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TENSION FACED BY THE SULTAN OF PAHANG DURING THE PAHANG UPRISING (1891-1895)

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ABSTRACT

Pahang faced British colonisation era at the end of the 19th century under the ruling of Sultan Ahmad. A new system was brought in by the British through their first Resident in 1988; and this has caused tension and disturbances especially to the Sultan. This article looks at and discusses the tension and problems faced by not only Sultan Ahmad but his chieftains and commoners. Amongst the disturbances are: the allowance issue, establishment of the police force and council, slavery issue, and appointment of Tengku Mahmud as the crown prince. Sultan Ahmad was frustrated with the intervention from the British which resulted in him seeking solace to Pulau Tawar. The tension that resulted from these issues was later seen contributing to the Pahang Uprising.

Key words: Sultan Ahmad, Malaya and Pahang History, British, Pahang Uprising.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sultan Ahmad was the supreme ruler in the state of Pahang who administered the state in a traditional manner. He was assisted by trust worthy and accountable Malay chieftains; and the state of Pahang has mass reserve in natural produce and at that time was a subject of envy amongst other Malaysian states including the British. This made the British worked very hard to conquer and colonise Pahang and at the same time, siphon the state's wealth [1]. The British succeeded in their endeavour when they appointed J. P. Rodger as the first British Resident and this marked the start of many changes in Pahang. The British brought in many changes in introducing a new system to Pahang [2]. The changes brought tension to the people especially the Sultan himself. The tension faced by the Sultan is one of the leading factors contributing to the Pahang Uprising (1891-1895). This article focuses on the pressures faced by Sultan Ahmad before the Pahang Uprising [3].

2. SULTAN AHMAD AL-MUAZZAM SHAH IBNI AL MARHUM BENDAHARA ALI

Bendahara Wan Ahmad was officially appointed as the ruler of Pahang by the Orang-orang Besar Pahang. He was the first Pahang Sultan from the descendants of viziers or treasurers who used the title "Sultan" within the classical Malay kingdoms administration; which was in the past under the ruling of Raja Bendahara Pahang. This started with the death of Bendahara Tun Ali who was replaced by Tun Mutahir in 1857 and Tun Mutahir ruled Pahang until 1863. Under the ruling of Tun Mutahir, the country witnessed a civil war between Tun Mutahir and Tun Ahmad. The civil war lasted for a long time and hampered prosperity and opportunities in strengthening the development in the state of Pahang [4][5]. The dispute between Tun Mutahir and Tun Ahmad was won by Tun Ahmad. Tun Ahmad was later crowned as the ruler of Pahang; carrying the title Bendahara Ahmad in 1863 and he was proclaimed as Sultan Ahmad on the 6th of August 1882. The installation of Tun Ahmad as Sultan Ahmad al-Muazzam Shah Ibni al Marhum Bendahara Ali took place on the 12th of December 1884 [6][7].

3. THE PAHANG UPRISING

The Pahang Uprising happened between 1891 and 1895. It is an important event seen as the people's reaction which was not expected to happen during the initial stage of British colonisation. Early literature related negativity towards the freedom fighters who fought out of their dissatisfaction on issues such as allowances for chieftains and stripping of ranks from certain individuals. These are some of the reasons which contributed to the uprising [8][9].

The British did not expect the possibility for the rebellion to happen and it has cost them greatly especially in the conscription of the police force established in Pahang and nearby states. On the other hand, the riot in Pahang was led by Dato' Bahaman who was at that time, the district superintendent of Semantan. Dato' Bahaman has a pretty impressive background and he was endowed with characteristics respected by friends and foes; and this enabled him to step forward [10][11].

British invasion into Pahang using a variety of tactics and strategies had brought a new dimension not only to the state administrative system but also to the lives of local people in general. The traditional way of living of the Pahang people where they were comfortable and complacent in upholding a king began to destabilise with the invasion. The locals got more confused as new systems and legislations were introduced in the state. The appointment of the first British Resident in 1888 added to their confusion and in the opinion of the authors; it has brought a disaster unexpected at all by the British. The uprising or people's revolution through combined forces to fight against the British has prevailed peace between the year

1891 and 1895. The British labelled Bahaman and his troops as terrorists and claimed that they were deliberately causing chaos in the state. But to Bahaman's and his followers' point of view, they were protesting openly towards the colonists who were purposely interfering in the affairs of their daily lives [12][13].

The British, in response to the complaints and dissatisfaction voiced out by the state dignitaries specifically Dato' Bahaman himself; started to arrange for new and better improvement in their offer and administration for the dignitaries and local people. They suggested a raise in living allowance from \$72 a month to \$500 a month but Bahaman refused to accept this offer as the claims from the other chieftains were not being revised fairly by the British. Apart from his own interest, Bahaman put the welfare of the other chieftains as a priority. Even though the negotiations failed, Bahaman asked the other dignitaries to be patient in order to protect the interests and security of the people. Because the British had yet to settle the claims from Bahaman and the other Pahang dignitaries, Bahaman still continued to collect taxes and allowed his followers to do so to finance their jobs and their responsibilities [14]. The British had repeatedly prohibited Bahaman to collect the taxes. Bahaman was determined and very hopeful that his homeland could not be manipulated by the colonists. J. P Rodger was aware of this situation and asked Tengku Mahmud to dismiss Bahaman after failing to influence Sultan Ahmad to do so, as the Sultan loved and looked upon Bahaman [15][16].

Dato' Bahaman's actions actually showed his protest against British administration. He continued opposing the colonists by implementing illegal tax to the boats along the Semantan River. His actions were never complaint by the local people as they were used to the situation. The British could not accept Bahaman's actions and they felt that he was purposely disobeying their orders [17].

Pahang Annual Report later stated in December 1890 that Bahaman wrote to the Temerloh Magistrate Mr. Wise saying that he disagreed with the British plan of building a police station in Lubuk Terua. The letter also stated that the Pahang people had betrayed their own country except himself. In addition, in the view of the authors, Dato' Bahaman also wrote to the Resident of Selangor, W. E. Maxwell demanding for some claims as a sign of his continuous protest against the colonists. Amongst his demands were asking for his district to merge with Selangor, raising his allowance, and for the dignitaries to be highly paid. The demands according to the authors, was not made only based on his interest but as he was also fighting for the rights of other dignitaries [18][19].

Thus, when the British failed to reach an agreement with the Sultan, the Sultan instructed Bahaman to go to Pekan to be judged by Tengku Mahmud and the acting Resident; but Bahaman did not show up because he claimed that he did not write the letter. Then in February 1891, Datuk Maharaja Perba Jelai was commanded by the Sultan to bring in Orang Kaya Bahaman to Pulau Tawar for a meeting but when Tok Raja reached Semantan, Bahaman has gone to Kelantan. Upon his return to Semantan, he was met by Mr. Owen the British Collector and the Temerloh Magistrate [20] [21]. Bahaman openly explained that he refused to support the government under the British administration if he was not given a living allowance of \$6000 yearly and he will influence and instruct his followers to go against the colonists as well [22][23].

In a state meeting in October 1891, Bahaman's actions and behaviours became the main topic of discussion. It was debated seriously by all members of the council. Bahaman was seen stopping his followers to be surveyed in a census in the year 1891. Datuk Bahaman's sedition over his followers continuously defied the orders and new laws introduced by the British. His refusal to cooperate with the British was one of the reasons for the British to suggest him to be stripped off his power by the sultan. Therefore, on the 18th of October

1891, the British issued a decree for the title Orang Kaya Setia Perkasa Pahlawan Semantan to be stripped off Datuk Bahaman. This marked the end of his position and role as the leader of Semantan [24]. This was the first time such event has occurred where a leader who is someone chosen by the sultan himself, was being stripped of his position. This event has also caused a chaotic situation in Pahang especially in Semantan. This chaos was not only amongst the chieftains but the society as a whole. Bahaman's dismissal allowed the British to fine him as he was no longer protected by the power of the Sultan. An order was issued by the government to recover the royal stamp of authority which certifies Bahaman as the Orang Kaya Semantan [25][26].

Sultan Ahmad and Tengku Mahmud both supported the idea of dismissing Dato' Bahaman as recommended by the British. This situation portrayed cooperation between the British and Sultan Ahmad. However, the Sultan has his own reasons to why he should agree with what was suggested by the British. In the Sultan's opinion, Bahaman was the only person who could go against the British. He was very confident of Bahaman's personal capabilities as he knew Bahaman since small. Bahaman's dismissal was also to gain back the Sultan's power which had fallen into the hands of the colonists. The Sultan opined that power could only be restored through armed resistance. With Bahaman's dismissal, this meant he could openly attack the British and announce the armed resistance when the British started to detain his people [27]. When conditions worsen, a battle called the "Barat" (which means West) started as a sign of rebellion. The rebellion caused a lot of grievance and loss on both sides. The rebellion took place in two series: the first and second rebellion [28][29].

4. THE TENSION FELT BY SULTAN AHMAD BEFORE THE PAHANG UPRISING

The appointment of J. P. Rodger as the British Resident in 1888 marked the end of Sultan Ahmad's sovereignty as political power shifted from the sultan to the British Government. Whatever the British intentions especially in protecting their interest and investments; offended the people of Pahang greatly. This was clearly witnessed in the appointment of Rodger which was seen as a complete intervention into Pahang administration by the colonists [30][31]. It also marked the beginning of a new system as opposed to the existing Pahang traditions. This situation clearly sparked anger amongst the people of Pahang who were very strict in their adherence to traditional practices [32][33].

It was certainly true that with the arrival of the British colonists who offered good relations and loyalty, has caused social and political unrest in the state of Pahang. The transition of power happened gradually between the year 1888 and 1895. The whole of Pahang was in a transitional state to accept the new ruling which was to replace the long practised traditional administration. Of course, the changes resulted in dissatisfaction amongst the people especially the local chieftains and the Sultan himself. There was confusion to whether the locals should obey the sultan and dignitaries; or the new administration, as well as whether to abide by the new rules and regulations set by the British. The new rules and system drew mixed reactions amongst the local people and lastly, evoked a rebellion at the end of the 19th century [34].

The many changes introduced by the British sparked hatred towards the colonists. Examples of the changes were the establishment of courts, police force, state council, departments and introduction of new laws. The sultan was personally affected by his loss of power. So were the dignitaries, who were also affected as they traditionally had privileges and wealth. The local people were also affected by the prolonged injustice. The arrival of the British, although accepted by a minority of people (a few oppressed dignitaries under the

sultan's ruling and people) was rejected because the love towards the traditional ways of the Malay living was embedded deeply especially in the hearts of the Malay people [35].

Additionally, the allowance issue was something very sensitive and affected the local chieftains and Sultan tremendously. It was the most critical issue that sparked anger amongst the chieftains. Sultan Ahmad and his chieftains were not happy with the allowances given and arranged by the British. This is because the amounts were less than what they used to receive under previous ruling [36].

Sultan Ahmad was amongst the first to oppose to the new rule and he was furious about the allowance issue. This is because his allowance was equally reduced and suddenly he only received a total of \$ 1500. He expressed his opinion by requesting the allowance to be increased by \$ 2,000 a month on the grounds that he has a lot of dependents and the wage he was receiving was insufficient. Sultan Ahmad's request was entertained by the British because they were worried that he will influence the people under him who were also paid poorly. This situation, more or less has lessened Sultan Ahmad's anger against the British [37].

The dissatisfaction towards the British did not stop at the issue of allowances. The British then elected Sultan Ahmad's son, Tengku Mahmud as the crown prince of Pahang. Tengku Mahmud was seen as a capable and energetic candidate to carry out the mission and vision of the British in Pahang [38]. The appointment has actually shown that Sultan Ahmad was losing his power and influence as the supreme ruler of Pahang. The situation made Sultan Ahmad very sad especially when he had very loyal followers under him. The appointment of Tengku Mahmud also caused Sultan Ahmad to shift to Pulau Tawar [39][40]. The Malays' loyalty to traditions was something that the British could not anticipate. The authors concluded that it was in Pulau Tawar the opposition strategized their fight against the colonists and finally, the Pahang Uprising which was led by Bahaman took place at the end of the 19th century [41][42].

The British later divided Pahang into six districts namely Pekan, Kuala Pahang, Kuantan, Rompin, Temerloh and Hulu Pahang. In each district, a European collector was appointed replacing the Malay traditional chieftains. Aruna wrote that there were only two local chieftains who supported and agreed with the appointment of the European collectors under the British administration [43][44]. They were Dato' Maharaja Perba from Jelai and Wan Chad, where else the rest did not give any cooperation as they felt that their traditional lives were threatened and being destroyed by the British. Haji Wan Daud in Lipis was shot dead when he showed his anger towards the British who took his land. This was a clear sign of the rebel against the colonists amongst the chieftains who were dissatisfied with the British administration. Haji Daud's death caused sorrow to His Majesty Sultan Ahmad because the Sultan was indebted to Haji Wan Daud who once led the civil war between the Sultan and Tun Mutahir [45][46][47][48].

The establishment of the state council has curbed and controlled all individual powers including the Sultan's privileges. This situation aggravated hatred and anger felt by the Sultan and his chieftains. The state council was represented by Sultan Ahmad, Dato' Bandar, Dato' Raja, Orang Kaya Chenor, Tengku Mahmud, Raja Muda and Imam Perang Indera Mahkota; while the Resident was only an ex-officio. The composition of the state council showed that the Pahang chieftains were being side lined. In addition to the mounting anger felt by the people of Pahang; is the fact that even though the Resident was only an ex-officio, he had more powers than the sultan [49].

Slavery issue and forced labour which were passed in the state council meeting ignited anger and inconveniences for Sultan Ahmad and the Pahang chieftains. They felt threatened with the new laws concerning slavery and labour as these two issues were important sources

of wealth for them in the traditional government. This also confirmed that the power and privileges that they had all this while in politics and economy were being snatched away with the British invasion. The Sultan's position was considered as a British puppet as the Resident was closer and trusted Tengku Mahmud and the crown prince more. The Sultan was also forbidden to have any slave, which having one is a status of being wealthy at that time. He was also instructed to reduce the taxes imposed by him. In addition, the Sultan and his dignitaries were unhappy with the ways taxes were collected by the appointed British collectors [50]. The authors viewed the Sultan as not being able to avoid these situations as the situations were effects or impacts he had to face in protecting his position as the ruler of Pahang before this.

Sultan Ahmad became more depressed when his authority in the field of defence was taken away. This is due to the establishment of an organized police force and involving 50 Sikhs and 150 Malays. The British had appointed Sikh men as police in Pahang because they claimed the Malays were too bounded by the Malay tradition [51]. The reason could not be accepted and has angered Sultan Ahmad and also the people of Pahang. In the view of the authors, the British did not trust nor believe the Malay people. To the British, being bounded by tradition meant that the Malays will be more obedient to the Sultan as the head and their chieftains compared to the British even though they were with the police force. The British's distrust towards the Malays caused the Malays not to be appointed as police in their own country. At the same time, the establishment of the police force consisting of the Sikhs was also not favoured by Sultan Ahmad because according to him they behaved rudely and could not speak Malay [52]. His worry on the issue of Sikhs representing the police force was very apparent as he was confident that the Sikhs were more loyal to the British. Similarly, his position as a chief judge was also threatened by the new police force because everything will be reported and judged by the police with the establishment.

Sultan Ahmad became more unhappy and hurt with the British and their actions. Furthermore, he has lost his position in the Supreme Council which was established in 1888; where new members were now chosen by the British. He was angry and decided to shift to Pulau Tawar and resided there in December 1889 [53]. This was considered by the British as a passive resistance from Sultan Ahmad, and it portrayed him as still being reluctant to give full cooperation to the new British administration. It was also difficult for the British and burdened the new administration; as they had to commute to Pulau Tawar for the purpose of managing and obtaining the Sultan's consent on certain state matters [54].

The British should be concerned of Sultan Ahmad's move to Pulau Tawar. Although it was beyond their expectation, the increasing dissatisfaction amongst the chieftains on issues such as giving allowances, loss of power and privileges, as well as Sultan Ahmad's being angry and stressed as his position was being threatened; Pulau Tawar certainly is a suitable fortress to plan a rebellion. Nevertheless, the British could not confirm Sultan Ahmad's involvement unless the rebellion really took place [55].

The author concludes that the failure to foresee Sultan Ahmad and his followers' plans was the weakness of the new administration in the anticipation of the possibility of resistance against colonisation. This is because the location of Pulau Tawar being far from Pekan and Kuala Lipis made it a strategic place to plan many strategies in the rebellion against the British. Sultan Ahmad's shift to Pulau Tawar was a sign of the return of a leader to his people. There, he could complain and voice out his opinions and feelings to his followers openly. He was also guarded and protected by his own people at Pulau Tawar. Despite being undetected by the British, the Pahang Uprising actually took place at the end of the 19th century [56][57].

4. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, Sultan Ahmad went through various pressures that contributed to the occurrence of the rebellion in Pahang between the year 1891 and 1895. The existence of the British colonists has complicated His Majesty's life and the complacent dignitaries. The privileges and powers of the local dignitaries were threatened with the introduction of the new system in the state of Pahang. The changes which took place gave stress and tension to the Sultan which resulted in hatred and rejection towards the British by the local people. Sultan Ahmad's influence as the traditional leader did not decrease even with the new laws introduced by the British. The evidence of his influence could be seen in the undivided loyalty and obedience of the Pahang people, and this was also the proof of the people's hatred and opposition against British colonisation.

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