (*Dasar Wawasan Negara*) as contained in the Third Outline Perspective Plan for the next ten years and to be implemented through the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

### **Coping with Economic challenges and realizing vision development**

Honourable Members,

The national and State economies had begun to recover as a result of sound and firm strategies adopted by the government. Nevertheless, since last November the economies of developed nations began to undergo a rather serious slowdown which has adversely affected the world economy as a whole, particularly in the electronic, computer and telecommunications industries. At the same time, the downturn in the world market for several key commodities, such as oil palm and rubber, over the past year aggravated the problem still further. As a result, the economic situation has now become less stable and more challenging.

Downturn in the electronic sector has forced many multi-national companies all over the world, including in Malaysia and in Penang, to cut down production, save costs and reduce the workforce. To date, 7,000 workers are estimated to have been laid off in stages by several factories in our State. Needless to say, the State Government is aware of and deeply concerned about this problem. A number of short-term measures are being taken, such as monitoring the situation closely; persuading factory owners not to terminate their workers, but to reduce working hours and allowances, and assisting all laid off workers in finding alternative employment and providing training to improve their skills for new jobs. Besides this, the State Government will increase the number of minor infrastructure projects and enlarge the distribution and implementation of these projects so that opportunities are given to small local contractors and suppliers so as to generate a 'multiplier effect'.

In order to cope with the impact of globalization brought about by the coming into force of the WTO and AFTA trade agreements and to ensure balanced and sustainable economic growth, the State Government through the Penang Development Corporation has formulated several major long-term strategies. The first of these is the identification and promotion of higher technology and the production of new products or components such as photonics and telecommunications which are the sectors which will develop very rapidly in the Era of Information and Communications Technology ("ICT"). The second strategy is to upgrade the competitiveness and increase the production level of existing factories through encouraging transformation to automation processes, marketing, logistics and consumer services. The third strategy is the promotion of local small and medium scale industries (SMIs) so as to meet the challenge of globalization and emerge as global suppliers which are competitive on the world market.

Fourth is the ongoing promotion of tourism which has developed rapidly over the last ten years. Special attention will be given to several new major tourist projects, such as the heritage sites of Georgetown and traditional villages, Bayan Bay Marina Resort, Pulau Jerejak Tropical Island Resort, Pantai Acheh National Park, the expansion of the Penang Botanic Gardens, and the beautification of Penang Hill. Fifth is the continued stimulation of the trade and services sectors, such as transportation and logistics management systems; import and export trade; storage and warehousing; the management of new wholesale and retail systems, and the promotion of financial, business and professional services which will increasingly use ICT.

The sixth long-term strategy is the promotion of a k-economy which is competitive and the establishment of a k-society which is progressive with a higher quality of life. A Knowledge and Information and Communications Technology Council (or Knowledge-ICT Council) which is chaired by the Chief Minister of Penang himself has been established to formulate the k-ICT Plan for Penang. Its objective is to establish a modern and advanced communications network fully equipped with various software applications which are suitable and effective, and to create an e-government and an e-community in various sectors of the economy. In order to reduce the 'digital divide', the State



Government together with the private sector will establish in stages internet community centres through the e-Village and e-City projects.

The seventh strategy is the continued promotion of education and human resource development, particularly in the fields of technology and management through universities, colleges and training institutions. The role and scope of the Penang Skills Development Centre (PSDC) will be further enlarged and upgraded. In order to prepare our workforce for handling new technologies such as photonics and telecommunications, the State Government is in the process of cooperating with industry and several local universities in developing new science and technology study programmes, in line with the concept of "Malaysia Inc".

The Eighth strategy is the development of the agricultural, fishing and animal husbandry sectors in a more systematic and productive manner through the use of modern technology and management techniques and the establishment of several new facilities. The State Government is grateful that the Agro-technology Park at Juru and the LKIM International Fishing Port Project at Batu Maung are to be implemented during the Eighth Malaysia Plan. The International Centre for Living Aquatic Resource Management (ICLARM) will begin operations next month and is expected to assist in upgrading the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the State and in the country. Padi production will also continue to be improved with the provision of irrigation infrastructure for the rice granary (*jelapang padi*) areas, whilst the production of vegetables and fruits on a commercial basis will continue to be encouraged. At the same time, animal husbandry activities will be reorganized together with steps to control pollution.

### **Infrastructure development and environmental conservation**

Honourable Members,

Adequate and excellent infrastructure and public amenities form the basic and prime requirement for the development of all sectors of the economy and for ensuring a reasonable quality of life for the people. On the other hand, infra-structural development projects will of their own accord generate economic growth, especially when other sectors of the economy are still generally weak. For this reason the State Government

will intensify its efforts to implement important infrastructural projects for our State.

Transport facilities by air, sea and land for this State will continue to be upgraded. The scheme for enlarging and upgrading the passenger terminal at the Bayan Lepas International Airport is almost completed and efforts are now being made to overcome a number of administrative hurdles so that the new air-cargo complex can become fully functional and be further expanded. The construction for the enlargement of the North Butterworth Container Terminal (NBCT) is proceeding smoothly and is expected to be ready within three years. In order to overcome the problem of traffic congestion in urban centres, several important projects such as the Jelutong Expressway, the Butterworth Outer Ring Road (BORR) and the Penang Outer Ring Road (PORR) are being carried out. Although there are delays caused by the economic slow-down, the State Government will continue to ensure that these three privatized infrastructural projects are completed on time in accordance with their respective new schedules. Efforts to improve traffic management will also continue to be carried on by the local government.

The State Government is constantly aware that rapid economic growth has and will continue to increase the demand for electricity, water and telecommunications services. As for water supply, a number of projects for reservoirs, water treatment plants and water supply systems will be carried out under the Eighth Malaysia Plan. For electricity supply, projects to upgrade the Prai and Gelugor Power Stations will be continued. In order to achieve the target of making Penang the first 'fully-connected State' in Malaysia, the State Government is encouraging and assisting telecommunication companies in completing various types of telecommunication networks in all corners of the State.

Rapid land and housing development, compounded by inadequate supervision over the past thirty years, has resulted in many problems of soil erosion in hilly areas and also of flash floods. Hill-slope strengthening and flood mitigation projects in several affected districts will continue to be implemented. In order to prevent these problems, there needs to be closer supervision by the State and local authorities on development in environmentally sensitive areas. In addition to this,

efforts will be made to improve the condition of polluted rivers through several projects under the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

The management of domestic and toxic wastes will also be improved to provide a cleaner and better environment. In this connection, the disposal site for solid wastes at Pualu Burung will be upgraded through the use of environment-friendly technology, transforming it into the central sanitary disposal site for our State. At the same time, pollution from pig and poultry farming will be contained in stages by firm and concrete measures. In order to facilitate the management of waste products, the State Government has proposed to the Federal Government the implementation of several waste treatment projects for our State.

The State Government is committed to continue efforts to make our State clean, beautiful and green, in line with the policy of making Malaysia a 'Garden Nation'. As we all know, our State has been named and is well known as the 'Garden of the East' and 'the Pearl of the Orient', and the time has now come for us to redouble our efforts to return the shine to our Island of Pearl (*Pulau Mutiara*). The two municipal councils will further promote greening and landscaping projects in public areas in accordance with the National Landscaping Policy. Furthermore, cleaning work will be further intensified by means of closer administration and supervision. Here the general public must play an important role. I would like to appeal once again to everybody in this State to practice the cleanliness culture at all times and in all places.

### **Balanced and healthy social development**

As I have often stressed, the development of our State should not be limited only to economic and material aspects. Development which is all-encompassing, balanced and sound should include all social and cultural aspects at the community level together with spiritual, intellectual and psychological aspects at the level of the individual and the family.

The eradication of poverty regardless of ethnicity will continue to be the main focus of the State Government. Efforts will continue to be made to raise the status and quality of life of those who live in the rural areas through a variety of programmes under the Penang Rural Development Agency (PERDA) and other government agencies. In addition, attention

and efforts will be directed towards alleviating several major problems in the kampung areas within the city area which are still lagging in development and the inhabitants of which are mostly Malays and Indians. This move will check negative social ills and pressures which could result in conflicts among these poverty-stricken groups.

The objective of social restructuring will be further enhanced by encouraging more effective and meaningful participation by all ethnic and social groups in the process of socio-economic development in the State. The effectiveness of programmes to promote the Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (MPPB) will be further enhanced through agencies like PDC, PERDA, MARA and UDA together with private sector commercial and economic organizations. Moreover, in line with the Vision Development Policy, the State Government will also cooperate with the Federal Government and other relevant organizations to promote more effective participation of the Indian community in the fields of economy and education.

The State Government is always aware that housing is a basic need within the concept of balanced development, indeed it is a 'fundamental right' of the people. For this reason, the State Government along with the private sector will continue to work for the provision of affordable housing for the people. Over the past six years, more than 18,000 low and medium-cost housing units have been built and occupied. Two projects under the People's Housing Programme (PHP) have been completed, while two more PHP projects and three low-cost housing projects will be implemented. Efforts will be redoubled to revive abandoned private housing projects and to relocate the poor and the destitute affected by the repeal of the Rent Control Act.

Another basic need which has to be targetted in any balanced development is quality health care services. Resulting from the joint efforts of the State Government and the private sector, this target can be generally said to have been achieved in our State. However, continuing efforts are still required to reach the level of a developed country in the provision of quality health care services, especially for low income groups and for those living in remote areas. Here I would like once again to place on record my highest appreciation of myself and that of the State Government to all the benevolent and voluntary organizations, especially

in the fields of health and social welfare, which have given and continue to give their supporting services in nursing and caring for people with disabilities, senior citizens, the orphaned and the less fortunate. The spirit of volunteerism amongst our people is truly impressive and should be given every encouragement to further increase.

Women and youth are two major target groups in the process of achieving balanced development. Although they have come to the fore in various fields, women still have to overcome various obstacles before their potential and skills are fully developed for them to make even greater and more meaningful contribution to the process of development in the State. Youth represents the younger generation who need guidance and support before becoming matured and ready to shoulder adult responsibilities. Alongside this, in order to combat drug-abuse and unhealthy social symptoms, several programmes such as the Students' Resilience and Interpersonal Skills Development Education (STRIDE) programme and the Concentrated Integrated Project (CIP), along with lectures and motivation camps will continue to be implemented so as to create a society of youth and women who are productive.

The State Government regards sports as one aspect of meaningful social development because sports not only give physical training which is good for health, but they also foster discipline, team-spirit and solidarity amongst both participants and their supporters, particularly among the younger generation. For this reason, in conjunction with the Malaysian Games (SUKMA) 2000, the State Government has succeeded in providing various facilities and activities to promote sports in our State. A State Sports Complex Corporation will be set up to manage all sports complexes. Because of the existence of these sports facilities, Penang has been given the honour this year of hosting several international sports events, including the Women's World Junior Squash Championship, as well as four events in the 21st SEA Games, namely Judo, Wushu, Tenpin Bowling and Squash.

### **The promotion of good governance**

From my experience of holding various posts in the public service for fifty-five years, I have observed that there are five important factors that

bring about progress, prosperity and happiness to society and the nation in general, and which promote good governance.

First are the sound values contained in the great religions that we follow and the civilizations that we inherit, which have guided us in whatever field we have been engaged in as well as in our relations with other human-beings and with Nature. Although Islam is the official religion of our country, freedom of belief for worshippers of other faiths is guaranteed. Furthermore, what is extremely important is that the attitudes of moderation and the spirit of mutual respect amongst one another should always be fostered so as to avoid religion from being used as an issue for political conflict.

Second is the need for having one comprehensive vision at all levels. This vision must be the compass for the formulation of policies and strategies and in planning and implementing programmes, projects or activities. In addition, the vision becomes the source of inspiration for all members of the public service so as to become more committed and spirited. I am of the opinion that our country is most fortunate because we have been guided by the vision of independence and by the vision of nation-building, as is embodied in the Federal Constitution, the Principles of State (*Rukun Negara*) and Vision 2020, together with major policies such as the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the 1970s and 1980s, the National Development Policy of the 1990s and now the National Vision Policy for 2001-2010, besides specific policies in various sectors, such as education, industry, agriculture and tourism.

Since 1970, development in Penang since 1970 has also been guided by the national vision and development policies. Furthermore, the State Government has formulated its own policies and strategies, taking into account the condition and needs of the people of this State. The Penang Master Plan which was prepared in 1970 has guided industrial development, infrastructure development and the process of urbanization in this State for twenty years until 1990. Since then, the First Penang Strategic Development Plan (PSDP1) for the 1990s has made its priority the promotion of high technology and the development of various sectors in a more balanced manner, the preservation of the environment and heritage sites and the establishment of a caring society. Following this, the Second Penang Strategic Development Plan (PSDP2) for the next ten

years will be implemented, including the State Five Year Development Plan which is being prepared for the first time for the implementation of these development programmes.

Although our State faces many obstacles because of lack of land, natural resources and products, the close cooperation between Government and people all along has succeeded in making our State a centre for industry, tourism and education which is known all over the world. I express my heartiest congratulations to the Honourable Chief Minister and his colleagues along with all the members of the public services and the people of the State for this achievement. In order to continue to progress, I would like to appeal to every citizen in this State to harness and enhance all our efforts, guided by the aims contained in the *Rukun Negara* and the National Vision and the principal policies at both National and State levels.

Third is the need for unity which forms the basis of our State comprising different communities, religions, cultures and languages. Unity will guarantee peace and stability so that the implementation of development is free from disruption. I wish to appeal to all the people in this State to continue to cooperate with one another and to promote the spirit of unity and avoid matters which could bring about disunity and conflict between communities or within communities.

The fourth aspect is the need to continue to increase the productivity and the quality of public services by always striving for excellence. In order to achieve this goal, the first step is to refine and upgrade the Client's Charter in all departments so as to make it more relevant and concrete to meet the ever-changing and rising aspirations and the ever-changing needs of the people. The second step is to create a more effective and better coordinated system and mechanism by making full use of ICT technology towards the achievement of an e-Government. The third step is to promote the concept of a k-society or a knowledge society in order that knowledge and skills in whatever field can be constantly upgraded.

The fifth aspect is the need for the commitment by each and every individual and group to their respective roles and duties in each and every organization. With this commitment, the interests of the nation, the people and organizations will always take priority over those of oneself

or one's own family. Pride, competence and integrity of both the organization and the individual will always be safeguarded, guided by sound values and vision. With this sense of commitment, a person will feel grateful that he or she has been given the opportunity to be of service and will always strive for excellence, the upgrading of productivity and making greater effort. I am, needless to say, extremely grateful for the strong commitment and spirit of the leaders and people of Penang which have enabled us to meet and overcome challenge after challenge at both the national and state levels since achieving independence.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity here to record my appreciation to all members of the public services in the State and in all the Districts, to all officers and members of the Police and Armed Forces, federal departments, statutory bodies and municipal councils, community leaders, social workers and social-civic organizations in this State, for their loyal and meritorious service and contributions. I express my thanks to the State Government and to all the people of Penang for their support and cooperation which they have given during my term of office as Head of State of Penang. I pray that the Blessings and Guidance of the Almighty will for ever be with all Honourable Members of this Assembly in carrying out your tasks and responsibilities with full dedication to the people of Penang. May you all, ladies and gentlemen, together with all members of the public services and the people work together shoulder to shoulder with determination so as to continue to serve, strive and succeed for the good of the country and its people always.

Thank you.







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## *Awards and Titles*

Year	AWARD and Title		Source
1974	<i>Kesatria Mangku Negara</i> (KMN) Order of Chivalry, 4th Class	Dato'	Malaysia
1972	<i>Panglima Setia Mahkota</i> (PSM) Order of Chivalry, 2nd Class	Tan Sri	Malaysia
1974	<i>Darjah Yang Mulia Pangkuan Negeri</i> (DMPN) Order of Companion of the State, 2nd Grade	Dato'	Penang
1989	<i>Darjah Utama Pangkuan Negeri</i> (DUPM) Order of Companion of the State, 1st Grade	Dato Seri	Penang
1989	<i>Sri Maharaja Pangkuan Negara</i> (SMN) Order of Chivalry, 1st Class	Tun	Malaysia
1989	Fellow		Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia
1990	Paul Harris Fellow		Rotary International

<b>Year</b>	<b>AWARD and Title</b>		<b>Source</b>
1991	<i>Pendidik Istimewa</i> Educator Extraordinary		Ministry of Education
1991	<i>Datuk Patinggi Bintang Kenyalang</i> (DP.Sarawak) Supreme & Noble Order of the Star of Sarawak	Datuk Patinggi	Sarawak
1991	<i>Datuk Bagindo Sati</i> (Minangkabau Award)	Datuk	Minangkabau
1992	Melvin Jones Fellow		Lions Club International
1992	<i>Khidmat Cemerlang</i> Distinguished Service Award		M'sian Schools Sports Council
1992	Honorary President		Life-saving Society of Malaysia
1993	Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun		Japan
1995	<i>Tokoh Maal Hijrah</i> The Hijrah Annual Leadership Award		Malaysia
1996	<i>Pingat Semangat Padi</i> 'Spirit of the Padi-field' Award		Malaysian Boy Scouts Association
2001	Commonwealth Vice-President of the Royal Life Saving Society		Royal Life Saving Society



## *Index*

- Abas bin Muhammad Taha, Haji (Muslim reformist) 10  
Abdul Aziz bin Ismail, Dato' (Dy DG. Education) 187fn19  
Abdul Aziz bin Jaafar 40.41  
Abdul Aziz bin Omar, Dr. 109.126fn4  
Abdul Aziz bin Yeop, Tan Sri (Chief Secrerary) 114  
Abdul Halim bin Haji Othman 124.135fn40  
Abdul Hamid bin Bidin, General Tan Sri 165.169fn21  
Abdul Hamid bin Mohd Nor 123.124.134fn35  
Abdul Jalil, Bendahara of Johor-Riau 259fn10  
Abdul Karim bin Isa, Haji 165  
Abdul Kudus bin Mohamad 81  
Abdul Latif Deman 73fn24  
Abdul Majid bin Ismail, Tan Sri Dr. (Director, Health Services) 109  
Abdul Manaf bin Jalil 49fn26  
Abdul Rahim bin Busu (Education Officer) 237fn16  
Abdul Rahman bin Abbas, Tun Dato' Seri Haji (Penang Head of State) 301.325  
fn8.326fn24  
Abdul Rahman bin Arshad, Tan Sri Dato' Wira (DG, Education) 187fn19.203  
fn1.333  
Abdul Rahman bin Haji Talib, Dato' (Minister of Education) 155.156.159.166  
fn1.170fn21.205fn14.242fn47.247  
Abdul Rahman bin Ya'cob (Minister of Education) 242fn47  
Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, Tunku 120.121.168fn15.206fns15.16;254  
Abdul Razak Bin Dato' Haji Hussein, Tun 64.110ff.114.120.128fn10.129fns13.  
15;134.170fn21.221.241fn40.247.293fn10  
Abdul Wahab bin Ariff, Datuk (Brunei) 109.126fn4  
Abdul Wahab bin Mohamad Ariff, Dr. Dato' 51fn38  
Abdul Wahab bin Toh Muda Abdul Aziz, Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang 97fn1  
Abdullah bin Ayob (Chief Secretary) 59  
Abdullah Hassan 123.134fn37



- Abdullah Sani bin Haji Baharuddin (brother of Siti Zainab) 148  
Abercrombie, British High Commissioner 135fn43  
Abu Hassan bin Ali, Haji (Special Project) 196.197.198.199.207fn22.208fn30.  
210fn33  
Acheh 11  
Ade Bisyen (schools broadcasts) 239fn31  
Adelaide, South Australia: twinning with Georgetown, Penang of, 322  
Adibah Amin (writer) 273.277fn22  
Administrative and Diplomatic Service 191  
adult education & illiteracy campaign 104fns38.41;221.245  
Adult Education Association of Malaya (AEAM) 95.96.104fn37; award to  
Hamdan of, Advanced Teachers' Institute, Singapore 63.64  
Advisory Council for the Coordination of Islamic Learning and Education *see*  
*under* Lembaga Penasihat Penyelarasan Pelajaran dan Pendidikan Agama  
Islam/LEPAI  
Africa 231  
Agricultural School, Perak 60.62  
Agricultural College, Serdang *see under* College of Agriculture  
Agricultural School Serdang, Selangor 235fn5f  
Agus Salim 4  
Ahmad bin Abdul Hamid 58  
Ahmad bin Sheikh Tahir 15.16.81  
Ahmad Hassan bin Osman, Dato' 102fn28.103fn33  
Ahmad Zahari bin Basri 103fn33  
Aishah bt Haji Mustapha 13; marriage to Sheikh Tahir, 7; parental role of, 23  
ff.34, 35.56.78  
Aishah Ghani, Tan Sri (Minister) 321  
Akihito, Emperor of Japan 314  
al-Azhar School/University, Cairo 1.6.7.16.45fn8.231  
al-Ikhwān 10.16.  
al-Imam 10.  
al-Manar 7.10.  
Ali bin Yaakub (Special Project) 209fn28  
Alias bin Yasin 49fn26  
Alisjabana, Sultan Takdir 160.168fn15  
Allen, G.V., Dr. 108  
Alliance Francaise 157  
Alor Star, Kedah 242fn48  
Amadou-Mathar M/Bow 279f.282.291fn4  
Ambrose 58  
American Council of Education 162  
American Geographical Society 161  
Aminuddin Baki (Chief Education Adviser) 59.85.114.116.130fn16.158.166  
fn4.168fn13.180.181.182.183.188fns25.16;189fn28;190.191.192.203  
fn1.204fn8.217.245.247.316

- Amsterdam 180  
 Anderson Primary School (Douglas Road), Ipoh 60.72fn21.140.149  
 Anderson School, Ipoh 48fns19.20.22;49fn26.72fn24.77;98fn4.100fn17.130f.  
 186fn10.188fn25.211fn40  
 Anglo-Chinese School, Parit Buntar 185fn10  
 Anglo-Chinese School, Penang 15  
 Anglo-Dutch Treaty, 1824 2.20fn2  
 Anglo-Malaysian Economic Cooperation (AMEC) 224  
 Annamalai University, South India 37  
 Anwar bin Ibrahim, Dato' Seri (Minister of Education) 295.304.309.315.316  
 Annuar bin Mahmud, Tan Sri (Vice-Chancellor, UKM, Bangi) 160  
 Applied Food and Nutrition Programme 220  
 Arabs of Singapore, the 15  
 Arfah bt Abdul Aziz (CDC) 238fns23.25  
 Arianayagam, A.K. (Dy Chief Education Adviser) 114.130fn16.158.167fn7.168  
 fn13.187fn19.290fn1  
 Ariffin bin Ariff 72fn23  
 Ariffin bin Mohd Nam, Dato' 82.114.130fn19.131fn20  
 Ariffin bin Suhaimi, Dato' (Dy.Rector, International Islamic University) 186fn15  
 Arulampalam (Exams Syndicate) 187fn17  
 Arulanantham, F.C., Datuk 69fn12.105fn44  
 Arumukham, V. (Clifford School teacher) 82.99fn11  
 Asia Foundation (USA) 161.167fn13.169fns18.19;188fn21.197.209fn28  
 Asiah Abu Samah (Director, CDC) 238fns23.259fn7.276fn20.333  
 Askiah, Cikgu 103fn32  
 Audio-Visual Aid Unit, Ministry of Education 221  
 Australia 214.232.236fn6.265.326fn24  
 Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA) 223  
 Awang bin Hassan, Tun Datuk Dr. Haji (Penang Head of State) 295.304  
 Ayathurai, Walter (Foreign Affairs Officer) 231  
 Aziz Badli bin Haji Awang Chik 122.134fn34  
 Azizah bt Sheikh Tahir 25.33
- Bacon, Francis (English philosopher), cited 307.326fn14  
 Badaruddin bin Alang Ahmad, Dato' 94  
 Baden-Powell, Lord (founder of Boy Scout Movement) 30f.46fn15  
 Bagan Serai, Perak 235fn5  
 Bahador Baba (Malaysian diplomat) 165  
 Baharuddin bin Lebai Yusuf, Haji (father of Siti Zainab) 147.148  
 Baker, Maurice 43  
 Bakhtiar Djamily 98fn5  
 Balraj, A.T. 186fn14  
 banana money (Japanese Occupation) 66.73fn33  
 Bandar Bayan Baru, Penang 278.295.296.297.300.301  
 Bandung 240fn38

- Bangkok 165.170fn21.240fn38  
Bangkok Accord, 1966 204fn10.223  
Banno, S. 58.59.60.70fn16  
Barnes, L.J. 46fn11  
Barnes Report on Education (1951) 27.46fn11.141.143.188fn25  
Battle of Midway Island, June 1942 73fn27  
Batu Feringgi, Penang 256  
Batu Gajah, Perak 95.103fn29.136.137.138.147.148.149  
Batu Gajah, Perak, Government English School at 101fn26  
Batu Pahat, Johor 9.261fn31  
Beijing 321; Nuijie Mosque at, 322  
Belanja 95.97  
Belfast 125  
Biology & Tropical Centre for Medicine (BIOTROP) 240fn38  
Birthday of the Prophet 318  
Bogor, Java 169fn18  
Boston, Mass. USA 162  
Bota 94.95.132fn23  
Botanical Gardens, Singapore 70fn14  
Bottoms, J.C. (MCS officer & historian) 132fn22.248  
Boy Scout Movement 30-1.46-7fn15.48fn22.87.89.93f.97.103fns30.33.105  
fn45.118.133fn27.245.258fn2  
Brinsford Lodge Teachers' College, England 115.116.153fn6.240fn37.261fn31  
Britain *see under* United Kingdom  
British Council 86.87.125.140.167fn13.188fn21  
British Military Administration (BMA) 66.68.74fn35.81.82.100fn18  
British military bases in Malaysia, withdrawal from 224.240fn36  
British North Borneo (Sabah) 140  
British North Borneo Chartered Company 251  
British teachers (for maths and science) 224  
Bruas, Perak 132fn23  
Brunei 119.174  
Bukit Bintang Girls' School, Kuala Lumpur 135fn44.151  
Bukit Tinggi, Sumatra 3.21fn15.321  
Bumiputera 17  
bunkyo classes (Japanese education and culture) 64  
Burhanuddin al-Helmy 18  
Butterworth, Penang (former British military base) 240fn36  
  
Cairo 7.17  
Cambridge Higher School Certificate (HSC) 178.182  
Cambridge 'O' and 'A' level examinations 174  
Cambridge Overseas Examinations Syndicate, 172.173.174.179.184fns5.6;185  
fn8.187fn18  
Cambridge School Certificate Examination 35.111.153fn4.183fn3.205fn14

- Canada 160.163.166.210fn35.214.223.232.235fn6.276fn17.321  
 Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship & Fellowship Committee 163  
 Carnegie Foundation (USA) 162  
 Carr-Saunders Commission 108.126fn1  
 Caxton Press, Ipoh 98fn5  
 Central Curriculum Committee 207fn20.218f  
 Central Malay School, Ipoh 48fn22  
 Central School, Kuala Kangsar 100fn22  
 Centre for Drug and Pharmaceutical Research 266.273.275fns15.16.17  
 Centre for Educational Development Overseas (CEDO) 210fn36.  
 Centre for Innovations in Technical Education *see under* INNOTECH  
 Centre of Educational Television Overseas 221  
 Ceylon *see under* Sri Lanka  
 Chan Teng Hong 133fn27  
 Chang Kwai (CDC) 201.238fn23  
 Chang Min Kee (education Officer) 114.130fn17.159.167fn9.232.290fn1  
 Chang Min Phang, Paul 48fn25.114.130fn18.167fn7.232  
 Chang Yin Fatt 130fn17  
 Che Tom bte Datuk Abdul Razak (Customs Supervisor, Kedah) 146  
 Chemor, Perak 188fn25  
 Chen, Peter (Special Project) 197.198.209fn29  
 Chenor, Temerloh, Pahang 236fn12  
 Chester, Ms (teacher) 144  
 Chief Education Adviser, post of 191f. title of, 204fn3.236fn15  
 Chiew Tow You (CDC) 238fns23.25  
 China 321  
 Chin In Kam 72fn23  
 Choi Siew Hong 35.49fn26  
 Chong Seck Chim (Cr. of Exams, etc.) 49fn28.171.179f.180.186fn14.187fn19.  
 221.232.283  
 Choo Seng Tak 99fn12  
 Christ's Hospital (English 'public' school) 210fn37  
 Christie (Chief Education Adviser) 114  
 Chung Ling High School, Penang 135fn44.264  
 Clifford, Hugh, Sir (Br. colonial governor) 28  
 Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar 26.28-35.37.39.44.46fn12.48fns19.20.25;76.77.  
 82f.86.87.90.91.99fn11;100fn21.101fns23.26;161.245.253.254.258fn2.260  
 fns16.24.307f; history of (book), 307; hockey team of,30.101fn26  
 Clifford School, Kuala Lipis, Pahang 28  
 Cliffordian, The 37.39.40.47fn17.49fn27.87.134fn30  
 Cochrane Road Secondary School, Kuala Lumpur 151  
 Cocos Islands 15  
 College of Agricultural Science, Hilo, Hawaii 208fn24  
 College of Agriculture, Serdang 37.40f.57.105fn44.235fn5  
 Colombia 96.104fn38

- Colombo Plan 214.216.236fn6  
Committee for Children's Health 218  
Commonwealth Education Commission (CEC) 231.232; 1968 Conference of, 232  
Commonwealth Education Conference, New Delhi, 1960, 159.160  
Communist Rebellion of 1926-7 (Dutch East Indies) 14  
comprehensive schools 236fn8  
Conference of Malay Rulers 328fn35  
Conference of Youth Leaders, Vatican, 1952  
Congo, Malayan UN force in 170fn21  
Convent School, Ipoh (Brewster Road) 58.62.137  
Cooke, Elena M. 135fn44  
CREDO *see under* Curriculum Renewal and Educational Development Overseas  
Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Kuala Lumpur 200f.209fns28.30;211  
fn40.218f.237fn21.238fns23.25.26;239fn27.241fn45.272
- Dato Bagindo Khatib 3.  
Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang *see under* Abdul Wahab bin Toh Muda Abdul Aziz  
Davies, J.N.(Chief Education Adviser) 114.120.158  
Deli 6  
Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka (DBP) 114.128fn11.181.198.206fn16.248.256-8ff.  
261fns28.31; 322; Hamdan's contributions to, 261fn33  
Dhanarajan, G., Dr. (Assoc. Professor, USM) 326fn24  
Din, Haji 64  
Dindings, Perak, 183fn4  
Diniyah Puteri School, Padang Panjang, Sumatra 321  
Director-General of Education, post of 204fn3; title of 236fn15  
discovery method (of teaching science, etc.) 195ff.208fns23.26;210fns34.35.  
211.fn37  
Disted College 313.326fn24  
Dobby, E.H.G., Professor 49fn25.30;93fn16;99fn16.110.127fns7.8;159.168  
fn13.232  
Dol Ramli, Dato' Haji (RTM Director) 96.104fn40  
Dol Said of Naning, Malacca (Malay patriot) 259fn10  
Donovan, Hugh (US Peace Corps) 197  
Dorai Raja Singam 132fn22  
drug abuse 266.270.275fn15  
Dublin, 125  
Dunwoody Institute, Minneapolis, USA 161  
Durkheim, Emily (American anthropologist) cited 311  
Dutch East Indies 8.14.22fn33  
Dyer, W.E., Professor 43.50fn36
- East Africa Examinations Council 184fn6  
East Coast States (Peninsular Malaysia) 265.266  
East-West Center, University of Hawaii, Honolulu 160.208fn23

Edinburgh 125

Education Ordinance of 1957 114

EDUCATION: colonial education: British, 27.45fn10.205fn13.214; Dutch, 5; Chinese & Tamil schools, 205fn13.222; comprehensive schools, 215; 'discovery method' of learning, 195ff; English-medium, 18.27 *passim*. 45fn10.90.111-12..116.90.128fn12.131fn20;143.193f;international conferences on education, 159, 159; Malay-medium, 26.27.45fns4.10.11.111-12.115f.131fn20.135fn42. 143.166fn1;172f.192f.205fns13.14;228.264.325fn12; national system, evolution of, 172ff; educational broadcasts and TV, 171.104fn39; 221.230fn31; recruitment and training of teachers, 190f.143.203.239fn34; science and mathematics, 194-203 *passim*; traditional (Malay/Islamic) 5-6.24 147-8.321. *see also under* Barnes Report; Modern Maths; Integrated Science; Nuffield Science; Rahman Talib Report.Razak Report; Schools, etc; Normal Classes; Special Malay Class;

Educational Testing Service, Princeton, USA 162.184fn6

Egypt 7.16.33.231.252

Eighth Malaysia Plan 324

Emergency, The 49fn26.91.131fn21.143.147

Endau, Pahang 169fn21

England 143.165

English College, Johor Bahru 211fn39

English language, role of 219

Eu Tong Sen (millionaire philanthropist) 49fn28

Eusoffe Abdulcader (high court judge) 69fn12

Examination Testing Service (ETS), Princeton, USA 174.177.178.184fn5

Examinations Council for West Africa 184fn6

Faizah Lucas, Professor (USM) 267

Far Eastern Economic Review 206fn15

Fatimah Ahmad 135fn44

Federal Department of Education, Malaya *see also under* Malayan Department of Education *also under* Ministry of Education

Federal Examinations Syndicate 171-89 *passim*. 233.237fn18

Federal House, Kuala Lumpur 113.129fn15.155.208fn25.243

Federal Inspectorate of Schools 237fn18

Federal Military College, Sungai Besi (FMC) 170fn21.184fn4

Federal Volunteer Reserve (FMSVR) 101fn26

Federated Malay States, formation of 235fn5

Federation of Malaya Certificate examination 111

Fenn-Wu Report on Education (1951) 143

First World War 235fn5

Five Year Plans (Malayan/Malaysian) 234fn2

Foo Yeow Yoke (Registrar, University of Malaya) 174

- Ford Foundation (US) 157.161.176  
Foreign Studies University, Beijing 322  
Foreman, Larry (Asia Foundation, KL.) 209fn28  
Francis Light Preparatory School, Penang 98fn3  
Franklin Publishers, Washington DC, USA 161  
French Indo-China 41  
Fullbright Commission and Foundation (USA) 182.238fn23  
fully residential schools 112f.114.119
- Gabungan Pelajar-pelajar Melayu Semenanjung/GPMS 85.86.92  
Geneva, Switzerland 290fn2  
Geological Survey Department, Ipoh 60  
Georgetown, Penang 253; twinning of with Adelaide, South Australia 322  
Gerakan (political party) 298  
Geylang, Singapore 240fn39  
Ghafar bin Baba, (Dy PM, President of PSM) 315  
Ghana 184fn6  
Ghazali, Haji 77  
Ghulam Sawar, Haji 132fn26  
Girl Guides 93f.103fn32.149  
Godman 114.126  
Goethe Institute, Kuala Lumpur 157  
Gopeng, Government English School at 101fn23  
Government English School, Kuala Kangsar *see under* Clifford School, Kuala  
Government English School, Parit *see under* Sekolah Iskandar Shah, Parit  
Government Girls School, Kuala Kangsar (SM Raja Perempuan Kalsom) 28  
Government Malay School, Kuala Kangsar 25.45fn3  
Government of 250  
Great Depression (Slump) of 1929, the 25.45fn2  
Great Britain *see under* United Kingdom  
Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere 53.54.63.64  
Gyugun (Japanese-inspired 'military volunteers') 64.65  
Gyutai (Japanese-inspired 'voluntary bodies') 64.73fn29
- Hackling, John 157  
Hadith, (Sayings of the Prophet), Hamdan's quotes from 309-10

HAMDAN bin Sheikh Tahir; background: family, 1; early schooling, 15-16.23.29-35; influence of his father on, 20.33.329; ambition to teach, 36.48fn25.55.83.85.330f education: Raffles College, 35 *passim*. 48fn25; during the Occupation, 58ff; post-war diploma and degree, 82.107ff; teaching career: teacher at Clifford School, KK, 82ff; HM, Sekolah Iskandar Shah, Parit, 89-94; Principal, STAR, 116.117-25 *passim*; at the Ministry of Education: Organizer of Secondary Schools, 110 *passim*; 125.155f; Scholarships & Training Division, 157f; Controller of Examinations, 162. 164.171-89 *passim*; Chief Education

Adviser/Director-General of Education, 190-242 *passim*.243; and the Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 206fn16.207fn17.256-8.269.305; Vice-Chancellor, USM: 262-77.276fn20. 297.321; appointment as, 262; concern for student welfare of, etc, 255f.266.276fn20; and student discipline, 267f. and the National Language, 262.269; policy initiatives of, 264f; at UNESCO in Paris: 244 *passim*. appointment, 272.278.279.281; participation in, 283; and the sights of : 244.256.258 fn2.265.269.278-94 discovery Paris, 289; Head of State, Penang: 244.295-328 *passim*. appointment of, 295-8.324fn1; installation of, 300-2; official functions of, 304-6.317; and Islamic values, etc.317-19.327fn28; concern for education of, 306.309.319; farewell speech of; Educational Issues: education national system, evolution of, 172ff; teacher recruitment, 190f.203; through the media, 220f; importance of English, 206fn16.228f.269.332; the National Language, 206fns15.16.17;331; promotion of Islamic values, 269; teaching of nutrition,220f; teacher recruitment, 217.222ff.239fn34; technical and vocational education, 213-17 *passim*; Related Interests: adult education and combatting adult illiteracy, 95-6 221.245; Boy Scout Movement, 30-1.258fn2; distance learning, 327fn24; interest in history of, 315; and the Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 116-17.245-53 *passim*.258. 298-300.327fn25; Life-Saving Society of Malaysia (LSSM), 254-6.261fn27; Strictly Personal: attitude to politics of, 75.206fn15.279; courtship and marriage, family ties, 330; as sumo wrestler, 59.63.80; command of spoken Japanese, 59.313.314; work ethic of, 232-3.273.333; Visits Abroad 89.97.99fn16.156.159.166.167fn12.168fn13.169fn19. 176.180-1.200.223.231.314.320-22; awards:258fn2;272.302.306.312.314.315. 316.319.320

Hamid bin Sheikh Tahir 1.15.16.23.25.27.29.39f.41.45fn2.46fn12.78f.330  
Hamka 8.54

Hamzah bin Sendut, Tan Sri (Vice-Chancellor, USM) 262

Hancock, Alan (BBC TV London) 221

Harrison family (Kirkby) 145

Harvard University International Seminar. 1962 160.162-3.168fn13; Hamdan's Report on, 169fn19

Hashim bin Yeop Abdullah Sani, Tan Sri (Chief Justice, Malaya) 72fn24.302

Hassan bin Ahmad, Dato' (Director, DBP) 258.289; observations on Paris life of 286f.293fn14; on UNESCO, 289

Hassan Lanulang, Professor 240fn35

Hawaai 208fn24

Hawkins, Gerald 132fn22

Head of State, Penang, changes in title of 325fn12

Heiho (Japanese-inspired 'auxiliary army') 64

Hendon bt Haji Baharuddin (sister of Toh Puan Siti Zainab) 148.149.154fn18

Hertslet, H.R. (veteran Boy Scout leader) 133fn27

Hertslet Camp, Ipoh 103fn33.133fn27

Hicks, E.C. (Director of Education, Perak) 47fn15.77.87.90f.100fns18.19.102  
fn26



- High School, Kajang 48fn19  
Higher Teachers' Training Institute, Perak 62.63.66.137  
Hirohito, Emperor of Japan 70fn14  
Ho Peng Yoke 58  
Hogan, J.P.C. 28  
Hogan's School *see under* Clifford School, Kuala Kangsar  
Holttum, R.E., Professor 70fn14  
Hong Kong 148.172.184fn6  
Honolulu, Hawaii 160.161  
Hussein bin Onn, Tun 233f.234.242fn47.248.249.250.267.274fn1.281.282  
Hutchings, R.S., Revd. (PFS) 247
- Ibadan, Nigeria 232  
IBM Company, Kuala Lumpur 186fn11; IBM computer, 176.185fn9.186fn13;  
IBM Teaching Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 177  
Ibrahim bin Arshad 32  
Ibrahim bin Yaacob 18.65.73fn30  
India 165.231.232.268  
Indonesia 224.249.268.320; universities of, 268  
Indonesian Confrontation 192.204fn10.223  
Indonesian nationalism/nationalist movement 4  
Indonesian teachers (recruited for Malaysian schools) 223-4  
Industrial School, Perak 60.72fn21  
INNOTECH 225.240n38  
INSPIRE Project 271f.276fns18.19.20;327fn24  
Institute of Education, University of London 86.87  
Integrated Science 199-203 *passim*, 207fn20  
Integrated System of Programmed Instruction for Rural Environment Project *see under* INSPIRE  
International Bureau of Education (IBE) 283.290fn2.293fn9  
International College, Penang 135fn38  
International Development & Research Centre (IDRC), Canada 272.276fn20  
International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) 283  
Ipoh 8.53.58.63.72fn21.84.85.86.90.91.92.114.116.117.118.129fn14.130fn17  
132fn25.134fn30;137.150.153.188fn25.245.254.260fn24; trade school at,  
235fn5  
Ishak Haji Muhammad 18.253  
Iskandar Shah School, Parit *see under* Sekolah Iskandar Shah, Parit  
Islam Islamiah *see under* Islamic Reform Movement  
Islam 2.3.4.10.12.17.24.269-70  
Islamic law 8.9.  
Islamic Reform Movement 7-8.10.14.15.16.36  
Ismail bin Abdul Rahman, Tun Dr 312  
Ismail bin Ngah Marzuki 32.40.50fn31  
Istana Negara, Kuala Lumpur 300.325fn6

- Ito, Ryoji (Japanese educationist) 159.166.167fn11  
 Izbah bin Ismail (Education Officer) 173
- Jaafar Haji Muhammad, Dato', Menteri Besar Johor 9.21fn22  
 Jacob, Dr. (USAID official) 224.225  
 Jaffna, Sri Lanka 99fn11  
 Jakarta 223.231  
 Japan 166.185fn8.223.250.268.292fn6.310.314.322; background to invasion, 41f.50 fn32.52  
 Japanese language, propagation of 55f.58.59.62.65.69fn9.70fn16.136f  
 Japanese Occupation, 19.36.47fn15.48fn19;52-74 *passim*.78.85.86.81.82.91.105fn44.107.112.136fn16.137.142.188fn25.195.198.241fn45.314.316; living conditions during, 65; end of, 66f; assessment of, 63.66f.  
 Japanese Volunteer Association 223  
 Jeddah 165  
 Jeffrey, Alex (British educational consultant) 200.201  
 Jempol, Negeri Sembilan 98fn10  
 Jenain, Anton (Special Project) 198  
 Jesuit Order 104fn38  
 Jikeidan (local vigilante groups) 64  
 John, A.P. (Exams Syndicate) 187fn17  
 Johor 8.9.11.25.35.64.184fn4.211fn39.246  
 Johor Bahru 9.114.119.129fn14.155.211fn40.254; trade school at, 325fn5  
 Joint Committee for Schoolchildren's Health 218.220.239fn28  
 Jones, F.H. 89.100fn21.126  
 Jumaat bin Dato' Mohd Noor, Dato' (Director, DBP) 258.261fns31.32  
 Junid bin Haji Abdul Rahim 49fn26.58.63  
 Junior Cambridge Examination 34
- Kamal Salih, Professor Datuk (USM) 326fn24  
 Kamaruddin, Dato' Seri Haji (Malaysian diplomat) 165  
 Kamaruddin bin Hashim 132fn25  
 Kamaruzaman bin Sharif, Tan Sri 301  
 Kampung Basong, Kuala Kangsar 26.44  
 Kampung Laut Mosque, Kota Bahru, Kelantan 259fn10  
 Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, twinning with State of Penang of 314  
 Kansai Haiden Kabushiki Kaisha/KHKK (electricity distribution company) 72fn22  
 Kanthan Halt, Perak 79  
 Karachi, Pakistan 165  
 Kartar Singh 104fn35  
 Kaufman, Peggy (US Peace Corps) 197  
 Kaum Muda 10.11.22fn26  
 Kaum Tua 22fn26  
 Kazuji, Nagasu (Governor, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan) 314

- Kedah 35.47fn15.48fn19.138.139.147.211fn39.271.276fn20.304.  
Kelang 73fn29  
Kelantan 104fn41.265; branch of USM School of Medical Science in, 265  
Kempetei 84.98fn8  
Kenya 184fn6  
Kesatuan Melayu Muda 65.73fn30  
Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung 65  
Kesatuan Rakyat Istimewa (KRIS) 65  
Khalid bin Halim, Dato' (Principal, STAR) 186fn15  
Khoo Eng Choon (Education Officer) 186fn14.225.240fn39  
Khoo Kay Por, Tan Sri 301  
Khoo Khai Hong 48fn25.90.99fn12  
King Edward VII College of Medicine, Singapore 36.37.38.41.57.49fn27.29.  
107.235.fn5  
King Edward VII School, Taiping 28.48fn19.22.98fn4.101fn25.186fn10.204fn5  
King George V of England, coronation of 9.  
Kingstanding Settlement, Birmingham, England (rehabilitation centre) 87-8.  
100fn20  
Kinta District 95.136.137  
Kinta Electrical Distribution Company (KED) 60.72fn22  
Kirkby Teachers' College, England 102fn27.110.115.116.141.142-5.240 fn37.  
306  
Kissinger, Henry, Professor, (US Foreign Affairs Secretary of State) 163  
Koay, Bernadette (FES) 186fn15  
Kodera, Saburo 62.63.73fn25.166  
Kogyo Gakko *see under* Industrial School, Perak  
Koh Tsu Koon, Tan Sri, Dr. (Chief Minister, Penang) 264f.274fn5.314.320.321  
Kolej Perempuan Melayu *see under* Sekolah Menengah Tengku Kurshiah  
Kota Bharu, Kelantan 42.52.129fn14  
Kota Kinabalu 251  
Kota Lama Kiri, Perak 47fn16  
Kota Setia, Perak 97  
Kota Tinggi, Johor 259fn10  
Koto Tuo Ampek Angkek, Bukit Tinggi (Sumatra) 1.6.7.12.13.320  
Kozan Gakko *see under* School of Mines, Perak  
Kuala Kangsar 7.8.13.16.19.23.25.26.27.28.30.39.40.45fn5.46fn13.48fns19.22;  
55.59.77.82f.89.91.98fn5.100fn22.101fns23.26;106fn45.111.  
Kuala Kangsar District 25.62.78.90  
Kuala Krai, Kelantan 188fn21  
Kuala Lipis, Pahang 129fn14  
Kuala Lumpur 48fn20.53.64.73fn26.81.104fn37.105fn43.110.114.128fn12.129  
fn14.150.151.155.157.168fn13.171.180.184fn5.199.208fms.24.25;211fn39.  
224.254.255.272.278;296.297.325fn4 trade school at, 235fn5.  
Kuala Lumpur Technical College 198  
Kuala Lumpur Technical School 219

- Kuala Selangor, Malay fort at 259fn10  
 Kuantan 48fn19.50fn35  
 Kuantan Polytechnic 216  
 Kubang Kerian, Kelantan 265.296  
 Kuching 100fn18; vocational school at, 216  
 Kum Boo, Dato' (Director, Schools Division) 199.201.207fn20.211fn39.216.  
 224.225.240fn37.240fn37  
 Kunming 322  
 Kwan Sai Keong 69fn12  
 Kyoin Yosei Jo, Ipoh *see under* Teachers' Training Centre, Ipoh
- Labis, Johor 79  
 Labrooy, Gerald 98fn5  
 Labuan 15.  
 Lagos, Nigeria 232  
 Lambor, Perak 94.95  
 Langkawi 139  
 Language and Literary Agency *see under* Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka  
 Lau Hut Yee 123.133fn26.134fn37.150  
 Laubach, Frank C., Dr. 96.104fns38.41  
 Layang-Layang, Perak 95  
 Lee Fong Chin 260fn23  
 Lee Guan Meng 58.63.186fn14  
 Lee Kuan Yew (PM, Singapore) 80  
 Lee Yeow Yin 99fn12  
 Lembaga Penasihat Penyelarasan Pelajaran dan Pendidikan Agama Islam/LEPAI  
 328fn35  
 Lenggong, Perak 100fn23  
 Lewis, G.E.D. 126  
 Lewis, T.P.M (HM, Clifford School, KK) 44.50fn32.126.260fn16  
 Liah Tet Yoke, Michael 133fn26  
 Life-Saving Society of Malaysia (LSSM) 245.253-6,260fn26; background of,  
 260fns23.  
 Conferences of (1979.1990), 256; HQ of, 255; Awards to Hamdan, 256  
 Likas, Kota Kinabalu, vocational school at 216  
 Lim Chong Eu, Tun (Chief Minister, Penang) 302  
 Limbak Urai 3.4.5.7.  
 Lincoln Centre, Kuala Lumpur (US) 188fn21  
 Ling, George, Sir (drug research, USM) 276fn17  
 Liverpool 144  
 Loh, David 63  
 Loh Boon Siew, Dato' (millionaire philanthropist) 298  
 Lokman bin Musa, Dato' 279.290fn1  
 London 8.89.90.91.125.148.165  
 Long Heng Hua (Education Officer) 156.204fn5

- Longfellow, W.H. (American poet), cited 310  
Low Bin Tick, Dato' (C-in-C. St. John's Brigade) 104fn34  
Lower Certificate of Education (LCE) 172.175.176.177.178.187fn17.205fn14.  
215.236fn9  
Luhak Agama 3  
Luke, K.D. (HM. Clifford School, KK) 82.83.161  
Lukut, Negeri Sembilan, Malay fort at 259fn10
- MacDonald, Malcolm, Sir (British C-G. South-East Asia) 108  
Madinah 165  
Madras, University of 48fn25  
madrasah 252.328fn34  
Madrasah al-Iqbal, Singapore 11  
Madrasah al-Joned, Singapore 15  
Madrasah al-Masyhur, Penang 11  
Madrasah Haji Thaib, Parit Jamil, Muar 11.15.25.252.253.329  
Mahathir Mohamad, Dato' Seri Dr. 216.219.221.234.238fn27.242fn47.247.262.  
274fn1.279.281.282.310.326fn20  
Mahmud bin Mat, Dato' 132fn22  
Mahsuri, S.N., cited 71fn18  
Mailwagam 58  
Majid bin Mat 49fn26  
Majid bin Osman (Education Officer) 173  
Majlis 16.17  
Malacca 15.69fn9.73fn26.100fn17.119.129fn14.132fn22.246.254.304; Sultanate  
of, 322; trade school at, 235fn5  
Malacca Women Teachers' Training College 98fn4.115.129fn14  
Malay Administrative Service (MAS) 36.48fn24.58fn24;100fn17.132fn22.253  
'Malay Agenda' 182.193.205fn11.207fn21.28;218  
Malay College, Kuala Kangsar 28.46fn12.82.98fn5.4.10.100fn22.115.128  
fn10.12;131 fn19.132fn22.134fn31.197  
Malay College Old Boys Association (MACOBA) 98fn10  
Malay culture 267.275fn10.281  
Malay Girls College *see under* Sekolah Tengku Kurshiah  
Malay Language 25.257.321.322; as the National Language, 111f.205  
fn14.268.322; as language of scholarship, 257.268  
Malay nationalism 8.18.19.20.21fn19.65.322.331  
Malay Peninsula *see under* Malaya  
Malay Regiment, stand at Pasir Panjang Ridge, Singapore of, 42.50fn33  
Malay 'special privileges' 241fn41  
Malay Teachers' College, Gelugor, Penang 212fn43  
Malay Teachers' College, Matang, Perak 148.153fn4.154fn16  
Malay World, the 1.2.5.6.7.15  
Malaya 7.8.11.18.19.25.47fn15.53.55.62; Chinese immigration to, 18; Indian  
immigration to, 18; racial distribution in (1931 census), 68fn4

- Malayan Administrative and Diplomatic Service 191.204fns2.6.  
 Malayan Association of Youth Councils 105fn44  
 Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society (MBRAS) 131fn21  
 Malayan Certificate of Education (MCE) 173.174.183fn3.184fn5.186fn10  
 Malayan Civil Service (MCS) 100fn17.128fn10.132fn22.190.191.203fn1.217  
   *see also under* Malayan Administrative and Diplomatic Service  
 Malayan Communist Party, ambitions of 68  
 Malayan Department of Education (KL) 108f.110.116.  
 Malayan/Malaysian Historical Society *see under* Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia  
 Malayan Nature Society 131fn21  
 Malayan Orchid Society 70fn14  
 Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) 60.64.68.73fn30  
 Malayan Secondary Schools Entrance Examination (MSSEE) 172.175.178.229  
 Malayan Teachers' Association, Ipoh 101fn26  
 Malayan Union 153fn11  
 malayanization 157  
 Malaysia 168fn13.192.200.208fn23.224.251.265.268.281.282.283.284.313.  
   315.320.321.328fn33  
 Malaysia-Japan Society 314  
 Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) 215  
 Malaysian History Congress of 1978 249.250  
 Malaysian monarchy, system of 325fn7  
 Malaysian National Commission for UNESCO 279.291fn3  
 Malaysian Students Department, London 130fns17.18  
 Malaysian TV 221  
 Malim Nawar Power Station, Perak 60.72fn21  
 Manila 231.240fn38  
 Masjidilharam, Mecca (the Great Mosque) 5.16.21fn15  
 Matheu, Rene DG UNESCO 282  
 Maxwell Road Secondary Boys School, Kuala Lumpur 149  
 May the Thirteenth Incident 198.212fn46.215  
 Mazlan bin Nordin (journalist) 98fn5  
 McLean Commission 107  
 Mecca 1.2.5.6.7.8.13.16.17.20.fns2.4;21fn15.21; 164.165  
 Megat Khas, Dato' Dr 207fn18  
 Mehmet Ali, Pasha, of Egypt 20fn4  
 Melbourne, Victoria, 313.326fns23.24.313  
 Middle East, the 7.8.  
 Minangkabau (district) 1.2.3.4.6.7.11 *passim*. 320  
 Minangkabau (people/society) 1.2.3.4.5.6.8.12 *passim*. 20fn5  
 Minden Campus, USM 263.267  
 Mines Department, Ipoh 60

MINISTRY of EDUCATION (Kuala Lumpur) 113.130fns16.17.134fn28.159.164.167fn31.173.181-2.184fn6.187fn19.188fn24.190.200.204fns3.8;208fn25.215-227 *passim*.233.239fn33.265.268.271.272.316f.322.326fn24.328fn35; organization, 218.222.237fns18.19;245.265.268.271.272.333; health & nutrition programmes of, 220; Audio-Visual Aid Unit/Division, 221. Education Media Service: 221; Educational Planning & Research: 178.187fn20.218.219.237fn21.238fns23.24.25; External Affairs: 237fn20; Private Colleges: 326fn24; Scholarships & Training: 157.158.164.166fn4.168fn13;171.180.181.182.223; Schools: 156.201.207fn20.208fn23. 211 fn40.224; Teacher Training: 159.209 fn30.279; Technical & Vocational: 213.214-17.218.237fn16. 279; *also see under* Curriculum Development Centre (CDC); Federal Examinations Syndicate

Ministry of Home Affairs 266

Mizutani (Japanese education official) 60.62

Modern General Science 202

Modern Maths 199-203 *passim*. 207fn20.211fn41.213.217-26 *passim*.237fn21

Modern Science 211fn41.213.217-26 *passim*

Mohamad bin Sheikh Tahir 15.16.80.81

Mohamad bin Yaacub (Minister of Education) 242fn47

Mohamad Said bin Mohamed, Tan Sri Dato' Dr (MB, Negeri Sembilan) 207fn18

Mohamed Yeop Abdul Raof, Datuk (President, LSSM) 256

Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab 20fn4

Mohammad Ilyas, Professor 19.20

Mohd Ali bin Ibrahim, Dato' 196.201.207fns20.23.208fns24.26.209fn30

Mohd Darus bin Abdul Rahman (Sr. Inspector of Schools, Kedah) 146

Mohd Din bin Ahmad, Tan Sri Dr. 109

Mohd Ghazali bin Jawi 120.132fn23

Mohd Ibrahim bin Haji Abdul Samad, Haji 34.48fn22

Mohd Khir Johari (Minister of Education) 119.120.121.131fn20.134fn29.167fn0.183.206fns15.16;231.232.233.234.242fn47.279.231.232.233.234.242fn47.279

Mohd Kusasi bin Mat 73fn24

Mohd Perdaus bin Badiozzaman 123.133fn26

Mohd Rashid bin Ahmad 105fn44

Mohd Sidek bin Elamdin, Dato' Haji 102fn27

Mohd Suffian bin Haji Hashim, Tun (Head of the Judiciary) 27.32.36.47fn16.17.18;99.327fn24

Mohd Zain bin Ayob, Haji 77.98fn4

Morris, Robert (CREDO) 202

Mountbatten, Louis, Lord 254.260fn25

Muar 9.11.12.23

Muar High School, Johor 253

Muhammad bin Ahmad Jalaluddin 3.20fn6

Muhammad Salleh Datuk Bagindo 3

Muhammadiyah Congress, Solo, 1927 14

- Muir, Douglas (1st Controller of Exams) 114.126.171.187fn19  
 Murad bin Mohd Noor, Tan Sri (DG.Education) 123.134fn38.156.183fn4.186  
 fn12.187fn19.219.230.232.233.238fns23.27.35;244.276fn20  
 Murad Committee & Report 230.239fn31.241fn44  
 Muslim New Year 318  
 Muslim Pilgrimage (Hijrah) 319  
 Muslim Society (Raffles & KEVII), Singapore 43f.51fn38.39.109.126fn5.127 fn6  
 Mustapha, Haji 7.25  
 Muttiah, Arthur (Clifford School teacher) 99fn11  
 Muzium Negara *see under* National Museum
- Nadeson, V. (Clifford School teacher) 32.99fn11  
 Nairobi, Kenya 164fn6  
 Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak, Dato' Seri (Minister of Education) 204fn6  
 Nanami, Sachiro 313  
 Nathan (Education Officer) 180.188fn23  
 National Anti-Dadah Council 261fn31  
 National Centre for Drug Abuse, (Penang) *see under* University of Science,  
 Malaysia  
 National Conference on Issues of Historiography, Penang 315  
 National Development Policy 318.323.324  
 National Education Policy/System 190.192.204fn9.213.226.237fn16.331.333  
 National Heart Institute, Kuala Lumpur 323.328fn39  
 National History Museum 249.259fn12  
 National Integrated Data System (NIDAS) 272  
 National Language (Malay) 111f.128fn11.131fn20;168fn15.172.192-4.205  
 fns 12.14;206fns15.16.17;219.222.227.241fn41.257.258.262fn33.264.  
 265.268f  
 National Museum, Kuala Lumpur 248.249.259fn9  
 National Palace, Kuala Lumpur *see under* Istana Negara  
 National Science Foundation, USA 206fn24.210fn34  
 National University of Malaya *see under* Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
 National Vision (Wawasan 2020) 320.324.325fb21  
 National Museum, Kuala Lumpur 248.249.259fn9  
 National Vision, the (Wawasan 2020) 320.324.325fb21  
 National University of Malaya *see under* Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
 Navaratnam, Visvanathan, Professor (drug research) 270.275fns15.16  
 Negeri Sembilan 64.98fn10.246.259fn9  
 Netherlands, The 180-1.183.250  
 New Delhi 231.279  
 New Economic Policy (NEP) 215f.237fn15  
 New York 162  
 New Zealand 214.216.236fn6  
 NIDAS *see under* National Integrated Data System  
 Nigeria 184fn6



- Nik Ahmed Kamil, Dato' 132fn22  
Nilam Puri, Kota Bahru, Kelantan 259fn10  
Nippon Hassoden Kabushiki Kaisha/NHKK (Nippon Power Supplies Company) 72fn22  
Nogyo Gakko *see under* Agricultural School, Perak  
Non-Federated Malay States (non-FMS) 235fn5  
Nordin, Dato', Dato' Setia Bijaya fiRaja, Perak 106fn46  
Nordin Bridge, Belanja, Perak 106fn46  
Normal Classes 137f.141.153fn4  
Northam Road English School, Georgetown, Penang 260fn23  
Nuffield Science Project 193-203 *passim*. 207fn20.211fns37.40.212fn43.227.241fn42
- objective tests 167fn18.177f.185fn8  
of, 108f.128fn9.130fn18.131fn19  
Ogle, N.A., Dato' (USM Registrar) 273.321  
Oh Bak Kim, Dato' (Exams Syndicate) 173.174.176.178.185fn10.186fn14.187fn17  
Oie Tiong Ham Hall 108  
Omar bin Othman  
Omar bin Mohd Hashim, Dato' Haji (Dy DG. Education: Chairman, PSM) 122.134fn33 173.174.176f.179.183fns4.5;185fns6.8.10;187fns19.20;188fn24.189fn27.233.300.325 fn5  
Ong Tat Lim (Exams Syndicate) 187fn17  
Oppenheim, Alexander, Sir, Vice-Chancellor, University of Malaya 167fn7.232  
ordinary teacher, 82ff; headmaster/principal - at SIS, 89-97; at STAR, 116.117-25  
Osman (Hamdan's official driver, Paris) 285.286  
Osman bin Talib, Tan Sri Dato' Seri 87.100fns17.19  
Ottawa 163.166  
Owen, C.T.J. (Raffles College lecturer) 43  
Oxford 165
- Padang Kerbau *see under* Padang Seleboh  
Padang Panjang, East Sumatra 321  
Padang Seleboh 94  
Padri Movement, Padri Wars 2.3.20fn3  
Pago-Pago (US West Samoa) 231  
Pahang 128fn10.169fn21  
Pakistan 232  
Palmer (US Peace Corps officer) 169fn17  
Pandu Puteri *see under* Girl Guides  
Pantai Acheh, Penang, observatory & astronomy centre at 22fn40  
Paris 244.245.279.280.283; life in and places of interest of, 284-9.290fn2.325 fn1  
Parit, Perak 90.91f.93.94.95.96.97.101fn23.102fns27.29.103fn30.104fn35.107.110.113.220.221.245

- Parit Buntar, Perak 148.185fn10
- Parkinson, C. Northcote, Professor 132fn22 *passim*.89.91.98fn5.100fn22.101fn23.26.106fn46.111.
- Payne, E.M.F. (Chief Education Adviser) 105fn43.113.126
- Peace Corps (US) 62.169fn17.197.200.208fns23.24.209fn27.223.237fn21
- Pekan, Pahang 128fn10
- Pelajar Melayu Insaf/PERMI 85
- PEMADAM (National Anti-Drug Agency) 276fn17
- Pembela Tanah Air (PETA) 65
- Penang 1.6.7.10.11.15.16.23.47fn15.53.64.70fn14.73fn26.86.87.98fn3.102fn27.104.fns34.41;126fn4.128fn14.130fn17.162.211fn39;220.235fn5.224.246.254.260fn23.262.271.276fn20.278.296.297.304.307.315.321.327fn34.328fn33; trade school at, 235fn5
- Penang (State), twinning with Kanagawa Prefecture of 314
- Penang Chinese Swimming Club, Penang 260fn23
- Penang Free School (PFS) 15.77.98fn3.185fn10.187fn17.278.309
- Penang Head of State, changing titles of, 303f
- Penang Rotary Club 255
- Penang State Executive Council 305.316
- Penang State Legislative Assembly 298.305.323
- Penang Trade Fair 320
- Peninsular Malaysia 169fn18.204fn10.206fn14.212fn41.214.216.221.232.239fn31.252
- Perak 7.8.17.25.28.30.31.32.45fn4.55.56.58.61.62.64.65.73fn26.78.86.87.97fn1.153fn16.211fn14.271.276fn20; history of schools in, 101fn26
- Perak Cricket Association 101fn26
- Perak Education Department/Office 60.62.71fn20.77.87.90.91.100fn19.101fn23.103fn30.
- Perak Gunseibu *see under* Perak Japanese Military Administration
- Perak Japanese Military Administration 55.63.70fn16
- Perak Jokyu Shihan Gakko *see under* Higher Teachers' Training Institute, Perak
- Perak Library, Ipoh 101fn26
- Perak River 25.91.92.94.95
- Perak State Council 101fn23
- Perak Teachers' Training College, Ipoh (Japanese) 137
- Percival, A.E. General 52.50fn33
- Perikatan Melayu Perak 97fn1
- Perlis 100fn17 138
- Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia (PSM) 104fn40.116-17.129fn15.131fn21.132fns22.23.184fn4.245-53 *passim*.298-300.325fns4.5.; annual history essay competition of, 251f; publications of, 247.249.251.259fn10.260fn16; award to Hamdan of, 315
- Phibun Singgram (Thai PM) 68fn2
- Philippines, the 224

- Pitkeathley 114.115  
Pius XII, Pope 105fn45  
polytechnics 216f  
pondok schools 328fn34  
Ponniah, S.V.J. 238fn25  
Portugal 250  
Praag, Gordon van (British educational consultant) 200.201.202.203.210fns34.  
37;211fn40;227.241fn42  
Prabhakar, M.P. (CDC) 201.202.203.207fn19.211fns38.40.213.232.238fn23.  
241fn45  
Pragasam, S.G. (Clifford School teacher) 48fn25  
Preedy, Bernard (HM, Clifford School, KK) 30.32.47fn19.48fn25  
Projek Khas *see under* Special Project  
Public Services Department 180.186fn10
- Quangchou, Ashab Mosque at 322  
Quran, The, literacy in 4.10.17.24.33; Hamdan's references to, 307.309-10. 318.  
330  
Quran Reading Competition 318
- Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) 104fn40  
Radio Taiso 59.61.70fn13.96  
Raffles, Stamford 126fn1  
Raffles College, Singapore 35 *passim*; 42f.46fn14.48fn24.49fn28.75 *passim*.96.  
99fn16;107-10 *passim*.111.128fn10.130fn19.153fn4.185fn10.188fn25.  
211fn39.235fn5.245; graduates of, 48fn25.108f.128fn9.130fn18.131fn19  
Raffles Institution, Singapore 105fn44  
Raffles Museum 70fn14  
Rafidah bt Abdul Aziz 40  
Rahmah bt Sheikh Tahir 25.33  
Rahman Talib Education Review Committee 162.166fn3.205fn14  
Rahman Talib Report (1961) 1.75.156f.163.166fns1.3;204fn8.205fn14.214.333.  
Raja Ahmad Noordin, Tan Sri Dr. 110  
Raja Azhar bin Raja Ahmad 72fn23  
Raja Kamarulzaman 55  
Raja Mohar bin Raja Badiozzaman, Tan Sri 27.29-30.32.46fn13.14.47fn17.58  
Raja Tun Uda al-Haj bin Raja Muhammad, Tun 303.304  
Raja Zainal bin Raja Sulaiman (pioneer electrical engineer) 207fn18  
Rajan (EPRD) 238fn25  
Razak Report on Education (1955) 111ff.114.128fns10.11.121.166fn3.172.188  
fn25.188fn25.192.204fn8.205fns13.14.214.333  
RECSAM Workshop, Penang, 1972 281  
Red Cross Society 105fn45.118  
Regional Educational Centre for Science and Mathematics (RECSAM) 224ff  
Regional English Language Training Centre (RELC), Singapore 229.240fn38

- Rembau, Negeri Sembilan 236fn12  
 Remove Class Examination 178  
 Research; use of English in, 269; Bahasa Malaysia, Implementation Committee of, Rexed, Bror (UNFDAC Director) 275fn17  
 Riau 6.11.25  
 Richards, John (Technical Education) 157fn7.214.232.237fn16  
 Roberts, P. (Director of Education, Perak) 120  
 Rome 97  
 Roolvink, R., Professor 160.181.188fn23  
 Rowellan, Lord 103fn33  
 Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) 180  
 Royal Life-Saving Society of the Commonwealth 254.255; Annual Asia-Pacific  
 Royal Life-Saving Society of Great Britain 253.254.260fns23.24.25  
 Royal Malay Regiment 169fn18.302  
 Roziah Munira bt Mansor (CDC) 237fn21.238fn23
- Sabah 184fn4.192.199.204fn10.212fns41.43.216.221.234fn3.239fn31.241  
 fn41.251.261fn33.271.304; Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka branch in, 261fn33;  
 [ribumi privileges of, 241fn41; State Government of, 250 fn33.271.304;  
 Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka branch in, 261fn33; [ribumi privileges of, 241  
 fn41; State  
 Sabah Foundation *see under* Yayasan Sabah  
 Sahabat Pena 98fn3  
 Saigon 240fn38  
 St. George's Secondary Girls School, Penang 309  
 St. John's Ambulance Brigade 103fn34.105fn45.118; Hamdan's award from,  
 104fn34  
 St. Paul's School, Seremban 98fn10  
 St. Xavier's School, Penang 15  
 Salinger, Rudin (Richard), Dato' Haji 196.198.199.200.208fns23.24.26;209  
 fns27.30;210fns32.34;218.211fn37.218.219.237fns21.22.238fns23.24.  
 25.26  
 Salleh bin Jabot, Haji 103fn30  
 Salleh bin Hussein, Dato' 82  
 Saman bin Shariff (historian) 252  
 Sambanthan, V.T. 47fn17  
 Sandakan, Sabah; vocational school at 216  
 Sands, Frank K 105fn43  
 Saran Singh Sekon (Exams Syndicate) 186fn15  
 Sarawak 47fn15.100fn18.192.204fn10.199.204fn10.211fn39.212fns41.43;216.  
 221.234fn3.239fn31;241fn41.261fn33;304; Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka  
 branch in, 261fn33; pribumi privileges of, 241fn41  
 Sardon bin Haji Jubir, Tun Dato' Haji (Penang Head of State) 120.304  
 Sarekat Islam 4  
 Saudara 10.16.17

Saudi Arabia 16.165

Saw Chu Tong (CDC) 238fn23

Sayong 25.45fn5

scholarships, American (USA), 157; Colombo Plan, 157; Commonwealth, 157; Egyptian, 157; European, 157; FMS, 35f.86f; federal minor, 182.183; Indonesian, 157; non-FMS (State), 35; Queen's, 32.35.128fn10.188fn25; Saudi Arabian 157; United Kingdom (UK), 157

School Health Programme 220.239fn29

School Histories Project 246

School Supplementary Feeding Programme 221.239fn30

School of Agriculture, Serdang *see under* College of Agriculture, Serdang

School of Mines, Perak 60.72fn21.24

School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), University of London 99fn10.169fn18

SCHOOLS: fully residential secondary - Alam Shah, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, 182.207fn23; Dato' Abdul Razak (SDAR) 116.129fn15.131fns19.20.134 fn29; Tengku Kurshiah, 198; Tuanku Abdul Rahman - *see under* separate heading Tun Fatimah, Johor Bahru, 129fn14; secondary - Abdullah Munshi, Penang 309; Kuala Besut, Terengganu, 227; secondary science - Bukit Mertajam, 229; Cheras, 211fn40; secondary technical - Alor Star, Ipoh, Johor Bahru, Malacca, Seremban, 236fn13

schools' broadcasts 221.230fn31; background of 239fn31

Science Centre, Kuala Lumpur, 198.199.209fns28.30;219

science secondary schools 212fn46

Scott, C.A., Lt-Col. 48fm25

Scottish Schools Inspectorate 200

Seberkas (political party) 242fn48

Second World War (1939-45) 28.36.41f.47fn16.100fn20.107.143.210fns34.37

Seinen Kunrensho *see under* Youth Leadership Training School, Ipoh

seishin ippai 57.68fn9.86.153fn2

Sekolah Gaya Pos 76f.326fn24.331

Sekolah Iskandar Shah, Parit 89 *passim*.101fns23.25.102fn29.104fn35.105fn46.110.132fn23.244.245.308; Old Boys' Association of, 308

sekolah pondok 3.11.22.fn28.252

Sekolah Rendah Jalan Residency, Penang 152

Sekolah Rendah Padang Tembak, Kuala Lumpur 151

Sekolah Rendah Sultanah Asmah, Alor Star 154fn18

Sekolah Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Ipoh (STAR) 115.117-25 *passim*.133fn27.149f.155.156.208fn23.244.245.308; Old Boys' Association of, 308.309

Sekolah Menengah Padang Tembak, Kuala Lumpur 151f

Selangor 246

Senegal 279

Senior Cambridge Examination 34.188fn25

Seremban 198

Seri Mutiara, official residence, Penang Head of State) 297.302.303-4.306.  
312.317

Shanghai 322

Sharimali, K.L., Dr. (Indian Minister of Education, 1960) 167fn10

Sharom Ahmat, Professor (Dy Vice-Chancellor, USM) 298.326fn24

SHEIKH MUHAMMAD TAHIR JALALUDDIN; family background of; 1 *passim*; early education 4f; student in Mecca, 5f; reluctance to return to Minangkabau, 6-7; marriage of, 7; as teacher, etc. in Kuala Kangsar, 8ff; as an astronomer, 6.7.8.19f; as Inspector of Religious Education, Johor, 9; as Principal, Madrasah Muhammad Thaib, 11f; visit to Minangkabau and imprisonment, 12-15; at Singapore, 1929, 15f; and his children's education, 23.25.33.34.41.45fn2.78; influence on Hamdan 15-16.56; last visit to the Middle East, 16; settles down in Kuala Kangsar, 16f.23; proposes a university for Perak, 17-18; last years of, 18f; death of, 19.20; works of, 19.20; and al-Imam, 10; and the Islamic Reform Movement, 7-8. 10.14.30.47fn17.48fn19.22.25.45fn2; and Malay nationalism, 18f; general, 81.320

Shen, Professor (USM) 267

Sheppard, Mubin, Tan Sri 248.259fns9.10

Shonan Jokyu Shihan Gakko *see under* Advanced Teachers' Institute, Singapore

Shonan Koa Kunrensho *see under* Officers' Training Institute, Singapore

Sibu, Sarawak, vocational school at, 216

Sieveking, G. deG. 132fn22

Sijil Pelajaran Malaya (SPM) 173.174.182.184fn5.186fn10.205fn14.215

Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia Vokesyenal (SPMV) 215.216

Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (SRP) 172.175.176.177.178.187fn17.205fn14.215.  
236fn9

Sinaga, Hulman, Dr. (USM lecturer) 276fn20.327fn24

Singapore 10.15.23.25.35.41.47fn15;57.58.63.64.78.80.99fn16.104fn38.105  
fn44.111.140.178.224.225.234.235fn4.240fn38.288.330; Naval Base, 42.50  
fn32; and the Japanese invasion,41 *passim*.50fns32.36;52; surrender of,  
102fn26

Singapore Institution 126fn1

Siti Aishah bt Hamdan 155.164.278.296

Siti Bidayah bt Haji Baharuddin 146.148.149.154fn18

Siti Khadijah bt Hamdan 150.151.155.164.296

Siti Mazenah, Datuk (Reistrar USM) 276fn18

SITI ZAINAB bte Haji Baharuddin, Toh Puan 124.136-154.155.165.244.290;  
birth,148; education of 148f; attends Normal Class 138-9; courtship and  
marriage 59. 136-8.147.153fn2; Supervisor of Primary (Malay) Schools,

139.146f; studying in England, 136ff.153fn2; Watford College, 140; Kirkby, 141-5 *passim*; teaching career, 149-52 *passim*; headmistress, 151-2; Organizer of Primary Schools, Selangor, 152; and the Penang home, 278f; and life in Paris, 284ff; and Hamdan's appointment as Penang Head of State, 295ff.301.324fn1; as Penang's First Lady, 303.304.306ff.317.321. 323; Hamdan's driver, 124.298.325fn1; as wife and helpmate, 149ff.244.278 f.325fn2

Sixth Form Entrance Examination 177.182.189fn27

Skinner, A.M. (Resident Councillor, Penang) 303.325fn12

Socio-Economic Research & General Planning Unit, PM's Department 272

Soemantri, H. (Sec-Gen. Indonesian Ministry of Education) 223

South Asia 159

South Korea 310

South-East Asia 70fn14.159.271.281.283.313; Islamic studies in 19

South-East Asia Research Centre for Agriculture (SEARCRA) 240fn38

South-East Asian Ministers Education Organization (SEAMEO) 224

South-East Asian Ministers' Engineering Centre (SEAMEC) 240fn38

Special Malay Class system 26f.28.45-6fn10.12.14

Special Project 195-9 *passim*.200.201.207fn20.209fns26.30;218.219.225.237 fns21.22

Specialist Teachers' Training Institute (STTI), Cheras 210fn32.253.254.255

Sputnik, impact of launching of 210fn35

Sri Andalas University, Padang, West Sumatra 320.328fn33

Sri Lanka 174.184fn6.185fn8

Standard Five Assessment Test 229g.241fn43f

Suguro, Hiroshi 59f.61.62.63.71fn20.166

Sukarno, Achmad, (first President of Indonesia) 168fn15

Sulaiman bin Haji Daud, Datuk Dr. (Minister of Education) 277fn21

Sulaiman bin Hamzah 81

Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Star 48fn19.134fn38.156.184fn4.211fn39. 242fn48

Sultan Azlan Shah of Perak (9th Yang DiPertuan Agong) 137.300.306

Sultan Idris Murshidul A'zam Shah I of Perak 8.9.45fn.154fn16

Sultan Ibrahim Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar of Johor 9

Sultan Idris Teachers' College (SITC), Tg Malim 99fn10.115.125.129fn14.153 fn4.188fn25.

Sultan Iskandar Shah of Perak 17.97

Sultan Ismail College, Kota Bharu 130fn17.207fn23

Sultan Mahmood Iskandar of Johor (8th Yang DiPertuan Agong) 300

Sultan Muzaffar Shah I of Perak 259fn10

Sultan Yusuf Sharifuddin Muzaffar Shah of Perak 45fn

Sultan Yussuff Izzuddin Shah of Perak 105fn46.121.134fn30

Sultan Yussuff School, Batu Gajah 99fn11.101fns23.26;136.148.306

Sumatra 1.2.6.7.11.14.25.55.168fn15.320

sumo wrestling 59.70fn14.71fn17

- Sutter, John O. (Asia Foundation rep.) 168fn13.169fn18  
 syari'ah law *see under* Islamic law  
 Syed Ahmad bin Mohd Zain 103fn33  
 Syed Mohamad Alhady 69fn12  
 Syed Muhammad al-Naguib al-Attas 163.166.169fn18  
 Syed Muhammad Rashid Redha 7  
 Syed Nasir bin Ismail (Director, DBP) 114.131fn20.173.206fn16.207fn17  
 Syed Salim 97fn1  
 Syed Shaidali, Capt. 92.93.101fn26.102fn27  
 Syed Sheh bin Syed Abdullah Shahbuddin, Tun (Penang Head of State) 304  
 Syed Sheikh bin Ahmad al-Hadi 10.11.98fn3  
 Syed Zahiruddin bin Syed Hassan 47fn17  
 Syonan 55
- Tagar Singh 64  
 Tahir bin Muhammad *see under* Sheikh Muhammad Tahir bin Jalaluddin  
 Tahiruddin bin Hamdan 278.296  
 Taipoh 166  
 Taiping 8.55.85.93.98fn4.102fn27.254  
 Taiwan 310  
 Tamura 62  
 Tan Cheng Lock, Dato' 132fn22  
 Tan Chiew Kang, Joseph 133fn26  
 Tan Ghim Keng (CPO, Penang) 298  
 Tan Siew Sin, Tun 176.239fn33  
 Tan Teik Keong (Exams Syndicate) 187fn17  
 Tan Teong Leong 123  
 Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore 16  
 Tanglin Kechil Malaya (Primary) School, Singapore 16.25.  
 Tanjung Bungah, Penang 256  
 Tanjung Malim 129fn14  
 Tanjong Rambutan 93  
 Tapah, Perak; Government English School at, 101fn23  
 teachers, recruitment of 222.240fn37  
 Teachers' Day 316  
 Teachers' Training College, Kuala Lumpur 207fn21  
 Teachers' Training College, Matang, Perak 153fn4.154fn16  
 Teachers' Training Institute, Glugor, Penang 224.263  
 Teachers' Training Institute (MESTI), Kuala Lumpur 238fn23  
 Teachers' Training Institute, Perak 58.59.60.62.70fn14  
 technical and trade schools 214-16 *passim*. 235fn5  
 technical and vocational education 234fn3; background of, 235fn5  
 Technical College, Kuala Lumpur 37.39f.57.79.198.214.235fn5.236fn14  
 Technical School, Jurong, Singapore 236fn13



- Technical (Training) School, Kuala Lumpur 216.219.235fn5 *see also under*  
    Treacher Technical School
- Technical Secondary School, Kuala Lumpur 236fn13
- Technical Teachers' College, Toronto, Canada 163
- Teeuw, A., Professor 181
- Teh Ewe Lin (Tan Sri) 298
- Teluk Anson (Intan), Perak 93.98fn4
- Teluk Bakong, Perak 132fn23.259fn10
- Temerloh, Pahang 166fn1
- Templer, Gerald, General Sir 131fn21.169fn18.248.253
- Tengku Bahriah School, Kuala Terengganu 211fn40
- Teoh Teik Lee, Dato' (LSSM founder) 253ff.260fn24.261fn27
- Terendak Camp, Malacca (former British army base) 240fn36
- Terengganu 246.252
- Textbook Bureau 218
- Thailand 52.224
- Thenenthiran, K.V. (Exams Syndicate) 186fn15
- Thirteenth of May Incident 225.226.241fn40
- Thong Kuo Sin 72fn23
- Thuraisingham, E.E.C., Dato' 131fn21.132fn22
- Toh Chin Chye 35.49fn26
- Tokoh Maal Hijrah 319
- Tokyo 166.231.314
- Tonga 208fn24
- Tongue (Australian Architect) 115.117
- Too Chee Chew (C.C.Too) 49fn26
- trade and technical schools 235fn5
- Treacher Technical School, Kuala Lumpur 235fn5
- Trinidad 276fn17
- Tronoh, Perak; Government English School at, 101fn23
- Tsang Ah Liat 49fn26
- Tuanku Abdul Rahman (first Yang DiPertuan Agong) 119.120.121
- Tuanku Ahmad Jalaluddin 3.
- Tuanku Bainun of Perak (Raja Permaisuri Agong) 153fn7.306
- Tuanku Changking *see under* Muhammad bin Ahmad Jalaluddin
- Tuanku Imam of Bonjol 2
- Tuanku Lareh Ampek Angkek 3
- Tuanku Muhammad *see under* Muhammad bin Ahmad Jalaluddin
- Tuanku nan Tuo 3.4
- Tuanku Same *see under* Tuanku Ahmad Jalaluddin
- Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj (PM) *see under* Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj
- Tunku Hussein bin Yahya 95
- Tunku Ismail bin Mat Jewa, Professor (USM) 276fn20

UMNO (United Malay National Organization) 21fn22;75.97fn1.98fn3.99fn10.  
114.224.242fn48.321

UNESCO 96.130fns16.18;152.159.167fns9.11;197.219.231.237fns20.21;238  
fn26.239.244.276fn21.278.279-92 *passim*; background, role and functions of,  
280ff.290fn2; *modus operandi* of, 280-4 *passim*. 292fns7.8.9;294fn19; Institute  
of Education, Cologne, of, 283; Malaysian Permanent representative at,  
130fns16.17; Malaysian contribution to, 281; cultural project for Malaysia,  
281.282.292fn9.293fns10.11; Regional Office for Primary Education, Bangkok,  
of, 283; role of State Permanent Representatives in, fn9.293fns10.12; Western  
attitudes towards, 279f.292fn5.6;

Ungku Mohsin bin Ungku Mohamad 69fn12

Ungku Omar Polytechnic, Ipoh 216

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) 238fn23;249

United Kingdom (UK) 200.210fns34.35;223.232.235fn6.250.280.292fn5

United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization *see under*  
UNESCO

United Nations Narcotics Bureau, Geneva 266.276fn17

United States of America (USA) 160.161.168fn13.185fn8.210fn35.223.249.  
280.292fn5

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 160.161.168fn18.237fn21.240fn35;  
249.265

Universiti Putra Malaysia *see under* University of Agriculture, Serdang

UNIVERSITIES: Agriculture, Serdang, 311 - Tun Dr Ismail College of, 312; al-  
Azhar, Cairo, 231; Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 181; Bath, England, 275fn16;  
Cairo, 231; California, Berkeley, San Francisco, USA, 161.168fn16.208fn24;  
Cambridge, England, 10fn37.32.37.184fn6.210fn37; Chicago, USA, 264;  
Colombia, USA, 161; Deakin, 312.325fn24; East Asia, Macao, China, 321;  
Foreign Studies, Beijing, 322; Harvard, Conn., USA, 160.162; Hong Kong, 37;  
Hull, England, 211fn40; Illinois, USA 208fn24 - De Kalb Campus of,  
162.168fn17; Kobe, Japan, 59; Leiden, the Netherlands, 181.188fn23; London,  
England, 98fn3.99fn16.184fn6. 188fn25.210fn37.211fn40.275fn16; Manitoba,  
Winnipeg, Canada, 320.321.328fn36; McGill, Montreal, Canada, 163.166.169  
fn18; Michigan, USA, 70fn16; Minnesota, USA 161; North-west, Chicago,  
USA, 211fn39; Nottingham, 86.87.93.99fn16; Ohio State, USA, 208fn24;  
Oxford, England, 32; Minnesota, USA, 161; Penang, 263; Princeton, USA,  
167.187fn18.264; Science Malaysia (USM), Penang *see below*; Queensland,  
Australia, 207fn23; Reading, England, 134fn38; Singapore, 235fn4 - Faculty of  
Education of, 177; Sri Andalas, Padang Panjang, Sumatra, 320.328fn33;  
Stanford, California, USA, 161; Technology, Kuala Lumpur, 215.216.217.236  
fn14; Utrecht, the Netherlands, 181; Waseda, Tokyo, 70fn16; Technology, Kuala  
Lumpur *see below*; Tokyo, 59.73fn25; Wesleyan, Conn., USA, 208fn24 *see*  
*below*;

University of Malaya, 191.207fn21.234.261fn31.263.265.312.325fn5; Dept. of Engineering at, 234; Dept. of Malay Studies 160.181; award of doctorate to Hamdan, 312.325fn5

University of Malaya in Singapore 7.84-5.96.99fns10.16;107-10 *passim*.114.130 fns17.184fns4.6;188fn25.234; Faculty of Engineering at, 234

UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE MALAYSIA (USM), Penang 19.102fn27.130fn18.135fn38.152.244.251.262-77.278.296.315.325fn2.326fn24; Applied Sciences Centre of, 266.296; Bahasa Malaysia Implementation Committee of, 269; Centre for Drug and Pharmaceutical Research of, 266.270f; Kubang Kerian Campus of, 265.296; Off-Campus Studies Programme of, 266; School of Educational Studies of, 264.272.276fn20; School of Medical Science of, 265; Teaching and Learning Advisory Unit of, 266.274; Tronoh Campus of, 296; award of doctorate to Hamdan, 272.312

Universities Act, 1971 267.268

USAID Fund, Washington, DC. 224f.240fn38

Usman Awang poem cited 334

Utam Singh 90.101fn25

Vancouver 166

Victorial Institution, Kuala Lumpur 207fn23.211fn39

Vision 2020' *see under* National Vision Policy

Voluntary Service Organization (VSO.UK) 223

Wahabi Movement 2.20,fn4

Wahidullah Khan (CDC) 201.238fn23

Wales 144

Wan Abdul Hamid bin Mohd Saleh 69fn12

Wan Hassan bin Haji Wan Teh 83.84

Wan Hua (Hamdan's interpreter at UNESCO, Paris) 286

Wan Mahmood, Dato' Paduka (Selangor State Official) 231

Wan Razali, Dato' (District Chief, KK) 78.80

Wan Zaid bin Nordin, Tan Sri Dr (DG, Education) 204fn6

Wang Gung-wu 132fn22

Wantman, Morey J, Professor 177.178

Warmambool, Geelong, Victoria 313

Washington, DC., USA 161.225

Watanabe, Wataru, Col. 69fn9

Watford Teachers' Training College, England

Watherston, D.C. 81.98fn9

Wang Yoon Nien 135fn44

West Africa 232

Wheatley, Paul, Professor 168fn16

Wilkinson, R.J. 247

- Winnipeg, Canada 166.320  
 Winstedt, R.O. 247  
 Women Teachers' Training College, Malacca 140  
 Wong Poh Kam (lecturer, USM) 327fn24  
 Wong Pow Nee (Dato' Seri (one-time Chief Minister, Penang) 162  
 Wood Badge Course, Gillwell Park, Chingford 87.88.89  
 Works, K.L. of.  
 World Bank 219.238fn26  
 World Health Organization (WHO) 110.266.270.271.275fn17  
 World Youth Council of Malaya 97  
  
 Xiamen 322  
  
 Yaacob bin Abdul Latiff, Tan Sri (Malaysian Ambassador to Egypt) 231  
 Yahya Ariff 76.98fn5  
 Yamashita, General 52  
 Yang Shangkun (President of China) 321  
 Yayasan Sabah 250.251.276fn20  
 Yokohama, Japan 314  
 Youth Leadership Training School, Ipoh 60.72fn24  
 Yuen Yuet Leng, Dato' Seri (CPO, Perak) 72fn23.153fn2.  
 Yuk Choy Primary School, Ipoh 153fn2  
 Yuk Choy Secondary School, Ipoh 62  
 Yusof, Haji (postmaster, KK) 77  
 Yusuf, C.M. 97fn1  
  
 Zaharah Za'ba 239fn31  
 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba) 81.98fn10.132fn22.239fn31  
 Zainal Abidin bin Endut 97fn1  
 Zainal Abidin bin Ismail 58  
 Zainal Abidin bin Mat Asin, Haji 102fn29.103fn33  
 Zainal Abidin bin Sutan Maidin 77.98fn3  
 Zainal Abidin bin Wahid, Professor (UKM) 169fn17.248.259fn10  
 Zainal Alam bin Zainal Abidin 98fn3  
 Zakaria bin Salim, Dato' Dr 110.127fn6  
 Ziang Jemin (President of China) 321