

Call of the Azhar: The Malay Students Sojourn in Cairo Before World War II

By

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Who or when the first Malay set foot on Egyptian soil is difficult to ascertain because the existing information does not shed much light on it. The Malay literary work *Hikayat Hang Tuah* claimed that in a mission to Rum, the legendary Malay hero Hang Tuah, stopped in Egypt and stayed there for three months as a guest of its grand vizier.¹ Reports by Venetian sources, however, showed that there was an active Achehnese trading activities in Cairo, at least until the middle of the sixteenth century.² Egyptians, on the other hand, had been in contact with the Malay World since pre-Islamic times and available

1. See Kassim Ahmad (annotated with new introduction), *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993, pp. 541-546.

2. C.R. Boxer, "A Note on Portuguese Reactions to the Revival of the Red Sea Spice Trade and the Rise of Atjeh, 1540-1600", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. X, No. 3, December 1969, p. 419.

historical evidence shows that their traders extended their activities with the Indians to the Malay Peninsular and beyond to China.³

Following the demise of Arab trade and the triumph of the Western maritime powers, Egyptian traders ceased their operations in the Eastern trade and also their relation with the Malay World. Renewed contact between them only emerged again in the closing years of the nineteenth century when Malay students began to visit Cairo to complement their religious knowledge after completing their earlier education in Makkah.

The emergence of Cairo as a significant intellectual destination for the Malays was related to the importance of the University of al-Azhar as *Manar al-Ilm* and *Ka'bat al-Ilm*.⁴ The university which was part of the al-Azhar Mosque, was noted by Hurgronje as "the Athens of Shafi'i learning", and was highly regarded as a prestigious academic religious institution by Muslims at large, including the Malays.⁵ Despite its long prominence, it is only known to have

3 See Arnold Wright & Thomas H. Reid, *The Malay Peninsula. A Record of British Progress in the Middle East*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1912, p. 12; H.G. Quaritch Wales, "The Sabaens and Possible Egyptian Influences in Indonesia", *JMBRAS*, Vol. XXIII, Part III, 1950, pp. 36-37.

4. Mona Abaza, "Some Research Notes on Living Conditions and Perceptions Among Indonesian Students in Cairo", *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, September 1991, p. 355.

5. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, Leiden, E.J. Brill 1970, p. 185. There are a number of writings published in Malay journals which show high Malay regard for the University of al-Azhar, which was established in 361AH/972AD. For example, see "Al-Azhar. Tempat Pelajaran yang Terlebih Tua Dalam Dunia", *Dunia Melayu*, 20 December 1928, p. 15; *Persahabatan*, Vol. 1, No. 15, 23 November 1936, p. 14 (the speech given by Haji Abu Bakar Ashaari during the open day celebration of Madrasah al-Huda al-Diniyan al-Islamiyah, Penang). See also Muhammad Labib Ahmad, "Al-Azhar Dulu dan Sekarang", *Majalah Dian*, No. 106, February 1978, pp. 100-114. The changing trends at the university from conservative to modernist were closely monitored and reported by the journal *al-Ikhwān* ("Parlimen Mesir dan al-Azhar", Vol. 1, No. 2, 16 October 1926, pp. 13-14; "Mesir Di Antara Tua dan Kaum Muda. Perubahan Dalam al-Azhar", Vol. 1, No. 7, 16 March 1927, pp. 137-138; "Perubahan Dalam al-Azhar", Vol. 1, No. 7, 16 March 1927, pp. 137-138; "Perubahan Dalam al-Azhar Dari Kaum Tua Kepada Haluan Muda", Vol. 3, No. 5, 16 January 1929, pp. 156-157; "Pelajaran Agama di Mesir".

received its first Malay student, Shaykh Wan Ahmad bin Muhammad Zain al-Fatani, in the early 1870s⁶. Later on, it was through his personal encouragement that the university began to attract an increasing number of Malay students, particularly those who had studied in Makkah, to proceed with their studies in Cairo⁷. The most famous among these early Makkan-educated Malays to study there was Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin⁸.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, when al-Azhar was still not a popular intellectual destination for Malays as compared to Hijaz, it was its pioneering Malay students who played the main role in encouraging parents to send their sons to further their studies in Cairo. These students wrote to *Neracha* extolling the advantages of continuing their education in Egypt and tried to allay fears for their safety while studying there⁹. A notable role in encouraging Malay students to study in Egypt was also played by individuals, such as Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Affendi al-Suhaimi, a close associate of Shaykh Rifaah al-Tahtawi al-

Vol. 2, No. 7, 16 March 1929, pp. 217-218. (Accompanying the article was a picture of the committee which revived the education at the university). For the history and development of the institution, see J. Jomier, "al-Azhar", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (New Ed.) Vol. 1, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1960, pp. 813-821; Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning*, Washington D.C., The Middle East Institute, 1961, A.S. *Azhar and Politics*, Kuala Lumpur, Al-Rahmaniah, 1988, pp. 7-74; Jorg Kraemer, "Tradition and Reform at Al-Azhar University", in Benjamin Rivlin and Joseph S. Szyliowics (eds.), *The Contemporary Middle East. Tradition and Innovation*, New York, Random House, 1965, pp. 338-344; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, "The Beginnings of Modernization Among the Rectors of al-Azhar, 1798-1879", in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East. The Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 267-280.

6. Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Fatawa Tentang Binatang Hidup Dua Alam Syeikh Ahmad AL-Fatani*, Kuala Lumpur, Penerbitan Hizbi, 1990, p. 36.

7. The major trend among Malay students to go first to Makkah and then proceed to Cairo to continue their studies persisted until in the 1920s. For example, in September 1924 it was reported that eleven Malay students at al-Azhar. See *Pengasoh*, Vol. 7, No. 159, 27 November 1924, p. 13.

8. Wan Mohd. Saghir Abdullah, *Al'Allamah Syeikh Ahmad al-Fathani. Ahli Fikir dan Dunia Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur, Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1992, p. 19 [footnote 12 (3)].

9. See for example *Neracha*, Vol. 2, No. 44, 31 July 1921, p. 2; *Neracha*, Vol. 3, No. 63, 11 December 1912, p. 4.

Jawhari, Principal of al-Azhar University. For instance, in October 1924, he traveled to Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies to explain the advantages of pursuing higher education at al-Azhar to the general Malay public, and gave recommendations for those students who wished to further their studies there.¹⁰

It was only after World War 1 that Egypt managed to attract an increasing number of Malay students to further their education at al-Azhar University, particularly in the early 1920s. This was attributed to by the rise in incomes resulting from the boom in rubber prices which enabled more parents to send their sons to further their studies in Cairo¹¹. Even though most of the Malay students who went to Cairo studied at al-Azhar University and the education given there was free of charge, it was also necessary for them to acquire additional lessons given elsewhere to complement their knowledge. The lessons given in these private institutions were charged with fees ranging from the cheapest, at \$60 with only books provided, to \$500 with all inclusive; food, lodging and books¹². Apart from these expenses and an estimated allowances of about \$500 as living expenses while in Cairo, some \$300 in addition was also needed for travelling costs. Since a relatively sound financial backing was needed to support a student at al-Azhar, only well to-do or well-connected families could afford this kind of education for their sons.¹³

Apart from economic reasons, there were certain other factors which explained why these years also saw more Malay students deciding to study at al-Azhar University. The major contributing factor was the tendency of those who had completed their studies related to the *madrrasah* system of education in Malaya to continue their studies in Cairo, rather than in Makkah, where the latter educational system was better adapted to the teaching method used at the *surrahs* and mosques.¹⁴

10. See *Pengasah*, Vol. 7, No. 159, November 1924, pp. 7-8.

11. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, Kuala Lumpur, Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 1980, p. 88.

12. See *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 3, No. 29, February 1928, p. 578.

13. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p.88.

14. Nik Abdul Aziz, "Approaches to Islamic Religious Teaching in the State of Kelantan Between 1860 and 1940", *SARI*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1983, p. 94.

The opening of more *madrasahs* throughout the Malay Peninsular in the early twentieth century further enhanced this trend, as in the case of Kelantan, where there was a noticeable increase in the number of students continuing their studies in Cairo following the establishment of Madrasah Muhammadi at Kota Bharu in 1917.¹⁵ Similarly in Penang, a comparatively greater number of students pursuing their studies in Cairo occurred only after the establishment of Madrasah al-Masriyyah in 1906 and Madrasah al-Mashhor al-Islamiyyah in 1919.¹⁶

The availability of convenient transportation was also a contributing factor which enabled Malay students to proceed to Cairo. Egypt was located on an important shipping route for steamships plying between East and West through the Suez Canal. This, further heightened during the boom years, and facili-

15. *Pengasoh* on 8 October 1925 reported that four students from Kelantan, Haji Ahmad Awang, Mustafa Chik Tengah, Nik Jaafar Nik wan and Wan Adam Haji Wan Abdullah were furthering their studies at the Univeristy of al-Azhar. Mustafa Cik Tengah however, died a few months after arriving in Cairo. In the following year (see *Pengasoh*, Vol. 9, No. 204, 22 September 1926) it was reported that Dato' Perdana Menteri was sending his second son, Nik Mustafa Fadhil to Cairo, together with the son of the Qadi of the Shariah Court in Kota Bharu, Wan Yusoff Haji Wan Hussein, to further their religious studies there. Both of them left for Cairo on 14 September 1926.

16. The exact number of students from these schools who went to further their studies in Egypt is difficult to trace. Among the early batch of students from Madrasah al-Masriyyah who went to further their education at al-Azhar were Shaykh Junid Tola, Hussein Said and Mohd. Zain Noh who went there in 1922. Meanwhile, it appears that a substantial number of students from Madrasah al-Mashhor only went to further their studies there in the middle of the 1920s. For example, it was reported that on 13 December 1925 twenty seven students had arrived in Cairo, of whom four were from the al-Mashhor (see *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 17). One of these students was Haji Abu Bakar Ashaari (see Prof Dr. Harun Din, "Syeikh Abu Bakar Al-Ashaari: Ulama Tegas Dan Berani", in Abdul Rahman haji Abdullah, *Gerakan Islah Di Perlis. Sejarah Pemikiran*, Kuala Lumpur, Penerbitan Pena Sdn Bhd., 1989, p. 101; *Arrajaa*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1 August 1928, pp. 13-14). Another early student from the al-Mashhor who went to Egypt was Abdul Wahab Abdullah from Chemor, Perak. While in Egypt Abdul Wahab's early studies was financed by Mustafa al-Halabi, the proprietor of a well-known printing press there. Abdul Wahab was the first Malay student to pass in the diploma Veterinary Science in Egypt (see *Al-Ikhwan*, Vol. 3, No. 12, 16 August 1929, pp. 385-386; *Semangat Islam*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1 November 1929).

tated travel from there to Malaya and vice versa. The sudden surge in the number of Malay students furthering their studies in Cairo was also partly due to the uncertainties which developed in Makkah following the capture of the Holy City by Ibn Sa'ud in October 1924 and the dominating role of the Wahhabis.¹⁷

The significant increase in the number of parents sending their sons to further their studies in Egypt was most evident from the middle of the 1920s. According to Roff, (quoting his information from Othman Abdullah, a contemporary Malay student who was then in Cairo), in 1925 alone there were no fewer than twenty seven Malay students from British Malaya taking up residence in Cairo, bringing their number there to about eighty. In the same year it was also quoted that there were some two hundred or so students who came from the Netherlands East Indies who studied at al-Azhar.¹⁸ The number of Malay students in Cairo, however, fluctuated from one year to another and in 1930 their number was reported as about 120.¹⁹

17. It is difficult to determine a comparative figure of the number of students who went to further their studies in Egypt before and after the takeover of the Holy City by Ibn Sa'ud. According to one source, in the early 1920s there were only 629 non-Egyptian students studying at al-Azhar, of whom only seven were recorded as being categorised as Javanese, compared to its student population of 9,757. See S.A. Morrison, "El Azhar Today and Tomorrow", *The Moslem World*, Vol. XVI, 1926, p. 137. This figure seems rather unreliable since existing accounts shows that the number was much higher. Roff put their number in 1919 as fifty or sixty Indonesians with an additional twenty from Malaya and Southern Thailand. See William R. Roff, "Indonesian and Malay Students in Cairo in the 1920's," *Indonesia*, No. 9, April 1970, p. 74.

18. William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, p. 88; William R. Roff, "The Life and Times of Haji Othman Abdullah", *Peninjau Sejarah*, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 1966, pp. 63-64. The number cited by Roff is higher than that given by a contemporary account published in *Seruan Azhar* and *Pengasoh*, which put the number of Malayan and Indonesian students there during that time as 150 (see *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1925, p. 12; *Pengasoh*, Vol. 8, No. 182, 1 November 1925, p. 18). The exact number of Malay students studying in Cairo, however, has never been correctly established since no reliable record is available. Existing figures are based upon accounts and recollections which are subject to a considerable margin of error.

19. *Temasek*, Vol. 1, No. 6, August 1930, p. 115.

The growing trend of an increasing number of young Malays of good standing applying for passports or nationality-certificates to enable them to pursue a course of religious education in Cairo alarmed the British authorities in Malaya. The concern stemmed from the latter perceptions of Cairo as a hot-bed of anti-colonial and Muslim propaganda, and they tried to find ways of checking the influx of Malay students going there. They were, however, faced with difficulties in finding a viable alternative solution, since there was a great demand for qualified religious teachers, especially following the opening of more *madrasahs* in Malaya.²⁰

The British were also aware that a policy of preventing young Malays from proceeding to Cairo was impossible in the long run. Quiet discouragement had been attempted, but could not continue indefinitely. In order to check the problem two solutions were proposed. The first was the establishment of an Islamic College in Malaya under government supervision, where students could further their religious studies, rather than going to Egypt.²¹ This proposal, however, received a mixed reception from the British administrators themselves. Those officials who were against the proposal argued on the basis of the expense involved. Furthermore, it was argued that the success of such a college would depend entirely on obtaining religious scholars of necessary reputation and who could also be relied upon to remain loyal to the British government. Nonetheless, the British officials who favoured the establishment of the college argued that, if it was successfully staffed, it would solve the anxiety now being experienced. These officials also believed that the establishment of such a college would probably be zealously supported by the rulers and by leading Malays in Malaya.²²

The second proposal recommended by the British administrators was to encourage (by means of pecuniary assistance) Malay students to proceed to Gordon College, Khartoum, which was a religious institution where the British

20. CO 537/936, Mariott (Deputy Officer Administering the Government) to Amery, 10 October 1925; enclosure *The Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 32, August/September 1925.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

had relatively firm control. The college offered specialised instruction in Muslim Religious Sciences in the *Qadi* Training School which formed part of the college, in which Malay students could enrol. Even though the proposal was considered, it was regarded as not practical by the British officials, although no specific reasons were mentioned.²³

Concern towards the increasing number of young Malays going to Cairo was also expressed by the Malay rulers. At the Durbar of Rulers held in Kuala Kangsar in 1927, the Sultan of Selangor voiced his disapproval of sending Malay boys to study in Egypt, and as an alternative, he too proposed the setting up of a college of higher Islamic education locally. In voicing his objection, he drew attention to his fears that these students while in Egypt were being exposed to undesirable elements, which he believed served them no good.²⁴ This unfavourable view of sending Malay students to Cairo to further their studies continued to be held by the Sultan of Selangor, and at the November 1935 meeting of rulers in Kuala Lumpur (not styled a Durbar), he again voiced his concern that the Malay students while in Cairo would associate with other nationalities, which would lead to undesirable behaviour on their part while undergoing religious education there. Similarly, the Sultan of Perak also voiced his concern over the influence the students would have while they were in Egypt, and the consequences when these students returned to Malaya. He was particularly concerned that these students would harbour views which were undesirable to the government.²⁵

The presence in Cairo of an increasing number of Malay students coming from all over the Malay World led to a pressing need for them to look after their own welfare and to avail themselves to the necessary facilities. Common cultural background and their relatively small numbers enabled them to develop a close bond among themselves. This factor led to the formation of an

23. *Ibid.*

24. See Minutes of Durbar, enclosure in file 1927 Pejabat Sultan Pahang, Nasiona Archive, Malaysia (Kuala Trengganu Branch).

25. Minutes of Rulers Held at King's House, Kuala Lumpur, on Saturday the 16th of November 1935, Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1935, p. 9. Cited from William R. Roff "Indonesian and Malay Students," pp. 74-75.

association called al-Jam'iyah al-Khairiyah al-Talabiyah al-Azhariyah al-Jawah (The Welfare Association of Malay Students at the University of al-Azhar) in 1923.²⁶ The first president of the association was a Sumatran, Djanan Taib.²⁷ As the name indicates, the preoccupation of al-Jam'iyah al-Khairiyah during its early years was to provide welfare services to its members. Immediately after its formation, it embarked on a fund raising campaign in order to establish by means of a *Waqf* a student hostel, which was a pressing need at that time, to be used by these students who came to study at the University of al-Azhar.²⁸

The appeal for funds toward such an establishment was also supported by Shaykh Rifaat al-Tahtawi al-Jawhari, who in support of the project wrote a letter of appeal in Arabic and translated into Malay which was addressed to Muslims in Malaya and Java.²⁹ Among prominent Muslim leaders to whom the appeals were directed was Sayyid Hassan al-Attas, while the latter was visiting Egypt in 1923. The appeal was also published in the Malay daily newspaper, *Lembaga Melayu* on 22, 23 and 24 January 1924.³⁰ The effort for the establishment of a student hostel came to fruition when Sayyid Hassan bought and endowed a

26. See *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Nov. 1925, p. 35.

27. Others known to have held the post of President of the association are Raden Fathul Rahman Kafrawy (December 1926-November 1927), Abdullah Aidid (November 1927-?) and Haji Abu Bakar Ashaari (1930-32).

28. It appears that the appeals from al-Jam'iyah al-Khairiyah for donations frequently received an encouraging response. Through its journal *Seruan Azhar*, the association regularly acknowledged the receipt of donations from individuals in Cairo and from Malaya and Indonesia. See for example the acknowledgement of the donation of £1 (Egyptian) every month toward the organisation from Isa al-Babi al-Halabi (*Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 1925, p. 39) and a donation of £10 (Egyptian) by Sayyid Hassan Ahmad al-Attas (*Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 4, January 1926, p. 74).

29. CO 537/931, Marriott (Governor's Deputy) to Amery, 1 April 1925; enclosure *The Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 28, April 1925. Shaykh Rifaah al-Tahtawi was particularly close to the Malay students in Cairo and took special interest in their welfare, even finding them suitable accommodation. See also *Pengasah*, Vol. 7, No. 159, 27 November 1924, p. 3.

30. CO 537/931, Marriott (Governor's Deputy) to Amery, 1 April 1925; enclosure *The Malayan Bulletin of Political Intelligence*, No. 28, April 1925.

house near the al-Azhar Mosque. He bought the property in May 1926 during his second visit to Cairo to attend the Caliphate Conference being held there.³¹

Apart from looking after their welfare, another significant activity of Malay students in Cairo was the publication of journals under the auspices of al-Jam'iyah al-Khairiyah. By and large the publication was directly influenced by the political journalism that flourished in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was this influence which initially encouraged the publication of *Ittihad* in January 1913. The latter was the first Malay journal published there.³² *Ittihad* was published fortnightly under the editorship of Muhammad Bisyuny Imran, Ahmad Fauzi and Abdul Wahid bin Abdullah with Fadlullah Muhammad as its chief editor.³³ Being also the first ever Malay journal published outside Malaya, *Ittihad* was a popular and widely distributed journal. Generally, its publication was warmly greeted, but the issues it raised were closely scrutinised by the Malay reading public in Malaya and even as far as Makkah.³⁴ It is most likely that the journal did not survive beyond 1914

31. *Servan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 9, June 1926, p. 171. The house, which cost £10,000 and could accommodate between forty and fifty students, was to be used as a hostel by Malay students from Malaya and Arab students from Hadhramaut.

32. *Neracha*, Vol. 3, No. 66, 1 January 1913, p. 4. Since no copies of *Ittihad* have survived, it is difficult to determine exactly when it stopped publication. Information on the journal can only be gleaned from the journal *Neracha* which received its first copy. On receiving it, apart from offering its good wishes, the editorial board of *Neracha* also challenged Malay students who were studying in Europe to take a similar initiative to what was being done by Malay students in Cairo. (*Neracha*, Vol. 3, No. 74, 26 February 1913).

33. *Neracha*, Vol. 3, No. 66, January 1913, p. 4.

34. For example when *Ittihad* published an article entitled "A Meaningful Call" by one Abdul Wahid bin Abdul Rahman Talib suggesting that Malay parents should send their children to further their study in Egypt, a polemic erupted. The suggestion was disapproved by among others, K. Anang the editor of *Neracha* itself, who argued that it should not necessarily be only Egypt but also Japan, France and Germany. In another instance, a debate also erupted on the issue of Malay attire, when *Ittihad* stressed the need for Malays to stick to their own dress, rather than imitating others. The article, which it extracted from the journal *al-Manar*, received a barrage of criticism in Malaya and even attracted a response from Makkah. For the correspondence published by *Neracha* on these polemics, see

after about a year or so of its publication and that its termination was due to lack of funds.³⁵

It is *Seruan Azhar*, however, published by al-Jam'iyah al-Khairiyah, which was by far the most important and the most significant journal published by Malay students in Cairo. *Seruan Azhar* was first published in October 1925 with Djanan Taib as its chief editor.³⁶ Its director was Fathul Rahman Kafrawy and its editors were Ilyas Ya'acob and Abdul Wahab Abdullah. Another of its editors was Mahmud Yunus who wrote its first editorials. The address of the journal was given as No. 8, Atfet al-Masri, al-Darrasah, Cairo and its subscription fee was \$3.00 or 4 Rps per annum. Its administration was put under Haji Othman Abdullah, who funded its publication using money supplied by his father.³⁷ In his editorial, Othman Abdullah wrote that the journal was named *Seruan Azhar* (Call of the Azhar) because its aim was to call for awareness and it was published by Malay students who were studying at al-Azhar University, a well-known institution attended by students from all over the world.³⁸

Seruan Azhar ceased publication in May 1928 after publishing altogether thirty one issues.³⁹ No specific reason was mentioned for its sudden demise. A close look at the functioning of the journal indicate that finance was the most likely reason for its discontinuation, since the journal depended totally on sub-

Neracha, Vol. 3, No. 84, 7 May 1913; Vol. 3, No. 92, July 1913; Vol. 3, No. 100, 27 August 1913; Vol. 3 No. 107, 15 October 1913; Vol. 3, No. 108, 22 October 1913; Vol. 4, No. 115, 24 December 1913; Vol. 4, No. 119, 20 January 1914. For correspondence from Malay students in Makkah on the polemics, see *Neracha*, No. 108, 22 October 1913 and No. 15, 24 December 1913.

35. See also *Pengasah*, Vol. 8, No. 182, 1 November 1925, p. 19.

36. His picture appears in the first issue of the *Seruan Azhar*. When the journal was first published, he was on a visit to Paris and his greeting of its publication only appeared in the following issue. See *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1 No. 1, October 1925, p. 1.

37. William R. Roff, "The Life and Times", p. 4.

38. *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1925, p. 12.

39. The May 1928 issue of *Seruan Azhar* was its No. 32. This happened since its 23rd & 24th issues were a combined issue.

scriptions for its operation.⁴⁰ The financial constraint faced by the journal is evident, since in almost every edition, particularly in the latter issues, it had to appeal to its readers to pay up their dues. The journal was so irritated with some of its subscribers who failed to come up with their payments that it even published their names as a harsh reminder.⁴¹ The financial constrain was especially apparent in the last issue before it ceased publication, where its pleas for payment were couched in a rhetoric call to support the cause of Malay progress. Again those subscribers who failed to pay their subscriptions were threatened with the publication of their names.⁴²

Another likely reason for the demise of the journal was the shortage of manpower as one after another of its pioneer editorial board completed their studies and returned home or applied for leave from their involvement because of other commitments. This reality had to be faced by the journal right from inception of its publication when six months after it first appeared its chief editor, Djanan Taib, had to leave the journal for a new post in Makkah. He was replaced by Ilyas Ya'acob.⁴³ Six months later at the beginning of its second year two more of its editors, Mahmud Yunus and Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi also left the editorial board owing to personal reasons.⁴⁴

In August 1927 Othman Abdullah went on leave to Paris⁴⁵. Subsequently he also left *Seruan Azhar* and his name did not appear thereafter as an admin-

40. See *Pengasah*, Vol. 8, 182, 1 November 1925, p. 8. William R. Roff, however, also suggests that its termination may have been contributed to by the split in its editorial board sparked by ideological differences concerning the extent to which the journal should openly promote radical political causes. These differences led to the desertion of a number of its pioneer editors who published a rival journal, *Pilihan Timoer*. See William R. Roff, "Indonesian and Malay Students", p. 86.

41. *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 2, No. 16, January 1927, p. 317.

42. See *Seruan Azhar*, Vol 3, No. 32, May 1928, p. 642.

43. See the decision taken on 21 February 1926 in *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 6, March 1926, p. 103.

44. *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 2, No. 13, October 1926, p. 242. The meeting to appoint the new editorial the new editorial board was held on 31 August 1926.

45. *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 2, No. 23-24, August/September, 1927, pp. 478-479. He went to Paris on 8 August 1927.

istrator in following issues of the journal. At a meeting held on 2 September 1927, Mahmud Yunus was reinstated as the chief editor of the journal but again asked to be relieved in February 1928.⁴⁶ From March 1928 Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi was appointed as its acting chief editor assisted by Abu Bakar Ashaari, Ahmad Ataullah and Abdul Kahar Muzakkir until the journal ceased publication in May 1928.⁴⁷

Apart from manpower, financial and other internal problems, the difficulties faced by *Seruan Azhar* were also compounded by the constraints posed by colonial authorities for its publication and distribution. Comparatively *Seruan Azhar* was viewed as a greater danger by the Dutch, as opposed to the British. After several issues of its publication, the Dutch authorities came to a conclusion that *Seruan Azhar* was politically inclined and was a source of potential danger to their administration.⁴⁸ As a result, in 1928, on the advice of the Dutch Consul-General in Cairo, the Governor-General banned the journal from entering the Netherlands East Indies. Even though *Seruan Azhar* had only three hundred subscribers there, compared to seven hundred in Malaya, the ban retarded the progress of the journal and sent a shock wave to the Malay students in Cairo.⁴⁹

In addition to banning the journal from entering Indonesia, the Dutch also influenced the Egyptian government to take stern measures toward its publication. Under its pressure, in April 1928 the Egyptian Government decided to deliver a strong warning to *Seruan Azhar* over its political inclination. In order

46. *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 3, No. 25, October 1927, pp. 403-406; *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 3, No. 29, February 1928, p. 576.

47. See *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 3, No. 30, March 1928, pp. 593-594. Even though Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi was appointed acting chief editor at the meeting of the journal held on 17 February 1928, his name was printed as "chief editor" on the front page of *Seruan Azhar*.

48. For a discussion on what was believed by the Dutch authorities as the political inclination of *Seruan Azhar*, see Mohammad Redzuan Othman, "The Middle Eastern Influence on the Development of Religious and Political Thought in Malay Society, 1880-1940", PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 273-276.

49. Taufik Abdullah, *School and Politics: Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927-1933)*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Monograph Series, March 1971, p. 147.

to calm the situation, the new editor of the journal under Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi agreed to let the Dutch Consul to censor its manuscripts before being published.⁵⁰

During its two and half years of life, *Seruan Azhar*, however, proved to be a popular and widely read journal, with subscribers and distributing agents found all over Malaya and in the Netherlands East Indies.⁵¹ Apart from being distributed by these agents, the journal was also requested by individuals as in the case of one reader who ordered one hundred copies of the journal's first issue.⁵²

In October 1927, *Seruan Azhar* was joined by another monthly journal, *Pilehan Timoer* (Choice of the East).⁵³ *Pilehan Timoer*, however, was banned right away in the Netherlands East Indies. The publication of the journal, which caused much anxiety to the Dutch, led their Consul in Cairo to warn the British High Commissioner in Egypt about its "revolutionary character" and to advise them that it should be banned in Egypt and also Malaya.⁵⁴ In April 1928, the British yielded to Dutch pressure and at the suggestion of the British High Commissioner, the Egyptian government decided to ban the publication of *Pilehan Timoer* on its soil.⁵⁵

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

51. See *Pengasok*, Vol. 8, No. 182, 1 November 1925, p. 8. For a list of its distributing agents in Malaya, see *Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 2, Nos. 23 & 24, August & September 1927.

52. See the letter of Tengku Abdul Kadir of Kota Bharu who wished to buy one hundred copies of the first issue of *Seruan Azhar* (*Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 1, No. 11, August 1926, p. 217). See also the acknowledgement of the receipt of the amount of \$28/- by the editorial board of *Seruan Azhar* and the sending of one hundred copies of the reprint of the first issue of the journal as requested. (*Seruan Azhar*, Vol. 2, No. 13, October 1926, p. 255).

53. Apart from *Ittihad*, *Seruan Azhar* and *Pilehan Timoer*, there were two other journals believed to have been published by Malay students in Cairo. One was *Usaha Pemuda* edited by Abdullah Aidid and Ahmad Azhari which appeared for four issues. The other was *Merdeka* published by the International Student Club of Cairo and edited by Zainuddin Tahir. No information on the date and contents of the journals is available. See William R. Roff, "Malay and Indonesia Students", p. 86 (footnote 36).

54. Taufik Abdullah, *School and Politics*, p. 149.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 149. See also "Pemberitahuan Dari Pejabat Pilehan Timoer Di Mesir at Kaherah", *Al-Ikhwan*, 16 December 1928.

In an announcement published in the journal *al-Ikhwān*, *Pilehan Timoer* acknowledged in a statement released by Ilyas Ya'acob and Mukhtar Lutfi on 19 October 1928 as stating that it had to stop publication under a directive of the Egyptian government.⁵⁶ The statement, however, did not elaborate why such a directive was given. Despite the fact, Roff however believed that *Pilehan Timoer* ceased publication because of lack of funds.⁵⁷ Before it ceased publication, *Pilehan Timoer* managed to appear in eight issues with the last issue appearing in October 1928. Like *Seruan Azhar*, *Pilehan Timoer* was also a popular and a widely read journal with distributing agents found in Sumatra, Java, Borneo and almost every state in Malaya.⁵⁸

Apart from publishing journals, certain Malay students in Cairo also established their own printing presses, encouraged by the availability of the facilities there. The first publisher ever established by Malay students in Cairo was al-Matba'ah al-Ittihadiyah, set up by Fadlullah Muhammad in 1914.⁵⁹ The most successful Malay publisher, however, was al-Matba'ah al-Marbawiyah founded by Muhammad Idris al-Marbawi in 1927.⁶⁰ In 1927, the Malay students in Cairo also established another publisher, Maba'ah al-Taqaddum, its pioneering work being the printing of the journal *Pilehan Timoer*.⁶¹

The 1920s and 1930s saw Malay students in Cairo engaging with multi-faceted activities, like setting up organisations, publishing journals and establishing printing presses, apart from their principal occupation of acquiring religious knowledge. Despite the fact that their numbers were relatively small and that they totally depended on their parents for support, they proved to be

56. *Al-Ikhwān*, 16 December 1928, "Pemberitahuan Dari Pejabat Pilehan Timoer Di Mesir al-Kaherah", pp. 126-127.

57. William R. Roff, "The Life and Times", p. 64.

58. See *Pilehan Timoer*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1927 (back page).

59. *Neracha*, Vol. 4, No. 124, 25 February 1914, p. 3. For the company constitution of the printing press, see *Neracha*, Vol. 4, No. 125, 4 March 1914, pp. 5-6.

60. Abdullah al-Qari, *Sejarah Hidup Tok Kenali*, Kota Bharu. Pustaka Aman Press, 1967, p. 113.

61. *Pilehan Timoer*, Vol. 1, No. 1 October 1927, p. 16.

a creative and progressive group of students. These students also proved that they were ahead of Malay students in other centres of learning, for example, Makkah and elsewhere especially in terms of creativity and initiatives. The knowledge and experience obtained by these students while in Cairo proved to be a meaningful asset for when they returned home they continue their struggle to bring about social changes in their society.