Aceh was a sultanate of considerable political and economic influence in the Malay Archipelago up to the late eighteenth century. Its strategic location and commercial importance attracted the English East India Company which made efforts to establish a factory there. Acehnese rulers, expecting a treaty arrangement to enhance the sultanate’s trade as well as their own political position, responded favourably to early British overtures.

The British came closest to securing a base in Aceh between 1760 and 1824 at a time when Aceh was looked upon as an invaluable entrepôt to support their China trade and as a possible naval base to protect British interests in the region amidst growing threats from the French and Dutch. In this search for a British base, Aceh appeared prominently in the original intention and instructions of the authorities in India and in London. In the end, the British decided on Penang and, later, Singapore. In the accounts of the founding of Penang and Singapore, Aceh is consequently treated only incidentally. This study, however, traces the course of those events back to Aceh where British interest in establishing a base for the region was first stirred. It also examines the reasons why this interest was not sustained.

As trade between the British and Aceh grew, relations between the two became strained. This study looks at the course of Aceh–British relations that culminated in the 1819 treaty. The treaty, arranged by Stamford Raffles, was as much an attempt to resolve an internal Acehnese conflict as it was to regulate Aceh–British relations.
SOUTH-EAST ASIAN HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS

The Sultanate of Aceh
South-East Asian Historical Monographs

A country with considerable political and economic influence in the Malay Archipelago up to the late eighteenth century. Its strategic location and commercial importance attracted the English East India Company, which made efforts to establish a lasting power. After these rulers,
Preface

This study is based on an MA thesis submitted to the University of Malaya. When completed in 1968, it was set aside for many years before there was the opportunity to make the necessary revisions. I only turned my attention to the study again in 1983 when I was able to spend several months consulting additional materials in the India Office Library in London and in the Rijksarchief in the Hague.

In the intervening period, several important studies on the history of indigenous states of the Malay Archipelago have appeared. These publications have advanced considerably our knowledge of the features of these sultanates, as well as the social, economic, and political forces they contended with. These studies also demonstrated how new analytical approaches could be employed in reconstructing the history of the indigenous states.

Of the sultanates in the region of the Straits of Malacca, Aceh was one of the most important and influential from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. It was a flourishing trading centre and became a major military power in the straits. Aceh was subjected to the same influences as the other Malay states, and it evolved fairly similar political and cultural features. For long periods, it had close ties with the states of north Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, largely through trade, interstate rivalry and wars, and marriage, especially among the ruling families.

On Aceh itself, there have been very few recent publications. However, research findings from the study of the other states are relevant and useful in understanding the situation in this north Sumatran sultanate. The period 1760–1824 was examined in this study because it was during this time that there existed fairly regular contact between Aceh and the British; consequently, there are detailed references to Aceh in the records of the English East India Company. The Company was interested in Aceh because the sultanate was an important source of highly sought after commodities such as pepper, betel-nut, camphor, and benzoin, which were particularly of value for its trade with China. Aceh
was also considered by the British as a possible entrepôt centre for the development of their commerce in the region and, at one stage, as a prospective naval base. In fact, in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, the authorities in India approved steps to set up a factory in Aceh as British anxiety grew over French and Dutch threats to their strategic and commercial position in the Indian Ocean and the Malay Archipelago.

In this search for a British base, Aceh appeared prominently in the original intention and instructions of the authorities in India and in London. In the end, the British decided on Penang and, later, Singapore. In these decisions, a significant role was played by Francis Light and Stamford Raffles, who were guided by other objectives. In the accounts of the founding of Penang and Singapore, Aceh is usually treated only incidentally. This study, however, traces the course of those events back to Aceh where British interest in establishing a base for the region was first stirred. It also examines the reasons why this interest was not sustained.

The course of Acehnese history was, in that period, shaped by interactions with the British. British trading posts, set up on Sumatra's west coast and in Penang, affected trading patterns within the region, which in turn had serious implications on the internal politics of Aceh. Moreover, the politics in the Acehnese capital could not entirely escape the economic and political presence of nearby Penang, and the British were increasingly and directly drawn into some of the problems of the sultanate.

The history of Aceh during this period must, therefore, take cognizance of its relations with the British. Furthermore, given the lack of Acehnese sources, British documents are extremely useful in reconstructing this important phase of its development. However, British sources such as correspondence and reports can be meaningfully used only when viewed within the context of Anglo-Acehnese relations. This study aims to set out the nature of this contact.

Nevertheless, there is a need for balance in such a presentation. The Acehnese perspective is essential not only in that the Acehnese side of the account be offered, but also that appropriate attention be focused on developments and institutions in Aceh. This is not easy because the documents were originally prepared for a different purpose, and British officials of the day reported what they observed or could understand. Often the accounts do not contain the kind of data that would be more helpful in reconstructing Acehnese society and internal politics. Despite the
limitations of the sources, this study tries to piece together a coherent picture of the politics and economy of the sultanate.

In revising my study, I have benefited from all recent works. They have helped to formulate new questions that enable a few of the issues to be looked at afresh. The findings of recent works have also filled some of the gaps in my study. With significant areas in the broad canvas of archipelagic history being gradually covered, one is able with slightly more confidence to locate Aceh in this process of change in the Malay Archipelago in the period of the study.

These new publications have also, however, set new and higher levels of scholarship. The task of revision becomes therefore more demanding. Weaknesses in the earlier version of my study had to be corrected and parts rewritten in the light of new findings and interpretations.

I did my research for a short while under the supervision of the late Dr David Bassett, who suggested the topic and who generously made available some of his own notes. Professor A. J. S. Reid took over the supervision when Dr Bassett left Kuala Lumpur to join Hull University. Professor Reid provided helpful comments as he went through my drafts.

Professor Wang Gungwu, who was then head of the History Department, was very supportive of the research, granting me a tutorship. As a graduate student, I spent many stimulating and rewarding hours with him in the fortnightly book review sessions. From Professor Khoo Kay Kim and the late Rollins Bonney, I learnt much from the discussions I had with them while they were completing their pioneering works on Malaysian history.

I must acknowledge the encouragement of Muzaffar Tate, former editor at the Oxford University Press, who shared my enthusiasm for this period of Aceh’s history. I would like to thank the University of Malaya Library, the India Office Library in London, and the Rijsarchief in the Hague for all their kind assistance.

Finally, I am grateful to Mrs Lau Beng Thye, who typed the original manuscript, and to Dr John Roxborogh and Miss Chow Mun Seong, who were most helpful in preparing the revisions.

I bear full responsibility for the shortcomings in this study.

Kuala Lumpur
February 1994

LEE KAM HING
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Abbreviations

BKI Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde
Encl. Enclosure
FCCP Fort Cornwallis Council Proceedings
FMCP Fort Marlborough Council Proceedings
FWCP Fort Williams Council Proceedings
HMS Home Miscellaneous Series
IOL India Office Library (London), now known as the Oriental and India Office Collections
Java Java Factory Records
JIAEA Journal of the India Archipelago and East Asia
JMBRAS Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSBRAS Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSEAH Journal of Southeast Asian History
JSEAS Journal of Southeast Asian Studies
OB Overgekomende Brieven (Incoming Letters from Batavia)
RIMA Review of Indonesia and Malaysia
SNL Singapore National Library (Straits Settlements Factory Records)
SSFR Straits Settlements Factory Records (Oriental and India Office Library)
Sumatra Sumatra Factory Records
TBG Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen
VKI Verhandelingen van de Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde
**Names Used in the Text** | **Variant Spellings**
---|---
Analabu | Annalaboo, Meulaboh (modern)
Barus | Bahroos, Baros
Bencoolen | Benkulen
Burung | Burang
Kalayat | Cluat, Kaluat
Labuan Haji | Labuan Hadji
Mangin | Manghin
Muki | Mukic
Pasai | Passy, Pase
Pedir | Pedier, Pedie, Pidie (modern)
Penang | Prince of Wales Island
Pulau Dua | Pulo Dua
Saluhat | Selucat, Saluckat
Samalanga | Samalangan
Sawan | Shaween, Shawing
Sebadi | Sebadie
Shilloch | In the period, it was associated with Burung.
Singkil | Sinkel

*Note on the Spelling of Place Names*
Introduction

The Scope

This is an attempt to piece together the history of Aceh by studying the relations between the north Sumatran sultanate and the English East India Company between 1760 and 1824. The study covers the reigns of three Sultans: Ala’ad-din Mahmud Syah (1760-81), Ala’ad-din Muhammed Syah (1781-95), and Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah (1795-1823). The rule of the three Sultans formed part of a dynasty of Bugis origin established in 1727 when the Maharaja Lela Melayu, a Bugis, was appointed ruler by the powerful orang kaya (merchant-officials) and ulubalang (territorial chiefs). It was also the last ruling line as it came to an end when Aceh was occupied by the Dutch in 1874.

The three Sultans ruled during a period when European powers were seeking commercial and political influence in the Malay Archipelago and competing with one another for dominance in the region. There was a degree of fluidity in the balance of power among the major European nations. Within this power rivalry, Aceh came to the attention of the Europeans and the Americans. Despite a gradual loss of influence over the trade along the Straits of Malacca, Aceh remained a port that was commercially attractive to traders of all nationalities. There were ships from India, the surrounding states, and, until 1730, junks from China. Traders came with textiles, opium, and specie (coin money) in exchange for pepper, benzoin, betel-nut, and camphor. It was a period when new pepper plantations were opened along the west coast, so that Aceh became one of the largest suppliers of the commodity in the world. It was also strategically located, lying on the eastern edge of the Indian Ocean and commanding the trade routes along which ships passed through the Straits of Malacca or down the west coast of Sumatra before proceeding via the Sunda Straits.

This study examines two major aspects of Aceh’s history. First, given the nature of existing source materials which are largely British, focus will be on relations between Aceh and the English
East India Company. It is true that in the broad framework of British colonial history, Aceh occupied merely a very small and peripheral part. It fought no major wars with the British, and Aceh was not a subject that absorbed the sustained interest or attention of London. Similarly, within the context of Acehnese history, the British element was relatively less important than the role played by other European powers such as the Portuguese and the Dutch. The arrival of the Portuguese, for instance, virtually helped spark the beginnings and the expansion of the Acehnese empire in the early sixteenth century. Over a period of more than a century, the Portuguese in Malacca fought several major wars with Aceh. The Dutch presence likewise became more dominant in Acehnese history, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The study will show, however, that there was a short period when contact between Aceh and the British was of significance, and certainly one that was more important than has been realized. This was a period of renewed interest in the region by the Company, an interest that arose out of both commercial and strategic considerations. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Company began seriously once again to search for a site in the Malay Archipelago that could be developed into an entrepôt centre. Such a centre was for the collection of South-East Asian products, especially in its China trade, and to serve as a refitting stop for ships plying the India–China route.

The Company was also looking for a British naval base to complement the defence of the east coast of India. This became urgent during the Anglo-French wars when French warships, using Aceh as a refitting station, were deployed more dangerously in the Indian Ocean than the British fleet, which had to return a long way to Bombay on the west coast of India. British settlements along the Indian coast became, as a result, exposed to French naval attacks. In this search for a commercial entrepôt centre and a naval base, Aceh ranked high among the places considered suitable. Several missions were, therefore, sent at different times to obtain approval from the Acehnese rulers for a factory.

At no other period was there such regular and, at times, intensive contact between Aceh and the British than that which took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This contact came to be further facilitated by the founding of British settlements in west Sumatra and later in Penang. As the local trade between Aceh and these settlements grew, there was a certain amount of
official contact. A large part of it was through correspondence, and the subject of Aceh began to frequently appear on the agenda of the councils in Bencoolen and Penang, reflecting some of the complexities that grew out of this commercial and, to a lesser extent, political interaction. The most voluminous was that between Aceh and Penang.

All these records, including the reports of the various missions, shed useful information on the nature of Aceh-British relations during the period. They explain fully and in considerable detail British interests and objectives with regard to Aceh and to South-East Asia. There were the broad interests of the Company in trade and in security, as outlined by London and India. There were also the specific concerns of local British authorities. But the issue that predominated, and upon which there was agreement among officials, whether in London, India, Bencoolen, or Penang, was the need to safeguard free commercial access to Aceh and to the region as a whole. There was apprehension that this branch of trade was threatened by American competition and by other Europeans, principally the Dutch, who seemed determined to close off the archipelago to the British.

Of equal concern was what local officials believed to be the obstruction posed by local rulers, such as those in Aceh, wanting to regulate and to restrict trade. John Prince in Tapanuli and Francis Light in Penang, as well as successive Governors on the island, all opposed such measures of trade control. Yet there was a minority and divergent view. In Penang, some officials and merchants sympathized with the Sultans' policies, and men such as Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles advocated the acceptance of the principle that Acehnese rulers be allowed such exercise of their trade rights. Raffles, in particular, argued that this would strengthen the position of the rulers and enable them to hold these states together, which would indeed be in the interests of the British. Otherwise, there would be an increase in piracy, and the weakening or disintegration of the sultanates would render them vulnerable to expanding Dutch influence.

The second aspect of the study focuses on the Acehnese sultanate itself. The reports of the several missions provide some insight into conditions in the sultanate of Aceh. Some of these missions spent lengthy periods in the capital, and they held meetings with the Sultans and the ulubalang. Others visited the outlying districts such as the pepper ports along the west coast and the betel-nut region.
of the Pedir coast. The missions recorded their impressions, brief though these may have been, and provided various trade and political data. Their usefulness, however, is severely limited by the generally uninformed and superficial perspective through which they viewed the situation in Aceh. The more useful records are the council proceedings of Penang, Bengal, and Bencoolen on the subject of Aceh, and correspondence between Aceh and the British. These dealt with problems as they arose, relating particularly to incidents of alleged piracy in Acehnese waters, the introduction of new trade regulations, political unrest, and the threat to British interests by the French and American presence in Aceh.

The letters of the Sultans provide an Acehnese perspective to many of the issues that concerned relations between Aceh and the British. It is the attempt to understand the Acehnese side of the bilateral relations—what the Sultans expected out of a closer link, and how Aceh reacted to some of the British overtures—that forms the core of this part of the study. In addition, because the Sultans’ response was also determined during this period by events within the sultanate, a study of Aceh-British relations will shed considerable light on the politics of Aceh. Certainly, the records offer a view of the sultanate in much greater detail than that found in the few existing indigenous sources. A broad picture of the internal politics can, therefore, be sketched even if the result is not as complete as one would desire. The discussion on the Acehnese sultanate will dwell only on three major topics in order to keep it within meaningful focus.

The first deals with the position of the Sultans. During this period, the rulers were considered politically weak in relation to the more powerful orang kaya and ulubalang. They were at different times challenged by these two groups, and two of the Sultans—Mahmud Syah and Jauhar al-Alam Syah—were overthrown and had to fight back to recover their positions.

The second topic concerns the outlying districts which were, in contrast to a weak capital, bustling with commercial development. Pepper cultivation expanded along the west coast while betel-nut was exported from the Pedir coast. Both stretches were then among the world’s largest exporters of the commodities. As their trade expanded, they drifted further away from Acehnese central control. Conflict arose when rulers attempted to reassert their authority over these regions.

The third focus is on the reported activities of pirates and of bands of marauding Acehnese, which worried European authorities
along the west Sumatran coast. Several cases of Acehnese attacks on ships flying the British flag were publicized in reports of the Company. Some of these attacks were made by unidentified Acehnese, but a number were carried out by local Acehnese chiefs and by the rulers of Aceh. There were also cases of districts in Sumatra under Company protection being threatened and, on at least one occasion, attacked. These incidents were usually seen as evidence of a weakening Acehnese central authority unable to maintain law and order.

How fully did Company reports represent what was really happening in Aceh, and how far were they a fair interpretation of developments in the sultanate of the period? Certainly, the Aceh of 1760–1824 was not the Aceh of a hundred years previously when there were strong and dynamic rulers such as Sultan Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah (1589–1604) and Iskandar Muda (1607–36), who dominated the orang kaya and ulubalang and led the sultanate into a period of territorial expansion. The loss of political and economic influence in the region set in following the death of Iskandar Muda in 1636. The balance of power then shifted to the orang kaya and ulubalang, who placed four successive queens on the throne. While this resulted in more political stability at the capital, it also marked the decline of the Acehnese empire.

One of the difficulties in reconstructing the early history of Aceh lies in the paucity of surviving indigenous materials—except for the various hikayat—which can offer a more balanced and complete picture. The hikayat are the only references against which British accounts can be checked. There are two Acehnese texts which are particularly useful for this period of Aceh’s history. The first of these is the Hikayat Potjut Muhamat, which has been studied by G. W. J. Drewes and James Siegel. This hikayat describes the epic struggle between the sons of Sultan Ala’ad-din Ahmad Syah, the first ruler of the Bugis dynasty, and Sultan Jemal al-Alam Badr al-Munir, who was deposed by the ulubalang and who subsequently sought to recover his position. The events described can be dated to around 1735. The hikayat provides some details of events and conditions in Aceh, including the political alignments of the various ulubalang.

The second Acehnese text is the ‘Tjarita Asal Sultan jang Sakarang ini Poenja Bangsa dari Boegis’. The ‘Tjarita’ was first mentioned by Raden Djajadiningrat in an article published in 1911.¹ The manuscript of this text, consisting of fifty-two pages, is in the Muzium Nasional in Jakarta. It is in romanized script,
and the date given on the manuscript is 1877. As suggested by the title, the ‘Tjarita’ deals with the beginnings of the Bugis dynasty and ends with the reign of Jauhar al-Alam in 1823. The first twenty-eight pages are largely a summarized version of the Hikayat Potjut Muhamat, covering the campaigns of Potjut Muhamat and his brothers against Jemal al-Alam. It differs from the Hikayat in that the rulers of Bugis descent are more favourably portrayed.

The second part of the ‘Tjarita’ is devoted to the reign of Jauhar al-Alam. The narrative provides some details, such as the marriage links of the principal personalities, which are featured less in British documents but are very useful to explain the nature of political alignments. The struggle between Jauhar al-Alam and his maternal uncle, the Tuanku Raja, is described at some length. In the ‘Tjarita’, Jauhar al-Alam emerged as the hero. This strongly suggests that it was written by someone who knew him. The Sultan is depicted as a wise and able ruler. He was also said to be shrewd and resourceful; to illustrate these qualities, the author narrated how the Sultan disguised himself as an ordinary sailor in order to evade the authorities’ ban on his landing in Penang. Where there were references to Jauhar al-Alam’s political difficulties, these were blamed on the intrigues of his opponents, particularly the Arab group in the capital.

Admittedly, the Acehnese narratives have serious limitations. They concentrate on selected episodes of Acehnese history, and tend to cover events surrounding the court. They tell little of the trade, society, and developments in the outlying districts. In fact, by highlighting war and conflict in Aceh, the hikayat reinforce a picture of Aceh as a sultanate in continuous unrest. In this respect, the effects are similar to those of British sources where references to Aceh were made only when problems arose, which are, of course, to be expected in official reports. However, all these can create a misleading impression because overlooked are the long periods of stability in Aceh during which orderly trade was carried out regularly.

This period of Aceh’s history is also a part of the story of Bencoolen, Penang, and, to a certain extent, Singapore. The beginnings of these establishments were closely linked to the British search for a base in the Malay Archipelago. The decisions regarding the suitability or availability of Aceh as a base influenced the eventual choice of Bencoolen, Penang, and later Singapore. Both Francis Light and Stamford Raffles, who had much to do with the
founding of Penang and Singapore respectively, were men associated with events in Aceh. This was more so with Francis Light, who served for a while with the Madras Firm in Aceh. Later, as superintendent of Penang, Francis Light—because of his previous experience and his own trading involvements in Aceh—sided with the merchants critical of the Acehnese trade regulations. Raffles, on the other hand—believing that it was in the interests of the British to have strong indigenous rulers in the Malay Archipelago—befriended Jauhar al-Alam and advocated British support for him.

Trade with Aceh formed a significant part of the economy of Penang and Bencoolen. In Tapanuli, John Prince, the resident, was closely engaged with the west coast pepper trade. In Penang, all the principal European, Chinese, Arab, and Indian traders had ships sailing to Aceh. Among these were James Scott (who had been closely associated with Francis Light), Koh Lay Huan (Kapitan Cina of the Chinese on the island), and Syed Hussein Aideed (a leader of the Muslim community). Developments in the sultanate invariably had an immediate impact on Penang and Bencoolen, and Aceh continued to be on the agenda that was monitored by officials and merchants in these two places.

It is often forgotten how closely linked Aceh is to the history of the Malay Peninsula. All that remains is the image of an Islamic state fiercely battling the Portuguese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is also the picture of Aceh, in the same period, striking fear in men as it made periodic invasions across the Straits of Malacca to subjugate several of the Malay states. But as the study will show, there was more than just these episodes. There were peaceful trade and political activities of considerable significance carried out by the Acehnese with British settlements and Malay states, and these continued to be important even after the 1824 London treaty which separated Aceh from the British sphere of influence in the Malay Peninsula.

**Economic and Political Features of the Sultanate**

Aceh is located in the northernmost part of Sumatra. In the period of this study, its political influence extended to Tapus along the west coast and to Tamiang on the east coast. It is strategically sited on the eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal, which gives it a commanding position over the Straits of Malacca. It was well populated in comparison to the neighbouring states in Sumatra.
and the Malay Peninsula; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was estimated to have about 300,000 inhabitants. Its produce attracted traders who sought camphor, sappanwood, dammar, rattan, and beeswax. Pepper and betel-nut were by far the most significant items of trade during this period. Some rice, as well as horses, was exported from the Pedir coast while a small quantity of gold was mined in the interior. Items imported into Aceh were opium, cloth, iron, muskets, gunpowder, various Indian piece-goods, and an assortment of Chinese articles.

The Acehnese capital was about 5 kilometres inland from the mouth of the river. It was called Banda Aceh Dar al-Salam, or Abode of Peace. In recent times, it has become known as Banda Aceh or Kota Raja. (To avoid confusion and for the sake of consistency, Banda Aceh will be used in this study.) Here was located the palace of the Sultan, referred to in Acehnese as the dalam. Further downstream was the main commercial centre. On the west bank was Kampong Java, and on the east bank Peunajong. Trading took place at Kampong Java and Peunajong, where merchants set up shops and residences. Collection of river tolls and harbour dues was carried out in Kampong Java.

In its ideal form, the political structure of Aceh was similar to other sultanates in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. The Sultan was at the apex of a system in which he was the source of all political, judicial, and economic power. In theory, he made all the appointments, including those of the orang kaya and the ulubalang. Even when many of these positions were later attained through succession or by the seizure of power, a letter of confirmation from the Sultan was valued. The Sultan was also important in the religious life of the state, and was required to uphold Islamic laws and teachings. Rulers had been deposed for failure to do so and new contenders said to be more religiously faithful were installed.

Below the Sultans were the ulubalang or territorial chiefs. Aceh was divided into many mukim, each of which included a number of mosques. Each mukim was ruled by an ulubalang. Over time, some ulubalang controlled more than one mukim. It is believed that the original role of the ulubalang was as military commander of their respective mukim. On occasions of war, they mobilized fighting men in support of the Sultan. Gradually, the ulubalang assumed other functions. One of these was the collection of taxes on behalf of the ruler. Part of these taxes was retained by the ulubalang. It has been suggested that during the reign of Nur al-Alam Nagiyat ad-Din Syah, the demarcated mukim of Aceh were grouped into
three federations. Each federation came under a Panglima Sagi, who was usually identified by the original number of mukim that had been placed under him. Hence, there were the Panglima Sagis of the federations of the twenty-two, the twenty-five, and the twenty-six mukim. The most powerful of the three was said to be the Panglima Sagi of the twenty-two mukim federation. Successive holders of this office were referred to as the Panglima Polim.

A number of mukim around the capital were outside the control of the three Panglima Sagis: the capital and some surrounding mukim came directly under the Sultan and other ulubalang. The powerful Teuku Kali Malikon Ade, for instance, controlled four mukim. These mukim, including those under the Panglima Sagis, formed Aceh (later referred to as Aceh Besar or Aceh Proper). But there was an even larger Aceh, consisting of political entities along the west and Pedir coasts. A number of these were once established principalities such as Pedir, Samalanga, and Pasai on the east coast, and Analabu, Singkil, and Tapak Tuan on the west coast. Others were newer settlements formed in the early or late eighteenth century by Acehnese immigrants. The early Sultans appointed family members as heads of these principalities to maintain control over them. But over the years, such ties had loosened.

The older places had evolved political structures similar to Aceh. In Pedir, the head was a raja who ruled over his own ulubalang. Pedir was said to have seventy-seven mukim, and the ruler presided over a council consisting of twelve orang besar. In some of the smaller and newer places, the political system was simpler, with only a chief or a council of chiefs sharing power. They were usually given the title of panglima or keucik and occasionally lebai; their functions were similar to those of an ulubalang. During the period of this study, the chief of Singkil was Lebai Dappah. The title of lebai suggests that the chief originally had a religious role as well. As with the ulubalang in Aceh Proper, the heads of the coastal ports received letters of appointment from the Sultan, and were referred to as his wakil (representatives). Along the west coast, the Sultans claimed that their authority extended beyond Tapus to Barus, Sorkam, and even to Tapanuli. On the east coast, Batu Bara and Tamiang were said to mark the limit of Acehnese influence.

During this period of Aceh’s history, covering some sixty-four years, there were only three Sultans, each of them ruling an average of twenty years. This reflected a certain degree of durability even if the Sultans did encounter political difficulties at different stages in their reigns. Therefore, significant lengths of time passed during
which there was political equilibrium within Aceh, when the Sultan and the ulubalang accepted the parameters of each other’s power and authority. It is not entirely clear where the parameters were drawn. Some scholars contend that the parameters gradually shifted in favour of the ulubalang, and that the real power of the rulers became very circumscribed. Their rule and their power, it is said, were a necessary fiction in Acehnese society. The ulubalang and orang kaya professed loyalty to the Sultan, however politically weak he may be, because they expected to be similarly accepted by their own followers. But, on the other hand, it could be argued that the Sultan had more influence and power than merely the symbolic part he played. Even his ceremonial part was important because much of what flowed from it was required in Acehnese society, and only the Sultan could perform this role. For example, the Sultan’s letter of appointment was needed to lend legitimacy to the position of the ulubalang. In disputes and conflicts among the ulubalang, it was the Sultan who would be called upon to arbitrate. In such conflicts, the support of the Sultan could make a difference in the outcome.

The area where the demarcation of power between the Sultan and the ulubalang was most disputed during this time was in the collecting and sharing of revenue and customs duties. In theory, the Sultan was the recipient of a whole range of taxes and duties. These were collected by his syahbandar at the capital and in all the outlying ports. But in practice, because he did not have an elaborate administration and because politically he still had to rely on the powerful orang kaya and ulubalang, the collection of some of these was farmed out to the ulubalang. It is not clear whether the share received by the ulubalang was for expenses incurred or was an entitlement. Even the powerful Panglima Sagis received a part of the port duties. There must have been an accepted formula by which the revenue and customs duties were shared out. Much, then, depended on all parties abiding by the agreement. During this period, disputes over the apportionment of revenue or of entitlement to collection were regular sources of conflict. When disputes arose, the capital and the country could be thrown into turmoil once again.

At the capital, there was a class of merchant-officials referred to as orang kaya. These were rich merchants, court officials, and members of the nobility. Many were involved in trade, and through this became wealthy. As a result, some gained control over land, although there were those who originally were territorial ulubalang.
The mercantile orang kaya were a powerful group within Acehnese politics, and were often viewed as a serious commercial and political rival to the Sultan.

There were also large communities of foreign merchants at the capital who were important not only in Aceh's trade, but also influential in the capital's politics. In the period of this study, the two largest groups were the Chulias, an Indian Muslim group, and the Arabs. They traded with the ruler and the ulubalang, to whom they gave advances in goods and loans. They came to wield considerable influence in Acehnese politics, largely because of their connection and access to the ruling groups. As Muslims, they integrated easily into Acehnese society. The Arabs, many of whom were religious teachers or wealthy merchants, enjoyed high status and some married into the families of rulers and senior ulubalang. Out of their ranks have emerged a number of rulers.

During this period, there were large and important Chulia trading communities in most South-East Asian ports, such as Junk Ceylon, Kedah, Johore, and Mergui. In most of these places, they exerted considerable influence within the ruling circles. A number of Chulias became close advisers to the Sultans and the ulubalang. Thus, a network of commercial ties was created in South-East Asia which was linked to the Coromandel coast, and this enhanced the commercial and political position of the Chulias. The network also protected them and their trade against possible discriminatory actions.

As in the ideal political structure of the Malay states, there was a body of officials attached to the Acehnese court who assisted in the affairs of state. Members of this body were referred to as orang besar (great men). Influenced by Hindu cosmological beliefs, there was a pattern of four orang besar of the first rank followed by eight of the second rank, sixteen of the third, and so forth. The most important were those of the first and second ranks. References to some of the titles of the first-ranked orang besar can be found in several works. The Bustanu Salatin made mention of the Maharaja Seri Maharaja, Laksamana Seri Perdana Menteri, Seri Maharaja Lela, and the Maharaja Setia. In Raffles's own study, they were identified as the Maharaja, the Laksamana, the Paduka Tuan, and the Raja Minara. William Marsden differed from Raffles only in that he referred to the Bendahara instead of the Raja Minara. G. P. Tolson, writing much later, listed the four principal officials as the Maharaja Mangku Bumi, Maharaja Mangku Besi, Perdana Menteri, and Laksamana Panglima Dalam. In earlier times, the orang besar of
the first and second ranks, totalling twelve members, formed a council in the Acehnese court. No reference has been found so far in the Acehnese writings as to what this body was called. Raffles referred to it as the Council of Wuziers. The reference by Raffles is the only mention found thus far in the British records of the functioning of this body.

The only office-bearer who figured prominently in this period was the syahbandar, and it is doubtful if he was placed within the first rank of orang besar. Despite this, in virtually all the accounts, the syahbandar was described as the most influential official. This, however, could be explained by the fact that traders and visitors were usually directed to the syahbandar, and consequently, he was viewed as the most powerful person in the Acehnese court. Similarly, when a number of Europeans later joined the service of the Acehnese rulers, they were also described as wielding tremendous influence. However, their role was really that of commercial agents, and like the syahbandar, they assisted in the collection of duties. It was not possible that the Europeans replaced any of the traditional officers of the Acehnese court.

The council of orang besar probably played an increasingly less important role from the time of Mahmud Syah. Many of them retained their titles, but functioned as ulubalang in charge of ports or stretches of mukim. Thus, the function of the Laksamana was probably taken over by the Panglima Laut, who commanded the Sultan’s armed fleets. From 1810, the Sultan shifted to Telok Samoy, and it is difficult to imagine that a court could have been established there. The other traditional institutions remained. There is, for instance, reference to the setting up of a court of justice by the Sultan to try a Chulia ship for illegal trading.

The Annals of Acheen also referred to a Council of State. From the description of its power and function, this body differed from the council of orang besar attached to the court. The Council of State, consisting of the three Panglima Sagis, the ulama, and various prominent orang kaya and ulubalang, met to dethrone a Sultan or to elect a new one. Although its power to dethrone a ruler had been disputed, events showed that some of its decisions to remove and to install rulers had been successfully effected. Even Raffles acknowledged that the council had such powers, and what he questioned really was the legitimacy of the body in 1814 to dethrone Sultan Jauhar al-Alam as it was not, according to him, properly constituted on that occasion.
The Historical Background

Aceh had far earlier and more sustained relations with the British than is generally realized. It was a contact that began in 1602 when a fleet of the English East India Company visited Aceh and a treaty was signed with the Sultan. This was the first agreement made by the Company with an Asian state. Subsequent links were maintained primarily through private British merchants, referred to as ‘country’ traders, who came to Aceh in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Many of these traders had ties with Company officials in India. Madras was the centre from which many of these ‘country’ ships sailed for Aceh and the Malay Archipelago.

The first encounter between the two took place when Aceh was reaching the height of its political and commercial power while the British, on the other hand, were making their first foray into the Malay Archipelago. Sultan Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah (1588–1604) was the ruler when the Company’s first voyage arrived at Aceh. Led by James Lancaster, the four ships touched at Aceh on 5 January 1602. The principal objective of the British, as with the Dutch who had arrived earlier in 1599, was to gain access to the spice trade. Lancaster and his second in command, John Middleton, were warmly received by the Sultan. Presents were exchanged, and Lancaster handed over a letter from Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen proposed a treaty of friendship and called for free trade between the two countries. Permission was sought to set up a factory in Aceh. In a bid to win over the Acehnese, Lancaster informed the Sultan of an alliance existing between England and Turkey, a Muslim power from whom Aceh had once sought assistance to fight the Portuguese. Lancaster further explained that England was then at war with the Portuguese.

Later during the visit, the Acehnese Sultan signed a treaty with Lancaster. Free trade, extra-territorial rights, and exemptions from various customs duties were some of the privileges offered by the Acehnese to the British. The treaty was a useful document for reference when the need arose later. In 1771, nearly 170 years later, the Company, when claiming the right to take over a factory in Aceh operated by a group of British private traders, drew attention to the existence of the treaty. But in a foretaste of what was to come, relations between the two did not develop into full trade or political links despite the cordial opening. As on several occasions subsequently, the British shifted their attention away from
Aceh to another place. On the first British visit in 1602, the reason had to do with Lancaster’s disappointment with trade prospects in Aceh. At that time, there was little demand yet for English goods in Aceh. Furthermore, the British appeared at a time of a shortage of pepper in Aceh owing to a poor harvest. Pepper offered for sale was expensive. Then, while in Aceh, Lancaster learnt that large quantities of pepper were available in Priaman and Banten.

It was to Banten in west Java that the British were eventually drawn. Lancaster left Aceh and sailed southwards, arriving in Banten in December 1602. Trading conditions there were more attractive than in Aceh, and within five weeks, the British bought up all the pepper they wanted. Banten pepper was cheap and abundant. When Lancaster returned to England, he left a few of his men behind to manage a newly set up factory.5

The Company sent a second fleet to South-East Asia in 1604 under Sir Henry Middleton but it did not call at Aceh. In fact, after Lancaster, no other British ship visited Aceh during the lifetime of Sultan Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah. Besides being disappointed at the poor response in Aceh to British goods, British merchants also had to contend with the depressed pepper market in Europe arising from the large quantity of the commodity brought back by the first two British voyages from Asia. Thus, the next few expeditions of the Company were to the Levant instead.6

It was to be ten years later, in 1613, that Thomas Best came with the Hosiander and the Dragon, bearing a letter from King James I. Aceh was now ruled by Iskandar Muda (1607–36), who was probably the most celebrated of the rulers. Under him, Aceh further expanded its influence in Sumatra and in the Malay Peninsula. Within Aceh, the Sultan enhanced his power by keeping in check the orang kaya, who had grown wealthy and powerful through Aceh’s growing trade and prosperity. Iskandar Muda reportedly executed a large number of the orang kaya. Their weapons were seized and they were forbidden to have buildings constructed of brick or stones. It was under Iskandar Muda that a set of commercial regulations was codified in an attempt to further consolidate the ruler’s economic and political position. Subsequent Sultans were to rely on these regulations, one of which stipulated that trade be limited to the Acehnese capital.

The introduction of the new commercial regulations was said to have deterred Best and other British traders from exploring further trading possibilities with Aceh. The Sultan’s exercise of trade control extended not only over Aceh but to all its dependencies.7 Given
this state of affairs, the British chose Banten as their commercial base in the Malay Archipelago. In any case, by 1625, the main interest of the Company had shifted to the Indian subcontinent.

Iskandar Muda died in 1636 and was succeeded by Iskandar Thani, his son-in-law. The new ruler lacked the forceful personality of his predecessor. Under him, the decline of the Acehnese empire became evident. His reign also witnessed the rise of the Dutch as a new regional power in the archipelago. The Dutch, having established themselves in Batavia in 1619, occupied Malacca in 1641, and from then on extended their influence along the Sumatran coasts and the Malay Peninsula.

For Aceh, the long years of incessant warfare against the Portuguese and Johore had taken its toll; building the huge fleets had seriously taxed its resources.8 The mobilizing of men for war had disrupted its agricultural activities. Thus far, the Sultans could hold the state together and check the ulubalang so long as there were wars and an external threat. But in its decline and without the distractions of military campaigns, the internal divisions in Aceh soon surfaced. The authority of the court began to be challenged by the orang kaya and ulubalang. At the same time, several dependencies took the opportunity to break away from Aceh.

In 1641, Iskandar Thani was succeeded by his wife Taj al-Alam Safiyat ad-Din (1641–75). She was the first of Aceh’s four queens who ruled successively over sixty years. It was a period in which Aceh pursued a less adventurous course in its external policy. Internally, there was political stability. But this was achieved at the expense of a greatly weakened Acehnese court. The mercantile orang kaya, kept in check by Iskandar Muda, asserted themselves. Power was exercised by the mercantile orang kaya and ulubalang, who decided on the succession to the throne. It has been argued that they accepted the queens to prevent a return of strong and authoritarian rulers.9 The female rulers were tolerated so long as they did not interfere in trade or seek to control the agricultural interior.

Away from the capital, the territorial ulubalang also emerged strongly in political influence. Although Aceh had grown rich and powerful through trade, it had always been important in agriculture, especially in the cultivation of pepper and rice. The heads of the agrarian regions were the ulubalang, and their relative strength and influence were indicated by the number of followers they could command. This number was translated into cultivators in peacetime and fighting men during periods of war.
The head of the twenty-two mukim federation was the most powerful of the three Panglima Sagis. The twenty-two mukim federation was located further inland, and the population, usually referred to as the ‘people of the hills’ or ‘people of the interior’, was largely agricultural and therefore likely to be most distrustful of the merchants at the capital. It is not known how deep the tension was between the agriculture-based ulubalong, such as those of the twenty-two mukim federation, and the mercantile orang kaya, and how much such prevailing differences allowed the Sultans to maintain a political balance.

The attitude of the territorial ulubalong towards trade was at times ambivalent. On the one hand, the Panglima Sagis and their ulubalong relied on tolls and taxes imposed on goods passing through their territories for a significant part of their revenue. They also had trade links with the Arab and Indian Muslim traders on whom they relied for credit. On the other hand, they felt a political uneasiness towards foreign merchants and visitors, as the Sultan had, in theory, much control over trade and it was the court, assisted by the syahbandar, that dealt with foreign traders. Such control, when effectively maintained, strengthened the position of the Sultan. Moreover, the ulubalong feared that through such commercial links the Sultans had access to the military assistance (such as supplies and technology) of foreign powers.

It was under such conditions in Aceh that the British made the next official contact with the sultanate. It must be pointed out that despite the absence of formal links, British ships had continued to call at Aceh. British traders enjoyed exemptions from customs duties under an agreement made between Henry Gary and the sultanate in 1660, which further encouraged British ships to call at the port. John Hallewell, commanding a Company ship, stopped at Aceh in 1670. Thomas Bowrey was in Aceh in 1675, and J. Taylor commanded the St George which arrived in Aceh in 1681. In 1684, ties were renewed when two officials, William Cawley and Ralph Ord, were sent by the Madras authorities to negotiate the establishment of a factory in Aceh. Banten, which had been favoured by British traders, had fallen to the Dutch in 1682. Another port was urgently needed, and Aceh was thought to be the most suitable.

The British mission led by Cawley and Ord was warmly received by Anayet Syah Zagiya ad-Din (1678–88). But the request to set up a fortified factory was turned down. Opposition came from
the orang kaya and ulubalang, who feared that a structure of the specifications asked for could be used against the Acehnese. When the Acehnese turned down their request, some Priaman rajas, who were in Aceh seeking assistance against the Dutch, offered their place as a site to the British mission in exchange for Company protection. Before the British mission could sail for Priaman, a similar offer came from Bencoolen. Cawley and Ord decided on Bencoolen when they learnt that the Dutch had pre-empted them in Priaman.14

In 1699, the last of the four female rulers of Aceh, Kamalat Syah, was removed from the throne by opponents who argued that Islam forbade a woman from ruling.15 Badr al-Alam (1699–1702), the brother of Kamalat Syah, took over. This rethinking was in response to a late seventeenth century Islamic revival in the Middle East. Islam had always been a powerful influence upon Aceh, and its ports were usually open to foreign religious teachers. It is likely that the move against Kamalat Syah was because of her reported attempts to regulate trade more stringently in Banda Aceh, and the religious reason was merely a convenient excuse for opponents to act against her. The removal of Kamalat Syah marked the beginning of a period when the succeeding rulers, now even more weakened, were vulnerable to dethronement by the ulubalang. Badr al-Alam was shortly overthrown by the ulubalang.

An Arab religious leader, backed by the ulubalang, became the new Sultan with the title of Sultan Perkasa Alam Syarif Lamtui (1702–3). His accession showed that the large Arab community had become a significant commercial and political force. At this juncture, British traders in Aceh intervened briefly in the internal politics of Aceh.

On taking over in 1702, the new Sultan, Perkasa Alam, was just as anxious as past rulers to regulate trade. New levies were introduced to improve the collection of state revenue. Duties were also reimposed on British traders. A number of British traders present in Aceh, including Alexander Hamilton, asked for exemptions, claiming that they had been granted trading privileges by previous rulers. Since 1688, there had been a community of British private traders in Aceh. Bowrey was reported to have a house in Aceh where, in 1688, he entertained William Dampier. William Soames resided in Aceh between 1696 and 1697 with semi-official status as a trader of the Company. There were references to several other Englishmen living in the port city of the sultanate. The request was flatly rejected.
Whereupon, the British, led by Hamilton, blockaded the port and fired on the villages along the river-mouth. By this time, too, the new taxes had caused dissatisfaction among the orang kayci and the ulubalang. They took advantage of the beleaguered position of the Sultan to launch a rebellion. Perkasa Alam was overthrown shortly afterwards.\textsuperscript{16}

The new Sultan installed by the ulubalang was also an Arab. Sultan Jemal al-Alam Badr al-Munir (1703–26) ruled for more than twenty years, managing to provide a degree of stability and peace. Under him, trade revived and Banda Aceh once more attracted ships from all around the region. A contemporary source noted that the capital was exceeding populace, the nobles had large possessions, the merchants numerous and opulent. . . . The city was then of great extent, the houses were of brick and stone. The most considerable merchant was a man named Daniel, a Hollander; but many of different nations were also settled, some from Surat, some from Kutch, others from China. . . . \textsuperscript{17}

In 1709, Jemal Syah wrote to Madras, inviting British traders to Aceh. His own vessels were trading along the Indian coast and he was keen to have more British ships visit Aceh. The letter also sought to offer assurance to Madras following a protest in June 1706 over reports that the Sultan had seized a British ship. The ship had been detained over an infringement of the Sultan’s regulations. The letter is significant, as it foreshadowed the frequent misunderstandings over trading regulations that were to take place between the British and the Acehnese. The Madras authorities responded favourably to the Sultan’s letter, and soon afterwards a number of ships began to call again at Aceh. Then for a short period between 1716 and 1730, trade between Madras and Aceh fell again. In July 1716, the Messiah, a British-registered ship, was detained, and her cargo of gold seized. The British protested, and when there was no reply from Aceh, retaliated in October 1717 by seizing a ship belonging to the Acehnese Sultan, which happened to be in Madras. Relations between the British and Aceh thereupon became strained once more. Fewer British ships visited Aceh from then until 1730.

There could have been other reasons why there was a drop in the number of British ships trading at Aceh. Among these was the fact that, at about this time, Chinese junks, which previously formed an important segment of the trade in Aceh, had stopped calling there. British ships also found Riau, then developing in importance.
as an entrepôt, a more attractive alternative. Under these circumstances, British trade with Aceh was conducted largely through Indian and Armenian ships.

The decline in the British and Chinese trade led to such serious revenue loss that Jemal Syah, in efforts to improve his treasury, was forced to tighten control of trade and the collection of port dues all over Aceh. He succeeded in imposing trade and political control over Batu Bara. But when he moved against the Panglima Sagi of the twenty-two mukim federation, he was strongly resisted. Why he took on the federation is not clear. In retaliation, men of the federation marched on the capital. In 1726, Jemal Syah was defeated and he retreated to Pedir. For a brief time, the capital was controlled by the three Panglima Sagis.

None of the three Panglima Sagis tried to take over the throne. Instead, they installed others as rulers. The first two Sultans whom they placed in power after Jemal Syah did not survive long. In the end, they turned to the Maharaja Lela Melayu, an official of Bugis descent who had earlier been entrusted by the fleeing Jemal Syah to take charge of affairs at the capital.

The rule of the Maharaja Lela Melayu, under the title of Sultan Ala'ad-din Ahmad Syah, marked the beginning of the Bugis line of Sultans. He was probably chosen because the Panglima Sagis thought him to be pliant. But the accession of the new Sultan also reflected the growing influence of the Bugis in Aceh as well as in other parts of the Straits of Malacca. Since about 1700, Bugis influence and power had begun to dominate in Riau and Selangor. Bugis traders actively traded in the straits, and maintained a steady traffic between Aceh, Selangor, and Riau. The Maharaja Lela Melayu had been part of this Bugis trading community in Aceh. According to Acehnese tradition, the Maharaja Lela was a trader who was washed ashore after a shipwreck off Aceh. His rise in influence during Jemal Syah's reign and his subsequent elevation to power were likely to have been backed by the Bugis community. His successors cultivated this link, which had a wider commercial and political setting. The shared Bugis background led to close contact, for instance, between the rulers of Aceh and Selangor.

Trade between Madras and Aceh resumed during the reign of Ahmad Syah. For the East India Company, these were years of growing trade with China. In Madras, most firms taking part in the Aceh trade were partnerships between Madras officials and private traders. This private trade was conducted through 'country'
ships, and goods such as opium and cotton piece-goods were exchanged for South-East Asian produce. These were then exported to China. The ‘country’ traders therefore played a useful role in complementing the Company’s trade with China. Indian goods, particularly opium, fetched a high price in Aceh, and it was reported that the rulers were able to retail these for four times the price they had paid.

Under Ahmad Syah, Aceh enjoyed a brief period of peace. The years of conflict had exhausted all sides, and for a while, there were no further reports of challenges from the ulubalang. However, in 1735, as soon as Ahmad Syah died, Jemal Syah reappeared on the scene to reclaim his title. He established himself at Kampong Java near the capital. Thus began a long conflict between Jemal Syah and the sons of the late Sultan. This episode of Aceh’s history is recounted in the celebrated Acehnese epic Hikayat Potjut Muhamat. According to the Hikayat, the Panglima Sagi of the twenty-five mukim federation confirmed Poteu Ue, the eldest of Ahmad Syah’s sons, as Sultan with the title of Ala’ad-din Jehan Syah. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the battle between Jemal Syah and Ala’ad-din Jehan Syah was due to an underlying competition between the Arab and the Bugis communities, and that, therefore, the issues were related to trading concerns within Aceh. The Panglima Sagis did not seem to have figured prominently in the conflict. In the end, the young Sultan, supported by his brothers, triumphed; Jemal Syah was killed in battle.

After the conflict, Aceh enjoyed another period of relative peace. Sultan Jehan Syah’s long reign of twenty-five years was for the most part a quiet rule. It was only towards the end that he encountered problems with the ulubalang. According to traditional sources, the crisis arose when the Sultan introduced new trade regulations. As with the efforts of previous rulers, the Sultan’s move was aimed at redirecting all trade and the collection of duties in Aceh to the capital. Opposition came from sections of the trading class, including rajas of ports in the distant districts. They managed to enlist the backing of the Panglima Sagi of the twenty-two mukim federation and launched a revolt against the Sultan. The challenge failed, and men of the federation were forced to retreat. Jehan Syah ruled for another three years.

Through all these events, English ‘country’ traders based in Madras continued to visit Aceh, irregular though this might have been at certain periods. Aceh remained important, through them,
for the Company’s trade with China. There was, however, no attempt to seek a Company presence there. Officials and merchants in Madras were quite contented with prevailing trade arrangements in the sultanate which, except for one or two incidents, always remained accessible. The experiences of Bowrey, Dampier, and Soames in Aceh all indicated that British traders were well received by the rulers, and that they continued to enjoy exemptions from various customs duties.

The 1750s saw brief British anxiety about Aceh in the context of the Anglo-French war. Officials in India received reports that Admiral D’Ache, commander of the French squadron in the East, was using Aceh as a shelter from the monsoons and as a base to refit his fleet. If true, this would give him a strategic advantage in the Bay of Bengal over Admiral Pocock, who commanded the British fleet. In January 1758, Bengal sent the Fanny to Aceh to obtain intelligence on the movement of the French fleet. The Fanny returned in June 1758 to report that she had found no French warships in Aceh. With that, the British took no further notice of the matter. British interest in Aceh was once again left to private traders.


The son of Sultan Ala'ad-din Jehan Syah succeeded to the throne in 1760, taking the title of Sultan Mahmud Syah. He ruled for nearly twenty-one years. It was a long reign, interrupted by serious challenges from the orang kaya and ulubalang. On at least two occasions, he was deposed. Some reports by visitors to Aceh during this period referred to unrest in the capital, and of the great difficulty the Sultan had in maintaining authority throughout the state. The picture was of a Sultan with reduced powers, barely surviving against the unrelenting opposition of the ulubalang.

The British portrayed Mahmud Syah as a weak and indecisive ruler, relying heavily on one or two favourites for advice. Yet the fact remains that he ruled for a long time, and even managed to send armed fleets to the outlying regions to collect revenue. His durability may have been due to his ability to maintain a balance between the diverse commercial and political groups within the capital. Of these, the most important were the Chulias and the Arabs, who both enjoyed close links with the Sultan and the principal ulubalang. His choice of Chulias as advisers had, therefore, commercial and political calculations.

It was during Sultan Mahmud’s reign that the English East India Company renewed its interest in the Malay Archipelago after an absence of some 100 years. There was interest in an entrepôt centre within the region to collect South-East Asian goods for the Company’s China trade. Aceh was a port well frequented by traders of the region during this period, including large numbers of Chulia and European ships. Mahmud Syah was initially responsive to the British proposal of a factory.

The Sultan’s Attempts at Consolidation

The first five years of his reign were some of the most difficult ones faced by Mahmud Syah. Almost as soon as he became Sultan, an attack on the capital was launched by the leader of the
twenty-two mukim federation, the Panglima Polim. The Sultan beat off the challenge, largely with the support of prominent ulubalang. For most of his reign, the Panglima Polim remained the most implacable of the Sultan's opponents.

Thomas Forrest, a country trader who had at one time served the East India Company, made his first trip to Aceh, probably soon after the first attack from the Panglima Polim and the ulubalang in 1762, but made no mention of political disorder in Aceh. This would suggest that Mahmud Syah had very quickly restored the situation in the capital to normal. Forrest's brief description of trading conditions in Banda Aceh is illuminating. He mentioned that the orang kaya were not allowed by the Sultan to trade freely. The impression conveyed by Forrest was that this was to enable the Sultan to control trade fully and to weaken the orang kaya. Consequently, even Forrest found conditions difficult and, therefore, could not sell off his consignment of opium because the syahbandar, the only trader and acting on behalf of the Sultan, did not agree to the price asked for. Forrest then sought out a certain Abraham, a Jewish trader who had long resided in Aceh, probably hoping to get some assistance from him.

The Sultan's improved political position, as observed by Forrest, could have been helped partly by developments along the Sumatran west coast following the outbreak of the Anglo-French war. In February 1760, two French warships, the Conde and the Frigate, under the command of Admiral Comte Charles Deodate d'Estaing de Toulouse, captured the British settlements of Natal and Tapanuli. Since the French had no intention of retaining the two territories, Natal was given to the Dutch while Tapanuli was handed over to the commander of the Sultan of Aceh's armed fleet in the west coast, who was known as the Panglima Laut. In the French operations, there was a reference to the Acehnese Panglima Laut having accompanied Admiral d'Estaing's naval squadron, suggesting that there was some collaboration between the two fleets in the attack on Tapanuli and Natal.

The reference to an Acehnese Panglima Polim on the Sumatran west coast at this time is significant. As soon as he came to power, Mahmud Syah tried to assert Acehnese authority on the west coast. The establishment of Company factories in Natal and Tapanuli was a development that had similarly troubled his father, Ala'-ad-din Jehan Syah, for this was considered British encroachment into the Acehnese sphere of influence and which also seriously damaged the Sultan's ability to control trade. Thus,
as soon as Mahmud became Sultan, he appointed a Panglima Laut to the west coast. As the title indicates, the Panglima Laut was commander of the Sultan’s armed fleet deployed to patrol the Acehnese coast. More importantly, he enforced the collection of royal duties. It is not known how many such officials there were at any one time, or whether the frequent references in British and Dutch records to the Panglima Laut were really to only one post held by various individuals at different times. Whatever it was, the naval movements of the Panglima Laut caused grave concern to Dutch officials at Padang and the British at Tapanuli and Natal. Reports described the Panglima Laut harassing trading vessels, both Acehnese and non-Acehnese, and occasionally attacking villages. Tapanuli, especially, felt increasingly vulnerable, and in particular feared that its trade would suffer as a result of the Panglima Laut’s raids.

It is not certain whether or not the ruler of Aceh at the time of the French attack on Tapanuli was already Mahmud Syah and, if this was so, whether or not the Panglima Laut referred to was his appointee. In 1760, the Panglima Laut was certainly a man of some influence and power. If the Panglima Laut was one of his officials, this may perhaps explain how Mahmud Syah was able to defeat the powerful Panglima Sagis and the territorial chiefs. It would also account for the ulubalang’s hostility to the Sultan if indeed he was deploying the Panglima Laut against them.

The attempts by Mahmud Syah to collect port duties and control trade in the country continued to be a major source of conflict within Aceh during this period. Port duties and participation in trade were the main sources of revenue and wealth of the rulers. Over the years, however, the rulers had not been able to regulate trade to ensure that port duties were collected regularly and effectively. They lacked the administrative machinery and military capability to do so, and they had also to contend with the powerful orang kaya and ulubalang anxious to guard their autonomy and wealth. Yet without this revenue, it was difficult for the rulers to create and finance a force strong enough to carry out their wishes. It was, therefore, a vicious cycle in the increasingly weak position of the rulers. Their influence remained limited to the capital and the immediate vicinity. Intermittently, they made a show of power beyond their usual confined domain.

The middle of the eighteenth century was a significant period of new economic opportunities in Aceh, reflected in an increase in the number of European ships and traders plying the Acehnese
The attractiveness of Aceh as a port was particularly enhanced at this time by the establishment of European trading bases close by. The British set up a factory in Natal in 1751 and in Tapanuli in 1756 to facilitate the pepper trade of Bencoolen. Pepper was bought from the surrounding regions by the two settlements and shipped to Bencoolen. The Dutch on their part appointed residents at Padang and Barus under treaty arrangements with local rulers. The French had no settlements, but found the port facilities of Aceh convenient for trade and, on a few occasions, for their naval campaigns against the British in India. But the presence of these European settlements and increased trade caused new stresses within the sultanate and exacerbated the existing tension between the Sultan and the local (coastal) ulubalang. Many foreign ships now preferred to go directly to the coastal ports, finding this to be convenient and profitable. It was not simply a matter of evading payment of duties but of reaching the sources of supplies, and securing them at prices more favourable than those offered at the capital. For the local ulubalang, it meant being able to sell their produce to foreign traders at prices higher than what they could get from the Sultan.

The success of the Panglima Laut on the west coast must have been a contributing factor in enabling Mahmud Syah, after the first challenge from the Panglima Polim, to consolidate his position between 1762 and 1764. The naval expeditions of the Panglima Laut probably had an intimidating effect on the coastal ulubalang as well as on those in the capital, while going some way towards replenishing the coffers of the Sultan. Forrest, in his second visit in 1764, noted that the Sultan seemed able still to maintain some control over the orang kaya. In 1764, Forrest finally had the opportunity to meet Mahmud Syah. One evening, he was taken to the audience hall and the experience impressed him: ‘... the audience hall which was about sixty feet long, and twenty broad, built of stone, with a stone floor. At the farther end, which was covered with carpets, hung a superb cloth of gold, about fifteen feet square.’

The audience hall possessed the fittings and atmosphere of abundant wealth, and was of a quality in keeping with the status and dignity generally expected of a local ruler. Forrest also commented on the appearance and dress of the Acehnese present at the meeting:
There were about twenty well dressed persons in the room, orang-cayos [orang kaya], a venerable caliph [a Muslim religious teacher], and others... The king was gaily dressed in silver brocade, over an inner garment of while muslin, gathered together at the end, tied round the head with a half knot, and was ornamented with a few jewels. He seemed to be about forty years of age, with a pleasing countenance, rather fair for a Malay.8

It must have been soon after this second visit by Forrest in 1764 that there was another rebellion against the Sultan, which resulted in his ouster. An Acehnese source dated the event to around March 1763.9 However, this date is unlikely to be accurate because Mahmud Syah was reported to have been on the run for almost two years and he could not have so fully recovered his authority and put on such a display in the audience hall by the time Forrest returned in 1764. The rebellion is therefore more likely to have taken place after 1764.

This time, the opposition came from the Maharaja Lebri, who had gained broad support. Many of his supporters were the orang kaya and ulubalang who were adversely affected by the Sultan’s control of trade. The three Panglima Sagis joined the rebellion, and the Maharaja Lebri ousted Mahmud Syah. According to the Acehnese source, the Maharaja Lebri was from a Siak ruling family which had settled in Aceh.10 But if indeed competing economie interests between the ruler and the orang kaya and ulubalang were the cause, then changing Sultans did not resolve the problem. Thus, in 1765, the Maharaja Lebri, who had taken the title of Badr ad-din Juhan Syah, was himself killed in a rebellion led by the Panglima Sagi of the twenty-six mukim federation, and Mahmud Syah returned to power.

Mahmud Syah’s position after his return was considerably weakened. According to contemporary accounts, there were sporadic night attacks on the capital by men of the twenty-two mukim federation in search of plunder. Nevertheless, during Mahmud Syah’s reign, there was a semblance of order and stability sufficient to attract ships and traders to Aceh. The large mercantile communities, both local and foreigners, were anxious that peace should prevail so that trade could be carried on. They, perhaps, had tolerated the return of Mahmud Syah, while seeing to it that he could not rebuild the influence and power that might endanger their interests and even personal safety. For example, the ban on the participation of the orang kaya in trade would have been relaxed upon their insistence. It was likely that the large and influential
Chulia community, and possibly even the Arab merchants, might have encouraged a political accommodation acceptable to the Sultan and his ulubalang.

A Madras Interest in Aceh

It was in such circumstances that a ship belonging to a group of Madras traders arrived in Aceh either in late 1766 or early 1767. The Indian Trader had been sent out by the Madras Association, a private trading concern of which the major shareholders were East India Company officials at Madras. The association had been set up earlier in 1766, and among those who had shares were senior officials attached to the Madras Council. They included Paul Benfield, Francis Jourdan, Edward Monckton, and Henry Brooke. These were men who, in the course of the Company’s business in India, had become aware of the attractive commercial opportunities in South-East Asia. British ‘country’ traders from India trading in the archipelago were bringing back cargo that regularly yielded huge profits. The Madras officials had, therefore, decided to get a share of this lucrative branch of the trade in their private capacity.

Circumstances during this period had become favourable to the English ‘country’ traders, especially in the Straits of Malacca region. This had been helped by the emergence of Riau and, later, of Kuala Selangor as trading ports where Bugis power was established. Another place of increasing commercial importance was Kuala Kedah. In this growing trade, Aceh fitted in conveniently within the sailing routes and trading schedule of the ‘country’ traders. Ships crossing the Bay of Bengal called at Aceh first, and then sailed over the short stretch of the Straits of Malacca to Kuala Kedah, before proceeding down to Kuala Selangor and further south to Riau. On their return, they probably stopped over at Aceh again.

The British officials, confident of huge profits in South-East Asia, planned to send out ships of the Madras Association to sell Indian goods such as textiles and opium, and to bring back commodities like tin, pepper, and bird’s nests to be sold to the Company for its China trade. The demand for South-East Asian goods was so high that some ‘country’ traders need not transport their cargo back to India, but instead waited in the Straits of Malacca to transfer it to Company ships en route to China. Such were the expectations of the council officials that the Madras
syndicate confidently bought the *Indian Trader* and launched her to Aceh on a maiden trading voyage under the charge of her supercargo, Gowan Harrop.

There had been several British-registered ships, largely ‘country’ traders, recently arrived in Aceh. Gowan Harrop could have previously sailed on one of these, for he was certainly familiar with the situation in the region. The *Indian Trader* was well received by Mahmud Syah. The Sultan was anxious to encourage foreign trade, and he opened up Aceh to trading ships of all origins. On Harrop’s arrival, boats of various nationalities, including a few which were French, were already lying in the port. Harrop met Mahmud Syah, who readily extended various facilities. It could be that the Sultan had been informed of the influential backers of the Madras Association, and in response was especially helpful.

There is a suggestion that the first voyage of the *Indian Trader* carried as part of her cargo arms and ammunition, which were eagerly sought by the Acehnese Sultan. The trip made moderate profits, and a second was sent in 1767. Jourdan, in a subsequent report, claimed that the *Indian Trader* only made her first voyage in 1767. If, in fact, there had been an earlier trip which involved the sale of arms, it is unlikely that Jourdan would have revealed it. Furthermore, the sale of arms in the first voyage might explain why there was fresh unrest in Aceh upon the arrival of the *Indian Trader* on the second occasion. As a result of the unrest, Harrop found trading conditions in Aceh difficult in 1767. Business was slow, and he decided to proceed to Selangor and Riau, leaving behind part of the cargo in the charge of his assistants, Mohamed Sultan and Nakhoda Cassim.

Following Harrop’s departure, another ship of the Madras syndicate, the *Experiment*, turned up. By this time, the political situation in Aceh had deteriorated. This was how Thomas Baillie, the captain of the *Experiment*, described it: ‘At my arrival at Atchin I found the Country involved in a war. Numbers of Bandits, coming down from the Mountains attacking the Town in the Night and whenever they thought there was a favourable opportunity to plunder.’

Worried about the safety of the goods left behind by the *Indian Trader*, Baillie transferred them to a ship belonging to Sultan Mahmud. This arrangement of safeguarding the cargo of the *Indian Trader* had earlier been worked out between Harrop and the Sultan. Baillie decided also to place forty bales of long cloth from the *Experiment* on the Sultan’s ship.
At this juncture, there arose a dispute between the Sultan and the supercargo of a French ship, the *La Paix*. The supercargo, a Mr Fouchet, claimed that the Sultan owed him a large sum of money. Convinced that his debt was not going to be cleared, and taking advantage of the unsettled political conditions, the supercargo ordered the *La Paix* to seize one of the Sultan’s ships lying in the harbour, and to take her back to Pondicherry in India, together with all the cargo on board.\(^{19}\) As it so happened, the cargo of the *Indian Trader* and the cloth from the *Experiment* had been placed on board this particular ship.

News of the seizure of the Sultan’s ship and her cargo quickly reached Madras, much to the dismay of the shareholders.\(^{20}\) The owners of the *Indian Trader* immediately reported the matter to the authorities, and the Madras Council thereupon wrote to the French at Pondicherry seeking the return of that part of the cargo they claimed belonged to the *Indian Trader* and the *Experiment*.\(^ {21}\) An agent was also sent to Pondicherry to pursue the matter. The French Governor responded by referring the complaint to a court, which ruled the case in favour of the *La Paix*. The Pondicherry authorities declared that the entire cargo on board the *La Paix* belonged to the Sultan, and this had been seized to cover a debt owed to the French.\(^ {22}\) The *La Paix* claimed that the cargo on board the Sultan’s ship, including that from the *Indian Trader*, belonged to the Sultan, as a sales transaction had been completed between the Madras Association and Mahmud Syah. The Madras Council protested against the judgment, contending that it was not aware that the matter had been brought before a court, and that at the time of the hearing, Harrop and the captain of the *Indian Trader* were still away and thus not available to present supporting evidence.\(^ {23}\)

The Madras Council was persistent in its pursuit of the case. A series of correspondence was exchanged between Madras and Pondicherry. This determination to recover the loss was understandable, and merely underlined the fact that so many of its members had invested in the *Indian Trader*. It was estimated that the loss was about 7,500 pagodas. The matter was reported all the way up to the court of directors in London and to the commander of the British naval forces in India.\(^ {24}\) Despite these efforts, the Madras Association failed to recover its confiscated cargo.

In the end, the party which really lost the most in this episode was Sultan Mahmud Syah. His ship, as well as all the cargo on board, had been seized. He later had to offer restitution to the
Madras Association for the loss it incurred. But most serious was the damage to his image and standing within Aceh. The French seizure exposed him to his subjects as a ruler incapable of defending his property or that of others. The political balance of power could be so easily upset by such an incident, especially when there had also been a serious financial loss to the Sultan.

There was very little that Mahmud Syah could do to recover his ship or to take punitive measures against the French. The British in Madras, wanting some form of retaliation, had expected him to adopt reprisal action against visiting French vessels or at least bar them from Aceh. But the Sultan did neither. His navy could not act against the better-armed French ships. Furthermore, he was reluctant to exclude the French on the basis of the *La Paix* episode even if he had the power. He could not risk offending any European power if he wished to encourage ships of all nationalities to come to Aceh.

All that the Sultan could do was to seek the help of a number of Chulia traders to appeal on his behalf to the Pondicherry authorities for the return of his ship. These Chulias traded regularly between Aceh and India. The Sultan also sent an envoy, Abubakar Leby, to call on Nawab Wolan Jir of Carnatic, hoping that the latter could assist by using his influence with the French authorities. Evidently, Mahmud Syah was acquainted with the Nawab, a relationship that must have been cultivated through trade. The Madras Association closely followed the Sultan’s efforts, believing that these could have a positive bearing on its own claim. It was hoped that the Sultan’s identification of his part of the cargo during the appeal would conclusively prove that the remaining items belonged to the *Indian Trader*.

In the meantime, there was the question of compensation to the Madras syndicate. The Sultan unhesitatingly accepted responsibility since he had offered his ship as a safe storage place. This must surely count as a positive feature of Mahmud Syah’s character. He could quite easily have disclaimed responsibility by placing the entire blame on the *La Paix*. In fact, the Madras Association’s complaint was against the action of the *La Paix*, and it considered the Sultan as very much a victim himself. There is no evidence that the Madras Association at any time demanded compensation from Mahmud Syah since this would have prejudiced its case against the *La Paix*. Nevertheless, the Sultan felt that his honour and reputation might be tarnished if he did not acknowledge some responsibility for what had happened.
On Harrop's return to Aceh from Riau, the Sultan offered to work out some form of compensation. But the Sultan was in no financial position to make restitution. He was already reportedly in debt to several merchants in Aceh, mainly Chulias. In the end, the Sultan offered Harrop and the Madras Association the right to half of the port customs duties that were normally due to him. In return, the syndicate was obliged to provide him with sepoy assistance.

The arrangement initially appeared attractive to both sides. For the Madras Association, the port duties would cover the earlier loss. More importantly, the collection process could be managed to the advantage of the association over that of the foreign traders. Admittedly, some expenses would be incurred with the stationing of sepoys, but their presence would also ensure security for the association's proposed factory, particularly when there was still political unrest in Aceh. In any case, such expenses could be recovered from the port duties.

For the Sultan, signing away half his port revenue was no real loss because, in the prevailing situation, he faced difficulty collecting those duties anyway. But if the collection could be effectively carried out with the assistance of the association, especially backed by sepoys, then there was a chance that his half of the revenue would be even higher than if he were to collect it without the association's help. The arrangement would also commit the Madras Association to a longer and more established stay in Aceh, thus steadying his political and commercial position. The presence of the sepoys, while primarily to guard the factory, could also be a deterrent to his opponents. Hopefully, order and security so essential to trade would be restored. Sultan Mahmud saw no potential danger from the Madras Association with its contingent of armed sepoys. The syndicate was merely a private trading company. The Sultan's fear was always his own ulubalang.

Officials of the association in Madras readily agreed to the Sultan's proposals. Harrop was sent back to Aceh by the association to head the factory. Initially, some fifty sepoys were stationed at Aceh. But with continued political uncertainties, another twenty-five sepoys were dispatched.

London's Attention Is Drawn to the Madras Association

Unfortunately for the Madras syndicate, the venture in Aceh, despite the privileged position it enjoyed, turned out to be less
profitable than it had earlier been led to expect. The erection of the factory buildings was expensive, and there were the one hundred sepoys and trading staff to maintain. Disappointingly too, the association’s trade in Aceh was not generating enough money to cover the expenses.

There were some suggestions in official reports of mismanagement on the part of Harrop. But the fact was that Harrop found it difficult to cope with the way business in Aceh was conducted. In Aceh during this period, all goods, irrespective of the type and quantity, were traded on credit. Collection of payment took time, and there were high rates of default. The Sultan himself was one of those who owed a large sum of money to the syndicate, and Harrop had not been able to recover this debt.

It is possible that to recoup some of the new losses, the Madras Association might have insisted on additional trading privileges. Harrop would have prevailed upon the Sultan to grant favoured status to the Madras Association, allowing it priority over other traders to the Achenese market. While this would seem fair to Harrop, all these privileges caused resentment among other traders. Soon, there were complaints from other British-registered ships that they had been prevented by the Madras Association from trading in Aceh.

At least one British ship, the *Fortune*, claimed that she was turned away from Aceh by the Sultan at the instigation of the Madras Association. The captain lodged a strong protest which eventually came to the attention of the court of directors in London in 1771. There were no details of what really happened while the *Fortune* was in Aceh. But the allegation that the Madras Association exercised considerable influence in Aceh surprised London. The court of directors seemed genuinely ignorant of the activities of the Madras syndicate. This was possible because the association, as a private business, would not have figured prominently in the official correspondence.

In fact, references to the Madras Association had come up before, but in a different context—during the *La Paix* incident, and the court case in Pondicherry. London might have missed noting the part played by the Madras Association because the focus was on the dispute between the French and the Sultan. The background to the claims of the *Indian Trader* and the *Experiment*, including the formation of the Madras Association, was mentioned in the correspondence. But this was incidental to the issue and did not arrest the attention of the court of directors, bearing in
mind too that the Madras Association had not yet assumed prominence in Aceh.

Even before the complaint lodged by the *Fortune* in 1771, there was, however, already some mention to London of the special position of the Madras Association in Aceh. In December 1769, Joseph Darvell, the resident at Natal, had written to L. Sulivan, a member of the court of directors, drawing his attention to the establishment of the Madras Association in Aceh and the stationing of 150 sepoys. He reported that the Sultan found it so difficult to maintain his authority that he was under the necessity of applying for assistance to some Madras Private Traders. In consequence of which a Number of Gentlemen there in consideration of granting them an exclusive trade, entered into a joint Agreement to carry on the same and they are now, I hear, erecting a Factory and [left blank] at Acheen, and have supplied the King with Sepoys to garrison his Fort, to the Number it is said of 150; and with the Force and other help from Madras he has been enabled to subdue the Rebels, and establish the Peace of His country.29

The implication of all these reports before London was certainly serious. A situation where Madras merchants exercised allegedly monopolistic rights, keeping out other British traders, was regarded as most objectionable by the court of directors. London also reacted with some concern to the news that sepoys were assigned to Aceh. The complaint had given the impression that a military pact had been entered into between the Madras Association and Aceh. London had given no such authorization, and what worried the court of directors was that such commitments might be costly and dangerous to the Company. There was a risk that the Company could be drawn into military entanglements from which it might not easily extricate itself. London expressed some astonishment that these developments had taken place without the Madras authorities being alerted to them.

The directors declared in their general letter to Madras dated 10 April 1771: ‘Such a proceeding is not only contrary to our express Order but may involve us in differences or disputes with those [Asian] powers, or embarrass us with the states of Europe who may consider our encroachments as an invasion of the right of their respective Subjects.’30

London was displeased with Madras, noting in its letter that the traders and the sepoys in Aceh were from Madras, and therefore, the dispatch of troops must have been cleared by the authorities
there. On this matter, London had not been kept informed. The court, therefore, demanded that Madras investigate immediately the deployment of the military force in Aceh; whether or not the sepoys were from Madras, and who had been financing the operations. Madras was also to put an end to the abuses contained in the complaint of the Fortune. Finally, the court of directors asked Madras to look into the commercial prospects offered in Aceh, indicating that interest in the sultanate had been aroused in London following the complaints.

Meanwhile, some members of the court felt that since there was a factory—buildings and other facilities—already established by British merchants in Aceh, the Company might as well take it over. Moreover, the terms that had been agreed upon between the Madras Association and the Sultan seemed acceptable to London. Hence, barely a month after the general letter from the court, Madras received yet another directive from London. Dated 8 May 1771, the dispatch from the secret committee contained fresh instructions on the subject of Aceh. The Madras authorities were now specifically asked to take over the factory in Aceh. Thus, even before a reply came from Madras regarding the Fortune’s allegations and Aceh’s commercial viability, London had decided that the Company should assume control of the factory, rather than leaving it to a group of private merchants.  

Anticipating accusations that the Company was unfairly dispossessing the Madras Association of the latter’s hard-earned acquisitions, the secret committee referred to the 1602 treaty signed between Aceh and the Company. London argued that the Company was the rightful recipient of all rights to a settlement in Aceh. It was merely taking over what was previously granted to it: ‘whose predecessor were the original Grantees from the King of Atchin even at so early a Period as the year 1605 [sic].’ In any case, the association’s present arrangements with the Sultan had been made without the authorization of the Company. Nevertheless, London was willing to consider fair compensation to the association for the costs and efforts it had expended.

The secret committee directed that before taking over the factory, Madras should send a capable official to Aceh. He was to negotiate the terms afresh with the Sultan, ensuring that these were favourable to the Company. At the same time, care should be taken that such an agreement would not impinge upon the rights of other Europeans. Finally, London cautioned that if indeed military
assistance to the Sultan was insisted on as part of any agreement, then at most this could only be for defensive purposes.

On receiving the court's first letter, members of the Madras government must have felt uncomfortable and even embarrassed. They had been called upon to make inquiries on a matter which London probably suspected they knew about, and in which, indeed, many Madras officials were deeply involved. Some were major shareholders of the Madras Association, and not so long ago had engaged in a long-drawn-out dispute with Pondicherry on the Indian Trader's cargo.

On receiving London's first letter, the council acted according to procedure by writing to members of the Madras Association on the allegations made by the Fortune. The person who replied on behalf of the Madras Association was Francis Jourdan, one of the three directors. Jourdan had also, in 1770, held the post of mayor of Madras, a position of influence within the Madras establishment. In his lengthy reply, Jourdan traced the background of the partnership known as the Madras Association, formed to trade in South-East Asia. In 1770, the business of the association was transferred to the Madras Firm, consisting of largely the same shareholders, in an effort to place it on a firmer footing. He contended that the factory, far from obstructing other British traders, had in fact assisted all arriving ships. He claimed that since the establishment of the factory, trade in Aceh had increased. Except for the Fortune, there had been no complaints. Jourdan pointed out that several British ships, such as the Royal George, as well as British merchants from Madras had traded unhindered in Aceh. Furthermore, the Madras factory had advanced bills of exchange, made out against Jourdan, to British traders who had unloaded consignments of goods for the Sultan, but were unwilling to wait too long for payment.

Madras, in its own reply to London, admitted that it had known of the activities of the Madras Firm in Aceh. But it claimed ignorance of the existence of a factory onshore and of the deployment of sepoys there. It had assumed that the merchants' activities were directed from a ship. The council pointed out that there had been no complaints by British traders against the Madras Firm, except the one brought by the Fortune. It further contended that if there had been ships or traders prevented from trading in Aceh, then neither the Madras Firm nor the Madras Council could be held responsible as these were decisions of the Acehnese Sultan.
The Mission of Giles Holloway, 1771

London also wrote to Bencoolen on the subject of Aceh, perhaps believing that Fort Marlborough, geographically closer, would be in a better position to know what was happening in the sultanate. Moreover, there had been an earlier report by Joseph Darvell, the Natal resident, regarding developments related to the Madras Firm in Aceh. In substance, the letter was similar to that addressed to Madras.\(^{37}\) In its reply, Bencoolen claimed, perhaps to the surprise of London, that it knew nothing about the Madras syndicate in Aceh. Presumably, it could not recall Darvell’s report from Natal. In any case, the Bencoolen authorities decided, on receiving the court’s letter in August 1771, to send a mission to Aceh to find out more, now that the matter had been raised.

Giles Holloway, the resident at Tapanuli, was called on to lead the mission to Aceh. Holloway not only spoke Malay but, having served in the Sumatran west coast for quite some time, was familiar with the situation in the region. The mission was to ascertain the status of the Madras Firm in Aceh, the people who financed the organization, and under whose responsibility the sepoys were placed. The mission was also to find out whether or not the Acehnese Sultan would allow the Company to set up a commercial factory.\(^{38}\)

The Panglima Laut’s Activities in the West Coast

There was another matter which Bencoolen wanted Holloway to raise with the Acehnese Sultan, an issue that was of particular concern to the British in west Sumatra. This had to do with the Panglima Laut’s harassment of trading vessels in the Natal area, which Bencoolen wanted the Sultan to put an end to. In 1763, at the end of the Anglo-French War, Natal and Tapanuli were returned by the French to the British. Following this, the Acehnese Panglima Laut withdrew to the north. Some reports indicated that he then used Singkil as a base from where he maintained a surveillance of the coast.\(^{39}\) Little is known about the identity of this Panglima Laut. One report says that the Panglima Laut in the west coast at this time was a person from Singkil who also acted as the wakil (representative) of the Sultan.\(^{40}\) Another reference much later suggests a Panglima Laut who was the younger brother of the Raja of Pedir.\(^{41}\)

The English and the Dutch authorities in the west coast settlements condemned the attacks by the Panglima Laut as
piracy. His activities not only endangered shipping and trade, but also threatened their settlements in the region. From the Acehnese point of view, the Panglima Laut, as the Sultan’s wakil, was merely enforcing the collection of duties in all the west coast ports considered to be Acehnese. The Acehnese had still not quite accepted the British settlements of Natal and Tapanuli, nor that of the Dutch at Barus. The deployment of the Panglima Laut could well have been to maintain Acehnese pressure on these settlements, as well as to check other districts from drifting away from the sway of the capital.

Barus, because of its proximity to the Acehnese ports, felt most vulnerable, and the naval manoeuvrings of the Panglima Laut were, therefore, closely monitored by the Dutch resident there. The Dutch had signed a treaty with Barus in 1668, and had since placed a resident there. In March 1771, the resident alerted Padang that increased Acehnese military activities had been detected in nearby Sorkam. The resident also received intelligence reports that the Panglima Laut was backing a certain Siradin, the son of a former chief, in his attempt to seize control of Sorkam.

In June 1771, the Panglima Laut was reported to have moved out of Singkil and deployed his men further south at Tapus. Tapus was only about 48 kilometres to the north of Barus. Barus, whose chief was not recognized by the Acehnese Sultan, felt the pressure even more as the Panglima Laut began amassing a large number of armed men at Tapus. There were reports that the Panglima Laut had under his command five ships and about 200 armed men. Soon afterwards, ships of the Panglima Laut were reported to have blockaded the coast along Tapus and Sorkam. The Dutch resident, fearing an imminent attack from the Acehnese, ordered the reinforcing of the defence of Barus. Despite taking such precautions, Barus came under a sudden attack in late July 1771. One Dutch and three Bugis soldiers were killed before the Acehnese withdrew to Tapus where they entrenched themselves in fortified positions at the mouth of the Tapus River. Padang immediately sent reinforcements and supplies to Barus.

News of the Panglima Laut’s attack on Barus reached Bencoolen in August 1771. John Bunnet, the official in charge of Natal, reported the incident and alerted the authorities to the possibility that the Panglima Laut might next attack Tapanuli. Bunnet had earlier rushed additional troops to Tapanuli, and now appealed to Bencoolen to strengthen the depleted force in Natal. Bencoolen,
recognizing the seriousness of the threat, sent a small detachment of troops.  

**The Sultan Receives Holloway**

The ship that was to transport Holloway’s mission was the *Luconia*, which, under the command of Thomas Forrest, had earlier been scheduled to sail from Bencoolen to Natal to drop off some cargo. It was now given the additional task of transporting the mission to Aceh. The ship left Bencoolen in early September 1771 and, after a short stopover at Natal, called at Tapanuli to take Holloway on board.

On arrival at Aceh in late September 1771, Holloway sought an audience with Sultan Mahmud Syah. This was not granted immediately, and Holloway was asked in the meanwhile to meet with the *syahbandar* instead. Holloway had to wait for three weeks, and only on the day before he was due to leave was he granted an audience with the Sultan. The delay in seeing Holloway could simply have been because the Sultan believed that Holloway was a merchant from Tapanuli and therefore, in accordance with local practice, had to conduct all business first with the *syahbandar*. Or it might have been that the Sultan was advised not to receive Holloway. There was a suggestion that Gowan Harrop had influenced the Sultan against the mission, but this was unlikely as events later showed. If indeed there had been a party which was anxious that the Sultan should not receive Holloway, it could have been the Chulias, who had reasons to feel threatened by the prospect of a British factory.

Yet it is also likely that the Sultan’s reluctance to meet Holloway earlier was because of the Panglima Laut issue. The Sultan probably suspected the subject might be raised, but was not quite ready to discuss it. There is also reason to believe that the Sultan himself was beginning to consider the Panglima Laut a nuisance and a threat, and wanted time to decide on what course of action to take. Since the Panglima Laut was expected back in Aceh at any time then, the Sultan might have wanted to meet with him first before seeing Holloway.

Forrest, who had met the Sultan previously, was anxious on this trip not to be seen in close association with the mission. On this trip, he regarded himself simply as captain of a vessel hired out to transport the mission. Forrest did not hold out much
prospect of success for the mission, and therefore wanted to stay out of any unpleasant atmosphere that might result. He valued both his friendship with the Sultan and his good links with the Company. He therefore made no move to see Mahmud Syah. Writing many years later, Forrest recalled that conditions in Aceh at the time of the Holloway mission were different from the time he was first there in 1762 and later in 1764. Forrest was able to detect some political tension: "There was great anarchy and confusion at Atcheen at this time; the malcontents came often, as I was informed, near the King's palace at night."\(^{49}\)

Forrest, on one of his trips ashore, met Harrop, who was on that occasion paying the sepoys their monthly salary, and was seen weighing out 8 rupees’ worth of gold-dust to each of the soldiers. Forrest got the impression that the sepoys were employed by the Sultan, and that Harrop was given command over them. Harrop confided to Forrest that although the capital was outwardly calm, the political situation was in fact far from stable. There was a general sense of insecurity, particularly about the safety of life and property. This being the case and as his sepoys could not be relied on, he had to perform guard duty on some nights.

When Holloway finally met the Sultan, he raised the matter of the special position said to be enjoyed by the Madras syndicate. During the three weeks he was in Aceh, Holloway had lost no time in gathering information about the Madras Firm. He informed the Sultan that the Company was not happy that the Firm had used its facilities to obstruct other European merchants from trading in Aceh. To this, the Sultan gave a reply which Holloway thought was vague and evasive.

When the question of the Panglima Laut was brought up, Mahmud Syah was more forthcoming. The Sultan clarified that the activities of the Panglima Laut had been carried out without his authorization. This was a tacit admission that he had indeed appointed the Panglima Laut, although he did not approve of the latter’s subsequent actions. The Sultan acknowledged that he had received reports of the Panglima Laut committing acts of violence and extortion against settlements and trading vessels. He then assured Holloway that the Panglima Laut would be arrested and put to death.

On the day of the meeting, whether by chance or by design on the part of the Sultan, the Panglima Laut returned to Aceh. According to Holloway, he was immediately arrested by the Sultan’s men. There was no mention of what subsequently happened to
him.\textsuperscript{50} A Dutch report confirmed the arrest of the Panglima Laut.\textsuperscript{51} It is possible that the Sultan himself was worried because the activities of the Panglima Laut were harming trade along the west coast, an outcome which would have adverse consequences upon Aceh itself. Another concern was that the attacks on settlements where the British and the Dutch had factories, if unchecked, could lead to retaliation which the Sultan wished to avoid. More importantly, the Panglima Laut had to be apprehended lest he became too powerful for the Sultan to handle.

The matter of establishing a Company settlement in Aceh was not brought up by Holloway, who sensed that the idea of a factory did not appeal to the Sultan. Furthermore, even if the Sultan was agreeable, Holloway believed that there would be such strong opposition from the \textit{ulubalang} and other Acehnese that it would be extremely difficult, and even dangerous, to establish a British presence. From his observation of conditions, Holloway decided that Aceh was neither commercially attractive nor politically stable enough to sustain a viable Company factory. Holloway's assessment was shared by Forrest, who had felt, based on his knowledge of the Sultan and observation of conditions in Aceh, that what the mission was seeking would most certainly be turned down.\textsuperscript{52} The conclusions made by Holloway based on his meeting with the Sultan had long been reached by Forrest.

\textit{The Mission of Charles Desvoeux, 1772–1773}

In February 1772, the Madras Council decided to act upon London's second set of instructions, and arrangements were therefore made to send a mission to Aceh. The man chosen to lead the mission was Charles Desvoeux, who had only arrived in Madras some six months earlier, and was then serving as sheriff of Madras.\textsuperscript{53} As a new arrival, it was improbable that he could have been involved in the Madras Firm. By this time, the purpose of the mission had broadened beyond inquiring into the status and activities of the Firm in Aceh. London was keen that the Company take over the privileges of the Madras syndicate in Aceh.

\textbf{An Offer from Kedah}

In the meanwhile, prospects for a factory similar to that in Aceh became available in Kedah. The port of Kuala Kedah was, at this time, reported to be as well-frequented as Aceh. Just as in the case
of Aceh, Kedah had come to the notice of the Madras authorities largely through the activities of the Madras Firm. Kedah had become a regular port of call for the syndicate’s ships, and one of its employees who frequently visited Kedah was Francis Light, who, like Gowan Harrop, was based in Aceh, but often travelled to Kedah.54

Light considered Kedah a commercially more suitable and profitable place than Aceh. Writing to the Madras Council in November 1771, he pointed out that Kedah had a greater variety of goods required by the Company for the China trade, and that these were available in larger quantities. He reported that more pepper and betel-nut were brought over from the Pedir coast to Kedah than were sent to Aceh: “There is more Pepper and betel-nut brought to this Port [Kuala Kedah] from the Coast of Pedir than is carried to Acheen and with that Article Tin and Dammar I will engage to load any two of your vessels from this Port by the 1st January, and I will send Wax, Timber and Rattan as the demand may be.”55

An opportunity to establish links between the Company and Kedah came when a rebellion broke out in the sultanate in March 1771, when Bugis from Selangor arrived in support of those opposed to the Sultan. In desperation, Sultan Muhammed of Kedah wrote to Madras asking for assistance against the Selangor invaders. In April, the Sultan even sent an emissary to appeal to the Madras Firm in Aceh. Light readily complied by sailing to Kedah in two armed vessels carrying arms and thirty sepoys. By the time he reached Kedah, the rebellion had ended. The Bugis had withdrawn to Selangor, taking along with them some 300 brass cannons belonging to Chulia traders in Kuala Kedah.56

In the aftermath, Harrop and Light entered into an agreement with Sultan Muhammed under which the Madras Firm would station 100 sepoys to help defend Kedah. In return, the Firm would be accorded trading privileges and permission to establish a factory. The terms were similar to those in Aceh. With that, the Madras syndicate established a presence in Kedah.

In August 1771, the Sultan of Kedah, seeking the recovery of the Chulias’ cannons and other booty taken during the invasion, sent a letter to the Madras Council through Light, suggesting an offensive military alliance against Selangor. In exchange, additional trading privileges were offered. The proposal was made again in November. When he still did not get a reply from Madras, the Sultan wrote directly to Bengal.57
In fact, Madras had received the first message and was considering the request very positively. To Madras, there appeared better chances of establishing a factory in Kedah than in Aceh since an actual offer had come from the Sultan. No such overtures had been made by Aceh. The council’s growing interest in Kedah could also have been due to the influence of those connected with the Madras Firm who shared the disappointment of Light and Harrop about trade prospects in Aceh.

One of the many difficulties foreseen in Kedah, however, was the hostility of the Chulias. As in Aceh, the Chulia trading community was very large and commanded great influence, which extended into the royal courts of the two states; naturally, the Chulias regarded the British as a commercial competitor and a threat. Light believed that the Chulias would rather risk another attack from the Bugis of Selangor than accept the extension of British protection in Kedah. Also, there were political uncertainties in Kedah as in Aceh. Here, the danger was largely external, with the threat of an outside invasion. Nevertheless, the Madras Firm was confident that the stationing of a few armed vessels along the Kedah coast would be an effective deterrent against any outside attack.

Thus, the Madras Council had before it options in Aceh and in Kedah. But its increasing preference was Kedah. Conceding that Aceh had a superior harbour, the council nevertheless echoed Light’s assessment that from the view of the Company’s needs, Kedah had much more to offer: ‘It appeared to us in the Course of our Enquiry that a Factory at Quedah would be more advantageous to the Company than one at Atchin, because we conceive the great Object to be, the means of supplying the Chinese Market….’ Though London’s directive had referred only to Aceh, Madras confidently interpreted the instructions broadly to include a mission to Kedah: ‘We hope we have not exceeded those intentions by accepting a Grant of Quedah, altho that place is not particularly mentioned in your Commands. We have taken the spirit and not the words.’

Edward Monckton was appointed to lead the mission to Kedah. He was higher in rank than Desvoeux in the Madras establishment, having been his predecessor as the sheriff of Madras. Monckton, therefore, was a more senior and experienced man, suggesting that the council viewed Kedah as having better prospects and greater promise. Of equal significance is the fact that Monckton was one of the Madras officials who had invested in the Madras Firm.
The instructions given to Monckton and Desvoeux were identical in most aspects. In their negotiations with the rulers, both men were to ask first for the right to the collection of port duties. This control was thought to be more attractive than the offer of half the retail trade that had been made to the Madras Firm by Kedah, and before that by Aceh. Secondly, a request was to be made for a piece of land to build a factory. Thirdly, Madras wanted a general agreement signed on trade. Under this agreement, consignments of goods from Madras were to be bartered for quantities of commodities to be delivered by the rulers of Kedah and Aceh at agreed prices. Through this arrangement, Madras would avoid the tedious and complicated retail and credit practices in which the local traders and the Chulias were more adept. The type of goods was to be specified, and from Kedah and Aceh, Madras wanted items for its China trade.

The Madras Council was willing to commit troops to assist the rulers in both sultanates. In the case of Aceh, the Company was prepared to take over command of the sepoys from the Firm and, if circumstances warranted, to deploy them on behalf of the Sultan against attacks from his enemies. But such use was strictly for defensive purposes. In Kedah, sepoys would be stationed to guard against attacks from Selangor. Kedah and Aceh were to bear the costs of maintaining the troops. The money was to come from the port duties. Madras proposed that the British collect the duties on behalf of the rulers and deduct from the sum all expenses incurred. The balance was to be handed over to the rulers.

The Sultan Grants a Concession to the EIC

Charles Desvoeux, together with a detachment of troops, arrived in Aceh on 26 March 1772 on board the *Adventure*. But Desvoeux must have sensed while still in Madras that there were those who preferred a British settlement in Kedah. Monckton’s mission to Kedah left at about the same time; thus, even if the Aceh attempt failed, there was a back-up option for Madras. On his arrival, Desvoeux learnt of Holloway’s mission to Aceh six months earlier. He was informed, wrongly, that the Sultan had turned down Bencoolen’s request for a factory in Aceh. This information might have caused Desvoeux to delay calling on the Sultan. Furthermore, Harrop was at this time away somewhere in the Straits of Malacca, and his assistant was reportedly sick. Desvoeux was anxious to first find out from them the actual situation in Aceh. In addition,
Desvoeux had to sort out with Harrop the details of the Company's acquisition of the Firm's facilities in Aceh; matters regarding the syndicate's assets and liabilities in Aceh had to be worked out. Finally, Desvoeux was new to the Sumatran region, and he probably wanted Harrop to accompany him, at least as an interpreter, to the meeting with the Sultan.

Harrop arrived back in Aceh a few days later, and he went immediately to brief Desvoeux. He was helpful, and there was no indication that he regarded the Desvoeux mission as a potential rival. On the contrary, the Company's intention to take over the Firm's operation could salvage the syndicate from an investment that was not doing well. Harrop was probably relieved that the Company was interested in the Aceh venture. What Desvoeux found out about the performance of the Madras Firm in Aceh amazed him. Evidently, the syndicate was a losing concern almost from the day it was set up. In his report, Desvoeux expressed surprise that the merchants and investors in Madras had continued to put money into an enterprise that had not been paying any dividends. As far as Desvoeux could determine, the Firm in Aceh was poorly managed and there was very little supervision from Madras. No account book was kept of transactions. The only person in Aceh with any experience or knowledge was Harrop, on whom the Firm relied entirely. But Harrop was frequently away visiting other ports.

The losses could not be entirely blamed on Harrop. Both Holloway and Desvoeux had noticed that trade in Aceh was carried out on a system of credit. Even small quantities of goods were advanced to Acehnese merchants. Organizations such as the Madras Firm and the East India Company, which relied on bulk trade and barter, could not compete against the Chulias and local traders who, according to Desvoeux, were willing to give long-term credit. In the end, the Firm had little choice but to also advance goods in order to compete in Aceh. One of those to whom the Firm allowed credit was the Sultan. Soon the association faced serious cash-flow problems, and even became indebted to some Chulia traders.

Desvoeux commented that the Chulias were prominent in the trade at Aceh where a large number of them, especially from Nagore and Porto Novo, turned up regularly each year. They linked up easily with the local merchants and planters, such as those in the pepper and betel-nut regions. Some of the Chulias owned homes in the capital, and a number of them had become
close to the rulers. Considering the large number of Chulias and the important commercial role they played, the rulers found it helpful to have men with similar background and experience to be advisers or commercial agents. In turn, the Chulias considered it advantageous to have their people at the rulers’ courts. At the time of Desvoeux’s visit, however, it was a Malabar Muslim, known only as Kassim, who was influential in the Acehnese court. He also held the important position of *syahbandar*. Although from Malabar, Kassim was acceptable to the Chulias.

After waiting a few more days, Desvoeux decided to meet the Sultan. However, probably on the advice of Harrop, he asked first to see Kassim. At the meeting, Desvoeux explained the purpose of his mission. Kassim showed some anxiety when told that Desvoeux was planning to take over the Madras Firm’s factory in Aceh. Kassim could have been under the initial impression that Desvoeux, as with Holloway, was there merely to hold exploratory discussions with the Sultan and to collect data about the country’s trade, after which he would leave. But it became clear that the mission intended to stay and to station its own sepoys if allowed by the Sultan to do so. Such a move had broad implications, both for Aceh and for his own position. A British resident with sepoys would eventually exercise considerable influence on the Sultan and overshadow that of Kassim. For the moment, there was little else that Kassim could do, and he agreed to arrange an audience for Desvoeux with the Sultan.

Mahmud Syah was well briefed by Kassim before he met Desvoeux the next day. In their discussions, the Sultan agreed to allow the Company to have a settlement in Aceh. Possibly against the advice of Kassim, he also approved the stationing of sepoys at the Company’s proposed premises. As for expenses for troop maintenance, Desvoeux argued that this should be passed on to the Sultan since the latter would benefit most from the security provided. To this, the Sultan replied that he was not able to bear the costs, and cited his weak financial position as a reason. He explained that he had farmed out the collection of port duties, which was his main source of income, to some merchants for a five-year term in exchange for 60,000 rupees per annum. Ten thousand rupees went towards repaying a loan, and the remaining amount was barely sufficient for his and his family’s needs. Desvoeux, who had been hoping to have the rights to the collection of port dues, was disappointed that these had already
been given out. He proposed that, as an alternative compensation, the import and export duties on all Company goods be waived. To this, the Sultan agreed.

At a subsequent meeting, the Sultan agreed to Desvoeux taking over immediately the premises of the Madras Firm. When Desvoeux inspected the factory, he came away unhappy with its location, which was only about 500 metres from the Sultan's fort, but was some 5 kilometres from the river-mouth. Desvoeux suspected that the Sultan had sited the factory close enough to his fort to monitor the activities of the Firm. It was also conveniently near by so that the Sultan could call on the sepoys if he were attacked by troublesome *ulubalang*. Desvoeux would have preferred the factory nearer the mouth of the river to facilitate transfer of goods from the ships. There was also the strategic consideration. Desvoeux did not want a factory site too far inland; it could easily be cut off from the sea.

On 8 April, Desvoeux formally handed over the Company's letter to the Sultan with accompanying presents. Later on the same day, the Sultan reciprocated by sending a document granting the Company the tract of land on which the factory stood, and the right to import and export goods free of duty. On receiving the documents, Desvoeux hoisted the British flag to signify the take-over of the factory.

Thus, in April 1772, the East India Company had two settlements, one in Kedah and the other in Aceh. Monckton had, in the meantime, obtained permission from the Sultan of Kedah to set up a factory there. In both cases, the Company took over existing facilities of the Madras Firm, although fresh agreements were signed with the respective Sultans. The two missions had progressed quite independently of each other, but they had managed to keep each other informed of their progress.

The issue that remained unresolved was a proposed general trade agreement with Aceh. Desvoeux reported that in the existing circumstances, the Sultan was not in a financial position to accept large consignments of goods from the Company, an arrangement preferred by Madras: 'nor is he provided with the means of giving Security for the Payment of any which might be sold to him upon Credit'.
would have to keep troops there. Thus, unless some form of trade
agreement was worked out, the prospect of a viable Company
venture in Aceh was bleak.

A few days after his meeting with the Sultan, Desvoeux found
out that it was none other than the Madras Firm that had been
given the rights for the collection of port duties. Desvoeux went to
see the Sultan again, and after much insistence persuaded
Mahmud Syah to transfer the collection rights to the Company.72
But these were only for collection of duties due from European
vessels. Half of the collection would be retained by the Company
to cover the expenses of stationing the sepoys in Aceh. The other
half was to be given to Harrop to clear the Sultan’s debt to the
syndicate. Eventually, the entire proceeds would go to the Company.
Duties from non-European ships remained with the Sultan.

Madras was regularly briefed by Desvoeux through his reports
on the negotiations. The council suggested a tentative acceptance
of the Sultan’s offer, but ruled that the long-term position of the
factory depended on London’s approval. But given Desvoeux’s
pessimistic assessment of trade prospects in Aceh, the council
held few hopes that the operations of the factory could be
continued. While waiting for further instructions from London,
Madras sent over to Aceh quantities of goods to be traded. The
proceeds were to help cover the factory’s expenses.73 Desvoeux was,
however, asked not to enter into any major trading commitment.
Neither was he to carry out trade on a scale that might harm the
interests of the Madras Firm. In the meanwhile, another official,
William Sedgely, was to be sent to assist Desvoeux in Aceh.74

Given the uncertainty of the situation, Desvoeux carried out very
little trading. In May 1772, he reportedly managed to purchase a
shipload of rice from Pedir and arranged to send it to Monckton
in Kedah.75 There was said to be a shortage of rice in Kedah, and
the Monckton mission was experiencing some difficulties. Desvoeux
wrote that he encouraged Acehnese and Pedirese merchants to
export rice to Kuala Kedah; this suggested that he was already in
contact with the local traders.

The subject of compensation to the Madras Firm came up at this
time. The council was understandably very sympathetic to the
claims of the Madras syndicate. On 17 June 1772, John Sulivan
and Antonio de Souza, the two members managing the syndicate
offered to hand over to the Company their factories in Kedah and
Aceh, together with such privileges as had been granted by the
rulers. In return, they asked that the Company assist the Firm in
recovering all debts in the two sultanates. The syndicate was willing to relinquish to the Company the right to the collection of port duties. But they wanted equitable compensation for the warehouses, properties, and various goods to be taken over by the Company in Kedah and Aceh.

In its reply to Desvoeux’s letter of 23 May 1772, the council on 20 June gave instructions to Desvoeux on the wind-up of the Madras Firm’s factory. One of Desvoeux’s duties was to calculate the amount of compensation due to the Firm, which was to be allowed to trade freely until January 1773 (under the concessions it had gained from the Sultan) as it wound up all its business affairs. Until its debts from the Sultan were fully recovered, the syndicate could continue to collect that part of port duties farmed out to it. Even after the Company assumed all its rights, the Firm could still trade in Aceh just like any other merchant group. Finally, the council proposed that given its experience, the Firm should be retained by the Company to help manage the collection of port duties.

The Company’s interest in safeguarding the future of the Madras Firm was understandable since several of its members were shareholders of the syndicate, and they were clearly anxious that their investments in Aceh be protected. The Firm was still very much a viable proposition if properly run, and with Aceh as one of its bases, it was expected to continue operating in the archipelago. Its ships bought tin and other commodities from the Malay states. Some of these goods were brought to Aceh while others were collected by Company ships en route to China. While Desvoeux was in Aceh from March 1772 to January 1773, at least three Company ships were sent by Madras to collect tin obtained by the Firm. These were the Lincoln, which arrived on 9 July, the Norfolk on 2 August, and the Aurora on 7 August. Four other ships, the Minerva, the Ann, the Cuddalore, and the Crescent, had also called at Aceh during the same period.

The Sultan Withdraws the Concession

Meanwhile in Aceh, a dispute arose between Desvoeux and the Sultan over the matter of port duties. Following the agreement made in April 1772, Desvoeux had been collecting duties from the few European ships that arrived in Aceh. When Desvoeux finally went to the palace to obtain the formal grant, the Sultan indicated that he had changed his mind and was taking back the
rights. Sultan Mahmud’s change of mind came about when he discovered that it was a practice of many non-European ships to fly the British flag or to engage European captains in order to obtain British naval protection, and that by doing so, they were no longer liable to pay duties to the Sultan under the terms of the concession. The Company gained because of this, but not the Sultan. Desvoeux, however, reminded the Sultan that an agreement had been made. The Sultan was firm in his stand, but finally agreed to an amendment that the Company could continue to collect such port duties as agreed upon until December 1772.

Soon afterwards, a letter from Madras dated 20 June 1772 arrived, instructing Desvoeux to obtain from the Sultan half of the port taxes due not only from European but from all ships. When approached, the Sultan politely turned down the request, explaining that his subjects would object strongly to such a grant. A concession of this nature would enhance the power of the Company in Aceh, and signing away such a grant would render the Sultan’s political position even more precarious.

Desvoeux did not view the Sultan’s change of mind kindly, and confirmed his very poor opinion of Mahmud Syah. A month after his arrival, he wrote an assessment of the Sultan:

The Sultan is universally thought to be a man of a very mean Capacity and my own Observations have fully confirmed me in this opinion. He is really as weak and Capricious as a child and it is surprising that such a man should have been so long suffered even to bear the name of Sovereign. He is ever the Tool of Flatterers, and so very inconstant that if his greatest Favourite Cassim happens but for one Day to be prevented by Illness or other accidents from paying him the accustomed tribute of adulation, he listens eagerly to the advice and pursues the measures proposed by the next sycophant, however opposite to the Counsel he had before received from Cassim and warmly adopted. 79

Desvoeux’s latest request on the port duties came to the knowledge of the Chulias, who were already apprehensive about the mission. Desvoeux claimed that the Chulias had long been evading the payment of duties to the Sultan. Should the Company take over the collection, it would be more difficult for them to do so. Desvoeux alleged that the Chulias were determined not to allow the British to gain control and had instigated the Sultan against the Company.

The opposition of the Chulias soon became more apparent. They allegedly passed word around the capital that more troops from
India would arrive in Aceh. The rumour gained currency from two events taking place. First, there had indeed been some troop movements in the region. In August 1772, some of the troops accompanying the Monckton mission stopped at Aceh on their way home to Madras following the decision to pull back from Kedah. Desvoeux indicated in his report that he expected more troops to arrive from Kedah on transit to India. In the light of the rumours spread by the Chulias, such activities confirmed the apprehension of the Acehnese. Secondly, the behaviour of the British also created much suspicion among the Acehnese and the Chulias. The hoisting of the British flag over the factory by Desvoeux could very well have led to some unease among the ulubalang. Their anxiety would have been heightened by the firing of guns by arriving British ships as a salute to the flag.

The matter of port collection caused further unpleasantness between Desvoeux and the Sultan. According to Desvoeux, a vessel from Surat, the *Commerce*, flying English colours and commanded by a European arrived at Aceh on 10 September. The supercargo was an Indian. Desvoeux decided that duties were liable from the *Commerce* to the Company. At the same time, the Sultan’s officials had also demanded port duties from the supercargo, insisting that the ship was not really a European vessel. Suspecting that the supercargo, having been threatened by the Acehnese, was going to make a deal with the Sultan’s officials prior to sailing, Desvoeux had him detained in the fort until he settled his port duties.

The incident that really brought matters to a head, however, was Desvoeux’s attempt to repair the fort. At about the time of the *Commerce* incident in September, Desvoeux, noting that the strategically important southern wall of the fort within the factory compound was in poor condition, ordered repair work to be carried out. Not long afterwards, Desvoeux was summoned by the Sultan, who demanded that all work on the fort be stopped immediately. The Sultan informed Desvoeux that the construction work was alarming his people, who probably viewed the activities as an attempt to expand the fortifications. Desvoeux insisted that the fort had to be repaired because its south side was exposed. A compromise was reached when it was agreed that only bamboo materials be used, and that the Sultan would have these delivered. The promised materials, however, did not arrive for several days. Acehnese from the interior, presumably from the twenty-two mukim federation, were seen gathering around the factory. Desvoeux
thereupon ordered the immediate resumption of the repair work to the southern wall. Only then did the Sultan send the supply of bamboo.

On 15 November, Desvoeux received a letter from the Sultan in which he explained that the arrival of the mission and the recent developments had led to growing discontent among his people against him. There were accusations that the Sultan had sold the country to the British. Several Acehnese chiefs were said to have formed an alliance to overthrow him. Mahmud Syah told Desvoeux that he had no choice but to ask for the return of the grant that allowed the setting up of a factory, and that all the sepoys should leave Aceh by the first available ship. He assured Desvoeux that he would settle the debt he owed to Harrop.

Desvoeux replied that no withdrawal could be made until instructions were received from Madras, and the earliest that he expected any communication would be February of the next year. The Sultan sent another note a few days later repeating his earlier request. A letter addressed to Madras was included, explaining why all concessions had to be withdrawn.83

Desvoeux, in his letter to Madras, judged that the situation was becoming very difficult, and that the safety of the mission was endangered. While the existing garrison of sepoys could deal with an emergency situation, there would, in the long run, be problems of supplies. At 5 kilometres from the entrance of the river, its supply and evacuation route could easily be cut off. There was already a hostile and ugly mood against the factory, and for the mission to insist on remaining, a much larger force would have to be deployed. The Sultan’s call for the withdrawal of the mission was, by this time, widely known in the capital, and British refusal could only worsen the situation.

The Sultan’s withdrawal of the grant may seem to confirm contemporary assessment of him as weak and unreliable.84 But a closer look at the sequence of events leads to a more sympathetic evaluation. Mahmud Syah’s initial warm response and the granting of concessions were genuine. He seemed determined to clear a debt that was due to the Madras Firm, part of which could have been compensation related to the La Paix incident. There was the new debt incurred through goods being regularly advanced to the Sultan by the Firm but which had not been paid for, and Holloway, Desvoeux, and Harrop all point out in their reports that this had arisen because of his spendthrift habits. Mahmud Syah’s own explanation was that expenses had been incurred in dealing with
political unrest in the country. Military supplies had to be bought, and armed supporters paid for. Moreover, during periods of unrest and disturbances, the collection of various taxes was all the more difficult. The enforcement of port duties along the west coast had also been greatly affected following the reported arrest of the Panglima Laut in late 1771, at the time when Holloway was in Aceh.

Despite all these events, Mahmud Syah had earlier been willing to transfer the grant from the association to the Company because he accepted that Harrop had to comply with the instructions of the Madras Council. His debt to Harrop had still to be cleared, and he accepted a revised arrangement that involved the Company. The new deal at first appealed to Mahmud Syah because with the Company he could expect reliable military assistance to bring greater stability to the capital.

He realized the risks in granting the Company the right to establish a factory in Aceh and to the collection of duties, even though it was only from European ships. The Sultan was well aware of the distinction between the Madras Firm as a private company and the Company, which commanded the political and military power of a state. The raising of the flag over the settlement by Desvoeux and the firing of salutes from arriving ships demonstrated some of that power, and must have increased unease among the Acehnese. Mahmud Syah might have been warned by the ulubalang that the British were dangerous, and could come to dominate Aceh politically. The British presence in Bencoolen, Natal, and Tapanuli was a nearby reminder of what could happen.

Mahmud Syah himself probably had no such fear. His only concern was the hostile reaction from the Acehnese orang kaya and ulubalang to the agreements with Desvoeux. At first, he seemed to have calculated that this opposition could not be any worse than the unrest already prevailing in the capital. He hoped that the Company’s sepoys would be a sufficient discouragement to any new trouble.

It is more likely that Mahmud Syah changed his mind and asked for the withdrawal of the mission because of intensified pressure from the Chulias, who regarded the British as rivals. In Kedah where the Chulias were already dominant, Francis Light reported that they ‘would want to keep out the British’. With strong opposition from his ulubalang already, the Sultan could not risk alienating yet another powerful group. The Chulias were
naturally apprehensive at the turn of events. They noted that Monckton and Desvoeux had succeeded by April 1772 in setting up factories in Kedah and Aceh. The Chulias must have realized that with factories in the two states, British influence could expand considerably in the straits region, especially when backed by military force.

In Aceh, the Chulias tolerated the April agreement between Desvoeux and the Sultan since this covered collection of port duties from European ships only. Chulia vessels remained liable only to the Sultan. When Desvoeux subsequently requested control of half the port duties on all ships, this was certainly not acceptable to the Chulias. There would be stricter control of collection if this was approved, thus rendering evasion more difficult. This could affect not only their profits, but also competitiveness against other traders. Already the Company enjoyed exemptions from export and import duties. Furthermore, the collection of duties could result in the Company control of the port.

At this point in time, several Chulia ships from Nagore and Porto Novo arrived in Aceh. The months of August and September were the beginning of a new season for the Chulia trade in the straits region. Significantly, the Sultan’s change of mind took place not long afterwards. Furthermore, Desvoeux noted that the new arrivals were more opposed to the British presence. They could have added to the chorus of opposition, and advised the Sultan against granting the additional concessions sought by Desvoeux. The Sultan must have been, by this time, calculating his own losses because several non-European ships were passing themselves off as European-registered vessels.

Developments in Kedah at this time might have further encouraged the Chulias in their opposition. By August 1772, it was known in Aceh that the Kedah Sultan had terminated his contract with Monckton. The mission began pulling out from Kedah, and the sight of detachments of sepoys stopping at Aceh en route to Madras must have given much encouragement to those in Aceh opposed to the Desvoeux presence. The Kedah events would have also influenced Mahmud Syah.

There was, however, a slight hitch to an early withdrawal of Desvoeux from Aceh. In Kedah, there had been no encumbrances. But in Aceh, the Sultan still owed the Madras Firm a sum of money. Realizing that this could be used by Desvoeux to delay a pull-out from Aceh, the Chulias came forward to help out the Sultan. Mohamed Haffas, a prominent Chulia from whom the Firm
had borrowed 24 katis of gold, agreed to set this sum off against what was owed to the syndicate by the Sultan. Considering the size of the loan involved, the offer indicated how keen the Chulias were in wanting the mission out of Aceh.

Desvoeux also suspected the Chulias to be behind the gathering of armed Acehnese around the factory in September at the time discussions on the port duties were being held with the Sultan and when the fort was being repaired. Given their close business links with some of the orang kaya and ulubalang, the Chulias could quite easily have instigated the Acehnese to demonstrate their opposition to the factory. The threat of violence also represented a form of pressure on the Sultan.

Against a background of unrest from the ulubalang, the Chulias’ opposition to the Company’s presence was an important explanation of the Sultan’s request for the withdrawal of the Desvoeux mission. Mahmud Syah depended on the commercial and financial backing of the Chulia merchants, with whom he mainly traded, and from whom he had credit facilities. Without their support, there was no way he could deal with his own ulubalang.

On receiving Desvoeux’s letter of 9 December 1772, Madras decided to recall the mission. Two ships, the Cuddalore and the Aurora, were dispatched to bring home the mission and the accompanying sepoys. Desvoeux was asked to make clear to Mahmud Syah that the withdrawal was at the request of the Sultan, and that the grant could be taken up again when circumstances were more favourable. In the meantime, the Sultan was to compensate the Company for the factory building and other assets. If the Sultan was unable to pay, an acknowledgement note was required so that the Company could at some future date make its claim or assume control once more of the factory premises.

In January 1773, Desvoeux was still in Aceh. Writing on 9 January, he reported that the collection of all port duties had reverted to the Acehnese court. Desvoeux left Aceh some time later that month, and proceeded to Bencoolen. He returned to Madras in July 1773. Part of the troop detachment was redeployed in Bencoolen upon the latter’s request, and this was much appreciated, given past failures to recruit sepoys from India. With that, a major attempt by the British to establish a base in Aceh came to an end.

Mahmud Syah’s problems did not end there. Six months after Desvoeux’s withdrawal, his capital was attacked by the Panglima Polim of the twenty-two mukim federation. The Sultan was
defeated and forced to flee. It is not known whether or not this rebellion was linked in any way to the events that had taken place during Desvoeux’s mission. The Panglima Sagis helped install Raja Udana Lela as the new Sultan. Less than two months later, Mahmud Syah gathered his forces in the federation of four mukim in the vicinity of the capital, and regained the support of several territorial chiefs. He defeated his opponents and returned victoriously to the capital. There were no further reports of major rebellions against him after that.

Thomas Forrest stopped at Aceh in 1775 on his way to Bencoolen. He wanted to pay his respects to Sultan Mahmud, who, however, was reportedly very ill and was not receiving visitors. Abraham, the old Jewish trader, was still in Aceh. But there was a new syahbandar, a Chulia who had replaced Kassim as the close adviser to the Sultan. The background of the new syahbandar reflected the continued influence and importance of the Chulias as a trading community in Aceh. Mahmud Syah passed away in 1781.

7. Forrest, A Voyage from Calcutta, p. 49.
8. Ibid.
11. F. Jourdan to Messrs Sulivan and de Souza, undated, enclosed to Secretary Goodlad of Select Committee, Fort St George, on 10 February 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.
12. The names of the shareholders are found in the list of those who signed letters to the Fort St George Council on the loss of the Indian Trader's goods. An example is the letter from the owners of the Indian Trader to Charles Bourchier, President and Governor, Fort St George, 19 January 1768 (FSGCP 21 January 1768), HMS, 110(2).


14. 'A letter from Mr Jourdan on Behalf of the owners of the snow King George to the Secretary is read and entered hereafter, making an offer of 500 candies of Tin which he expects to have at Malacca in the course of the present month at 34 pagodas per candy to be received by the Company's ship at Malacca—the weight to be ascertained at Canton—the amount to be paid here in the month of January or February next with Land interest from the time of delivery on Board the Company's ship' (FSGCP 19 June 1770), Madras Public Department Consultations, Range 240, Vol. 30.


16. Extract of a letter from Gowan Harrop, supercargo of the ship Indian Trader and ketch Experiment dated Malacca 19 December 1767, presented at Fort St George Consultations, 21 January 1768, HMS, 110.


18. Owners of the Indian Trader to Charles Bourchier, President and Governor of Fort St George, 19 February 1768 (FSGCP 19 February 1768), HMS, 110.

19. Sir Robert Harland, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Ships in India, to President and Council of Fort St George, 26 October 1771, HMS, 110.

20. Owners of the Indian Trader to President and Governor in Council, Fort St George, 19 January 1768 (FSGCP 21 January 1768), HMS, 110.


25. Owners of the Indian Trader to Charles Bourchier, President and Governor of Fort St George, 28 July 1768 (FSGCP 5 September 1768), Madras Public Department Consultations, Range 240, Vol. 27.

26. F. Jourdan to Messrs Sulivan and de Souza, undated, enclosed to Secretary Goodlad of Select Committee, Fort St George, on 10 February 1772 (FSGCP, 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

27. D. K. Bassett, 'The British Missions to Kedah and Acheh in 1772: Some

28. General letter of Court of Directors to Fort St George, 10 April 1771 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

29. J. Darvell to L. Sulivan, 4 December 1769, Sumatra, Vol. 30.

30. Court of Directors to Fort St George, 10 April 1771 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.


32. Secret Committee, London, to Fort St George, 8 May 1771 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.


35. F. Jourdan, J. Sulivan, and A. de Souza to Secretary of the Government, 10 February 1772 (FSGCP 17 February 1772), Madras Public Department Consultations, Range 240, Vol. 36.

36. Fort St George to Court of Directors, 28 February 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.


38. Ibid.

39. KB 3335 OB 1770, Padang Resolutions, 28 September 1770.


41. He had the title of Tunku Laut. *Prince of Wales Island Gazette*, 5, 213 (June 1819).


43. Resident at Barus to Padang, 14 March 1771, KA 3361 OB 1771.

44. Resident at Barus to Padang, 27 July 1771, KB 3361 OB 1771.

45. Resident at Barus to Padang, 26 October 1771, KB 3361 OB 1771.

46. FMCP 20 September 1771, Sumatra, Vol. 79, p. 298.


51. Resident at Barus to Padang, 26 October 1771, KB 3361 OB 1771.


54. Light (1740–94) joined the British Navy in 1759. He left the Navy, and went to India in 1765, where he later entered the service of the Madras Association.


60. Fort St George to Secret Committee in London, 28 February 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

61. Ibid.

62. Instructions to C. Desvoeux from the Select Committee, Fort St George, 23 February 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

63. Instructions to E. Monckton from the Select Committee, Fort St George, 23 February 1772, Sumatra, Vol. 15.

64. Governor of Fort St George to Lieut. T. Lane, Commander of *Adventure*, 23 February 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

65. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 15 April 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

66. Harrop subsequently returned to India and set up a company in partnership with Edward Stevenson. The Harrop–Stevenson Agency House was based in Tranquebar and dealt largely with Madras and the Malay Archipelago in the 'country trade'. The agency house, which owned several country ships, experienced difficulties and Harrop was briefly imprisoned by Hyder Ally, the Sultan of Mysore. In the 1790s, Harrop’s fortunes improved when his agency house supplied ammunition to the British during the war with Tipu Ali. Harrop also opened up indigo plantations. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade*, pp. 294–5.


68. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 9 December 1772, Sumatra, Vol. 15.

69. Sultan of Aceh’s grant of a factory to the East India Company, 8 April 1772. Encl. in letter from C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 15 April 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

70. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 23 May 1772 (FSGCP 25 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

71. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 15 April 1772 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

72. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 23 May 1772, Sumatra, Vol. 15.

73. FSGCP 25 June 1772, Sumatra, Vol. 15.

74. G. Prock was sent to assist Monckton in Kedah.

75. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 23 May 1772, Sumatra, Vol. 15.

76. J. Sullivan and A. de Souza to Josias Du Pre, President and Governor, Fort St George, 17 June 1772 (FSGCP 19 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.
77. Select Committee, Fort St George, to C. Desvoeux, 20 June 1772 (FSGCP 24 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

78. J. Sulivan and A. de Souza to Fort St George, 24 June 1772 (FSGCP 25 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

79. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 23 May 1772 (FSGCP 25 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

80. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 9 December 1772 (FSGCP 29 December 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15. Earlier in July, Monckton, on instructions from Madras, had clarified to the Sultan that the treaty arrangement just concluded between the Company and Kedah was not an offensive one. The Sultan, disappointed that the British were unwilling to help him against Selangor, therefore withdrew the earlier offer. Bonney, *Kedah 1771–1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, pp. 49–51.

81. Ibid.

82. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 9 December 1772 (FSGCP 29 December 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

83. Sultan of Aceh to Fort St George, undated, enclosed with letter from C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, 9 December 1772 (FSGCP 29 December 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.


85. F. Light to F. Jourdan, 25 November 1771 (FSGCP 17 June 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

86. According to Forrest, Chulia ships arrived for the new trading season in August, taking advantage of the monsoon winds, and returned in the months between February and April of the following year. Forrest, *A Voyage from Calcutta*, p. 40.

87. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George, 9 December 1772 (FSGCP 29 December 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

88. G. Harrop to C. Desvoeux, undated but enclosed with letter from C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, 9 December 1772 (FSGCP 29 December 1772), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

89. Fort St George Proceedings, 29 December 1772, Sumatra, Vol. 15.

90. Fort St George to C. Desvoeux, undated (FSGCP 7 January 1773), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

91. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, 7 January 1773 (FSGCP 7 January 1773), Sumatra, Vol. 15.

92. C. Desvoeux to Select Committee, Fort St George (FSGCP 13 August 1773) Madras Public Department Consultations, Range 240, Vol. 34.


Sultan Muhammed Syah, 1781–1795

The Sultan and the Botham Mission, 1782

SULTAN MAHMUD SYAH was succeeded in June 1781 by his son, who took the title of Sultan Ala’ad-din Muhammed Syah. During Muhammed Syah’s reign a new phase of agricultural development took place along the west coast of Aceh. This was carried out largely through the initiative of local rajas and immigrant Acehnese. The soil in this part of Aceh was most suited for the cultivation of pepper, and new plants brought from the Malabar coast grew very well in the sloping, well-drained coastal plains and river valleys. Pepper cultivation was greatly boosted by an expanding trade through Indian, American, and European ships frequenting the west coast. As the region developed, it attracted Acehnese from other areas, including Pedir, to settle there and to open up new pepper gardens. Some of the migrants were those forced to move away from the older pepper areas of Aceh due to soil exhaustion there. Henry Botham, when he was at the Acehnese capital in 1782, also blamed the Sultan’s trade policy for the decline of pepper cultivation in Aceh Proper. All pepper there had to be sold to the syahbandar, who paid 6 Spanish dollars per pikul, a price lower than that offered elsewhere. It became, therefore, another factor for the migration of Acehnese planters to the west coast.

Muhammed Syah was only twenty-two years of age when he came to power. Thomas Forrest, on his final visit to Aceh in 1784, had the opportunity to meet the new Sultan. Forrest learnt from Poh Salleh, the syahbandar who had also served Mahmud Syah, and Abraham, the old Jewish trader, that Muhammed Syah had spent a short while at Mauritius. The young prince was on his way to Mecca when bad weather forced his ship to change course. Mauritius was a busy port which also served as a base for French naval vessels. While on the island, he became fascinated with the casting of iron and the manufacture of artillery shells carried out there. He learnt about the industry, and when Forrest visited him...
in the palace on the first occasion, he proudly displayed a shell which he had cast himself. Through his travels, Muhammed Syah had also acquired some knowledge of French and Portuguese.

Muhammed was depicted in contemporary accounts as a ruler who withdrew into seclusion for long periods. During such times, he was said to engage in meditation, a practice which suggested that he was deeply religious. However, one account claimed that he was particularly involved in teachings and practices designed to render himself invulnerable to harm. He was interested in books, and certainly he could read Arabic. Given his character and reticent style, it was not surprising that his wife, the Principal Queen, gradually gained some influence over the affairs of the court.

Muhammed Syah was married to the daughter of Sultan Badr ad-Din, who in 1764 briefly occupied the throne. The marriage to Marah di Awan was probably an attempt to heal whatever bitterness there might have been between the two families. Marah di Awan showed later that she had not entirely abandoned the ambition of her family. She not only expanded her own influence within the court, but also saw to it that her brother, the Tuanku Raja, had some role. Moreover, she seemed to have retained the links which her father, Sultan Badr ad-Din, had established with the three Panglima Sagis.

Muhammed Syah came to power at a time when the position of the throne came under pressure from new directions. The internal danger from rebellious ulubalang was always there. But a growing threat was the impact of an increasing British commercial and political presence from this period on: the establishment of Penang in 1786, and a more commercially assertive Tapanuli and Natal. All these British settlements opened up trade along the west and Pedir coasts, further loosening the political and trade ties between the capital and the Acehnese dependencies.

**London Examines Aceh’s Strategic Potential**

In the sight of the East India Company, Aceh was still of potential commercial and naval importance. As British trade in China grew, the demand for South-East Asian commodities increased. An entrepôt centre located in Aceh would facilitate the acquisition of such goods for the China trade. Since the 1770s, the search had been for such a place, as seen in the missions of Monckton and Desvoeux.
As a possible naval base, Aceh became even more strategic when war broke out once again in 1780 between British and French forces in India. During the conflict, British and French navies renewed the contest for dominance in the Bay of Bengal. The British learnt with concern that, during the monsoon periods, French fleets sailed to the sultanate’s ports for shelter and to refit. From Aceh, the French were able to return to the Indian coast earlier than the British navy, which had to sail all the way to Bombay on the other side of the subcontinent. This naval advantage of the French dangerously exposed British settlements on the Indian east coast, as when Admiral Suffren appeared in Indian waters in 1782 and caused great anxiety to British officials in India and London. French use of Aceh had, therefore, to be neutralized, either by getting the Acehnese to deny the use of port facilities to the French, or by the Company obtaining a site of comparable advantage as that in Aceh.  

There was a third possibility, and this was to occupy Aceh itself. It was an option favoured by Lawrence Sullivan and William James, the chairman and deputy chairman respectively of the East India Company in London, who called for the urgent establishment of a British settlement in Aceh. Writing on 16 November 1781 to Lord Hillsborough, the Secretary of Trade, they expressed fears that Bencoolen might fall at any time to the French as had happened once before in 1760. Should this occur, the pepper trade of the British would be seriously disrupted. Therefore, Aceh should be acquired for such contingencies, to protect British commercial interests. To enhance Aceh’s value as a naval base, Sullivan and James recommended the occupation of the nearby Nicobar and Andaman islands. Both places had abundant timber suitable for ship construction and repair.  

In any case, Bencoolen, the only British settlement in South-East Asia, was not conveniently located. It was too far from the regular sea lanes. Furthermore, for a number of years, Bencoolen had been an unprofitable concern. Earlier in 1778, Sullivan had suggested that a new British settlement be established in Aceh, and that the civil and military establishment of Bencoolen be transferred there. With Aceh developed into a centre of British commercial activities for the region, Bencoolen could remain a residency, but subordinate to the administration in Aceh.  

The idea of Aceh as a possible British base was thus once again raised. This was despite the disappointment of the earlier missions.
Reports about the political and commercial prospects of the place had generally been unfavourable. Yet Sulivan was very positively disposed towards Aceh. It is not clear how he came to such a view. Having earlier served in India as an official and later as a merchant, he was certainly familiar with the situation in South-East Asia. Or the plan could have come from merchants in Madras or Bengal, who were closely associated with trade in the Malay states and who were worried about the expansion of Dutch influence. They feared that Dutch expansion might cut off their access to the region unless a base was quickly established to demarcate British interests and to protect British shipping and trade.

Lord Hillsborough was impressed by the arguments of Sulivan and James, and gave his immediate approval. Thus, in December 1781, the secret committee wrote to Bengal instructing it to establish a factory in Aceh. Bengal was to secure from Aceh a tract of land for a fort. The tract had to be sufficiently large to allow for subsequent expansion, and there was to be unhindered access to the sea. London must have remembered Desvoeux’s comments about the vulnerable location of the earlier fort used by the Madras Firm.

In its instructions, London stressed urgency in order to pre-empt the French and the Dutch in Aceh. There was certainly concern that Bencoolen might, by then, have fallen to the Dutch. This would leave the British without a base in Sumatra.

In the present posture of Affairs, we fear Fort Marlborough is before now possessed by the Dutch from Batavia therefore an Establishment at Aceen is more necessary. No time must be unnecessarily lost in treating with the King of Aceen for an exclusive settlement even suppose we proceed no further at present, then to fix a small number of servants there and to hoist English Colours in order to preclude Europeans from obtaining a Residence...

Botham Conveys London’s Request

Bengal did not particularly share London’s sense of urgency or enthusiasm. As it so happened, Henry Botham, a member of the Bencoolen Council, was in Calcutta at this time to bring attention to the poor state of Bencoolen’s defence, weakened by a recent accidental destruction of its arsenal. His briefing on conditions in the Sumatran region convinced Bengal that it would be difficult to get the Sultan’s permission to build a fort in Aceh. Anyway, since Botham was returning to Bencoolen, Bengal asked that he stop over at Aceh to raise London’s request with the Sultan.
Muhammed Syah had been ruler for about a year when Botham arrived in early December 1782 on board the *Elizabeth*. Aceh appeared quiet and peaceful. The new Sultan was accepted by the *orang kaya* and *ulubalang*, but as yet he wielded little real authority. It was said that much of the power and influence in the capital were held by the *ulubalang* and *orang kaya*. The Sultan at this stage already felt besieged. Philip Braham, the resident of Bencoolen, had been in Aceh a year earlier. This was in July 1781, shortly after Muhammed Syah had taken over. 'Mr Braham had an opportunity of learning the great degree of power and control possessed by certain of the *orang kayas*, who held their respective districts in actual sovereignty, and kept the city in awe by stopping, when it suited their purpose, the supplies of provisions.'

A year later, when Botham arrived, the Sultan’s position remained unchanged. However, several Chulias had by this time become influential in the Acehnese court once again. The most powerful of them was Poh Salleh, the *syahbandar*. Some accounts suggested that sometime in 1773 Poh Salleh ousted Kassim, Mahmud Syah’s close adviser. Kassim was said to have been poisoned, and there were rumours that Mahmud Syah died through a similar cause. Poh Salleh’s own account was that he succeeded his brother, who held the position before him, an account which is more plausible since, according to Forrest’s description in 1784, he was about the same age as Muhammed Syah. In 1784, Poh Salleh would only have been in his early twenties, too young to have served Mahmud Syah in 1773. It is likely that it was his brother who had taken over from Kassim.

Poh Salleh was the only official whom Botham could meet during the entire period of his mission. Attempts to see the Sultan, for whom Botham had brought a letter and presents from the Governor-General, were politely turned down. According to Botham, the excuse given was that ‘the King could not at present receive me in Person, that under the directions of his Priests and Physicians he was confined to a Room for Forty days and undergoing a course of medicine to render him invulnerable as his priest had forewarned him of some disturbances which would happen in the Government’.

Botham raised with Poh Salleh the possibility of having a factory and a fort. This was firmly refused. There was no way the Chulias or the Acehnese *orang kaya* would accept a British military presence in the Acehnese capital. However, Poh Salleh agreed to a commercial agent to look after British interests.

Botham, in his report to the supreme government, pointed out
that a base in Aceh would require a military force of 300 troops if the British were serious about the project. He regarded Poh Salleh as the main hindrance to the British. But he sensed that, as there was so much resentment against the Chulia syahbandar in the capital because of his preponderant influence at court, this opposition could be mobilized by the British to oust him easily. Botham learnt that some ulubalang had already made one attempt to remove him. But Poh Salleh was well protected within a stockade close to the palace where he had 100 armed sepoys. Botham believed that there would be ulubalang support if the British acted against Poh Salleh.

On receiving Botham’s report, Bengal agreed to take up Poh Salleh’s offer. J. Y. Kinloch, a Bengal official, was selected to assume responsibility as commercial agent in Aceh. The post was modest in scale. The earlier proposal had envisaged establishing some naval presence alongside that of a large factory, but since it was difficult to anticipate the capital’s politics, such a plan could be expensive and risky. It was also held that the strategic value of Aceh was by then not urgent or serious enough to warrant such risks. For the time being, a commercial agent would be sufficient, limited and tenuous though the position might be, but this could be expanded in the future if conditions in Aceh allowed.

Kinloch took up his position in Aceh, and remained there for a year. Nothing significant came out of his stay. He carried on some Company trade, largely to help cover the expenses of his post. Without a factory and support of sepoys, Kinloch’s position was virtually indistinguishable from other foreign traders in Aceh. After a year of indifferent trading, Kinloch was recalled.

The Sultan Honours Forrest

Forrest made no reference to Kinloch’s mission in his account of his trip to Aceh in 1784. This was Forrest’s final visit to Aceh, by which time Kinloch had long left Aceh. The Acehnese capital appeared quiet from Forrest’s account. While there was no indication that the Sultan was under any immediate challenge or threat, nevertheless sepoys continued to be recruited to serve as guards in the palace. Forrest commented that the young Sultan could not trust the Acehnese. He, therefore, had sepoys stationed outside the palace, and he had a guard of Indian mercenaries always close at hand. Francis Light, in August 1788, confirmed the observation of Forrest about the use of sepoy troops by the Sultan. 'The King of Acheen afraid to confide in any of his own People, has procured from the Coast a thousand Sepoys to Guard his Person,
and expects a further supply daily by his Vessels which are sent to Vijagapatem and other Ports on the Coast of Coromandel.25

What struck Forrest most was the further decline of the court’s influence vis-à-vis the ulubalang and orang kaya, compared to his earlier visits. Most significant was his observation about the deteriorating physical condition of the palace.

I never walked about the circuit of the palace; I feared it would have given offense, as if I was curious to spy the nakedness of the land: but I saw enough to convince me it had been once immensely large, and many parts showed an extensive ruin, with the points of beams in many places sticking up through the rubbish of long-fallen brick wall; the ruins of stone walls were overgrown with bushes, and were shaded by very large venerable trees and tall bamboos.26

Unlike Botham, Forrest was able to gain an audience with Muhammed Syah quite easily. The fact that he had known the Sultan’s father, Mahmud Syah, probably helped. Forrest met the Sultan several times, during which their conversations ranged over a variety of general subjects. Muhammed Syah seemed pleased to have the opportunity to talk to Forrest about the latter’s travels, especially around the Malay Archipelago. He was particularly keen to find out more about Europe and India. On one occasion, Forrest brought with him a book in French by Voltaire. ‘One day I carried a French book with me, a volume of Voltaire, which I left with him. I suspect, however, he could not read the Roman character; but he read with ease the names of the Molucca princes in the book I had presented, written in Arabic characters, which both Atcheenese and Malays use in writing.’27

In Forrest’s account, the Sultan came across as a person of intellectual curiosity. He was interested in the technology of armaments, and evidently enjoyed the long conversations with Forrest. He appreciated the evenings of discussion sufficiently to confer on Forrest the Acehnese Order of the Golden Sword, a few days before his departure from Aceh. The award granted the right to use the title orang kaya. It was an honour given to very few foreigners. Forrest valued the award conferred on him, and included a sketch of the medal in his portrait that appeared in one of the books he later published.28

The Rise of the West Coast Pepper Ports

Lebai Dappah and the Rise of Singkil

The individuals associated prominently with the opening of the Acehnese west coast were Lebai Kontee and Lebai Dappah. They
were brothers, but little is known of their background. Both must have been leaders of some standing in the Acehnese capital because they took a number of followers with them to the west coast. They could have been respected Islamic teachers. It is also possible that the two brothers might have been involved in some failed political intrigues against the Sultan, and subsequently forced to retreat to the more distant region. Having established themselves as chiefs in the west coast, both Lebai Kontee and Lebai Dappah eventually sought the Sultan’s recognition of their new status. Wherever the Acehnese immigrants settled, they continued in the late eighteenth century to consider themselves and the ports they controlled to be under the suzerainty of Aceh.

The two brothers first settled in Singkil, which was a very old settlement known to foreign traders since the early seventeenth century. However, it had gone into a decline and remained so until Lebai Dappah and his brother arrived. The Raja of Singkil at the time of the arrival of the two brothers was Teuku Poh Nyang. Through the energy of the Lebai Dappah family, Singkil was revitalized as a pepper-exporting port.Shortly afterwards, a power struggle developed between Teuku Poh Nyang and the new arrivals. The old chief then sought the support of the Sultan. According to an account, Lebai Kontee led the immigrant Acehnese in the eventual overthrow of Teuku Poh Nyang. After taking over, Lebai Kontee laid the foundation of Singkil's growth by encouraging neighbouring pepper districts to export their product through Singkil. Little pepper grew in the area immediately around Singkil because of the poor soil. But further to the south, the land was more fertile, and pepper was extensively planted. Lebai Kontee and later Lebai Dappah helped in the opening of pepper plantations in neighbouring districts and the selling of the produce to Singkil.

The development of the Acehnese west coast by Lebai Kontee and Lebai Dappah took place around the late 1770s and early 1780s. The declining years of Sultan Mahmud Syah and the later ascension to power of the young Muhammed Syah was a period of transition when there was less revenue demand and political interference from the capital. The two brothers were left undisturbed to expand their pepper trade, and to consolidate Singkil's influence over an increasingly broad stretch of the coast. Soon afterwards, Singkil took advantage of a power struggle within Susu, a port further to the north, to extend its influence there. According to John Canning who visited the region in 1814, new Malay settlers came to Susu around 1750. The soil there was
suited to pepper cultivation and the Malays opened plantations in response to the international pepper trade. It was said that the new community did not have a strong ruler. They then invited Dato Kanchrie, a chief from neighbouring Pulau Tapah, to be the head. But others turned to Raja Bagindah from Analabu. For a while, these two leaders agreed to share power. The arrangement did not last, and the two soon fell out. In the struggle, Raja Bagindah was supported by the Acehnese Sultan, whereupon Dato Kanchrie appealed to Lebai Dappah. With his help, Dato Kanchrie defeated Raja Bagindah. Not long afterwards, Lebai Dappah replaced Dato Kanchrie with Teuku Sarrang, his brother, and Poh Gadoon, his son, as chiefs of Susu.

At some point, Lebai Dappah's influence in the west coast came to be recognized by the Sultan. He was made the formal wakil (representative) of the Sultan, a title which was inscribed in the seals he used in all correspondence. The harmonious link was further strengthened when one of his daughters married Tuanku Raja, the brother-in-law of Muhammed Syah.

The expansion of Acehnese influence along the west coast began to worry Bencoolen. The British had two commercial residencies in the vicinity of the Acehnese west coast. These were Natal and Tapanuli. The settlement in Natal was established in 1751 by the Natal Concern, a private company whose early shareholders were officials of Bencoolen. The Company planned to use Natal to develop trade in the surrounding region, especially in camphor, benzoin, and later, pepper. Arrangements were made with local chiefs to supply these commodities on a regular basis. Some of these products were sold to visiting ships, but the bulk of them were brought back to Bencoolen. Tapanuli was established in 1756. It was started as a separate private enterprise, but eventually became part of the Natal venture. Tapanuli was situated further to the north, nearer to the Acehnese pepper ports, or what Bencoolen referred to as the north-western coast of Sumatra. Both Natal and Tapanuli were recognized by other European powers as belonging to the British only in 1763 under the terms of the Treaty of Paris.

At this time, the pepper districts of the Sumatran west coast consisted of dozens of ports headed by chiefs who also controlled adjacent stretches of land. Not all these ports were Acehnese. Some were said to be Malay districts while others had a mixed population that included Bataks. There was the important question of where exactly in the west coast did Acehnese political control end. During this period, the British considered Tapus to be the
southernmost limit of Acehnese authority. The population was largely Acehnese, consisting of those who had migrated from the twenty-five mukim federation. Barus, just further to the south and whose population consisted of Malays and Batak, was recognized by the British as independent.

The Acehnese rulers, on the other hand, maintained that the entire west coast stretch of pepper districts was part of Aceh. They laid claim to areas as far south as Tapanuli and the surrounding region, although in this period they were more realistic in not extending their demands beyond Barus. From time to time, the Sultans sent armed ships, usually under a Panglima Laut, to collect tributes and duties. Such expeditions were also for the purpose of demonstrating Acehnese power. A more usual practice was to use one of the local chiefs in the far-flung districts of the west coast to act on behalf of the capital. The chief then became the wakil of the Sultan, as Lebai Dappah seemed to have become. This strategy was convenient and less demanding on the resources of the Sultan. Getting a chief to represent the Sultan was not difficult, especially when there were several ulubalang in a particular place contending for power, or when a chief needed help to extend control over neighbouring districts. The Sultan would recognize and back someone ambitious, who in return was obliged to deliver part of the duties collected. Even so, the Sultan still needed some political or military capability to enforce his authority.

By the late 1780s, Singkil began to act more independently, and had reached a phase of expansion that brought it threateningly close to the British sphere of influence in the west coast. Ever in search of new supplies of pepper and of land for cultivating pepper, Lebai Dappah and the Acehnese population expanded further southwards, and it was only a matter of time till this led to friction with the British. When that took place, it caught the British by surprise.

The Acehnese Raid on Tapanuli

Early in 1786, Tapanuli was raided without warning by some 200 Acehnese led by a chief named Poh Chindy. After burning the factory to the ground, the attackers retreated, taking with them some sepoys as hostages as well as Company goods. The Acehnese reportedly withdrew, first to Sorkam some 50 kilometres to the north, and then to Singkil.

The attack came as a shock to Bencoolen. It was completely unexpected as there had been no sign earlier of any problems. It
was unclear to Bencoolen then what the motives were for the attack. The speculation in Bencoolen was that the Acehnese were interested only in plundering the place, and that the attack was simply the work of marauding or criminal Acehnese elements. But the fact remained that the raid was led by well-recognized leaders. Four of them were identified, the most important being Poh Chindy. Richard Maidman, the resident at Natal, believed that the attackers had ties with the people at Singkil, and that at Tapanuli, they were acquainted with the local people and had formed links with the datu of the place. There was, therefore, more than just a criminal character to the attack.

Overlapping claims to parts of the pepper districts, as both the Acehnese and the British expanded their pepper trade, are a possible explanation for the incident. For the Acehnese, Susu and Singkil were ports busy with arriving ships. To cope with the growing demand, Singkil expanded cultivation to neighbouring areas in the south. By placing all supplies of pepper under Singkil, Lebai Dappah hoped to control the trade and prices. The district he next eyed was the pepper-rich area of Sorkam and those areas that lay between Singkil and Tapanuli. But this same stretch also attracted British interest. This was a period when the British, through Natal and Tapanuli, were also broadening their search for pepper. Thus, these districts came to be contested, although not openly, between the Acehnese and the British.

The arrival of a new resident in Tapanuli, George Halifax, probably created circumstances that became a catalyst for the attack. There were already questions then about the competence of Halifax. He barely spoke the local languages, nor was he familiar with conditions in the region. More seriously, according to Maidman, Halifax failed to notice the growing number of Acehnese settling in Tapanuli or to monitor their movements around the Sorkam region. Indeed, Bencoolen had referred to earlier intelligence reports that the Acehnese had fortified some of their positions in Sorkam. It recalled that in a recent incident, a British naval party had pursued a group of pirates who evaded capture by securing refuge at Sorkam. The British were fired upon when they tried to go ashore and, finding the place so well fortified, retreated without ever apprehending their men. Maidman further noted that Halifax could have offended some of the local datu in Tapanuli through his zeal to expand the Company’s share of the local pepper trade.

On being informed of the attack, Bencoolen acted decisively and quickly. It declared that the attack could not go unchallenged,
otherwise the prestige of the British would be tarnished. Tough reprisal actions were decided upon. A force of some 200 troops under the command of Captain George Carpenter was assembled, including European artillerymen, sepoys, and Bugis mercenaries. Headed by J. Griffith, the secretary of the Fort Marlborough Council, the expedition was ordered to secure the release of the sepoys, to capture the leaders of the Tapanuli attack, to recover the cannons and goods taken from the factory, and to obtain a pledge from Singkil’s leaders not to permit any Acehnese to settle south of the Singkil River. Negotiations and diplomacy were recommended, but if these failed, Griffith was authorized to use force to achieve the objectives he was entrusted with. He was also to remain in Tapanuli for a while to take charge until the situation became more settled. Questions were raised then as to why a civilian from the council was chosen to lead the expedition. The explanation was that an inquiry into the attack was to be held at Natal and Tapanuli, and someone senior such as Griffith was needed to head it.

In early June 1786, the expedition left in four vessels, with the *Esther* captained by Thomas Forrest as the command ship. Barus supplied two local guides. The fleet called at Natal to take on additional troops from the small garrison there before proceeding to Tapanuli where Griffith held a brief inquiry into the attack. He also met the chief of nearby Sorkam, Raja Dato Raja Amat, who had turned up to express concern about the growing number of Acehnese settling in his district. It was an anxiety also felt by the British, who feared that the new Acehnese settlers could be a threat to Tapanuli. Impressed by the expedition and taking the opportunity of Griffith’s presence, Sorkam offered to place itself under British protection, and in return promised to supply pepper at agreed quantities and prices to Tapanuli. Griffith accepted the offer, and the moment the agreement was signed, the British flag was hoisted over the district.

The expedition then proceeded to Muara Telloor where the wanted Acehnese had reportedly retreated. Arriving there on 12 June, the ships immediately bombarded the fortifications. The defenders returned fire from their *rentaka* (small cannons), but under heavy shelling from the ships, they were forced to retreat into the surrounding jungle. Troops from the ships were landed. Griffith then ordered the settlement to be burnt, and sent some troops to hunt the Acehnese. Despite a search, the Acehnese could
not be found and the expedition sailed off. Griffith and his men then headed towards Singkil.\(^{44}\)

Lebai Dappah was alarmed by the ferocity of the British military response in Muara Telloor. At that point, he must have feared the damage the expedition might inflict upon Singkil even more than the Sultan’s claims of control. To protect Singkil, he had written for urgent help from the Sultan. A few days prior to the arrival of the expedition, he followed this up with a note to Tapanuli, dissociating himself from the attack. The letter also appealed for the release of several Singkil men held at Tapanuli.\(^{45}\) Attached to this letter was a note from the Sultan of Aceh, the contents of which may have been a response to Lebai Dappah’s appeal for help and a declaration of Acehnese sovereignty and protection of Singkil and Susu.

The British expedition arrived on 26 June. Singkil was, by this time, well fortified, and had readied itself against a possible attack. Griffith went ashore and demanded from Lebai Dappah a clarification of Singkil’s links with the Tapanuli raiders.\(^{46}\) In a tense meeting, Lebai Dappah denied any involvement in the attack on Tapanuli. He reiterated that Singkil was part of Aceh and his allegiance was to the Sultan. ‘They also read the King of Acheen’s Letter and pointedly observed to me, they acknowledged allegiance to him and that the Port was under his jurisdiction.’\(^{47}\) To placate the British, he signed an agreement to ensure that no Acehnese would settle south of Singkil. In addition, he offered to help hunt the leaders of the Tapanuli attack.

Griffith was satisfied with the assurance made by Singkil. As there was no real evidence to implicate Lebai Dappah in the Tapanuli attack, and since Singkil was part of Aceh, there was little reason to take any punitive measure against the place. He, therefore, ordered the expedition to pull back to Tapanuli. At Tapanuli, some troops were left behind to guard the restored factory while the rest of the expedition sailed on to Bencoolen. Griffith also announced rewards for the apprehension of the four wanted Acehnese leaders.\(^{48}\)

Soon afterwards, Lebai Dappah was reported to have sent a fleet of nine armed prahus to Labuan Haji, to where, it was learnt, Poh Chindy and his followers had fled.\(^{49}\) The Singkil chief acted to impose some order along that stretch of the coast as he realized that incidents such as the attack on Tapanuli could provide the pretext for the British, and possibly even the Sultan, to intervene in the region. Indeed, a short while later, Tapanuli received an emissary from Singkil reporting that Poh Chindy had been killed.
Griffith was not entirely satisfied with the claim, and insisted that Singkil produce the head of Poh Chindy to the British as evidence ‘but, that as the Chiefs of Sinkell had not fully performed their Engagements, which were to send his Head, he had ordered the Panglima back, and insisted on that point being complied with’.\(^{50}\) Arrangements were also made for the repatriation of the sepoys who had been taken captive to Aceh.\(^{51}\) In all, Bencoolen regarded the expedition as a success. It had been a show of force to demonstrate that the British could act swiftly and decisively to deter future attacks on their settlements.

Following the 1786 attack, the British in west Sumatra became more attentive to districts around Tapanuli. By the agreement with the chief of Sorkam, a useful buffer had been created between Tapanuli and the Acehnese districts. The British at Tapanuli agreed to protect Sorkam from external threats, and no Acehnese were to be allowed to settle in the district. With these arrangements, the British felt confident that their position in Tapanuli was more secure.\(^{52}\)

Despite Griffith’s successful campaign in 1786 and the agreements with Singkil and Sorkam, both the Acehnese and the British remained wary of one another. The British continued to distrust Lebai Dappah because they suspected that he was still harbouring ambitions of further expansion, although for the moment this was checked. On the other hand, for Lebai Dappah to turn to the Sultan for help suggested that he was not yet firmly in command of the region. Poh Chindy and his supporters who had led the attack might even have been, at that time, a contending power group in the Acehnese west coast, rivalling that of Lebai Dappah. The destruction of the Poh Chindy group probably cleared the way for Lebai Dappah to gain ascendancy in the west coast.

To Griffith, the expedition had not eliminated from the coast what he regarded as a continuing security threat to the British. He was particularly uneasy about the waters around Tapanuli and Natal where the incidence of piracy was high. He believed that most of the pirates were Acehnese who had settled in Air Bangis where they posed a threat to the safety of Natal. Griffith, therefore, proposed the stationing of an armed British ship off Natal to patrol the stretch of waters to the north of Padang.

Griffith also called upon the Bencoolen authorities to write to the Sultan to insist that Susu be the southernmost limit of Acehnese territory, beyond which none of his subjects should settle. This meant shifting the settlers in Singkil and Tapus northwards behind
the new border. Griffith's argument seemed to be that since the Sultan had so little control over the west coast, it would be best to insist on the Acehnese pulling further back to a point where the capital could better manage the situation. Otherwise, the presence of Acehnese over a wide extent of the coast created a greater risk of conflict arising from incidents over which neither the British nor the Sultan had any control.53

Bencoolen, however, was unwilling to be drawn into further complications with the Acehnese in the west coast by such a drastic measure. In fact, there were already a large number of Acehnese south of the Singkil River. Large numbers of Acehnese were already settled at Tapus. At this time, the leader of Tapus was Tuanku Haji Lebai Gunnar. Deciding that there was a need for a moderate leadership, and convinced that Lebai Gunnar was not linked to the Acehnese who attacked Tapanuli, Bencoolen signed an agreement in December 1787 allowing him and his followers to remain in Tapus. Tapus, however, was not allowed to have fortifications or to provide sanctuary to pirates. Furthermore, Tapus was only to trade with Tapanuli and Natal.54

The Betel-nut Producing Coast of Pedir

Developments in trade and agriculture were taking place at this time not only along the west coast but also in the Pedir districts. The Pedir coast in north-eastern Sumatra was previously well known as a pepper-producing area until soil exhaustion forced many of the planters to move to the west coast. Since then, one of the agricultural commodities that continued to be grown extensively, and remained important on the Pedir coast, was betel-nut. There was a regular demand for this commodity, both locally and on the Indian coast, and Chulia ships were the main purchasers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.55 The betel-nut came from the areca palm, which is believed to be native to the region. Even today, it is used widely in South-East Asia and India as a stimulant. In South-East Asia, betel-nut was offered to guests and was an important item in social relations. It later assumed significance in rituals.

Acehnese traders from the Pedir coast usually crossed the Straits of Malacca in their prahus, transporting their goods to Kuala Kedah, an important trading port. They then continued down the coast to Perak, Selangor, Malacca, and Riau before making the return
voyage. A second trading route was for boats to hug the east coast of Sumatra down to Siak, before crossing the narrow straits over to Malacca or to Kuala Selangor. Using the two routes in one voyage allowed an Acehnese trader a round trip covering all the major ports on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and the east coast of Sumatra, with Riau as the furthest point south.56

The Changing Order in the Straits

The first route became even more important following the establishment of Penang in August 1786. Some of the first traders who arrived in Penang in the early days were Acehnese, who increasingly preferred Penang over Kuala Kedah. As the trade developed, Acehnese prahus brought betel-nut, gold-dust, pepper, rice, and Acehnese cloth. They took back Bengal goods consisting largely of opium, cotton, tobacco, and iron materials.

The trade along the two routes skirting the Straits of Malacca helped maintain a tenuous political association of some significance between the Acehnese rulers and those in Selangor. The close link could be explained by the fact that the Sultans of the two states were of Bugis descent. Both ruling houses began at roughly the same time at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and certainly underlined the growing assertion of Bugis political and commercial power in the Straits of Malacca.57 The political links between Aceh and Selangor were paralleled by a close commercial relationship between the two sultanates. When the Dutch captured Kuala Selangor in 1784, they found a sizeable community of Acehnese, largely traders, there.58

There must have been ongoing interaction between the two sultanates because Aceh was drawn, to a limited extent, into the war between Selangor and the Dutch at the end of the eighteenth century. In 1785, Sultan Ibrahim, who was forced in the previous year to retreat to Pahang following the capture of his forts at Kuala Selangor, returned and defeated the Dutch. Expecting a retaliatory attack from the Dutch, Sultan Ibrahim wrote desperately to the English and Acehnese for assistance. Muhammed Syah responded immediately, sending several hundred armed Acehnese to help defend Selangor.59 With the aid of the Acehnese, Sultan Ibrahim was able to resist the Dutch attack for months. In 1786, peace was arranged between Selangor and the Dutch. Dutch officials, on their arrival in Selangor for the signing of the peace treaty, discovered that the majority of the remaining 300 troops defending Kuala Selangor were Acehnese.60
The fact that Muhammed Syah was able to send armed Acehnese to Selangor indicated that he had consolidated his position at the Acehnese capital between 1784 and 1786. As noted earlier, Forrest, who last visited Aceh in 1784, found the capital relatively calm and the Sultan politically secure. The more consolidated position of the Sultan might have been because of trade in pepper and betel-nut, and the resulting increase in revenue. Trade in Aceh must also have been boosted during these few years because of the Dutch–Bugis conflict, when commercial activities at Kuala Selangor and Riau were seriously disrupted and many of the ships that usually went to those ports were forced to trade in Aceh.

The situation changed after August 1786. First, the Dutch–Bugis conflict ended in July 1786 with the signing of the peace treaty between Selangor and the Dutch. Kuala Selangor and Riau were once again fully opened to trade. Secondly, in August 1786, the British established a new port at Penang where better prices were offered for Acehnese produce. Port duties were generally low, but the most attractive feature was the absence of onerous and arbitrary demands usual of local chiefs and rulers in Aceh. The impact of these two developments was the decline in trade in Banda Aceh, and an increase in shipping traffic between Pedir and Penang that bypassed the capital. This resulted in a serious loss of revenue for the Sultan.

Efforts by the Acehnese Sultan to control this trade were rendered difficult because the Acehnese capital was situated some distance away from the Pedir–Penang route. To overcome this inconvenience, Muhammed Syah turned Telok Samoy in Pedir into a base for his armed ships. Telok Samoy, lying nearly 140 kilometres to the east of the capital but well within the Pedir region, was suitably located for surveillance of the trade between Pedir and Penang. As an immediate measure, Muhammed Syah deployed a fleet of armed ships along the Pedir coast. The ships were entrusted with the collection of taxes and duties on behalf of the Sultan, and were to direct all foreign ships to trade in Telok Samoy or at the capital. The move by the Sultan was also aimed at dealing with piracy, which was a menace to Acehnese coastal trade.

The Sultan’s action met with strong resistance along the Pedir coast. Pedirese traders resented having to travel all the way to Banda Aceh or to Telok Samoy where, aside from paying duties, they were sometimes not allowed to trade with anyone except the syahbandar. This placed the syahbandar in a very strong monopolistic position, and the ruling greatly disadvantaged the traders.
Betel-nut traders, planters, and the chiefs clearly preferred to sell their crops in Pedir to foreign traders who offered prices higher than those of the Sultan. The Sultan's trade regulations were, therefore, generally ignored. There were reports of resistance to the Sultan's armed vessels with many chiefs refusing to comply with the demands for tribute or duties. Penang increasingly represented a problem to the Acehnese capital similar to that of Natal and Tapanuli but on a more serious scale. Not only was the island drawing trading boats away from Banda Aceh, but merchants from Penang were dealing directly with many of Pedir's ports. The Sultan also suspected that some of the Penang merchants were behind the Pedirese chiefs in defying his directives.

In October 1787, the Sultan complained in a letter to Bengal that British traders were supplying guns and military materials to rebelling Acehnese on the Pedir coast. Details were not given as to where the unrest in Pedir was. He alleged that Acehnese rebels had attacked and plundered passing ships. The letter mentioned that in one such incident a Captain Baines from an English ship had been killed. Even the Sultan's own armed ships had come under similar attacks.

In February 1788, the Sultan wrote to Penang announcing that his armed fleet would commence hostilities against the rebels at Pedir within a few days. The letter claimed that the rebels had attacked a ship, the Heyir. All ships were therefore no longer permitted to trade in Pedir, but had to proceed directly to the capital where passes would be issued. Those found in Acehnese waters without a pass were liable to be detained. By citing cases where British ships had been attacked, the Sultan expected sympathy and support from the British.

Both letters from the Sultan were polite, containing expressions of Aceh's wish to have friendly ties with the British. The Sultan wanted Penang to recognize his trade regulations and to co-operate in ensuring observance of the rules by British ships. Without Penang's help, the trade regulations would be difficult to implement. The Heyir incident provided the Sultan with the occasion to write to the British, hoping that this would convince Penang of the need for continued armed surveillance along the Pedir coast.

Francis Light, the superintendent of Penang, was not at all sympathetic to the Acehnese Sultan, and in his report to the Governor-General on 20 June 1788, he informed him that he had rejected the Sultan's trade regulations. He argued that the
regulations would deter Pedir traders from bringing pepper and betel-nut to Penang. Light had reported earlier, in January 1788, that Pedir was the most valuable of all the regions of Aceh. It produced gold, pepper, rice, betel-nut, wax, brimstone, benzoin, oil, sappan-wood, dammar, and cattle. In that year alone, it was estimated that Pedir exported 500,000 Spanish dollars worth of pepper and betel-nut. Penang received from the Pedir coast most of its pepper and betel-nut, and Light expressed fears that the Sultan’s blockade would seriously disrupt the supplies needed for the China trade. ‘... the coast of Pedier produces all the pepper and Betelnut that is brought here for the China Market, if these people [the Sultan’s armed fleet] are allowed to continue their depredations it will be attended with great inconvenience to those merchants who expect to make remittance to China this Season by means of this Port.’ Light commented to Bengal that he considered the Sultan’s proposal as ‘altogether unworthy of attendance’.

Light’s concern about the deployment of the Sultan’s armed ships was shared by many officials and traders residing on the island. It meant higher costs if Penang ships were to take the longer trip to the Acehnese capital and to make purchases at prices controlled by the Sultan or his merchants. The existing arrangement of commerce on the Pedir coast or with Pedirese prahus arriving in Penang opened up freer trade at competitive prices.

Many prominent merchants in Penang at this time were active in the Aceh trade. Among the Europeans were James Scott and James Carnegy, and among the well-known local merchants were Syed Hussein Aideed and Koh Lay Huan. Syed Hussein was an Arab who claimed to be the grandson of Sultan Jemal Syah of Aceh, who ruled between 1703 and 1726. He was very wealthy by this time, and using Penang as his new base, expanded his trading network so that, by the 1790s, his ships were travelling as far as Susu on the Acehnese west coast to purchase pepper. Koh, like many Chinese on the island, also had regular trade links with Aceh. Koh, or Che Wan as he was popularly known, moved from Kuala Kedah and, along with Syed Hussein, became one of the first settlers on the island. His trade links with Aceh may have begun while he was based in Kuala Kedah. It was Koh who was asked by Light to bring back from Aceh the first pepper vines for cultivation.

The threat to Penang’s Pedir trade was a most important
reason why Penang officials such as Light were highly critical of the actions of Muhammed Syah. This attitude was not helped by the fact that Scott, a trading partner of Light for many years, was involved in a business dispute with Poh Salleh. The latter claimed that Scott, who at one time traded in Aceh, owed him a large sum of money. Despite several reminders, Scott had refused to settle his debt. Light, too, did not have a good reputation as a trader among the Acehnese.

Quite apart from the issue of Scott's dispute with Poh Salleh, Light did not view Aceh positively. Having served in Aceh with the Madras Firm, he was familiar with the situation in the sultanate. From Light's correspondence, it is clear that he did not have cordial relations with either Mahmud Syah or Muhammed Syah. In 1772, Light, while strongly advocating a British base in the Straits of Malacca, did not consider Aceh a desirable choice, preferring instead a location somewhere along the Kedah coast. Writing on 15 February 1786, Light commented that

Acheen is a good Road, but no place of Security against an enemy. Ships cannot repair or heave down there. The Country is fertile beyond description and very populous. The inhabitants are rigid and superstitious Mahomettan, sullen fickle and treacherous. To form a settlement there of safety and advantage, a force sufficient to subdue all the Chiefs would be necessary.

Elsewhere, he explained why he thought Aceh was less suitable than Penang '... I prefer it [Penang] to the Port of Acheen as being more healthy and entirely free from that oppressive war and confusion which has ever distressed and at length driven out every European nation that has attempted to settle there.'

Sultan Muhammed Syah, in his campaign against the Pedir coast, had eventually to turn to Selangor for help. When this came to the knowledge of Penang, Light wrote to Sultan Ibrahim, advising him against becoming involved in Aceh. Although Sultan Ibrahim assured Light in a letter in 1787 that he would abide by his advice, nevertheless in June 1788, he sent his younger brother Raja Nala, the Selangor Yang di Pertuan Besar, to Aceh with sixteen ships and eighty men. Raja Nala died in Aceh in August 1788 during the course of the campaign. Truly, Sultan Ibrahim had remembered and appreciated Sultan Muhammed's help to Selangor at a time it was needed most, in 1785.
European Mercenaries in Aceh

A further irritant to the Penang government was the recruitment of several Europeans by the Acehnese Sultan as commanders of his armed ships. In a letter dated August 1788, Light reported to Bengal that several chiefs along the Pedir coast had complained to Penang about harassment of their coastal trade, citing the activities of the Sultan’s ships commanded by Europeans as a cause of the growing unrest in Pedir.75

Muhammed Syah might have been the first Acehnese Sultan to employ Europeans in such large numbers, an act which reflected an awareness by the Acehnese court of the growing European presence in the region, both political and commercial. Other states had in the past recruited Europeans, as did Banten in the 1660s and 1670s.76 In Aceh at this time, several mercenaries recruited had served in various European East India Companies. Penang officials described them as men of disreputable character in search of adventure and easy fortune.

Huatt was the commander of the armed fleet of Sultan Muhammed Syah and the leader of the European mercenaries. He was said to be from the Flanders region, and had worked with the Dutch, the French, and the British. He had then served a certain Count Byland, the chief of Saddrass, and commanded a vessel that plied regularly between that place and Aceh.77 Huatt was assisted in Aceh by William Lesle, an Englishman who had once commanded a ship belonging to Cuthbert Fenwick, a merchant based in Penang.78 In November 1787, Huatt and Lesle were picked out by Penang merchants as the men responsible for carrying out the Sultan’s policy of armed surveillance along the Pedir coast.79 Lesle was later detained for questioning by the British authorities in India after leaving the Acehnese service.

There were about a dozen Europeans serving as officers on board the Acehnese ships. Recruited for their maritime skills and military experience, each of them was paid between 40 and 50 Spanish dollars a month. The Sultan needed the European mercenaries not only to impose control over the local Acehnese villages, but also to cope with the increasing number of European and American ships arriving in Aceh. The Sultan wanted Europeans who could advise him in dealing with the new Penang administration as well as with the British merchants.

To a certain extent, Huatt and his men assumed the role previously carried out by the Panglima Laut in trade enforcement and
revenue collection. With the Sultan’s authorization, they exacted duties from the coastal ports and passing ships. They evidently had other functions, one of which was to act as the Sultan’s merchants. Plying the coast, they purchased local produce on behalf of the Sultan.  

Huatt, as it turned out, was as unreliable as Light had suspected. Acehnese and British traders soon accused him and the other Europeans of taking advantage of their position in Aceh to extort from trading ships and villages. Without the Sultan’s knowledge, Huatt forced Acehnese planters to deliver crops to him at low prices. He then sold these goods to American and European merchants for easy profits. In the end, these unauthorized transactions were uncovered, leading to his departure from Aceh. In early February 1792, Huatt had invoked the name of the Sultan to obtain a large cash advance from an American trader, Walter Sim. In return, he promised to supply an agreed quantity of pepper.  

Sim, impressed by Huatt’s position in Aceh, had readily entered into the deal. To obtain the pepper, Huatt tried to force several coastal chiefs along the west coast to deliver. On this occasion, he did not have much success. 

Sim, unable to collect the pepper from Huatt, proceeded to the Acehnese capital to complain angrily to the Sultan. Muhammed Syah, on being told of the contract made between Huatt and Sim, settled a major portion of the debt claimed by Sim. He then called for Huatt. Realizing that he had been caught out, Huatt ignored the directive to return to the Acehnese capital, but accepted that he could no longer remain in the Sultan’s service. 

Huatt decided to leave Aceh. But before that he, together with the other Europeans, commandeered four of the Sultan’s ships and fled to Junk Ceylon. He sold off one of the ships there and made plans to join the service of the Siamese. However, some of the other Europeans, less keen than Huatt to get involved in the ongoing Burma–Siam war, took one of the ships, the Swallow, and sailed her to Penang. Arriving in September 1792, they surrendered the ship and themselves to the Penang authorities. The loss of the ships severely damaged the Sultan’s campaign to control the Pedir coastal trade. 

This was welcome news for Penang. The more immediate problem for Light, however, was to decide whether to return the Swallow to Aceh or to hand it over to the crew members, who claimed that the Sultan had not paid them their wages. The Swallow was not the first ship to have been brought over to Penang in such circumstances.
The French Threat Emanating from Aceh

Penang’s relief at the departure of Huatt and the other mercenaries from Aceh was short-lived. Not long afterwards, there came in their place a menace to British interests that was thought to be even more serious. Reports were soon received that Aceh was being frequented by French warships which were using it as a naval base. Light reported that the first sighting of French warships in Aceh was reported in mid-1793 by James Scott, who had been trading in Telok Samoy. A Malabar ship informed him at Telok Samoy that a French warship had captured several trading vessels in Acehnese waters, including the British-registered ships of *Ceres* from Bombay, the *Crescent* from Penang, and the *Industry* from Bencoolen. The French privateer was identified as the *General Durmourier*, armed with 22 guns and carrying a crew of 150 men. Light reported that the *General Durmourier* then sailed on to Kedah and cruised off the Penang coast. Two British-registered ships, the *Eliza* and the *Carnatic*, managed to evade capture, but a Chinese prahu was attacked. A second French privateer, the *Egalite*, later joined the *General Durmourier* in waters around Aceh and Penang.

John P. Gapper, a member of the Bencoolen establishment, who happened to be on the *Industry* when she was captured, subsequently informed Penang that the *General Durmourier* was part of a fleet of fifteen French warships that had left Mauritius. Six more warships were being fitted out. Their objective was to intercept all British ships plying the trade routes to China and Manila.

In the face of what Light regarded as imminent danger, appeals were made for troop reinforcements and arms from Bengal. The defence of Penang was thought to be grossly inadequate. The main fortification was constructed of wood, and it was said that a single French frigate could easily destroy it along with the entire town. Construction of a new, stronger fort was not expected to be completed until the end of the year. The mood on the island was so gloomy that sections of the population asked for a ship to evacuate them. Light argued that the arrival of some warships or troop reinforcements would help restore public confidence and morale.

The belief in Penang was that the French privateers were
effective in the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca because Aceh was used as a staging post. Light, in his letter of 27 August 1793, appealed to Bengal to send warships against the French in Aceh and to free the British ships that had been captured. There was no immediate response to Light’s appeal. Sightings of French ships in Aceh continued to be reported. In 1794, Penang prevented an American ship, the *Three Sisters*, from leaving the harbour because the authorities suspected that she had been passing information on the movements of British shipping to armed French privateers in Aceh.

Bengal, finally acknowledging the danger to Penang and to British shipping, sent two armed ships, the *Diomede* and the *Heroine*, to the Straits of Malacca in early 1794. The two ships encountered no French privateers along the Sumatran coast on their way to Penang. Yet the danger was there, and the Bengal Council proceedings of 10 October 1794 referred to the capture of an American ship by French privateers in the vicinity of Aceh at about that time.

There is no evidence that the French ever had a naval base in Banda Aceh, nor could there have been any treaty arrangements for the use of Acehnese facilities. Very likely, French ships simply called at Banda Aceh or one of the ports along the west or Pedir coasts. The French, in fact, frequented the smaller ports of Labuan Haji and Pulau Dua, which had good harbours and where the local rajas were generally hospitable. In any case, it had been past practice for French trading ships and warships to call at Aceh. Muhammed Syah very likely permitted French ships to use the facilities of Banda Aceh under similar terms offered to other ships. Personally, he probably felt comfortable with the French as he knew a little of the language. Moreover, he had spent some time in Mauritius. But given the distrust of the *orang kaya* and *ulubalang* towards foreign powers, it was improbable that the French could have obtained concessions which the British had so far been unable to secure.

In the view of Francis Light, however, what seemed to be taking place in north Sumatra confirmed his worst fears. To him, it was an alliance between two forces hostile to British interests: the Acehnese Sultan and the French. Given such a perception, it is not surprising that he recommended a British attack on the French at Aceh. There was the option of using diplomacy if indeed there was such an alliance inimical to British interests. But this was not proposed. One can only suggest that the preference for a hard-line approach by Light had to do with his experience of unhappy dealings with the Acehnese Sultans over the years.


8. This information is provided in the genealogical table of R. H. Djajadininingrat’s article, ‘Critische Overzicht van de in Maleisiche Werken Vervatte Gegevens over de Geschiedenis van het Soeltanaat van Atjeh’, BKI, 65 (1911): 216–17.


13. Lord Hillsborough to Chairman and Deputy Chairman, East India Company, 24 November 1781, HMS, 155 (130).


15. Minute of Governor-General, 18 January 1784 (Extract of Bengal General Consultations, 19 January 1784), Sumatra, Vol. 23.


17. Instructions to H. Botham, 2 September 1782 (Bengal General Consultations, 10 November 1782), HMS, 219; ‘India to London, 16 February 1784’, in Indian Records Series: Fort Williams—India House Correspondence, Vol. 9, Public Series 1782–1785, ed. B. A. Saletore, Delhi, National Archives of India, 1959, p. 465, para 5.

19. F. R. MacDonald to Governor-General, Bengal, 20 September 1797 (Bengal Public Consultations, 5 March 1798), Board’s Collection, F/4/54 (1221); Report of J. Lawrence on his mission to Aceh, 12 August 1811 (FCCP 15 August 1811), SSFR, Vol. 31; P. Bowyer to T. S. Raffles, 28 September 1811, SSFR, Vol. 31.
21. Extract of Bengal General Consultations, 19 January 1784, Sumatra, Vol. 23. J. Y. Kinloch was described as being in his late thirties, and to have served the Company for nearly twenty-two years in the eastern trade section.
24. Forrest, A Voyage from Calcutta, p. 56.
25. F. Light to Governor-General, Bengal, 25 August 1788, SSFR, Vol. 3.
27. Ibid., p. 54.
28. Ibid., frontispiece.
29. Lebai was likely a title denoting a learned Muslim.
30. Report of Capt. J. Canning to the Secretary to Supreme Government, Bengal, on his mission to Aceh 24 November 1814, paras. 34–5, Sumatra, Vol. 27.
32. ‘Names of the Benjamin and Pepper Pons and Chiefs Residing at Them on the West Coast of Sumatra’ (Memorandum D of letter from John Prince to Capt. J. Canning, 4 June 1814), Encl. 6D in report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814.
37. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 4 May 1786, Sumatra, Vol. 89.
38. R. Maidman to Fort Marlborough, 8 September 1786 (FMC 9 September 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
39. Instructions to J. Griffith, 20 May 1786 (FMC 20 May 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
40. Instructions to R. Maidman, 20 May 1786 (FMC 20 May 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
41. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 28 June 1786, Sumatra, Vol. 89.
42. Ibid.
43. Rentaka were light, locally-made cannons used with a swivel which could be mounted on small boats.
44. Report of J. Griffith to Fort Marlborough, 10 July 1786 (FMC 23 August 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
45. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 28 June 1786, Sumatra, Vol. 89.
46. Report of J. Griffith to Fort Marlborough, 10 July 1786 (FMC 23 August 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
47. J. Griffith to Fort Marlborough, 10 July 1786 (FMC 23 August 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
48. J. Griffith to Fort Marlborough, 30 July 1786 (FMC 6 September 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
49. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 10 October 1786, Sumatra, Vol. 89.
50. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 10 November 1786, Sumatra, Vol. 89.
51. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 3 January 1787, Sumatra, Vol. 89.
52. J. Prince to Fort Marlborough, 4 February 1795, Sumatra, Vol. 95.
53. J. Griffith to Fort Marlborough Council, 30 July 1786 (FMCP 6 September 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89.
58. Report of Admiral J. P. van Braam to Governor-General, Batavia, 15 September 1784; Admiral J. P. van Braam to the Malay, Acehnese, and Chinese inhabitants of Selangor, 7 August 1784. Both papers are found in the J. P. van Braam Collection, A.R.A.
60. Ibid., p. 371 fn. 3.
63. Sultan Muhammed Syah to F. Light, 10 February 1787, cited in letter from F. Light to Governor-General, 20 June 1788 (FWCP 25 August 1788), SSFR, Vol. 3.
66. Scott and Light were shipmates in 1761–3, and they later went to Calcutta. Scott subsequently moved to Junk Ceylon and commanded a ship involved in country trade. He later became a trading partner of Light, and settled in Penang soon after Light acquired the island. Light had a share in Scott and Company, but Scott ran the business. Scott speculated in land and bought what was Jamestown

67. ‘Seyad Hussain and Seyad Juffer, two Malays of Arabian extraction and of considerable property, with very large families are come to reside, they are importunate to obtain a written declaration of the laws they themselves are subject to and a licence to govern their own families, slaves, and dependents, with an independent power, and in all cases to be judged by the Mahomedan Laws . . .’. F. Light to Governor-General in Council in India, 22 August 1792, in ‘Notices of Pinang’, *JIAEA*, 4 (1850): 655.

68. In 1797, a Capt. Swaine was reported to be the commander of a ship (belonging to Syed Hussein) which was about to proceed to Susu. F. R. MacDonald to Bengal, 20 September 1797 (Bengal Public Consultations 5 March 1798), Board’s Collection, F/4/54 (1221).


70. F. R. MacDonald to Bengal, 20 September 1797 (Bengal Public Consultations, 5 March 1798), Board’s Collection, F/4/54 (1221).


77. F. Light to Bengal, 25 August 1788, SSFR, Vol. 3. Huatt’s full name has so far not been found in the records.

78. Bengal to Penang, 7 May 1790, SSFR, Vol. 4.

79. W. L. Lesle to Governor-General, 3 May 1790. SSFR, Vol. 4.

80. ‘Proceedings of Committee to Examine the Officers and People Belonging to the King of Acheen’s Snow, the *Swallow* held on Prince of Wales Island, 10 September 1792’, SSFR, Vol. 4.

81. W. Sim, Captain of the *Betsy* to Francis Light, 27 December 1792, SSFR, Vol. 4.

82. F. Light to Governor-General, 26 September 1792, SSFR, Vol. 4.


84. F. Light to Governor-General, 27 August 1793 (FCCP 7 October 1793), SSFR, Vol. 4.

85. F. Light to Governor-General, 12 September 1793, SSFR, Vol. 4.

86. F. Light to Bengal, 12 September 1793, SSFR, Vol. 7.

88. F. Light to Governor-General, 27 August 1793 (FWCP 7 October 1793), SSFR, Vol. 9.
89. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya*, p. 130.
90. F. Light to Bengal, undated (FWCP 1 August 1794), SSFR, Vol. 4.
91. Fort Williams Consultation, 10 October 1794, SSFR, Vol. 4.
Regency in Aceh, 1795–1805

Acehnese Overtures to Penang

Sultan Muhammad Syah died in 1795 at about thirty-five years of age. There were rumours at the time that he was poisoned, believed also to have been the cause of Mahmud Syah’s death. The Queen emerged soon after to play a significantly intrusive role in the capital’s politics.1 The daughter of Badr ad-Din, she came across later as a woman of strong will and of political ambition. On the death of Muhammed Syah, she made sure that her brother was made the Regent since the late Sultan’s eldest son, Tuanku Hussain Ibni Sultan Ala’ad-din Muhammed Syah was only nine years old. Muhammed Syah’s younger brother, Tuanku Chut, was favoured by one faction in the capital to either succeed to the throne or to act as Regent.

The Regent, taking the title of Tuanku Raja, ruled for nearly ten years. During the early part of his regency, the capital was relatively quiet. Of some significance was the fact that Tuanku Raja was the son-in-law of Lebai Dappah, whose support might have helped Tuanku Raja in his position.2 Nevertheless, the Regent’s power would still have been very much circumscribed because of the continuing strong influence of the orang kaya and ulubalang at the capital.

In the 1795–1805 period, the flow of trade between Aceh and Penang was steady. Penang was happy to leave it as it was, and was not keen on any formal arrangement with Aceh that would interfere with the status quo, or prove to be expensive. There were offers from Aceh to sign a commercial agreement, and London itself showed some interest in a naval base in the sultanate. Penang turned down Aceh’s overtures, and advised Bengal and London to shift British interests away from Sumatra.

Penang in the years under Francis Light had been too preoccupied with its own development, and too anxious about its security, to incline towards establishing close ties with Aceh. On commerce the administration wanted to turn Penang into an
entrepot centre that could also serve the China trade.\textsuperscript{3} It was a policy backed by Penang merchants. With regard to Aceh, the merchants preferred existing arrangements where their ships traded without obstruction in most parts of the sultanate. Any treaty with Aceh to regulate trade was bound to be restrictive.

**Attempts to Regularize Aceh–Penang Trade**

In October 1794, Light passed away and was succeeded by Philip Mannington, who acted as superintendent for only a short while. In May 1795, Major Forbes Ross MacDonald took over, and there were signs that Penang under a new administration might consider entering into a commercial treaty with Aceh.\textsuperscript{4} MacDonald was a military man in the East India Company. Unlike Light, who had belonged to the group of free merchants, MacDonald believed that the function of Penang was primarily to serve the Company. He was critical of the fact that in Penang the interests of the free merchants had precedence over those of the Company. Proceeding from this thinking, MacDonald was keen to sign a commercial agreement with the Acehnese government. To him, Penang would then be assured of a direct and regular supply of pepper and this would benefit the Company. It was a proposition that did not find favour with the merchants. Throughout his term, MacDonald had poor relations with the community of local traders, particularly James Scott.

In 1797, MacDonald felt the time had come for some official contact with Aceh. He had also been worried by the reported appearance of fifteen French warships off Aceh in the previous year; they were believed to be using Aceh as a refitting stop. A British fleet subsequently engaged them in a naval battle off north Sumatra, but there was no conclusive outcome. Just at this time, there was in Penang a Captain Swaine, the commander of a ship belonging to Syed Hussein, who was about to proceed to Susu. Swaine had been trading in Aceh since 1782 and had come to know Poh Salleh, the syahbandar.\textsuperscript{5} MacDonald requested Captain Swaine to call at the Acehnese capital to check on the situation there, and to explore possibilities of a formal trade link.

Swaine, *en route* back from Susu, landed at Banda Aceh. He found himself immediately stranded at the capital when his crew hurriedly took off on seeing an approaching French privateer, the *Fox*. During his unplanned stay of several weeks, Swaine had the opportunity of meeting Poh Salleh on several occasions.\textsuperscript{6} Poh Salleh
was still the syahbandar during this period of Tuanku Raja’s regency. He was enduring, having served through the years of Muhammed Syah. Poh Salleh came across towards the latter part of his career as a man respected by both the Acehnese and the Chulias. This explains his long tenure as syahbandar. Swaine gained the impression that the syahbandar was close to Tuanku Hussain, and that the young prince relied on him for advice.

During their conversations, one incidental item that came up was a request from Poh Salleh for Swaine’s help to recover a debt from Scott. The debt was incurred while Scott was trading in Aceh in 1782, and Swaine had been present then to vouch for his character. On the main subject, Poh Salleh conveyed the willingness of Tuanku Hussain to enter into a commercial agreement with Penang. He assured Swaine that Aceh could provide Penang with 10,000 pikuls of pepper in 1797, and after that 18,000 pikuls annually at $10 per pikul. In return, the young prince asked for two warships and secondment of crew to be deployed in Aceh. The ships would fly Acehnese colours and come under the command of the Acehnese government. The recent experience of having Europeans such as Huatt and Lesle sailing away with the Sultan’s ships had convinced Poh Salleh of the risks in employing mercenaries, and he must have advised the young prince to seek East India Company officers who were answerable to the British authorities.

MacDonald was attracted by the Acehnese offer brought back by Swaine, which would guarantee Penang a regular supply of pepper. Demand for pepper was growing, and prices offered in the European market were high. By acquiring a substantial share of Acehnese pepper, Penang could enhance its position as an entrepôt centre. Furthermore, if the pepper could be collected and brought by the Acehnese to Banda Aceh under the commercial arrangement, Company ships avoided having to proceed all the way to the west coast. Given the prevailing Anglo-French hostilities, Company ships would, therefore, be less exposed to the danger of French privateers lurking along the coasts of Sumatra.

The only hitch in Poh Salleh’s proposal was the request for warships. MacDonald did not think that Bengal would approve, given its reluctance to risk being drawn into any local conflict. Nevertheless, MacDonald regarded the proposal as an encouraging start and sent Captain Swaine back to Aceh to draw up details of the commercial agreement. The troubling aspects could be sorted out in negotiations later. MacDonald instructed Swaine to quietly
sound out the young prince on the possibility of placing a British resident at Susu. If need be, the resident would be backed by a small military force. MacDonald also contemplated using an armed cruiser to transport pepper from Aceh to Penang since the coast at this time was still unsafe. A new cruiser would be commissioned for this purpose, and MacDonald hoped that the vessel might perhaps provide some assurance to Tuanku Hussain, if he still felt threatened by rebellious subjects.

Bengal responded with little enthusiasm to Swaine’s negotiations. As expected, it did not like the idea of providing warships and military supplies to Aceh. In a letter dated 27 February 1798, it communicated this view to Penang. There was also the opinion in Calcutta that a commercial treaty by which the Acehnese Sultan would be armed by the British would give him such control over Aceh’s trade as to become detrimental to British trade. ‘By this Treaty the Company were to furnish the King with 2 armed vessels, ostensibly for the purpose of guarding the Coast of his Territories and for preventing illicit commerce, but in reality to enable the King to monopolize more effectively the Trade of his Dominions.’ Following Bengal’s comments, no further initiatives were taken by Penang. Furthermore, MacDonald resigned as superintendent the next year, and returned to Madras. His resignation came about not because of the Aceh negotiations, but because he was tired of the continual clashes with merchants who did not like his style and policies. The moves to negotiate a commercial agreement with Aceh would certainly not have been supported by the local European merchants.

The Sultan Makes an Offer

In 1802, Tuanku Hussain reached the age of sixteen, and he sought to exercise full power as Sultan. He assumed the title of Sultan Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah. It was said that as a boy, Jauhar al-Alam had been placed on board a British ship, the Nonsuch, by his father to gain some naval experience and skills. There certainly was a ship called the Nonsuch in the area during this period. But there are no details of this episode in Jauhar al-Alam’s career. Muhammed Syah, perhaps remembering his stay at Mauritius, might have thought that serving on the Nonsuch was a good form of education for his son. It is more probable that Jauhar al-Alam went only on a short cruise on the ship. He maintained contact with visiting ships and merchants, and certainly
Jauhar al-Alam learnt enough English to do without an interpreter later on. He got on well with Europeans, and was to use some of them as advisers. He was also reputed to have acquired some navigational skills. But through such contacts, he also picked up some habits, including drinking alcohol, which did not endear him to those *ulama* (Muslim religious leader) and *ulubalang* who observed Islamic practices more strictly.

Despite his age, the young Jauhar al-Alam as a prince travelled around his country. In July 1801, John Crowninshield learnt that he was on a visit to Labuan Haji.

... the head man returned from Lemdonagee [Labuan Haji] with the pinace and made me a present of some fowls and yams, it seems that the King's son (who reside in the Capitol in the middle of the Island) is at Lemdonagee on a visit to that place, the preast [*ulama*] who came down again and speaks English says that—that there King's son send Capt a great many verry big sailams [greetings] and complements.¹³

The young prince invited the Americans to visit Labuan Haji. Later, he sent a young bullock to Captain Crowninshield. It is almost certain that the 'King's son' was Jauhar al-Alam. In subsequent years, Jauhar al-Alam visited Labuan Haji frequently, and the Raja there remained loyal to him.

Jauhar al-Alam's move to assume a full role as Sultan occurred when Poh Salleh, to whom he was said to have been attached, had passed away. The attempt of Jauhar al-Alam was strongly resisted by Tuanku Raja, and he was forced to retreat from Banda Aceh in 1802. A little while later, Jauhar al-Alam managed to fight his way back to a place close to the capital. He gained the support of several *ulubalang* of the Pedir coast.¹⁴ Among them was the powerful Raja of Pedir. Tuanku Raja, on the other hand, would have been supported by Lebai Dappah. Of significance is a British report from the west coast which mentioned that Lebai Dappah was in the capital at the time of the conflict. It certainly suggests an attempt at intervention. The war between Tuanku Raja and Jauhar al-Alam lasted for three years. Both sides appealed for assistance from outside Aceh. Tuanku Raja, through some French traders then at Aceh, sent a request to Batavia while Jauhar al-Alam wrote to Penang.¹⁵ Neither Batavia nor Penang gave any immediate response.

It was not for several years more that direct contact was again made between Aceh and Penang. In May 1805, Jauhar al-Alam appealed to the Penang government for military assistance in the fight against Tuanku Raja. He asked this time for two armed ships and 200 sepoys.¹⁶ The contact with Captain Swaine some years
earlier encouraged Jauhar al-Alam to turn to Penang. Furthermore, having spent some time on the *Nonsuch*, he was more favourably inclined towards the British. Most importantly, he expected the British, as much worried about the growing American trade in Sumatra as he was, to support his efforts at controlling the Acehnese west coast, particularly the trade at Singkil and Susu. Jauhar al-Alam hoped that with British military assistance ‘his duties at Soosoo should be secured to him in future, and an end be put to the clandestine trade with the Americans, by which he has been defrauded of his just rights.’

Significantly, at about the time when Jauhar al-Alam wrote to Penang, the court of directors in London turned its attention once again to the prospects of developing naval facilities in Aceh for British use. There was apprehension that in the context of the continuing Anglo-French hostilities, the facilities at Penang were not adequate to meet British strategic needs in the Indian Ocean. Aceh remained accessible to French warships which, being nearer to the coast of the subcontinent, could endanger the British in India. There were already reports that French warships were once again refitting at Aceh. A number of British ships in the Bay of Bengal had been attacked by the French. As in 1781, one proposal was to occupy Banda Aceh and to deny its use to the French. London believed that Aceh, when properly strengthened, would enhance the naval capability of the British in the Bay of Bengal. ‘To have full command of the Straits of Malacca therefore, it appears to be desirable that the British nation should occupy the Port of Acheen.’

On 18 April 1805, London wrote to Penang asking that it look into the possibility of establishing a settlement at Aceh.

**Penang’s Disinterest**

Penang remained cautious to London’s directive on the subject of Aceh. It was certainly aware of the commercial competition of the Americans, as mentioned in Jauhar al-Alam’s letter, as well as the French naval threat in Sumatra. But the Penang authorities did not view the establishment of a British settlement in Aceh as an answer to the two pressing issues; it rated a venture in Aceh as unviable and fraught with danger. These misgivings were contained in a report of R. Farquhar, the Penang Lieutenant-Governor, in 1805.

The political instability in Aceh and the insecure position of the Sultan were the main reasons for Penang’s apprehension. Furthermore, at the time of Jauhar al-Alam’s letter in early 1805, the outcome of the civil war was still uncertain. Penang believed that
any occupation of Aceh would require a very large military force, which had to include European troops not only to deal with likely hostile Acehnese reactions, but also as an effective defence against a possible French offensive. But such troops could not be spared. Even if these were available, Penang preferred that the troops be stationed on the island, particularly as there was fear that a French attack was imminent. Penang’s fortification was inadequate and the existing military force too small. Already, the government was being criticized by the European merchants for not paying sufficient attention to the defence of the island.

Penang, therefore, turned down Jauhar al-Alam’s latest offer of a commercial treaty in exchange for military assistance. In dispatches to London and Bengal, Penang gave explanations such as those outlined earlier as to why it did not support the idea of an Acehnese settlement. A year later in 1806, Penang suggested that if London was still keen on a treaty with Aceh, such arrangements that were to be agreed on should be limited to the appointment of a resident. The presence of this one resident ‘might throw difficulty and delay in the way of an Enemy’s fleet wanting Provisions or assistance of any kind’.21

Farquhar, however, not only argued against expanding British influence to Aceh, but called instead for the total withdrawal of all British interests from Sumatra. Farquhar, in his general report of 1805, argued that British policy in the East could be better served by closing down the British establishment of Bencoolen, including its subordinate residencies such as Natal and Tapanuli, altogether. The Company should instead concentrate its resources on Penang. Bencoolen, maintained at an estimated three million Spanish dollars a year, was an unprofitable concern. If the reason for having Bencoolen was to get supplies of pepper, British policy would be better served by acquiring this in Penang where sufficient quantities of good quality pepper were more easily available, having been brought into Penang from neighbouring areas. This trade could be further expanded by encouraging more Acehnese to bring the pepper to Penang themselves. Penang’s own pepper cultivation would get a boost if Bencoolen were closed down. British overall interests would be enhanced, although no doubt it would be Penang which would particularly benefit. When one looks back, such thinking anticipated what, in fact, happened in 1824.

Farquhar also questioned the ability of Bencoolen to respond to the American competition and to the French threat in Sumatra.
Bencoolen had, in recent years, been compelled to reduce its civil and military establishments to trim operating costs. The exercise had reached a level where its military was no longer a credible deterrent force against the French, and Bencoolen itself had become extremely vulnerable once again to an attack. There was no way it could protect British shipping against the French, nor cope with American competition in the west coast.²²

**British Interest in the West Coast**

**Rivalry in the West Coast**

During the period 1795–1805, the west coast continued to develop, especially those ports under Lebai Dappah. With the Acehnese capital preoccupied with its own problems and as long as Tuanku Raja was Regent, Lebai Dappah did not have to worry about interference from the court and steadily consolidated his influence. In Susu and Singkil, the two ports controlled by Lebai Dappah, trade with foreign ships expanded. Singkil was the busier port, and although not much pepper was grown in its vicinity, it had a good harbour. Susu, on the other hand, produced large quantities of the commodity, but its harbour was more exposed and dangerous to shipping during certain times of the year.²³

John Crowninshield, an American pepper trader, visited Susu in July 1801. While there, he met Lebai Dappah. Crowninshield gave a brief description of his first arrival at Susu and the meeting with Lebai Dappah. On coming ashore, the Americans found some 400–500 Acehnese. Although they were armed with krises and swords, the mood was generally friendly.

We proceeded up to the Rajahs—Liberdapper [Lebai Dappah] where I had to wait some time before could see him they told me he was ingaged on business from home when he came he carried me up in a little cock loft (in a square incloser of trees several guns and swivels mounted all round without any kind of regularity) it appeared as if he wished to be in secret as only two of the natives were admitted he could not speak or understand a word of English—one of his men could make out with a few words signs etc.²⁴

In Susu, he found a large supply of pepper selling for 11 Spanish dollars per pikul. But Crowninshield decided to go further south where there would be a safer anchorage. 'I told him [Lebai Dappah] I did not like the place to load as we could not fill our
ship in two months and in such a wild roadstead the risk is too great and that I must go further down the Coast and look for a better harbour.\textsuperscript{25}

Lebai Dappah used Singkil as his base, and put one of his sons in charge of Susu. He was always in search of new pepper-producing areas and encouraging Acehnese to settle in undeveloped lands. As he gained control of new areas, he appointed members of his family to head them. As a result, several other ports came under the control of Lebai Dappah's family; these included Air Dammah, Trumon, Rambong, Saluhat, and Kuala Baru.\textsuperscript{26}

The development of Susu and Singkil under Lebai Dappah formed part of a pattern of Acehnese migration along the Sumatran west coast. There had been Acehnese settling in this region in the past, but it was only towards the end of the eighteenth century that the trend of migration became more discernible, and the impact more strongly felt. Not enough is known about this Acehnese migration, but the high pepper prices were, without doubt, a significant contribution to the trend. Furthermore, many Acehnese migrants had been forced to leave Aceh Proper because of the heavy tax on the commodity or the low prices paid by the ulubalam and Sultans, as well as soil exhaustion. It was the immigrant energy and their agricultural experience that turned jungle land into new pepper gardens. For many, it was a hard and lonely life; an idea of the sufferings faced by an immigrant in the pepper plantations of the west coast is captured in the Acehnese poem \textit{Hikajat Ranto}, a work with Muki of this period as its setting.\textsuperscript{27}

Along with the settlers came the Acehnese traders, who played an important part in the growing coastal trade as their boats plied as far south as Padang.

In many places, the early Acehnese migrants settled among a large original population. Many of the early inhabitants were Malays. In the interior and upland region between Barus and Air Bangis, the population was made up of Bataks, who collected jungle produce such as camphor and benzoin, which were sold to the Malays and the Acehnese. In areas where the population had become mixed, political adjustments were made to maintain harmony and order. Sometimes, power was shared, with the different communities having their own chiefs. Where there were several leaders, a council was formed. In other places, the heads of the different groups took turns to be ruler. In Barus, for instance, the head of the Bataks alternated with the Malay chief.

Such harmony, however, was not always easy to achieve. In a
number of places, the arrival of the Acehnese settlers aroused resentment and opposition from the original population. They were also regarded as a threat to the established authority, resulting in an atmosphere of tension and conflict.

Occurrences of such conflicts were reported in Sorkam and Air Bangis, two areas geographically close to the residencies of Tapanuli and Natal, and these came to the attention of the British. Sorkam and Air Bangis were pepper-rich districts and supplied a considerable part of the needs of Tapanuli and Natal. There was already concern that the growing presence of the Acehnese settlers in Sorkam and Air Bangis endangered the security of Tapanuli and Natal. Memory of the Acehnese attack on Tapanuli in 1786 was still fresh in the minds of the British, and there remained the fear of another surprise assault. The British were aware, too, that the Acehnese Sultan had made a territorial claim as far south as Tapanuli.

In 1795, anxiety was openly expressed among some British officials at the growing number of Acehnese settling in the Sorkam district. The population of Sorkam was largely Malays, with a significant number of Bataks. During this period, Raja Dato Raja Amat was the chief of the Malays while Raja Soodee ruled over the Bataks. Sorkam lay just north of Tapanuli. The British regarded Sorkam as strategically important as a buffer between Tapanuli and the Acehnese districts further to the north. J. Griffith, during his expedition in 1786 against Muara Telloor, entered into an agreement with Sorkam, granting it protection by the East India Company against external threat. Already then, the threat was seen as coming from the Acehnese.

Prince’s Influence in the West Coast

It was at this time that John Prince, the resident of Natal, assumed an influential role in the events along the west coast. Prince, who began his career in Bencoolen in 1786, arrived in March 1790 to be assistant resident of Natal to Richard Maidman. During this period, the Natal Concern had not been making profits, and many Bencoolen officials had withdrawn from the venture. Prince eventually became the major shareholder. Between 1794 and 1798, he was acting resident of Natal. The separation of functions as acting resident appointed by the Bencoolen authorities and as a major shareholder of the Natal Concern, a private company, had never been very clear even to the British officials at Fort Marlborough. The expenses of the Natal Concern were underwritten by the
Company. A sum of 4,000 Spanish dollars a year was allocated for the defence of the area. Prince himself was given a Company salary of 540 Spanish dollars per month.  

In 1798, he was made resident of Tapanuli while retaining his majority share in the Natal Concern. As resident, Prince wielded power which no other private trader had. Backed by the status and influence of the office, he negotiated treaties and agreements with local rulers. Through favourable provisions in these agreements, he expanded the trade of the Natal Concern and gradually put it on a profitable footing. Money was also made by the Natal Concern as supplier of basic provisions to the Tapanuli and Natal settlements. Prince sent his boats to import rice from the Nias islands. But by far the most profitable part of the business was his dealings with ports along the west coast, particularly those in the vicinity of Tapanuli where he collected pepper, camphor, and benzoin, which were then shipped to Bencoolen.

Prince was always apprehensive about the Acehnese settlements to the north. He arrived in Bencoolen not long after the attack of Tapanuli in 1786, and the incident left him with a deep impression of the Acehnese as dangerous neighbours. He believed that the Acehnese had the aggressive ambition of expanding to all the districts right up to Tapanuli, and suspected that they were stealthily moving southwards. He was particularly watchful of Lebai Dappah, whom at this point he distrusted. In his early reports, Prince described the Singkil chief as a wakil or agent of the Acehnese Sultan, and this fact no doubt influenced his assessment of Lebai Dappah.

Prince insisted that the Singkil River marked the southern limit to any Acehnese settlement. Any place south of this line should be prohibited to any permanent Acehnese settlement. This undertaking, agreed upon by both the Acehnese and the British, was in the agreement signed in 1786 between Griffith and Lebai Dappah. Prince alleged that Lebai Dappah had flagrantly broken the agreement, of which he was a signatory, by encouraging Acehnese to settle beyond the Singkil River. The Acehnese were reportedly moving into Tapus and Muara Telloor.

In a dispatch dated 10 August 1794, Prince sounded an alert that the Acehnese were attempting to settle on the island of Nias. He called on Bencoolen to assign an armed boat to the waters around Nias to head off the Acehnese intrusion. Prince contended that the Acehnese movement was a hostile act that endangered British interests and security. Prince was probably more worried
over the possible loss to himself and the Natal company should there be disruption in the trade with Nias, which supplied all the rice requirements of Natal and Tapanuli. The Bencoolen authorities, in reply, called on Prince to remain watchful, but turned down the request to deploy an armed boat. Bencoolen did not think the threat was serious, and was also unwilling to incur extra expense.  

In February 1795, there was another alert from Prince regarding an Acehnese threat, a more alarming one because there were specific allegations that Lebai Dappah had instigated Raja Soodee, the Batak leader, to lay claim to the whole of Sorkam. Raja Soodee ruled over the northern part of Sorkam, but entertained ambitions of expanding control over the rest of the district. There were reports that Acehnese from elsewhere had once again moved southwards, and some were settling just north of the Sorkam River. It seemed that Singkil had sent a Nakhoda Muggat to Sorkam, ostensibly to trade, but was, in fact, for the purpose of secretly supplying arms and opium to Raja Soodee in his preparations to overthrow Raja Dato Raja Amat. The latter was the Sorkam chief who had signed a treaty of friendship with Griffith in 1786. Nakhoda Muggat was said to have left behind in Sorkam three rentaka, supplies of opium, and other provisions. Prince charged that Singkil’s support of Raja Soodee was part of a plan to eventually drive the British out from the Tapanuli and Natal area. This would eliminate an important competitor to Singkil in the pepper trade.

On this occasion, Bencoolen accepted Prince’s assessment of the situation at Sorkam. It was certainly worried by some aspects of Acehnese behaviour in the west coast. In its council meeting of 30 November 1795, Bencoolen authorized Prince to offer protection to Raja Dato Raja Amat against Raja Soodee. Beyond this, a warning note to Lebai Dappah would do as Bencoolen did not think that the situation at Sorkam had yet reached a dangerous enough stage to warrant drastic action. Prince was called upon to hand the council’s letter to Singkil and Susu so that he could personally convey Bencoolen’s deep concern over Acehnese encroachment at Nias and Sorkam.  

Air Bangis was another district in the west coast where tension between the Acehnese settlers and the local population was of concern to the British. In Air Bangis, the Natal Concern had, in 1798, entered into a commercial agreement with the local Malays whose chief carried the title of Tuanku. Then in 1802, clashes between the Acehnese and the Malays broke out during which the
Tuanku’s father as well as an Acehnese headman were killed. One hundred armed Acehnese were reported to have arrived soon afterwards to reinforce their countrymen at Air Bangis. In addition, about twenty-four armed Acehnese boats were said to be cruising off Air Bangis, checking on the movement of all shipping. Natal responded immediately by sending sepoys into Air Bangis, and forcing the armed Acehnese intruders to retreat. After the event, Prince sought permission from Bencoolen to intervene on behalf of the Tuanku.

In May, Bencoolen sent a force under Thomas Jarret to Air Bangis to help resolve the dispute between the Acehnese and the local population. In the meeting, both sides agreed to settle their differences. Jarret then signed a commercial agreement with the Tuanku under which Air Bangis was to deliver all its pepper to Natal. The agreement affirmed British support for the Tuanku. As in Sorkam, Prince believed that outside Acehnese were behind the unrest in Air Bangis. ‘I am very apt to conclude that People of much greater authority than the aggressors in this affair, are connected in this Combination, or such a Force could not be collected.’ Prince did not identify whom he suspected, but there is no doubt that it was Lebai Dappah of Singkil.

### American Traders in the West Coast

By this time, there was another threat to British interests in the Sumatran west coast with the arrival of a growing number of American ships. But there was a connection between the American arrival and the Acehnese. In fact, some officials, such as Prince and later Raffles, did not see the American challenge as a matter that could be separated from the Acehnese because it was largely in the Acehnese ports that the American ships were buying pepper. American traders were viewed with concern, not only because they were serious competitors to the British in west Sumatra in the purchase of pepper, but also because their exports to Europe were bound to affect the market. Interestingly, it was the growing threat of the American presence that led the British in the west coast, especially Prince, to reconsider the relationship with Lebai Dappah.

Among the early Americans to trade in Sumatra was Walter Sim. The first reference to him was in 1792 when he was reported to be commanding the *Betsy* and buying pepper in Padang and the Acehnese west coast. It is likely that he was in the region
much earlier, considering that he was familiar with local practices and that he had already established contact with the Acehnese. In 1792, he went to see Sultan Muhammed Syah to complain about Captain Huatt over non-fulfilment of a contract for which an advance had been paid.38

But the American generally credited with discovering Susu as a source of plentiful and high-quality pepper was J. Carnes, who arrived on the Grand Sachem in 1792.39 While at Padang, he learnt that all the pepper there was, in fact, obtained from the north, and it must have been then that he came to know of Susu. Carnes did not proceed to Susu on that trip. In 1797, Carnes returned with the Rajah. He called at Tapanuli where he bought some pepper from Prince. Only after that did he sail northwards to Susu where he made most of his pepper purchases. The Rajah disposed of the pepper in America at a profit of nearly 700 per cent.

In the beginning, not all the American ships arriving in Sumatra traded at Susu. During the 1800 and 1801 seasons, only three of the thirteen American ships called at the port. The rest bought their pepper from Padang and Bencoolen. Two American ships, the Belisarius and the Mercury, touched at Bencoolen where Walter Ewer, the resident, offered them its (Bencoolen’s) stocks of pepper. It was said that Ewer had hoped that filling up the American ships with Bencoolen pepper would keep them from proceeding to Susu. London, however, did not approve of such a sale to an American competitor, and Ewer was reprimanded.

Unable generally to purchase pepper at Bencoolen, American ships went direct to Susu and other Acehnese pepper ports for their supplies. The success of the Rajah and the ensuing huge profits obtained encouraged a growing number of American ships to sail to Sumatra. In 1802, twenty-one ships left Salem and Boston, the two American ports from where ships trading in pepper departed. In 1803, thirty-one American ships arrived in Sumatra.

Ewer next tried to apply the Jay Treaty as a means to check the competition from the Americans. Clauses in the 1796 treaty forbade the conveying of goods from Britain to any of its colonies by American vessels, and those caught doing so could be detained.40

Early in 1802, an American ship, the Harmony, was seized in Padang, after sailing from England. A year later, the Eclipse was captured just after leaving Susu. The Eclipse was alleged to have carried goods between Susu and Padang, and although the latter was then administered by Bencoolen, both were really not British territories. None the less, Ewer interpreted this as a violation of
the Jay Treaty. The charges could not be sustained, however, and both ships were later released on the instruction of Bengal. In February 1803, Ewer wrote to Bengal at some length on the American threat to the Company’s pepper trade in Sumatra. He pointed out that, in recent months, a number of American ships had arrived and taken away such large quantities of pepper from the Acehnese ports that if the trend continued, ‘one half of Europe will be supplied by the [Americans], and other half by the Dutch . . . the Trade of the Company will be confined to Great Britain and Ireland’. Ewer claimed further that the Americans were supplying pepper to Europe at a price lower than that offered by the British or the Dutch. This was possible because the Americans, without factories and bases in India or in Sumatra, had much lower operating costs.

Ewer feared that the Americans might eventually want a more permanent presence in the Sumatran coast. Already there were unconfirmed reports that the Americans had begun intervening in local disputes in some Acehnese ports. There were rumours that they had even hoisted the American flag in one of those ports as a prelude to forming a permanent settlement.

Indeed, the incident happened in Labuan Haji, which was a well-sheltered port a short distance from Susu and a producer of high-quality pepper. It had a population of 5,000, consisting of Malays and Acehnese. The district was ruled by several chiefs, and the authority of the Acehnese Sultan was acknowledged. Duties and tributes were said to have been regularly paid to the capital. Largely because of its sheltered harbour, Labuan Haji was a favourite place for foreign ships. It was reportedly used occasionally by French warships, and it became very popular with the Americans. If at all the Americans were to have a base in the Acehnese region, Labuan Haji was said to be a likely choice.

An opportunity did present itself in Labuan Haji in 1802 when a long-simmering dispute between the original population and Acehnese settlers broke out into open conflict. During the fighting, the Acehnese seized the fort and forced the Raja, Keucik Se Cappaye, to flee. The chief took refuge on board an American ship in the harbour. Later, he regained control of the place and hoisted an American flag. The action could have been because of gratitude to the Americans for their protection, or because he had hoped the gesture would lead to American support. Nothing came out of the incident. All the American ships then at Labuan Haji were private traders.
Nevertheless, Ewer became anxious, and he argued that the one effective way to curb the competition from the Americans was for the Company to enter into a formal arrangement with Lebai Dappah. The Company would buy up all the pepper produced at Susu at an agreed price on condition that Lebai Dappah would not sell any to the Americans. Admittedly, there were other areas along the coast producing pepper. But Susu and Singkil were the two ports capable of supplying large quantities of pepper. Elsewhere, the amount available was small, and ships would usually have to wait for longer periods to collect enough before making the return trip. This would frustrate American attempts to make large purchases for sale in Europe.

Entering into commercial agreements with local chiefs was not a new arrangement for British officials. In all the ports in the west and Pedir coasts, it was a common practice to deal only with the chief. In fact, this was a requirement stipulated in the traditional Acehnese regulations. The local chief was also the principal trader. It was not only less complicated, but the port chief was also the only person who could honour all contracts. If any goods or money were advanced, the port chief could be expected to fulfil all obligations. Dealing with individual planters, even if permitted by the chief, would be risky and required too much time.

From the viewpoint of politics, a trade arrangement made more sense in setting the basis for a stable and harmonious relationship between the British and Lebai Dappah. Once the sphere of interest was clearly demarcated, Lebai Dappah, as a trading partner, would have less reason to be hostile towards Tapanuli. In this way, the British could woo him away from future dealings with American traders, and thereby contain the threat of American competition. As a bonus, Lebai Dappah could be depended upon to control the more unruly Acehnese elements.

In early 1803, therefore, Bencoolen sent Thomas Jarret northwards to the Acehnese pepper ports. There, he was to negotiate commercial agreements with the local chiefs. Jarret arrived at Susu, but learnt that Lebai Dappah had been away since January and was not expected back for another four months. He was said to be on a pilgrimage. But other reports later claimed that he was in the capital where Tuanku Raja, his son-in-law, was battling Jauhar al-Alam. His brother, Teuku Sarrang, was in charge of the place. None of the other ports under the control of Lebai Dappah were willing to negotiate with Jarret. It was not only a matter of Lebai Dappah’s absence. It was also because all the
Acehnese ports on the west coast, including those under Lebai Dappah, considered themselves under the rule of the Sultan and could not, on their own, enter into agreements with the British. "[I]t appears none of these chiefs are competent to enter into Contracts without the Sanction and concurrence of the King of Atcheen as Lord Paramount."48 Teuku Sarrang proposed that Bencoolen send an official to the capital to pursue the matter further. Susu was willing to provide a representative to accompany such a deputation.

Jarret found that all the ports along the west coast reacted positively to British overtures. Ports that were largely Malay, such as Labuan Haji, saw the proposed agreements as protection against the Acehnese threat. Acehnese ports, including those under Lebai Dappah, expected commercial and possible political advantages in linking up with the British.

What is significant is that, despite this positive response to the British, Acehnese ports, including those under Lebai Dappah, openly acknowledged the authority of the Sultan. Singkil and Susu might not have yet felt strong enough to assert their independence. Moreover, Tuanku Raja was still the Regent in Aceh, and as Lebai Dappah's son-in-law, this acknowledgement was acceptable.

Lebai Dappah was keen to develop close trade ties with Tapanuli under arrangements proposed by Prince and Ewer because he saw the British as a future protector against the Sultan's demands. While so far there had been little interference from the capital, the politics in Aceh were changing and Jauhar al-Alam was already challenging the Tuanku Raja. There could come a time when Singkil and Susu would find themselves under pressure from the capital.

Both Prince and Lebai Dappah were also practical businessmen; they decided that all sides would benefit if some understanding could be reached. There could be a delineation of each other's sphere of influence to avoid future disputes. Prince recognized that Lebai Dappah exercised considerable influence over the Acehnese west coast, while Lebai Dappah realized the value of a powerful British ally. Some informal agreement was eventually reached between the two under which Singkil was responsible for the safety of the coastal waters around it. By recognizing Lebai Dappah's position, Prince pre-empted potential difficulties from the Singkil Acehnese.49

All these proposals were worked out by the British and Singkil
without consulting the Acehnese Sultan. This reflected the attitude of many British officials in Sumatra; they considered the Acehnese pepper districts as independent of the Sultan. The residents at Natal and Tapanuli preferred to deal with them directly. Bencoolen, however, was less certain. While agreeing with Natal and Tapanuli that many of the west coast districts were practically independent, Bencoolen felt that these ports were still nominally under the authority of the Acehnese Sultan and some acknowledgement of that fact had to be considered.

**The British Expedition Against Muki in the Acehnese West Coast, 1803**

The principle of referring to the Sultan on difficult matters along the west coast was, however, not generally practised by Bencoolen itself, as illustrated by an incident in Muki in 1803. When it came to deciding on retaliatory measures against the Acehnese in response to attacks, the British cared little for the demarcation between Acehnese and non-Acehnese regions. It may have been because of incidents such as in Muki that some Acehnese chiefs on the west coast, when faced with external forces, instinctively turned to the Acehnese capital for support or solidarity.

Muki was some considerable distance to the north of Singkil. Pepper was grown in the district by Malays said to have come from nearby Kalayat around 1760. Later, Acehnese arrived to settle in the area, and eventually became the majority population. Over a period of time, power was shared between the Malay and the Acehnese chiefs. The two sons of the Acehnese chief succeeded their father, and eventually gained political dominance of the district. Muki had a projecting neck of land protecting the bay from the northerly and north-westerly winds. It soon attracted foreign traders in search of pepper. When the Americans began coming to Sumatra, Muki was a port they frequented. In 1801 alone, there were no less than eighteen American ships trading there.

According to the 1786 agreement between J. Griffith and Lebai Dappah of Singkil, Muki fell well within the region regarded as Acehnese. At considerable distance from Tapanuli, and with Singkil and Barus located between them, Muki was never regarded as a security threat to the British. However, when a British-registered ship was allegedly attacked at Muki, Bencoolen’s response was decisive and drastic.
**The Crescent, Salvaged and Plundered**

In September 1803, the Calcutta firm of Archer and Smith reported to the Bengal authorities that one of its ships, the *Crescent*, was plundered by inhabitants of Muki.\(^5\) According to Alex Brownlee, the ship's captain, the *Crescent* called at Muki in early July 1803.\(^5\) The two chiefs of Muki, Dato Siboorang and his brother Dato Besar, as well as other notables of the area went on board the ship. A salute of welcome was fired from the guns of the *Crescent*, and a gift presented to the chief. The ship remained in Muki where she spent several days loading pepper. On 21 July, the *Crescent* completed her transactions and prepared to leave Muki. As she was sailing away, the ship ran aground. Men from Muki quickly came to the rescue of the crew and the cargo. The *Crescent* claimed that the Muki people took away the salvaged cargo of the ship, with a value of 38,000 Spanish dollars. According to Brownlee, he and his crew were detained by Dato Siboorang and were informed that their release would only be secured upon payment of a sum of money.

At first consideration, the incident seemed to be an unprovoked attack for which the motive was sheer plunder. This view was shared by the *Crescent*'s captain and the British authorities. Yet a closer look at some facts generally overlooked by British authorities at the time has raised some interesting questions. Aspects of this case could possibly help explain the many other occasions of seemingly unwarranted and piratical attacks made against European ships in the region.

Muki was generally well regarded by traders during this period. It was reputed to be a peaceful and law-abiding place in which trade was carried out in an orderly manner. The *Crescent* encountered no trouble with the local people during the period it was in port. Captain Brownlee himself, even though attributing plunder as a motive, admitted being perplexed over the whole affair because Muki was a thriving pepper port, and it was not as if the chief or the inhabitants were forced by economic circumstances to make the attack. He pointed out in his report that while the *Crescent* was in Muki, he had learnt that eight American ships had been there. ‘During my stay at Mackey [Muki] I found that Eight American ships had been loaded with Pepper from that Port during this season which had been paid for in Dollars.’\(^5\) Brownlee surmised that the presence of the Americans must show that ‘it was not necessity which induced them to plunder the *Crescent*’.\(^5\)
Muki had just obtained a large amount of money from the sale of the pepper, and no doubt was a relatively prosperous place. Reports about the people of Muki were favourable. John Crowninshield, an American who commanded the America III from Salem, was at Muki in 1801. He was full of praise about the people of Muki. In his log-book, he recorded:

They have behaved to us with the greatest attention and I may say politeness—where is there that Christian country that (to reverse the scene should a vessel of these people come and trade amongst and any of her officers (and crew) should go into a crowd of people in the publick streets or walks or on the warfs amongst merchants whilst receiving there cargo and not being able to speak there language take the first man they thought proper by the arm and whilst laughing him in the fact should make signs that he was a dry or hungry and would be glad he would give him (I dont mean sell him nor to shew him where he could buy some) some thing to eat and drink where I say is that polite country whose inhabitants would be pleased to understand such blunt simplicity as immediately to go or send for something for such an infidel to satisfy his appitite with—or what a roast beef look would such an innocent fellow receive.

This is one case all day long it being very warm on shore (these people dont drink any ardent sperits and they dont like to see people drink rack as they call it) and if we any of us are a dry all we have to do is to ask any of the head (if they are near we chuse to ask them) men or rather make signs for what we want and they without hesitation send some one and bring us cocoa nuts which is excellent drink, as well as food.55

Furthermore, Thomas Jarret of the Bencoolen establishment visited Muki in May 1803, just two months prior to the incident. The chief of Muki was friendly, and expressed interest in signing a commercial agreement with the British.56

Despite the atmosphere of friendliness and hospitality, it was also recognized even then that the local customs had to be respected as George Nichols, a merchant on board the Active, an American ship, who was in Muki the same year, was to discover. On one occasion while the crew was onshore, the supercargo of his ship snatched a bag from an Acehnese, claiming that it had been stolen earlier from him. This immediately provoked a gathering of angry Acehnese with drawn krises. Violence was avoided when Nichols carefully explained the situation to the Acehnese. He further observed that ‘nothing pleased the natives more than to find me ready to conform to their customs. I often walked arm in arm with their leading men, went into their huts to
‘light my cigars, and offering them some, would sit down and smoke with them.’

It made no sense that Muki would want to harm its reputation among European and American traders as a safe and reliable port by plundering the *Crescent* as alleged. The traders and planters depended on ships coming to Muki to purchase pepper. The presence of American ships and the fact that none were attacked in similar fashion suggest that there were reasons peculiar to the case of the *Crescent*.

One speculation put forward then was that the plunder had been carried out at the instigation of the Americans at Muki. At the time of the incident, there were still eight American ships in the port. One of these was the *General Strong*. According to Captain Brownlee, an officer from the *General Strong* was with the Muki chiefs when the crew of the *Crescent* was rescued from the sea. He was also present when the cargo was removed by the Muki people. Certainly, given the growing concern over American competition in the west coast, any suggestion that there was a conspiracy between the Americans and Muki against the *Crescent* would have credence in the British circle.

But Captain Brownlee himself did not believe that the Americans were behind the attack. He pointed out that while under detention, the crew of the *Crescent* were threatened with death, and according to Brownlee, it was only the intervention of the American officer from the *General Strong* which saved them. There was also no reason for American instigation. For their own future safety, it was unwise for American ships to encourage unprovoked attacks on a foreign vessel. There is also nothing in Brownlee’s account to suggest that there had been any misunderstanding between the *Crescent* and the Americans. Indeed, during this period, all foreign ships observed a practice whereby, on arrival, a ship had to wait her turn until a vessel already in the port completed her loading of pepper. This was to avoid unnecessary competition and dispute among visiting ships.

The seemingly unprovoked attack perhaps could be explained by focusing on the circumstances of the *Crescent* going aground. Until then, the whole trip had been uneventful and it had been a happy visit to Muki by the *Crescent*. When the ship got into trouble, men from Muki rescued the crew and salvaged the cargo. But it is at this point that the events must be viewed with reference to the indigenous maritime laws to explain the behaviour of the Muki inhabitants.
Under the maritime law and practice of the region, those taking part in the salvaging of goods from a boat that had sunk within sight of the shore were entitled to a share of the cargo recovered and part of the value of the ship salvaged. The rescuers could also claim a payment from those whose lives had been saved. These rights were contained in the laws of Malacca and Johore, and were likely to have been practised in most other states including Aceh. Ito Takeshi, in his study, pointed out that the Adat Aceh, a set of Acehnese laws used at the time of Iskandar Muda, did not deal with the subject of shipwrecks. However, he noted that Belieu recorded that, in 1621, the cargo of a ship wrecked in Aceh was confiscated by Iskandar Muda, and all her crew enslaved. The crew was later freed on payment of a sum of money. It is likely that rules and practices in Aceh regarding shipwrecks became more in line with those of neighbouring maritime states. If this was so, the Muki people had acted on the basis of their understanding of traditional maritime law, and they certainly considered it their entitlement to retain the cargo as well as to demand payment for saving the crew.

The incident took place in the presence of American ships, including an American officer, suggesting that the people of Muki really believed they were acting within their rights. Furthermore, a few months after the incident, Dato Siboorang went to Tapanuli to attend a wedding. He clearly did not expect to be detained by the British. His identity and his arrival were known, but John Prince, the resident, made no move to arrest him. When Bencoolen learnt of this later, it expressed disappointment that Prince had not seized Dato Siboorang. Prince’s non-action is significant. Usually quick to move against any misdeeds that threatened British interest, his reluctance this time suggests that he might not have been convinced about the case in Muki.

On 6 September 1803, the company of Archer and Smith reported the Muki attack to Bengal, and appealed for help to recover the cargo of the Crescent, which was estimated to be worth about 38,000 Spanish dollars. Bengal, on 8 September, referred the matter to Bencoolen, calling on it to investigate the incident and, if the charges were true, to take appropriate action against Muki and obtain redress for the Crescent.

Bencoolen readily interpreted the entire incident in Muki as an act of piracy upon the Crescent. This conclusion was a natural reaction conditioned by its own experience in the past, such as the attack by the Acehnese on Tapanuli and regular reports of hostile
Acehnese intentions in the west coast pepper region. No doubt, Bencoolen was influenced by the reputation popularly held of the Acehnese, which according to Crowninshield, 'represent[ed] them as worse than savages robbing vessels of there property massacring the crews ...'. However, Crowninshield believed that such stories about the Acehnese ports were deliberately spread by traders to frighten off rivals planning to trade at the pepper ports.

**Bencoolen’s Punitive Expedition to Muki**

Bencoolen made preparations to send an armed expedition to Muki. Although the declared intention of the expedition was to investigate the attack on the Crescent, Bencoolen officials had in their own minds anticipated what the findings would be. Muki had to be punished and to be made an example of for the apparent outrage.

Bencoolen was not able, however, to act immediately on its decision. It had itself recently come under attack from a French fleet, and the few boats that could be used for the Muki expedition had been destroyed. It was only in April 1804 that Bencoolen was able to fit out two vessels, the *Perseverance* and the *Phoenix*, for the expedition. William Grant, a member of the civil establishment, was appointed to head the expedition, which consisted of a large number of European troops and sepoys. The *Crescent* sailed with the naval fleet.

The expedition arrived at Muki on 13 April 1804. Grant requested Dato Siboorang, the Muki chief, to come on board the *Perseverance* to explain the attack on the *Crescent*. Alarmed by the arrival of an armed British expedition, Dato Siboorang sent a reply asking that the meeting be postponed by a day. On 14 April, the Muki chief sent Dato Besar and eight other chiefs to meet the British. Grant, however, refused to begin any discussions until Dato Siboorang turned up. Meanwhile, Grant noticed that construction work was being carried out around the fortifications of Muki.

Later that afternoon, Grant ordered the *Phoenix* to fire on the fortified positions along the shore. Shortly after the barrage, troops were landed. They were met by Muki’s armed men, and fighting was heavy. After an hour, the main Muki fort was captured. Dato Siboorang and about fifty of his men were killed while the British lost about ten soldiers. These casualties were high. The next morning, Muki called for a truce.
Grant laid down the terms by which hostilities would cease. Muki was required to deliver 1,500 pikuls of pepper annually for five years as restitution for the cargo seized from the *Crescent*, as well as to cover the costs of the expedition. This quantity would have had a value of about 75,000 Spanish dollars. Until this was agreed upon, the eight Muki chiefs and Dato Besar, who had come for the negotiations, were detained. Muki had no choice but to accept the terms imposed by Grant.

The tough British reaction to the incident in Muki was a response to what they perceived as dangerous Acehnese behaviour. The British expedition against Muki represented almost a natural reaction whenever a serious attack was made against British interests, whether this be a ship or a settlement. The thinking among officials was that if such attacks went unpunished, Acehnese aggression would be emboldened, which could further endanger British interests. Thus, Ewer hoped that the punitive action taken against the Muki chiefs would be a warning to the Acehnese of the dire consequences of harming British ships. But it may also be understood within the context of Bencoolen’s increasing frustration at its inability to contain the growing American presence in the west coast. Particularly disappointing to Ewer, the recent detention of two American ships, the *Harmony* and the *Eclipse*, had not been supported by his own superiors at Bengal on grounds of legality. But through the *Crescent* incident at Muki, Bencoolen was presented with an opportunity to vent its frustration and to serve a warning to Acehnese ports dealing with the Americans. The heavy reparation demanded would hurt Muki seriously and reduce considerably its supply of pepper available for trade with the Americans.

The episode did not end there. The British left behind a contingent of troops to help restore order. But their occupation of Muki was brief. Six weeks after Grant had left, an Acehnese named Panglima Poh Daud from a neighbouring district led a small party of armed men on a surprise attack on Company troops who had remained. The widow of Dato Siboorang had earlier appealed for revenge, and offered herself in marriage to whoever took up the challenge. The Company troops, taken by surprise, beat a hasty retreat, abandoning their weapons and heavy artillery. This forced withdrawal, by Bencoolen’s own admission, was embarrassing. Poh Daud had only twelve men to carry out the surprise attack. Bencoolen was also disturbed to learn that some cannons were seized from the British and later taken to Susu,
which was controlled by Lebai Dappah. In July, W. Hayes, who was on his way to Bengal, was asked to call at Muki and Singkil to negotiate the return of the guns. His ship was accompanied by the armed Phoenix, and he was authorized to use force should diplomacy fail.

Hayes arrived at Muki on 27 July, but all attempts to arrange a meeting with the inhabitants failed. Instead, the convoy was fired upon from newly constructed fortifications. The guns on the British ships returned fire and completely destroyed Muki’s defence positions. Subsequently, troops were landed and all settlements in the district destroyed. ‘... we landed at noon on the 27th ult. without opposition. The following day we marched into the country, and destroyed every village or house we met with...’

Hayes then sailed to Susu where he found Lebai Dappah. The Singkil chief surrendered a cannon, but denied all knowledge or involvement in the Muki affair. Hayes warned Lebai Dappah that he risked reprisals if he should act against the interests of the Company. None the less, recognizing the wide influence of Lebai Dappah, he asked the Singkil chief to help calm the situation at Muki. The British would take no further action provided the ringleaders of the attack on the British were not allowed to return to Muki, and the chiefs handed over the reparation as earlier agreed upon.

In November, Lebai Dappah visited Muki and later reported to the British that the place was deserted. The population which had evacuated the place on the arrival of Hayes in July had not returned. The British decided to release Dato Besar, and allowed him to go back to head Muki. He was considered unlikely to cause trouble, and the British hoped that he would be able not only to restore order in Muki, but also to maintain good relations with Bencoolen. Much later, a letter from Lebai Dappah described Muki as having returned to normal with most of its original inhabitants back.

It was to take some time for Muki to recover from the devastation inflicted by the British expeditions. The episode was a swift demonstration of power, even from a small establishment such as Bencoolen. British punitive strikes well into the Acehnese west coast once again exposed the weakness of the Acehnese central authority and the divisions among the local chiefs in the area. Such a situation was to continue. Some districts such as Singkil were now convinced that it would be prudent and even advantageous to work with the British. Lebai Dappah, for the part he
played, slowly earned the trust of the British. But the British assault on Muki might have caused many coastal chiefs to feel vulnerable in their (sole) autonomy, and to a certain extent, this checked the drift from the Acehnese capital. Meanwhile, in Muki, Dato Besar was seen as British-sponsored; thus, he faced growing opposition. Poh Daud asserted a strong challenge to his leadership. In the contest, Poh Daud sought the support of the Sultan.

1. According to J. Lawrence, who visited Aceh in 1811, the Queen was a suspect in the alleged poisoning of Sultan Muhammed Syah. He also referred to gossips that the Queen 'has formed an improper connection with a native of Malabar by name Muddeenee. This man (originally a slave presented to the late King by the Rajah of Travancore) has become her Counsellor and Minion [who] lives in opulence and carries on extensive trading concern without paying any duties to the King.' Report of J. C. Lawrence, 12 August 1811 (FCCP 15 August 1811), SSFR, Vol. 31.

2. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam to J. Prince, Resident of Tapanuli, 6 June 1813 (FWCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.


5. F. R. MacDonald to Governor-General in Council, Bengal, 20 September 1797 (Bengal Public Consultation 5 March 1798), Board’s Collection, F/4/54 (1221).

6. Ibid.

7. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah to Penang, undated, conveyed by Capt. Swaine, 1797, Board’s Collection, F/4/54.

8. F. R. MacDonald to Poh Salleh, *syahbandar* of Aceh, 15 June 1797, Board’s Collection, F/4/54.


10. Bengal to Superintendent of Prince of Wales Island, 16 March 1798, Board’s Collection, F/4/54.


19. Ibid.
25. Ibid., pp. 140–1.
26. ‘Detailed Statement of the Ports on the N. W. Coast of Sumatra under Separate and Distinct Heads’, Encl. 16 in report of Capt. J. Canning to the Secretary to Supreme Government, Bengal, on his mission to Acch, 24 November 1814, Sumatra, Vol. 27.
29. B. Heyne, Tracts, Historical and Statistical, on India, with Journals of Several Tours through Various Parts of the Peninsula, London, Black, Perry and Company, 1814.
30. G. Siddons to Bengal, 30 September 1815 (FWCP 27 January 1816), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 39.
31. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 31 August 1794, Sumatra, Vol. 95.
32. J. Prince, Resident of Natal, to Fort Marlborough, 4 February 1795 (FMC 21 February 1795), Sumatra, Vol. 95.
33. Secret letter from Bencoolen to London, 30 November 1795 (FWCP 30 November 1795), Sumatra, Vol. 96.
34. Fort Marlborough Consultations, 21 February 1795, Sumatra, Vol. 95.
35. J. Prince to Fort Marlborough, 25 December 1802 (FMC December 1802) and 25 February 1803 (FMC February 1803), Sumatra, Vol. 104.
36. T. Jarret to Walter Ewer, 22 April 1803 (FMC May 1803), Sumatra, Vol. 104.
38. W. Sim, Commander of the Betsy to Francis Light, 27 December 1792, SSFR, Vol. 4.


42. W. Ewer to Bengal, 24 February 1803 (FWC 4 August 1803), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 38.

43. Ibid.

44. ‘Detailed Statement of the Ports on the N. W. Coast of Sumatra under Separate and Distinct Heads’, Encl. 16 in report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814.

45. T. Jarret to W. Ewer, 22 April 1803 (FMC May 1803), Sumatra, Vol. 104.

46. An idea of how trade was conducted can be obtained from the reports of traders. Some of these are published while others are in the records of the East India Company. See Corning, ‘John Crowninshield in the America III’, pp. 139–57; Putnam, ‘Salem Vessels and Their Voyages’; Heyne, *Tracts, Historical and Statistical*, pp. 402–10.

47. T. Jarret to W. Ewer, 22 April 1803 (FMC May 1803), Sumatra, Vol. 104.

48. Ibid.


51. Archer and Smith to Governor-General, 6 September 1803 (FWC 10 November 1803), Calcutta, Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 38.

52. Deposition of Alex Brownlee, Captain of the Crescent, 5 September 1803, Encl. in letter from Archer and Smith to Governor-General, 6 September 1803 (FWC 10 November 1803), Calcutta, Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 38.

53. Deposition of Alex Brownlee, Captain of the Crescent, 5 September 1803.

54. Ibid.


56. T. Jarret to W. Ewer, 22 April 1803 (FMC May 1803), Sumatra, Vol. 104.


58. ‘Who ever rescues shipwrecked mariners can claim half a tael head from the boatswain. (If the rescued men are saved with their goods, the rescuer can claim an award of 10 per cent of the goods’ value. The rescued crew should make a true statement of the value of their salvaged goods to their captain. A member of the crew who tries to conceal his salvaged goods, which later come to light, forfeits all these goods to the captain.)’ R. Winstedt and J. de Jonge, ‘The Maritime Laws of Malacca’, *JMBRAS*, 29, 3 (1956): 28–49. The Johore laws contained a provision covering shipwrecks which is similar to the Malacca laws. See Anon., ‘Translation of the Malayan Laws of the Principality of Johor’, *JIAEA*, 9 (1855): 71–95.


60. Bengooelen to Bengal, 1 May 1804 (FWC 5 July 1804), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 41.

61. Archer and Smith to Governor-General, 6 September 1803, Calcutta.
62. Bengal to Bencoolen, 8 September 1803 (FWC 10 November 1803), Calcutta, Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 38.
63. Corning, John Crowninshield in the America III, p. 150.
64. Bencoolen to Bengal, 1 May 1804 (FWC 5 July 1804), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 41.
65. W. Grant to Fort Marlborough, 17 April 1804 (FWC 5 July 1804), Muki, Bengal Political Consultations, Range 117, Vol. 41.
67. W. Grant to Bencoolen, 4 August 1804 from Susu, Board’s Collection, F/4/187 3922A.
68. Lebai Dappah of Singkil to Bencoolen, dated as November 1804, in Board’s Collection, F/4/187 3922 A.
69. E. Coles, Resident of Padang to Bencoolen, 22 September 1804, Board’s Collection, F/4/187 3922A; Fort Marlborough Consultations, 16 August 1804, Board’s Collection, F/4/187 3922A.
A New Ruler Consolidates, 1805–1811

The Confiscation of the Hydroos

SOMETIME in 1805, Jauhar al-Alam defeated Tuanku Raja. Even as the young Sultan assumed power, the region was entering into a crucial phase in the Anglo-French war. Once again, Aceh’s strategic value came to the attention of British officials, especially when reports reached India of French warships returning to use the port facilities of the sultanate. However, the first years after Jauhar al-Alam assumed control of the capital were marked by British coolness and even suspicion towards Aceh. British officials in Penang and Sumatra opposed new commercial measures, introduced by the Sultan, which were seen as harmful to the interests of their traders. The reported presence of French advisers and warships seemed merely to confirm the unease with Aceh. Nevertheless, there remained an underlying belief, particularly among certain officials, that Aceh was not really a hostile state, and that indeed its ruler was keen to cultivate British goodwill.

Jauhar al-Alam managed to defeat Tuanku Raja when, according to an Acehnese account, the Queen Mother shifted her support from her brother to her own son towards the end after she learnt that Tuanku Raja was intent on killing the young prince. It had been a protracted struggle during which Tuanku Raja received the support of some powerful ulubalang. Among them was Lebai Dappah, Tuanku Raja’s father-in-law. Significantly, in 1803 and 1804, Lebai Dappah was away from Singkil. It is possible that this absence was in connection with the conflict in the capital. Some years later, Jauhar al-Alam referred to Lebai Dappah’s involvement: ‘Having at length succeeded against the intrigues of my maternal uncle and his father-in-law Tooanko Sinkil I have thank God, nearly established my legitimate authority throughout my country.’

The hand of Lebai Dappah in the capital’s politics possibly changed the character of the conflict. Details of this episode are very sketchy. It could have been ambition kindled by wealth and political influence gained in Singkil, or simply support for his son-in-law. But such an intervention could further explain why the
Queen Mother broke away from her brother. She then enlisted the support of a powerful ulubalang whose official title was Teuku Kali Malikon Ade. This was a turning point in the conflict. This ulubalang mobilized a force of between 300 and 400 men to attack Tuanku Raja.

Jauhar al-Alam also received support from Pedir to where he had retreated. There had been a long-established link between the ruling families of Pedir and Aceh. With the help of the Raja of Pedir, Jauhar al-Alam was able to fight his way back to the capital to join the decisive battle. Tuanku Raja was finally surrounded in his palace and, after some resistance, was defeated and killed. With that, the civil war came to an end and Jauhar al-Alam finally assumed full authority as Sultan. By December 1805, Penang received news of Jauhar al-Alam's victory.

In gratitude to Pedir, the Sultan granted trade privileges to the Raja, Tuanku Pakeh Daud. In 1810, the ties were further strengthened when he married the daughter of the Pedir Raja. It is also possible that the eldest son was conferred the title of Tuanku Laut by the Sultan for the assistance given. The old ruler died in 1810, and was succeeded by Tuanku Pakeh Hussein, probably the younger son, who was about the same age as Jauhar al-Alam.

The Sultan’s Appeal to Penang

Jauhar al-Alam sought to consolidate his political position through effective control of trade as well as the collection of duties and tributes. There was wealth to be accrued from the expanding lucrative pepper trade in the west coast as well as the thriving betel-nut trade in the Pedir coast. Yet the Sultan seemed to benefit least from all these. As with previous rulers, the court’s effectiveness in the collection of duties was very limited. Thus, immediately following his victory over Tuanku Raja, Jauhar al-Alam wrote to Penang appealing again for armed ships and sepoys, explaining that these were to help regain control of the west coast ports. Once more, his request was turned down by Penang.

Jauhar al-Alam’s request came at a time when Penang was too preoccupied with its new status and responsibilities. In 1805, a decision had been made by the Company to open a naval base on the island. Part of the British navy in the Indian Ocean would be stationed in Penang, and it was expected that the new base would provide logistic support to British forces in India. Armed ships assembled at Penang would also protect the convoys of Company
ships en route to China. Accompanying its new importance was the elevation of the island to the status of a presidency, with direct communication to the court of directors in London. The island's fort had to be repaired and new defences constructed in keeping with its additional responsibilities. There was reorganization of an enlarged staff. Within this scheme of change, Aceh was certainly not a priority.

The authorities on the island were nevertheless keen to promote trade between Penang and Aceh, which had been growing steadily over the past few years. Betel-nut and pepper were the main items imported by Penang from Aceh. But they saw this expansion taking place within the framework of Penang as an entrepôt centre. Trade had to be freely accessible, and the island's officials and merchants disliked the idea of supporting a ruler of a nearby state intent on imposing political and trade control. Such restrictions could harm Penang as an entrepôt centre and affect the trade of the merchants on the island. Many officials and merchants still remembered the attempts of Muhammed Syah to tax Acehnese boats taking their produce to Penang through enforcement of a blockade of Pedir's coast in the 1790s.

At this time too, Penang was trying to grow pepper for export. Several prominent European traders, such as David Brown, had acquired large tracts of land to open up pepper plantations. The local Kapitan Cina, Koh Lay Huan, had brought back some pepper vines on one of his trips to Aceh. By 1805, Penang was producing about 2,000 tons, of which 1,500 tons were exported. In the circumstances, there could have been a belief, wrongly as it turned out, that reliance on pepper imports from Aceh would eventually be reduced.

Furthermore, there was a glut of pepper in the European market, and since 1805, prices had fallen. The price of pepper had dropped to 7.5 pence per pound in 1807, and there was a large stock of unsold pepper. In January 1810, the court of directors wrote of nearly 17 million pounds of pepper in the warehouses waiting for buyers. Thus, while London was concerned about the ever-increasing presence of American ships in Sumatra and that some measures be taken to check the competition, it nevertheless advised against any contract with Aceh for more pepper. Aceh's offer of a regular pepper supply was therefore not an attractive proposition.

In the background, however, there was always the reminder to the British of the strategic importance of Aceh, especially since
the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars in 1793. At the onset of the hostilities, a fleet of French privateers left Mauritius for the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. Two of the warships, the General Durnouier and the Egalite, inflicted considerable damage to shipping in the northern stretch of the straits. In June 1800, the Hope, a British vessel sailing from Penang to Pedir, was captured by French privateers. Not long afterwards, the Montgomery was seized while sailing from Bencoolen to Bengal, as were two other English vessels later on. All the French privateers were based in Mauritius.¹³

Again as in past campaigns, French warships were reportedly using Aceh as a refitting station against the British navy in the Bay of Bengal.¹⁴ Aceh was a convenient shelter during the north-east monsoon, which usually lasts from October to February. Thus, the French had an advantage over the British, whose ships had to evacuate to Bombay. To overcome the disadvantage, Penang had therefore been established to provide a closer shelter for British warships. The development of a Penang naval base balanced the advantage of Aceh gained by the French. However, the fact remained that Aceh was still available to the French. But the idea of occupying Aceh and turning it into a British naval base as a means to keep out the French, an issue brought up from time to time, was not seriously pursued even in the midst of the renewed Anglo-French conflict. In the minds of some British officials, having Penang made Aceh less relevant.¹⁵

The main reservation against any treaty with Aceh was the internal situation in the sultanate. Uncertain about the stability of the Acehnese court, there was reluctance towards any plan that in the end might require the use of a large number of troops in the event of unrest. London was itself cautious, and always advised against any agreement that could draw the British into local conflicts in Aceh. Expense was also a consideration if the island was to get involved. Maintaining a resident with a garrison in Aceh could drain Penang’s treasury. But if Aceh could be made to pay for it, then having a resident would not necessarily be a burden. In April 1808, Norman MacAlister, the Governor of Penang, proposed acquiring from the Sultan the right to port duties to cover the costs of troop maintenance. He also saw the collection of port duties as a mechanism to keep French and other enemy ships out of Aceh.¹⁶ The proposal was not followed through because of the continued unwillingness of the British to commit troops, particularly at a time when these could not be spared.¹⁷
There was always a concern, as was argued in 1805, that the island’s security could be undermined if Penang troops were deployed elsewhere.\(^{18}\)

In 1808, the prevailing hostilities in Europe widened when war was declared between Britain and Denmark. It was feared that British shipping would be exposed to further risks. The Danes had an establishment at Tranquebar in India which could be used against the British.\(^{19}\) In January 1808, the supreme government in Bengal issued to all British settlements a notice to seize all Danish ships and their cargo partly as a pre-emptive measure.\(^{20}\)

**Seizure of the Sultan’s Ship and Revolt at the Capital**

In the light of these developments in the European conflict, British officials in Penang, already suspicious of Aceh, took an even more vigilant attitude towards its new Sultan. Therefore, when two ships from Aceh arrived at Penang in June 1808, the authorities scrutinized the vessels and their papers. It was quickly discovered that one of the ships, the *Hydroos*, was in fact previously known as the *Hero*, a ship that belonged to a Danish citizen.\(^{21}\) The *Hydroos* and the *Hussen*, the other Acehnese ship owned by the Sultan, were carrying rice and pepper from Telok Samoy to Penang. A Frenchman named Francis L’Etoile, claiming to be the commercial agent of the Acehnese Sultan, was in charge of the two ships. He produced various documents to the authorities, including what was claimed to be a bill of sale stating that the *Hydroos* was bought by the Sultan for 7,500 Spanish dollars. The bill was in Malay.\(^{22}\)

In spite of the documents, the Penang government confiscated the *Hydroos*, alleging that the ownership of the ship was still Danish, and therefore enemy property. It suspected that the ship was merely using Acehnese colours to evade capture by the British.\(^{23}\) The Penang authorities believed that the ultimate destination of the *Hydroos* was Mauritius. L’Etoile protested strongly, but to no avail.\(^{24}\) The ship was auctioned off in August 1808, but the cargo was returned to the Sultan.\(^{25}\) The Governor conceded that the Sultan might not have been aware of the legal implications of the war on the status of enemy properties. In the entire exercise, the Sultan of Aceh was not consulted, nor was he contacted until the boat was disposed of. There was no attempt to resolve the issue through diplomatic means or in a manner acceptable to both sides. The only communication was a letter from Governor MacAlister
informing Jauhar al-Alam of the confiscation of the *Hydroos*. Penang claimed that it was strictly observing the directive received from the supreme government in Bengal. Eventually, the papers relating to the *Hydroos* were sent to the Vice-Admiralty Court in Madras for a final decision.

The Sultan was dismayed by the confiscation of the *Hydroos*. It constituted a serious financial loss. The *Hydroos* and the *Hussen* had been scheduled to bring back merchandise from Penang to Telok Samoy, and to return immediately with another consignment of cargo to the island. During this period, the Sultan, through L'Etoile, had established commercial links with several traders on the island. Among the documents taken from the *Hydroos* were letters on commercial matters from the Sultan to several European merchants in Penang.

Furthermore, according to the Sultan later, the confiscation of the ship caused him a serious loss of prestige within Aceh. The seizure of the *Hydroos* would have soon been known to the merchant community in Aceh as well as to the *orang kaya* and *ulubalang*. Thus, the Sultan immediately sent off a series of letters to Penang and to Bengal protesting against the *Hydroos* seizure. A full year passed without any response from either of the two authorities. In his letters, Jauhar al-Alam explained that he had bought the *Hydroos* from Gustavus A. Streng at Telok Samoy, and he had no idea then that the ship could be classified as belonging to an enemy-subject of the British.

Some years later, Raffles raised the matter of the *Hydroos* with Lord Minto. In his letter to the Governor-General, he was critical of the procedure by which Penang had confiscated the ship, and he urged the case to be reviewed. Raffles was, at the time of the *Hydroos* affair, serving as secretary to the Penang government.

The vessel alluded to [by Jauhar al-Alam] was named the *Hydroos* and was sold by the Penang Government but I believe—never yet been regularly condemned in a Vice-Admiralty Court. I am not aware upon what principle she was seized and sold and the money appropriated by the Government of Penang nor has any satisfactory explanation of the motives which induced the seizure and of the circumstances which authorized the rule hitherto to my knowledge [been] communicated to the King of Achin.

The reference by the Sultan to the damage to his prestige because of the *Hydroos* affair was not exaggerated. Shortly after the seizure of the boat, political unrest against the Sultan was reported in the capital. The root cause of this unhappiness was probably the
Sultan’s patrolling of the Acehnese coasts. The measure must have been fairly effective since it enabled the Sultan to acquire quantities of goods for trade with Penang as evidenced in details emerging from the *Hydroos* episode. The employment of Europeans such as L’Etoile in the Sultan’s fleet must have contributed significantly to the success. Thus, not long after the *Hydroos* incident, a revolt broke out, during which the capital was seized and the Sultan forced to retreat to Telok Samoy. There are few details of this revolt. One of the leaders of the rebellion was said to be a prominent trader named Haji Abdul Rahim. Taking advantage of a situation when the Sultan was politically embarrassed by the *Hydroos* humiliation, his opponents moved.

This could well have been the same revolt as that in which Lebai Dappah was reported to be also involved. The indications were that Lebai Dappah had a central role in the revolt, and if this was true, then it would be the second occasion that he was involved in the capital’s recent politics. A letter from the Bencoolen resident to Bengal dated 1815 recounted that some years earlier Lebai Dappah had managed to bribe some powerful Acehnese at the capital, and for several weeks, he succeeded in occupying the palace and the main fort. It cannot be stated with certainty that this was the same episode as Haji Abdul Rahim’s revolt; but as the latter was the only one in the period between 1805 and 1814, there is a strong likelihood that it was the same rebellion. There is no reference in any Acehnese account to an attempt by the Singkil chief to seize power.

The rapidity with which Lebai Dappah had acquired wealth, inspired feelings of ambition which by the intrigues of the great but poor men of Acheen, was encouraged and so increased that by bribery on his part, and indiscretion on that of the reigning King he succeeded so far as to obtain possession of the Fort, Palace and Authority for several weeks. It now however became apparent that the ease with which he was permitted to attain his end, was no more than a trick on the part of the Ministers, who after having drawn from him a sum exceeding Dollars 30,000 which they shared changed their politics and exhibited symptoms of hostility.

The revolt against the Sultan was brief. The Sultan’s opponents did not appear to have been very organized and, if it had indeed also been the Lebai Dappah’s attempt to seize power, did not receive broad support. From Telok Samoy, Jauhar al-Alam mobilized his forces and, with the backing once again of several Pedir chiefs, he defeated his opponents and recaptured the capital. Tuanku Pakeh Hussein, the Raja of Pedir, was one of those who
remained loyal. Another was Bendahara Kamangan of Shilloch, whose family was said to be related to the Sultan.

The revolt could also have been in reaction to the recruitment of foreign mercenaries by the Sultan. The first mention of Europeans under Jauhar al-Alam was in 1808 in connection with the seizure of the Hydroos. Turned down by Penang and having to deal with even more unsympathetic authorities at Tapanuli, Natal, and Bencoolen, Jauhar al-Alam came to rely on an assortment of adventurers that included French, British, and Portuguese nationalities. He needed men skilled in manning large ships and experienced in the use of artillery. There were at least ten Europeans in the service of the Sultan at any one time. The man whom Jauhar al-Alam came increasingly to trust was Francis L'Etoile, the commercial agent in 1808 when the Hydroos was seized. Next to L'Etoile was Carlos de Silva, a Portuguese. L'Etoile was reportedly from Tranquebar, having served on board a private French ship. The others were also from India, and had first come into contact with the Sultan while serving on trading ships that plied between Aceh and the Indian coast.

The presence of Europeans, especially L'Etoile, had also come to the knowledge of Penang. But the reports were incomplete and garbled. The fact that L'Etoile was French became the source of all the subsequent rumours that Aceh had accepted advisers from France, and had therefore allowed the port to be used as a base for French warships. The news increased the unease and suspicion of a French connection in Aceh. But this was indeed odd because L'Etoile was acquainted with several merchants in Penang with whom he had business connections, and his background ought to have been well known.

The Sultan’s Interest in the West Coast

Revenue Collection in Aceh

Having defeated the rebels and regained the capital, probably in early 1809, Jauhar al-Alam turned his attention to the settlements along the long Acehnese coastlines. The west coast was his immediate objective, particularly the ports of Susu, Singkil, and Barus. The Sultan was keen to claim his share of this growing pepper wealth, and therefore endeavoured to bring under his control those ports that were prospering in the expanding pepper trade. In the campaign of 1809, Barus was the southernmost point of the Sultan’s objective. But Jauhar al-Alam had, on other
occasions, stated that Acehnese authority extended further south to Sorkam and Tapanuli. But for the moment he regarded Barus, Singkil, and Susu as the most troublesome of the west coast ports that needed to be dealt with.

In theory, the Sultan could claim taxes to a whole range of economic activities. The traditional maritime laws listed in detail the types of duties and taxes that the Sultan was entitled to. Several officials helped him to enforce his rights. The most important was the syahbandar whose main function was to collect some of these taxes, particularly those related to trade.

It was reported that on the Pedir coast the Sultan had appointed several syahbandar, usually Chulias. In Burung, the syahbandar even had assistants and about twenty sepoys to enforce the collection.

The Trade of Bouron produced in 1810 about seven thousand Dollars to the King (including his trading profits) after deducting the Expenses of Collection which consist in a Shabandar with his subordinate officers and twenty Sepoys. It should be observed that the production of Murdee, Samorlangan and some other small places in the neighbourhood are exported to Bouron and the whole of the Duties in those Districts are consequently received at Bouron.

Chulia syahbandar were appointed in Telok Samoy, Samalanga, and Pedir. In other places, especially in the west coast, the syahbandar were more likely to have been officials appointed by the local chief. John Crowninshield, who traded in Muki in 1801, observed the functions of the syahbandar there: ‘When the clerks come on board in the eve there is generally 6, 8 or 10 in the train and one shabander to receive the money to be sure and get the duty which is paid by the seller to the head men of the place—there has been one of them allways to attend the scale to make weight and he has invariable come on board.’

Along the Pedir and west coasts, generally all the chiefs or ulubalang were wakil of the Sultan, empowered by the Sultan to levy duties on his behalf. The collection of duties was carried out in the name of the Sultan. The rates varied. In Susu, there was a tax of 0.50 Spanish dollar levied on the planters for every pikul of pepper. At Labuan Haji, the tax was 1.50 Spanish dollar per pikul. The higher rate at Labuan Haji was said to cover the Sultan’s share of the revenue. In Burung, the chief retained one-third of the duties collected. ‘It is also necessary to mention that Toonko Camangan the Chief of Bouron receives one third of all the Duties levied on account of the King.’
Elsewhere, the local chiefs were said to have kept back half or even more. In the case of Labuan Haji where the leadership consisted of several Malay and Acehnese chiefs, half of the revenue collected was retained, and this was then shared out among all of them. Likewise, Muki had a Malay and Acehnese population, so duties were collected at two different landings at the harbour. One was Acehnese and the other Malay. It is, however, not clear what this dual collection represented and how it was carried out. In many places, the local chiefs kept most of what was collected, including the share that was due to the Sultan. Periodically, they might surrender a part of it to the court. But for most of the time and in many places, the rulers had to send armed fleets to enforce the collection.

George Siddons, resident of Bencoolen, observed in 1815: 'It appears to me that opposition is made by those chiefs principally if not wholly on the ground of the right which the king now endeavours to enforce, to claim duties. If the chiefs were to consent to pay the 1/2 dollar per pecul duty to the King, it would evidently be just so much losing to them...'

Usually, the rulers were placated before the situation became serious. The recalcitrant districts would send token sums of money and, in some cases, quantities of goods as tributes. They might even yield to having a syahbandar appointed by the sultan.

**Expedition for Revenue Collection**

In 1809, Jauhar al-Alam was no longer interested in token payments or mere tributes. He demanded the full share of the revenue he was entitled to. More than that, he computed the arrears for those years which he was not paid and which he wanted settled. For example, the Sultan calculated that Singkil owed him 40,000 Spanish dollars.

The other objective of the Sultan was to regulate the trade of both the west and Pedir coasts. Many suspected that the real purpose of the regulation was to make it possible for the Sultan to monopolize the export of the principal commodities such as pepper, camphor, benzoin, and betel-nut. By becoming the sole purchaser of all produce, he could manipulate prices to the disadvantage of the cultivators and traders. Towards this end, he reintroduced commercial laws used by past Acehnese rulers directing all foreign ships to trade only in the capital. He allowed Telok Samoy to be opened as a second port to foreign trade. Overall, the ruling was
difficult to enforce as it required constant patrolling of the coasts, and the Sultan did not have sufficient ships to do so. Non-compliance with the ruling was common, as was the evasion of payment of port duties.

While revenue and control of trade were the main objectives of his expedition, the Sultan was also keen to pare the political influence of the rich pepper ports. He was furious when he learnt that a few of the ports, such as Barus and Singkil, had signed agreements with the British without the court’s knowledge. To him, this was an attempt to break away from Acehnese authority. Jauhar al-Alam’s expedition could also have been a retaliation for Lebai Dappah’s involvement in the 1802-5 civil war and the 1809 rebellion. Since his failures at the capital, Lebai Dappah had confined his political ambition to Singkil. His adventures were not only financially expensive, but also had political costs. His prestige suffered and his ambition, now so evident, began to worry some neighbouring ports.

The Sultan could also have been seeking to consolidate his links with those chiefs in the west coast who supported him. Mention has been made of Panglima Poh Daud of Muki, who became chief of Muki following his success in forcing the retreat of the British in 1804. When Dato Besar returned, Panglima Poh Daud agreed to share power with him. But the two soon fell out. The dispute between the two sides dragged on for five years. In the end, Jauhar al-Alam reportedly stepped in and reaffirmed the position of Panglima Poh Daud as one of the two rulers of Muki. From then on, Panglima Poh Daud remained a staunch ally of the Sultan.

The Sultan had support at several other places in the west coast. In this region, disputes and rivalry among the various chiefs were common. Some of these conflicts were over succession. Others were contests for territories. Such disputes were exacerbated by the new pepper wealth as rival ports sought to gain control over new sources of supply. In these struggles, one side might seek the support of the Sultan against its opponent. In this way, the Sultan gained acceptance in the ports of Labuan Haji, Pulau Dua, and Tapus.

Ethnic and cultural differences often sharpened the conflicts. Barus and Tapak Tuan, for instance, were almost entirely Malay at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and both wanted to be free of Acehnese control. Sama Dua, Kalayat, Labuan Haji, and Susu all had large numbers of Malays settled there. In these and other districts where the Malays had become a minority, they were
ruled by their own leaders but accepted, reluctantly, the authority of the Acehnese Sultan. There were districts where the ethnically mixed population was more evenly balanced, and in many instances, there arose a power struggle between the Acehnese and the non-Acehnese. In these circumstances, the Sultan could be called upon to mediate and thus gain some influence in the area. In many cases, the Acehnese side of the conflict turned to the Sultan.\textsuperscript{45}

News of the Sultan’s impending visit in 1809 spread quickly throughout the west coast, causing alarm among his opponents. The most worried was Barus. The reason for its fear was that neighbouring Tapus had recently declared its allegiance to the Acehnese Sultan. Barus had always been nervous about the expansionist intentions of Tapus, and it feared that the Sultan would use Tapus to invade Barus. The two chiefs at Barus immediately wrote to John Prince, appealing for assistance. So fearful were they that the chiefs unhesitatingly offered to place Barus under the British.\textsuperscript{46}

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Barus was still an important exporter of camphor and, to a lesser extent, benzoin. Its population was mainly Malay and in the interior, Bataks. Barus had two rajas, one Batak and the other Malay, and they took turns to rule.\textsuperscript{47} The ruler in the 1809–15 period was the Raja Hulu, the leader of the Bataks. Barus had an estimated population of 15,000, a number far larger than that of Tapus. In spite of this, Barus was fearful of its neighbour for, according to British sources, the Acehnese were generally reputed to be a fiercer and more disciplined fighting force.

The uneasy relations between Barus and Tapus were made more difficult because of incidents involving runaway slaves and absconding debtors. Barus complained that many runaway slaves took refuge in Tapus, and that merchants in Tapus defaulting in repayment of debts to those in Barus were protected. There were also allegations that Tapus was a sanctuary for criminals whose activities had been disruptive in the Barus and Tapanuli area.

Significantly, at a time when there was resistance in parts of the west coast to the Sultan’s reassertion of control, Barus could not find common cause with others. It would have been expected, for instance, that Barus seek an alliance with Lebai Dappah of Singkil. This did not happen because Singkil was Acehnese and Barus regarded itself as Malay. But more importantly, Barus laid claim to Trumon, a district under Singkil.\textsuperscript{48}

In June, Barus received news that the Sultan was expected at
Tapus shortly. From there, the Sultan was to use the pretext of making a pilgrimage to an old tomb in Barus to try to invade the place. Two Barus leaders, referred to as Imam Barus and the Tuanku Barus, sent an urgent appeal to Prince for arms and ammunition.\(^{49}\)

Prince agreed that quite apart from the Sultan, the threat to Barus was from Teuku Poh Bye, Raja of Tapus. Prince explained to Bencoolen that the settling of Acehnese in Tapus was a concession made by the British after the 1786 agreement with Singkil. Under a separate agreement made subsequently, Acehnese were allowed at Tapus on the understanding that they would not pose a security threat to anyone. The agreement also required Tapus to sell its produce only to Tapanuli. But in the end, there was very little trade between the two places because Tapanuli categorized the export of Tapus as of inferior quality. Tapus' main trade remained with Chulia traders based at the Acehnese capital. To Prince therefore, Tapus had not complied fully with both conditions in the agreement.\(^{50}\) Reacting to the threat posed by Tapus, Prince, sent a strongly worded letter warning Poh Bye against any attempt on Barus. Separately, he assured the Tuanku of Barus that his request for arms had been forwarded to Bencoolen.

R. Parry, the resident at Bencoolen, called on Prince not to interfere in the dispute between the Acehnese Sultan and Barus. He reminded Prince that the British enjoyed good relations with Aceh.\(^{51}\) Referring to the 1786 treaty between the British and Singkil on the settling of Acehnese south of the Singkil River, Parry made the pertinent observation that the Acehnese Sultan had not been notified, and he wondered if Singkil had the right in the first place to sign such agreements. Parry advised that it was best that Prince mediate in the dispute between Tapus and Barus, and if necessary, invite Poh Bye to Tapanuli for discussions. He disapproved of the sending of arms to Barus.\(^{52}\)

Prince disagreed and, writing in reply to Parry, argued strongly for British backing of Barus. An exchange of correspondence followed, in which Prince insisted that Barus was Malay and not Acehnese.\(^{53}\) He informed Bencoolen of Barus's willingness to be placed under Company protection, and to allow a fort to be built in its district. The terms contained in Barus' offer were attractive to British interests, especially as Barus could be used as an additional buffer between Tapanuli and the Acehnese.

Meanwhile, the Sultan's fleet did not reach the west coast until December 1809. The progress of the Sultan's expedition was
closely monitored by Prince. Such news as there were about the fleet’s delay, and that this was due to a damaged mast of the Sultan’s ship because of a storm, reached the British. The Sultan himself led the armed fleet. The campaign had mixed results. Many of the coastal ulubalang, when confronted by the Sultan’s armed vessels, quickly submitted to the Sultan’s demands. The Sultan’s first success was in Analabu, whose chief reportedly paid 8,000 Spanish dollars. Encouraged by this success, the fleet moved southwards and collected duties as it went along. In some cases, only token amounts were paid. On reaching Singkil, the Sultan demanded 40,000 Spanish dollars as duties owed. Lebai Dappah reportedly handed over quantities of camphor and benzoin said to be worth about 1,000 Spanish dollars.

The Sultan’s fleet stayed in Singkil for a short while and turned back. Jauhar al-Alam chose not to move against Barus, nor make any demand. The Sultan’s decision could have been due to actions taken by Tapanuli. Despite earlier caution expressed by Bencoolen, W. Hayes, the resident of Tapanuli, reportedly sent troops into Barus as a show of British support to deter the Acehnese. The Sultan came to know of the troop movement, and decided against proceeding on to Barus, fearing that this could lead to complications with the British. In any case, he was satisfied with what had been gained. It had been a good trip from his point of view, and Barus could be spared until the next trip.

The French Alarm from Aceh
A French Agent in Sumatra

While the Sultan was preoccupied with the west coast of Sumatra, certain developments were taking place which gave cause for some anxiety to the British over what might be happening in Aceh. In May 1809, a French military officer identified as Lieutenant-Colonel Leon de la Houssaye was detained in the British district of Krue in south Sumatra. He was brought to Bencoolen, searched, and found to be carrying a large sum of money and various papers addressed to the royal courts of Aceh and Ava. De la Houssaye was sailing in a small vessel towards Aceh, but because of bad weather and unfamiliarity with local conditions was forced to land near Krue, where he and his crew were held. He had also become quite ill by this time. To Bencoolen, it was evident that he was
heading towards Aceh, and that the objective of his mission was
to forge close military links with Aceh and Burma. Under inter-
rogation, De la Houssaye admitted that Aceh and Ava were indeed
his destinations. Realizing the serious implications, Bencoolen
sent him on board the Lord Castlereigh to India.

En route to India, the ship called at Penang. The authorities had
a chance to interrogate De la Houssaye further, and to examine
the documents. The information appeared to confirm Penang’s
growing suspicion that Aceh was indeed leaning towards the
French in the Anglo-French conflict, and could be opening the
use of its port facilities to the enemy fleet. Despite the protest of
De la Houssaye, who wanted to be allowed onshore as he was
very ill, the Penang authorities decided that the matter was urgent
and directed that the Lord Castlereigh should proceed without
delay to India. Very shortly after his arrival, De la Houssaye
passed away.

Meanwhile, Penang decided to look into the whole matter of
Aceh more carefully, especially as it had continued to receive
reports of fresh sightings of French warships near Aceh. The earlier
issue of the Hydroos had cast a shadow over relations between
Aceh and Penang, particularly with the Sultan’s persistence in
seeking a return of his ship or some form of compensation. Never-
theless, in the subsequent months, the rancour surrounding the
matter had receded sufficiently for the Penang authorities to begin
taking up the Aceh question once again.

In August 1809, Penang wrote a strongly worded letter to the
Sultan, contending that it had documentary proof that Aceh was
in secret touch with the French. This documentary evidence
was no doubt the papers taken from De la Houssaye. In addition,
the Penang letter referred to reports that there were French
advisers in the Acehnese court, and that French ships were using
his ports. Such developments could not but be viewed as acts
hostile to the British, and Penang sought an explanation from the
Sultan, expressing at the same time its readiness to open friendly
relations with Aceh.

There was no reply to Penang’s letter. It is possible that the
letter did not reach the Sultan as he was then away on the west
cost. But to the British, the silence was worrying. As if to underline
the seriousness of the French naval threat, word reached Penang
and India that a French fleet had sailed from Mauritius in February
1809 for the Sumatran coast. Further news came not long
afterwards that the fleet, consisting of the *Venus*, the *Manche*, and the *Creole* under the command of Commodore Hamelin, had raided and destroyed Tapanuli.\(^5^9\) John Prince, the resident at Tapanuli, suffered heavy losses from the attack. The fleet also captured three East India Company ships: the *Windham*, the *United Kingdom*, and the *Charlton*. In July of that year, another Company ship, the *Orient*, was seized in the same area.\(^6^0\)

The supreme government at Bengal began to take a less sanguine view at this turn of events. It could not ignore what was happening, particularly with the discovery of the De la Houssaye mission. Bengal must have soon realized, too, that there had hardly been any official contact between the British in India and Aceh since Botham’s mission of 1782, a span of nearly thirty years. In the years since then, occasional and indifferent contact with Aceh had been made through Penang and, to an extent, Bencoolen. As a result, little was known about what was taking place in Aceh. To the officials in India, Aceh seemed to have drifted out of the British sphere of interest, and in the meantime, the French had moved in and established a presence.

The papers found on De la Houssaye confirmed that Aceh had indeed written to Batavia (which was then occupied by the French) seeking military support and that the De la Houssaye mission was a response to that appeal. The situation did not look good when viewed from the British position, particularly with reports that there were already French advisers in Aceh. Bengal was disturbed to learn too that Aceh had not replied to Penang’s letter of August 1809 on the matter of the French fleet in Aceh.\(^6^1\)

**The Mission of David Campbell to Aceh**

The Bengal government made some quick decisions. It agreed to send a mission immediately to Aceh to look into the reports. That the authorities considered the matter to be of urgency and of significance is indicated by the names of those suggested to lead the mission. One of them was John Canning who had just returned from a mission to the Ava court. He was a senior military officer, highly regarded by Bengal, who had been sent to deal with a difficult problem in Anglo-Burmese relations. In the end, Canning could not lead the Aceh mission because of a prior assignment related to affairs in Burma. David Campbell, an official in Calcutta, was eventually asked to take charge. Campbell was about to leave on a Company ship, the *Modeste*, for China when the supreme
government asked him to call at Aceh. In Aceh he was to hand over to the Sultan a letter and gifts from the Governor-General.

There were four other tasks in Campbell’s instructions. First, he was to ascertain the accuracy of the report regarding the presence of French advisers and warships in Aceh. Secondly, if the reports were true, he was to persuade the Sultan to discontinue such an alliance with the French. The Sultan should immediately stop allowing his ports to be used by the French and expel all French advisers. He was to be told that if the warning was ignored and the links continued, the British would act against Aceh. To assure the Sultan that he had nothing to fear from possible French retaliation, the British offered to extend their protection to Aceh.

... the British naval authority would no doubt be disposed on the condition of his Majesty’s engaging to exclude the enemies of the British nation from the country and his ports to render Acheen a station for British ships of war and to afford him that protection against the hostility of the French and Dutch which His Majesty could never derive from their naval power against the resentment of the British Government.

Thirdly, Campbell was to make a preliminary enquiry into the possibility of a British presence in Aceh. He was to assess whether an agent so appointed ought to have a political or a commercial role. If an agent was accepted, the supreme government was willing to consider stationing troops in Aceh. The matter of covering the expenses for such a commitment was touched upon. The instruction referred to a suggestion that the Sultan farm out to the British the collection of port duties as a means of covering the costs of a detachment of troops. It was a possibility worth pursuing.

Finally, Campbell was to gather information that would be useful in guiding the British in future dealings with Aceh. He was to find out the structure of political power, the resources of the country, and the military standing as well as the personal character of the Sultan, his ministers, and those advisers close to him.

Entrusted with these instructions, Campbell left on the Modeste from Calcutta in late June 1810. The mission arrived in Aceh on 11 July. An officer from the frigate was immediately sent ashore to inform the Sultan of the mission’s arrival. The officer came back with a message from the syahbandar that the Sultan was not in the capital. Jauhar al-Alam was at Telok Samoy, which he had been using as his base for two years. The Queen Mother was with him, but the rest of his family was still in the capital.
There was no sign of a French naval presence at the capital. The Campbell mission had not encountered French warships in its journey from Calcutta, and it saw no French officials or vessels at the capital. Campbell was told, however, by the Acehnese that only a few days before the mission arrived, a French privateer had been lurking in the vicinity. The manner and tone in which the Acehnese brought the matter up were significant. The Acehnese at the capital were evidently angered that the privateer had attacked some small boats along the coast, and they appealed to Campbell to help hunt down the French vessel. The fact that the Acehnese had complained to Campbell about the attacks and asked for British help suggested that the French did not enjoy favoured status in Aceh, and were in fact regarded at the capital as a hostile power.

Campbell decided to stay at the capital for a few days to take on fresh provisions. It was also an opportunity to gather information about Aceh and French activities in the area. During his stay, he learnt that the most influential person at the capital was the syahbandar named Uboo Hakeem, who claimed to have been appointed by the Sultan. Uboo Hakeem could be Haji Abdul Rahim, said to have murdered and replaced the previous syahbandar in 1808 or 1809, and who led a revolt against the Sultan. Campbell believed that the information and opinions given by the syahbandar were reliable and fair because these later matched those which the mission observed in Telok Samoy. Campbell also noticed that the syahbandar had a group of Arab and Chulia merchants around him. He described these merchants as being very influential in the capital.

Campbell, as the first British official to visit Aceh since Botham and Kinloch in the 1780s and the first to meet Jauhar al-Alam, provided a useful account of his stay in Aceh. At the capital, Campbell visited the Sultan's palace and fort. Both buildings were largely neglected and in dilapidated condition. Campbell also had a chance to find out the kind of revenue collected by the Sultan. The syahbandar explained that the Sultan depended largely on port duties for his revenue. A 5.5 per cent tax was fixed for all imports and exports. Among the most lucrative of the taxes was the import duty on opium and the export tax on pepper, betelnut, and bird's-nests. There was a tax on goods traded between the capital and Telok Samoy. He said that the Sultan had difficulties collecting duties at the capital and at the other ports.
What he received was mostly tributes irregularly collected from some of the port chiefs. What was significant was that the syahbandar mentioned Susu as among the ports that had complied with the demands of the Sultan. This must have been a result of the 1809 expedition.

Campbell reported that no land tax was collected, but that at particular times of the year, the Sultan was given an offering which Campbell termed a ‘nuzer’, a token tax from the people. To make up for the lack of revenue from the traditional sources, the Sultan took part in trade himself. According to the syahbandar, it was for this reason that the Sultan moved to Telok Samoy as it was situated closer to the trading routes along the Straits of Malacca. Campbell was later told that British traders were exempted from payment of duties in Aceh if the purchases were made from the Sultan’s officers. However, the prices were higher and the difference was really the amount the merchants would have to pay as duty.

Campbell Meets the Sultan

The Modeste left Banda Aceh on 13 July and reached Telok Samoy two days later. As the ship neared the shore, Campbell was disappointed with the view he had of Telok Samoy. He saw a very small village, and he was taken aback to learn that the Sultan’s residence was a mere shed and no more distinguished than the other buildings around it. At high tide, all the buildings were surrounded by water. It was a scene which Campbell, more familiar with the lifestyle of the rajas in India, had not expected. But it must be noted here that Telok Samoy was probably used as a base camp for the Sultan.

Two days after his arrival, Campbell accompanied by officers of the Modeste, went ashore to meet the Sultan, who had his European advisers with him. The letter and presents from the Governor-General were handed over to the Sultan. The first meeting was brief, and after an exchange of pleasantries, Campbell and his party left.

Campbell saw the Sultan again the next day. On this occasion, the two of them did have some time for discussions. In his report, Campbell commented favourably on Jauhar al-Alam, whom he found to be open and frank. On the most important point of his mission, Campbell could ascertain, supported by his observations at the capital and in discussions with Jauhar al-Alam, that there
was no truth in the reports that the Sultan had allowed the use of Aceh by the French. But if the Sultan did not encourage the French, neither was he, by his own admission, able to keep them away on the occasions they sailed into some of the Acehnese ports. Jauhar al-Alam explained to the British that he had no armed fleet or strong fortifications to prevent the coming of French warships.

The Sultan then went on at some length to emphasize that he had always been keen to develop friendship with the British. Even when he was in dire need during his conflict with his uncle, the Tuanku Raja, he had sought help not from the French or the Dutch, but from the British. Unfortunately for him, his overtures had not been reciprocated. The Tuanku Raja had, in fact, on that occasion written to Batavia for support. In looking back, Jauhar al-Alam believed that the French who were presently occupying Batavia had belatedly responded to Tuanku Raja’s earlier appeal by sending Lieutenant-Colonel de la Houssaye on that fateful mission, and that the affair had therefore nothing to do with him. With that clarification, the Sultan took the opportunity once again to ask for British military assistance.

According to Campbell, Jauhar al-Alam spoke Hindi tolerably well and had some knowledge of English. The Sultan showed interest in maritime matters, and was described as having a reasonable understanding of the management and operation of a ship. These skills must have been acquired during the short spell on board the English ship, the Nonsuch.

In the course of the meeting, Campbell met Francis L’Etoile and Carlos de Silva, the two European advisers closest to the Sultan. He formed a very poor opinion of the two men and thought of them as no more than adventurers. He described L’Etoile as a half-caste from Tranquebar where he had been employed as a ‘country’ trader. Subsequently, L’Etoile had commanded a trading ship based in Madras, following which he spent some years in Rangoon before coming to Aceh where he was taken into the Sultan’s service. L’Etoile was in Aceh simply to seek a fortune for himself, and hoping that his own private trade would benefit by an association with the Sultan. He had two brothers with him in Aceh. One of them was, at the time of Campbell’s visit, reportedly away on business at Nagore on behalf of the Sultan. He was also assigned to recruit sepoys for the Sultan. Campbell did not believe that L’Etoile or his colleagues were in Aceh to advance the French cause, as was widely thought by Penang and Bencoolen.
Campbell pointed out that, for the moment, he would not advise the British to insist on the expulsion of the European mercenaries from Aceh. They were not a threat at all to the British. In fact, the removal of these adventurers would simply weaken the position of the Sultan, which in the end was not to the interest of the British. The European advisers were of some military use to the Acehnese court, especially as there was only a small standing army in Aceh. At the capital, Campbell was told that there were between 400 and 500 troops, all of them non-Acehnese. But Campbell saw very few of these troops in the capital or at Telok Samoy.

The Sultan explained that he had to use non-Acehnese troops because he could not rely on the loyalty of the Acehnese.

... no one can entertain a worse opinion of the Achenese character than he does observing that none of them were entertained as soldiers. I asked His Majesty if they would not prove good troops. He replied that they were entirely unworthy of such employment, that a few Hindostance soldiers would repulse hundred [sic] of them, that they are complete masters of deceit and treachery, and after accepting service from you might the next day be induced for a small sum to assassinate you.69

Campbell was naturally surprised by the Sultan's harsh views of his own subjects. It revealed Jauhar al-Alam's sense of alienation from his people. This led him to wonder if the Sultan was really accepted and well liked. The _syahbandar_ at the capital offered a more polite explanation, and certainly a truer picture, as to why no Acehnese served as professional soldiers. According to him 'every Acehnese was armed and ready, when required, to serve his prince'.70 As in most Malay states of the period, rulers relied on volunteers rather than on a standing army.

The Sultan seemed determined to mobilize whatever forces he could to assert his authority over all of Aceh. Campbell was given to understand that the Sultan's strategy was to gain control of all the coastal ports. In this way, he could collect revenue. The Sultan also argued that dominance of the coast would allow him, eventually, to subjugate the _ulubalang_ of the interior who depended on the ports as exchange points for their agricultural produce and for needed imports. There was already evidence of some success of the Sultan's campaign, particularly his 1809 expedition to the west coast. Campbell saw that the Sultan had bought two new ships. (One of the ships was shortly to be sent on a trading voyage
The Sultanate of Aceh to India, and also to convey a letter seeking assistance from the supreme government at Calcutta.) The new ships reflected improved revenue for the Sultan.

Campbell ended his visit to Aceh on 21 July 1810. In his report dated 24 July, Campbell wrote that this was the most appropriate time to establish a British presence in Aceh. Given the fairly fluid and uncertain military situation in the region, Aceh had become of even more strategic value to the British. The Sultan, presently in need of foreign assistance, was favourably inclined towards the British. Campbell was confident that a British resident could operate safely in Aceh, provided a fortified strip of territory was acquired. Campbell believed that a force of 200 sepoys would be enough to defend the establishment. A British military presence was needed in any case, if only to ensure the exclusion of French or other enemy forces from Aceh, a primary objective of the British.

Jauhar al-Alam was pleased with the way the mission and the meetings with Campbell had progressed. He had no prior warning of the mission’s arrival, and he must have been a little embarrassed that the physical appearance of Telok Samoy was not more presentable to impress the visitors. The early part of the discussion with Campbell had been tense and uncomfortable, particularly while L'Etoile and de Silva were present. Moreover, the strongly worded letter from Lord Minto, which contained allegations of Aceh being used as a refitting station for French warships, had also warned that if the reports were true, the British would act to neutralize such threats. The letter reminded the Sultan of British power and capability in the region.

Jauhar al-Alam knew enough of the prevailing political balance in the region to appreciate the power of the British. He was pleased that discussions with Campbell had gone very well, and progressively, the meetings had become more relaxed and friendly. The Sultan was sure that his meeting with Campbell had cleared whatever British apprehension and suspicion there might have been, particularly about French presence in Aceh. At the end of the visit, Campbell presented Jauhar al-Alam with thirty muskets as well as gunpowder taken from the armoury of the Modeste. In return, the Sultan gave provisions to the mission for its entire six-day stay in Telok Samoy, and refused any payment when this was offered by Campbell.
Aceh and the British Invasion of Java

Raffles Contacts the Sultan

For more than six months after the Campbell mission, there was no further Acehnese contact with the British. Then in early 1811, Jauhar al-Alam received a letter from Thomas Stamford Raffles, informing the Sultan of impending troop movements by the British against the French forces in Java, and seeking the support of Aceh. Raffles had just been appointed Lord Minto’s special agent for the Malay states, and had arrived in Malacca to help in preparations for the Java invasion. Raffles had earlier served as secretary to the Penang government from 1805 to 1810. In June 1810, on his own initiative, he went to Calcutta to see Lord Minto, the Governor-General, to present his views on what British policies in the archipelago ought to be. Lord Minto was impressed by Raffles’s knowledge and comments, and in October, he sent him back to assist the planned expedition against the French in Java. Leaving Calcutta, Raffles proceeded in January 1811 to Malacca, which was to serve as a forward base in the next few months. There Raffles collected information that would be helpful to the British expeditionary force. He also wrote to various rulers in the archipelago known to be sympathetic to the British, alerting them of impending British moves. The letter to Jauhar al-Alam was similar in content to those sent to the other Malay states.

There is no indication that Raffles, up to this point, had any previous contact with Jauhar al-Alam. Raffles, however, displayed a good knowledge of the situation in Aceh, gathered no doubt during his years in Penang, and through access to council correspondence and other records. He also came to know more about Aceh through British merchants in Penang and Malacca. Raffles was in touch with at least two of them who were familiar with Aceh: Peter Bowyer and Alexander Hare. Both traded with Aceh, and Hare certainly had some commercial dealings with Jauhar al-Alam. Already, at this early stage, Raffles thought well of Jauhar al-Alam, and was sympathetic to his attempts to assert his authority throughout the country.

As early as 1810, Raffles was able to brief Lord Minto about the politically feeble position of Jauhar al-Alam and the difficulties he faced with the ulubalang. Raffles favoured a treaty with Aceh, and the establishment of a British political presence there. He
argued that the diminishing power of the Sultan was simply due to his inability to collect revenue that was rightfully his. Raffles suggested an arrangement under which the British could either take over the collection of the port duties entirely, out of which a percentage would be paid back to the Sultan, or administer the revenue system on behalf of the Acehnese. To effect this change would require the support of a force of 100 sepoys. The costs of such an operation would be borne by the Acehnese, but these could be easily recovered from the expected improvement in revenue collection.

Raffles’s thinking on Aceh was guided by what he considered to be the need to advance British interests—both strategic and commercial—in the region. He wanted the British to help ensure that Aceh was kept out of French influence. To Raffles, there was the danger that the Acehnese port facilities might already have been taken over by French warships for use against British interests.

The King upon a proper agreement being made would I have every reason to think assent to the measure and by this means should equally preserve the tranquility of the country, prevent it from becoming a nest of pirates and cut off a vast source of illicit trade which after our acquiring the domination of the eastern isles is more likely to be increased than impaired.78

In Raffles’s mind, if Aceh was to be of any value to the British, a strong ruler was needed there. He would have to be in a position to honour all treaty obligations. Jauhar al-Alam, whom Raffles recognized as the legitimate ruler, must therefore be given British support. Raffles associated the political integrity of Aceh with the position of Jauhar al-Alam.

The views of Raffles and Penang officials differed sharply on the subject of Aceh, a difference best reflected in the Hydroos incident. Raffles raised the matter in his letter to Lord Minto, sharply criticizing the actions taken by the Penang government in seizing the Sultan’s boat. Raffles called for a further investigation into the case.79

Raffles and Penang also held divergent views on the nature of the Sultan’s position and authority. Officials in Penang and Bencoolen, for instance, sided with those British merchants who disputed the right of the Acehnese rulers to control trade in outlying districts said to be independent or autonomous. It was thought that the Sultan was imposing jurisdiction over pepper-
and betel-nut-producing areas which Aceh had lost political control of a long time before. Penang traders were unhappy with having to pay duties levied by the ruler upon the coastal ports and to comply with the regulations. These would require Penang traders to trade only in the ports designated by the Sultan. More seriously, the Sultan would be able to control the supply and the price of the export commodities.

Raffles’s letter came when Jauhar al-Alam had been waiting to hear from the British, although not expecting it to come via Malacca. In December 1810, he had sent a small vessel to India to trade and to carry a letter to the Governor-General in Bengal. In December 1810, the Sultan had told Campbell, while the latter was in Aceh, of his intention to write to Bengal. The Sultan asked for a loan of 80,000 Spanish dollars and the dispatch of 500 sepoys, together with military equipment, to Aceh. He added that he would repay the loan and all troop expenses plus interest.

Jauhar al-Alam was pleasantly surprised by Raffles’s letter, and although there was no reference to his request of December 1810, he was none the less pleased with the friendly tone of the note. He had reasons now to hope for improved relations with the British, and to expect the issue of the Hydroos to be resolved soon in his favour. There was also a possibility that significant British assistance might be forthcoming. Raffles’s letter was couched in polite language, which to Jauhar al-Alam was so different from those he had been receiving recently from Penang, especially the ones related to the Hydroos affair. Furthermore, it was a letter from the agent to the Governor-General seeking the friendship and assistance of Aceh in the war against France. Coming so soon after the Campbell visit, this was further proof that the British attitude towards Aceh had indeed changed. More importantly, Campbell’s visit and then the arrival of a letter from Raffles would enhance his prestige and standing in Aceh, which had been hurt by the Hydroos affair.

In April 1811, Jauhar al-Alam sent an envoy named Tengku Nakhoda Abdul Rahman over to Malacca to deliver a reply to Raffles in which he requested Raffles’s assistance to obtain compensation over the Hydroos. He also brought to his attention recent harassments of Acehnese boats by British warships. Towards the end of the letter, the Sultan stated that he had no gifts of value and instead was conferring the title of Order of the Golden Sword.
He was one of the few Europeans known to be granted this award, which entitled him to be addressed as Orang Kaya. There had been only three other Englishmen to have received this title, among whom was Thomas Forrest.

It was an award presented by the Sultan in appreciation of what he evidently thought was Raffles's part in influencing a change in British attitude towards Aceh. He had found past British policy unsympathetic and, as he saw it, characterized either by indifference to Aceh's overtures or worse, by hostility in giving support to his rebellious ulubalang in the west coast and Pedir. There was promise of improvement in relations following Raffles's intervention. Jauhar al-Alam must have also guessed that Raffles was holding a position of influence that gave him direct access to the Governor-General.

In fact, the matter of the Hydroos had, by this time, been taken up by the supreme government. Whether or not this was done in response to the comments submitted by Campbell and Raffles is not clear, but Bengal did act on the case. The papers related to the Hydroos sent earlier by Penang had reached Madras for a legal opinion from the High Court there. When the case came up, however, the chief justice of Fort St George ruled that he had no jurisdiction on the matter. The papers were then forwarded to the Bengal High Court. There it was decided that the case should be referred to the Vice-Admiralty Court.

J. C. Lawrence in Telok Samoy

For Jauhar al-Alam, further evidence of positive British attitude towards Aceh was to come. As British preparations for the invasion of Java were stepped up, the supply of fresh provisions for the thousands of troops expected to assemble in Malacca remained a logistic problem. One solution was to get supplies from the neighbouring Malay states, and Aceh, known for its abundance of fresh food and being fairly close by, was thought to be a suitable source. In February 1811, Lord Minto directed one of his officers, Major Archibald Campbell, who was preparing to sail for Penang as part of an early batch of the expedition, to call at Aceh. In a letter sent separately to Aceh, Lord Minto alerted the Sultan to the expected visit of Major Campbell, and asked that the Sultan provide all assistance that might be requested. The letter also informed the Sultan that a gift of 100 English muskets would be brought to Aceh by Major Campbell.
Lord Minto soon afterwards had to write again to Aceh in response to the Sultan's request sent in December 1810. In his reply dated 15 March 1811, Lord Minto carefully explained that the Indian government was preoccupied with a 'foreign undertaking of great magnitude', a reference to the Java expedition, and that it had, therefore, deferred making a decision on the Sultan's request.

Major Campbell, in the end, could not make the trip to Aceh. Furthermore, the matter of fresh provision for the expedition had already been resolved without resort to Aceh. Lord Minto's gift of muskets was left at Penang, and instructions were made for its delivery to Aceh.

Penang appointed J. C. Lawrence to hand over Lord Minto's presents to the Sultan. Perhaps because the assignment was a matter that had received the Governor-General's personal attention, the Penang authorities took some care in the selection of the official who was to complete Major Campbell's assignment. Lawrence was the island's Malay translator, and certainly senior and qualified enough. After completing his mission to Aceh, Lawrence was seconded to serve with the British administration in Java. He was later appointed resident of Ceribon. The choice also indicated a willingness on the part of some officials to be more sensitive to what was happening in Aceh and the conditions there. Lawrence's mission was the first ever to be sent officially to Aceh by the government of Penang. Lawrence was asked by Penang to check once again on reports of French presence in Aceh, and to assess the extent of such a threat to British interests. He was also to collect trade and other commercial data that would be useful for British traders. On 21 July, Lawrence left Penang on the Minerva, carrying with him a letter from the Penang government expressing friendship.

A week after Lawrence had left Penang and was well on his way to Aceh, the Penang authorities received a letter from Jauhar al-Alam. Dated 13 July 1811, the Sultan reported that there had been some disorder in several districts of Aceh. A British ship was attacked in Pasangan on the Pedir coast, and two British crew members were killed. The Sultan notified Penang that he was taking steps to restore order in the troubled areas, and he appealed, therefore, for military assistance.

No report had come in to Penang so far of such an attack. The disorder that the Sultan referred to was likely part of the hostile reaction by some districts in Aceh to the Sultan's naval surveillance.
The attack on the British ship could have been a case of mistaken identity by those opposing the Sultan’s coastal control, or simply an act of piracy as claimed by the Sultan.

Penang responded favourably to the Sultan’s request. The timing, however, proved inconvenient as Lawrence had just left. Despite this, W. Phillips, the Acting Governor, immediately instructed the Sophia to proceed to Aceh with a quantity of military supplies. These consisted of four barrels of gunpowder and 200 rounds of artillery shells. Phillips’ decision showed a willingness to engage more positively with the Sultan, despite the continued misgivings of some officials and merchants towards Aceh. It could also have been because of the prevailing conflict with the French, and Bengal’s warm attitude towards Aceh.

Lawrence arrived in Telok Samoy on 29 July, a full year after Campbell’s visit. The Sultan, having earlier expected the visit of Major Campbell, had built a guest-house for the British mission. This was made available to Lawrence. By staying onshore, Lawrence had the opportunity to meet the Sultan more frequently, and also to have a closer look at the town. His observations and assessments matched those of Campbell. Because he spoke Malay, Lawrence was able to gain a deeper insight into what was happening in Aceh.

Lawrence found the Sultan to have ‘a mild and friendly disposition’ and ‘with an appearance of great frankness and candour’. But weighted against these qualities were habits and behaviour which Lawrence thought were not expected of an Acehnese ruler, so that he alienated many of his subjects. Lawrence attributed these characteristics of the Sultan to the short period he spent on the Nonsuch.

According to Lawrence, the Sultan’s behaviour had aroused much resentment among his subjects. But the Sultan’s attempts to regulate trade and to collect duties were still the more important and immediate causes of dissatisfaction. There were those in Aceh who particularly resented the fact that the Sultan—who was also
involved in trade—was using his power to demand delivery of crops such as pepper and betel-nut at prices they considered unfairly low. It was a move that had also caused much resentment in Penang. When the matter of the Sultan’s problems came up, Lawrence took the occasion to suggest that he could very quickly and with very little effort put an end to all the unrest by simply creating trade conditions that were fair and acceptable to his subjects. It would also be a demonstration to the British of the Sultan’s friendship.

I availed myself of this opportunity to mention how acceptable it would be to this Government if His Majesty would endeavour to effect an equitable and permanent arrangement for the Trade of his Dominions which in protecting the Commerce of his subjects with those of the Company would prove imminently beneficial to His Majesty’s real interest (at present so unfortunately estranged from his Government) and at the same time afford the most convincing proof of his Friendship to the British nation.92

The Sultan seemed responsive to Lawrence’s views. In a subsequent conversation, he expressed a desire to relinquish his commercial activities once he could effectively collect all the port duties and revenue due to him. But until then, he had very little choice but to rely on trade for part of his income. In the Telok Samoy harbour, Lawrence noted that there were eight ships belonging to the Sultan. Five of these were armed and deployed to enforce collection of revenue. The other three ships were used for the Sultan’s trade.

The Sultan’s determination to control trade through commercial regulations could have been supported strongly by his European advisers. Lawrence met L’Etoile and de Silva, and he believed that the lure of easy wealth by making use of the power and resources of the Sultan was the only reason why they and the other Europeans were in Aceh. There were only two non-European advisers to the Sultan at the time of Lawrence’s visit: Mahomed Pyah and Nakhoda Abdul Rahman. The latter could have been the Sultan’s emissary to Raffles in Malacca in 1810.

At the end of two weeks, Lawrence left Telok Samoy for Penang. The task of delivering the muskets had been completed. Lawrence also had had a chance to learn about conditions in Aceh, which he duly described in his short report. More importantly, Lawrence confirmed that there was no French military presence in Aceh, and that L’Etoile and the other Europeans did not represent a threat to British interests.93
But by this time, however, it did not really matter. While Lawrence was in Aceh, the British expedition, consisting of sixty ships led by Lord Minto himself, was well on its way to Java. The fleet sailed on 11 June 1811 and arrived in Java in August. In September, French forces on the island surrendered. Lord Minto remained in Java for a short while, and returned to Calcutta on 19 October, leaving Raffles behind to take charge. For the next five years, Raffles remained in Java as Lieutenant-Governor. Preoccupied by the affairs of the island, Raffles had little time for Aceh. Thus, Jauhar al-Alam could not, in the next five years, call upon the one important British official in the region who understood his difficulties and was sympathetic to his political aspirations.

2. Lebai Dappah of Singkil to Bencoolen, dated as November 1804, Board’s Collection, F/4/187 3922A. It was also reported that since January 1803, Lebai Dappah had been away from Singkil and that he had gone on a pilgrimage. These long periods of absence could be linked to events at the capital. T. Jarret to Fort Marlborough, 22 April 1803 (FMCP May 1803), Sumatra, Vol. 104.
3. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah to Resident of Tapanuli, 6 June 1813 (FWCCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.
4. This would be the Kadi Malik al-Adil, who traditionally was one of the four most senior orang kaya in the Sultan’s council. Ito Takeshi, ‘The World of the Adat Aceh’, Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1984, p. 104.
6. ‘The oldest son of the old Rajah of Pedier was styled Tuncoo Lout, Lord of the Sea’, in ‘Pedier and Acheen’, Prince of Wales Island Gazette, 5, 213 (June 1819). This title could be a variant of Panglima Laut, although carrying the same power and function.
10. London to Penang, 10 February 1807, SSFR, Vol. 186, paras. 7–9, 46.
12. Court of Directors to Penang, 18 February 1807, SSFR, Vol. 186, paras. 7–9, 29.
17. Penang to Court of Directors, London, 3 April 1808, SSFR, Vol. 179.
18. Penang to Court of Directors, 12 November 1805, SSFR, Vol. 179.
20. 'The object of this communication is to suggest to you the expediency of apprising any of His Majesty's Naval Officers who may be or may arrive at Fort Cornwallis of the rupture between Great Britain and Denmark in order that they may seize any Danish vessels and their Cargoes within their reach.' Governor-General to Penang Government, 29 January 1808 (FCCP 17 March 1808), SNL, Vol. A4, pp. 36–9.
25. Penang later explained to London that the ship had to be sold off because it was deteriorating very badly. Penang to London, 15 August 1811, SSFR, Vol. 180.
29. T. S. Raffles to Lord Minto, 11 June 1811, Raffles–Minto Collection.
30. Penang to Court of Directors, 30 June 1813, SSFR, Vol. 180, paras. 216–32.
31. 'This has produced a state of rebellion during the progress of which the Capital of the country has been wrested from the King and Himself confined to the Government of Tulosamoy with a portion of the surrounding Country; and the Command of the Sea Coast by which he intercepts the vessels and Trade of his rebellious subjects.' Penang to Court of Directors, 30 June 1813, SSFR, Vol. 180, para. 226.
33. Report of Capt. J. Canning to the Secretary to Supreme Government, Bengal, on his mission to Aceh, 24 November 1814, Sumatra, Vol. 27, para. 34.
34. G. Siddons to Bengal, 2 June 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 1.
36. In a letter to Penang on 9 September 1820, Sultan Jauhar enclosed four papers which provided information on trade, tributes, and duties in Aceh. These papers were: ‘This Is an Account [of tributes and duties] by the King Alaciddin Johor Oolalum Shah Which He Obtained by Enquiries from His Mother the Queen Dowager’; ‘An Account of the Merchandise Exported from Aceh’; ‘This Is an Account of Exports from Samerlanger, Murdoo and Passangan’; and ‘This Is an Account of Export from Telesamoy and Passy as far as Passier Puteh’. The letter and papers were enclosures in the report of W. Sartorius on his mission to Aceh, 29 September 1820 (FCCP 3 November 1820), SSFR, Vol. 77.


41. ‘Thus a duty of 1 and $\dfrac{1}{4}$ Dollars per picul is levied on the planter $\dfrac{1}{4}$ of which goes to the Malay Dutts $\dfrac{1}{4}$ to the Achenese Chiefs and $\dfrac{1}{4}$ are nominally reserved for the King.’ Report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814, para. 60.

42. G. Siddons to Bengal, 30 June 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 33.


45. Memorandum A to Mr Prince’s letter dated Natal 4 June 1814; Memorandum B to Mr Prince’s letter dated Natal, 4 June 1814; Memorandum D to Mr Prince’s letter dated Natal 4 June 1814; Encls. in letter from J. Prince to Capt. J. Canning, 4 June 1814, Encl. 6 in report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814. These memoranda contained information on the west coast ports collected by J. Prince.

46. Tuanku Raja Barus to J. Prince, undated, enclosed in letter from J. Prince to R. Parry, 27 July 1809, Sumatra, Vol. 46.


48. ‘... at a distance—the District of Bahroos extending as far up the Coast as Terooman [a place under Lebai Dappah]. The Company had now taken me under its protection, will it not lend its assistance towards recovering my former possession.’ Report of Capt. J. Canning on 24 November 1814, para. 27.

49. J. Prince to R. Parry, 1 June 1809 (FMC July 1809), Sumatra, Vol. 46.

50. Ibid.

51. R. Parry to J. Prince, 5 July 1809 (FMC July 1809), Sumatra, Vol. 46.

52. R. Parry to Bengal, 20 August 1809 (FMC August 1809), Sumatra, Vol. 46.


54. Bencoolen to Acting Secretary, Political and Foreign Department, 20 June 1809 (FWCP 10 April 1809), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/225.

56. Bengal to Bencoolen, 4 January 1810 (FWC 10 April 1810), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/225.
60. *Prince of Wales Island Gazette*, 5, 211 (10 March 1810).
61. Bengal to London, 27 February 1811, Political Letters Received from Bengal, L/P&S/6/23.
62. Instructions to D. Campbell from Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, 15 June 1810 (FWC 16 June 1810), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/225.
63. Instructions to D. Campbell, 15 June 1810.
64. First report of D. Campbell on his mission to Aceh, 14 July 1810, Encl. 1 in letter from Bengal to Penang, 31 July 1810 (FCCP 18 June 1811), SSFR, Vol. 31.
65. The commercial regulations given out by the Sultan stated that the tax was 6.25 per cent. Import duty for opium was twenty-five dollars per chest. Export duty for pepper for the Sultan was a quarter dollar per pikul, and for bird's nests, it was two dollars. These were said to be the most lucrative sources of tax for the Sultan.
68. Sultan to Penang, August 1809, appendix (FCCP 15 November 1813), SSFR, Vol. 42.
69. Second report of D. Campbell, 24 July 1810.
70. First report of D. Campbell, para. 3.
71. Lord Minto to Sultan of Aceh, 15 June 1810 (FWC 16 June 1810), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/225.
72. D. Campbell to Captain G. Elliot, Commander of the *Modeste*, 19 July 1810, Encl. in letter from Bengal to Penang, 31 May 1811 (FCCP 18 June 1811), SSFR, Vol. 31.
78. T. S. Raffles to Lord Minto, 11 June 1810, Raffles–Minto Collection.
79. Ibid.
80. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah to Lord Minto, Governor-General, 30 December 1810 (FWCP 15 March 1811), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 119, Vol. 28.

81. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah to T. Stamford Raffles, 27 April 1811, encl. 7 in Raffles–Minto Collection, Vol. 6, India Office Library, London.

82. Penang to Court of Directors, 15 August 1811, SSFR, Vol. 180.

83. Lord Minto to Sultan of Aceh, 6 February 1811 [Encl. 19] (Fort Williams 3 January 1812), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 199, Vol. 42.

84. Secretary to Government to Sultan of Aceh, 15 March 1811 [Encl. 18] (FWC 15 March 1811), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 119, Vol. 28.

85. Bengal to London, 11 June 1812, Political Letters Received from Bengal, L/P&S/6/25.

86. Secretary of the Penang Government to J. C. Lawrence, 24 March 1812 (FCCP March 1812), SNL, Vol. 19, p. 75; Secretary of the Penang Government to J. Erskine, 18 June 1812, SNL, Vol. 110, p. 307.

87. Instructions to J. C. Lawrence, 11 July 1811 (FCCP 18 July 1811), SSFR, Vol. 30.


89. Sultan of Aceh to Penang, 13 July 1811 (FCCP 15 August 1811), SSFR, Vol. 31.


92. Ibid.

93. Penang to J. C. Lawrence, 15 August 1811, SNL, Vol. 19, p. 60.

Diplomatic Relations Strained, 1812–1814

Enforcement of Acehnese Trade Regulations

Aceh–British Relations after the Java Expedition

The British conquest of Java had a significant bearing on relations between Aceh and the British. With Java occupied and Mauritius captured earlier in 1810, the French naval threat to the British in the Indian Ocean and the northern stretch of the Straits of Malacca in the remaining years of the Napoleonic Wars was eliminated. Having accomplished that objective, British anxiety about Aceh as a base used by forces hostile to their interest eased. Furthermore, Aceh was shown to be not as immediately vital to British strategic needs as was at first thought. The campaign in Java was attained without the assistance of Aceh. The use of the sultanate either as a refitting station or as a supplier of fresh provisions was limited, particularly when there were alternative sites available.

Jauhar al-Alam was unable, unfortunately for him, to recognize the already changing political and strategic order in the region, transitional though this might have been. He thought that the Campbell and Lawrence missions signified the longed-for improvement of ties with the British, and did not doubt that this could be sustained. In fact, soon after learning of the British victory in Java, Jauhar al-Alam had sent a note to congratulate Lord Minto. Of some bearing is the fact that Raffles, who had been the most sympathetic to Jauhar al-Alam, was away from the scene, and Lord Minto, who had opened the warm exchange with Aceh, was replaced late in 1813. In Penang, William Petrie took over in September 1812, and he was to prove to be the least sympathetic of all the Governors to Jauhar al-Alam. Petrie was Governor until October 1816, and during his administration, relations between Aceh and the British went through the most difficult phase.

Jauhar al-Alam had hopes at this point of using his new friendship with the British to firmly establish his control over the
outlying Acehnese districts. He made preparations to lead further expeditions of armed ships to both the west and the Pedir coasts. Over the next few years, Jauhar al-Alam visited the two coasts regularly to demand various port duties. The harvest seasons of the two main crops determined the schedule of his expeditions. There were two harvesting seasons for pepper, but the main one was from December when the berries began to ripen. The second was between July and August, although the quality and quantity of the crop were generally poor. On the Pedir coast, the harvesting of betel-nut usually took place between June and August. Thus, the Sultan sailed to the west coast towards the end of the year and remained there during the pepper harvest season. He would leave the west coast around May or June, to be back in the Pedir coast in time for the betel-nut harvest there.

In August 1811, the Sultan wrote to inform Lord Minto of his determination to establish his authority fully throughout Aceh. He indicated that he would lead his fleet to the west coast in December 1812. While he was away, some troops and ships would be retained at Telok Samoy to maintain order in the Pedir coast. In the letter, Jauhar al-Alam, confident of British support this time, appealed once again for a loan, explaining that because the supreme government could not provide him with troops, he had to recruit slaves and Arab mercenaries into his military force. A loan was needed to cover this expenditure.

Lord Minto returned to Bengal from Java in October 1811. Only in January 1812 did he finally write to Aceh acknowledging the message of congratulations sent by Jauhar al-Alam on the Java victory. However, Lord Minto politely but firmly turned down once again the Sultan’s request for assistance. Lord Minto assured the Sultan that Aceh was no longer threatened by the warships of the enemy. Troops from India could not be provided because there was no treaty alliance between Aceh and the British. The Governor-General declared that he could not justify the sending of troops ‘to distant countries and expose its subjects to the perils and hardships of war’, unless it was to resist Britain’s enemy, or if there were treaty obligations. None of those conditions existed. Finally, he explained that as a result of the heavy expenditure incurred in the Java campaign, the British were not in a position to provide the financial assistance asked for by the Sultan.

Lord Minto’s letter was sent via Penang to Aceh. Jauhar al-Alam did not receive it until October 1812. When the letter finally came,
he was deeply disappointed, for he had high expectations that this
time his request would be at least partially met. The sense of dis-
appointment is noted in his reply to Bengal dated 8 March 1813.
To ease the disappointment and embarrassment, the Sultan was
self-deprecating in tone, blaming his own linguistic deficiencies in
failing to explain more clearly to the Governor-General his difficulties
and needs.\(^5\)

Lord Minto’s letter of January 1812 was, therefore, indicative
that Bengal had, for the moment, once again set aside Aceh from
its attention. The Governor-General had again pressing problems
in India to deal with. This disinterest must have been sensed even
in Penang. Earlier, sections of Penang officials and traders must
have felt that Bengal was giving undue attention to Jauhar al-Alam.
None the less, despite such misgivings, the Penang government
had dutifully complied with all of Bengal’s instructions relating to
Aceh, including making efforts to send J. C. Lawrence to convey
Bengal’s gift to Aceh.

Aceh’s dealings with the East India Company had so far been
conducted through different British authorities: Madras and later
Bengal in India, Bencoolen and the residencies of Natal and
Tapanuli in Sumatra, and finally Penang. By the time of Jauhar
al-Alam’s reign, the various lines of communication had become
clearer. The supreme government in Bengal assumed overall
authority in all matters affecting British interests in South-East
Asia, which included Sumatra and Penang. Natal and Tapanuli,
by their proximity, kept Bencoolen informed of what was happen­
ing in the west coast of Sumatra. Bencoolen then relayed the reports
with comments and advice to Bengal. From 1786, Penang, because
of its growing trade with Aceh, became increasingly important,
and Acehnese rulers found it more convenient and appropriate to
address some of their concerns to the island administration.
Furthermore, from 1805, Penang acquired the status of a
presidency, and affairs of Aceh came under its responsibility.

An indication that relations with the British were not develop­
ing the way that the Sultan had hoped for came in 1812 when a
ship newly bought by Jauhar al-Alam was detained in India. It
was almost a repeat of the *Hydroos* affair, except that this time the
ship involved, the *Meracity*, was held because the Sultan had
allegedly not fully paid for her.\(^6\) The *Meracity* was probably the
ship mentioned to Campbell by the Sultan as the one he planned
to send with a message for the Governor-General in India. In any
case, when the ship arrived in India, her original owners applied to the court for her to be held. A court hearing on the case went against the Acehnese Sultan, and the boat was handed back to the original owner.

The detention of the *Meracity* could yet be another example of how Acehnese rulers had fallen victims to unscrupulous merchants and adventurers. The Acehnese had been too trusting, and their lack of familiarity with procedures and practices in British-administered territories made them even more vulnerable. In this case, Jauhar al-Alam was simply seeking, through the purchase of the *Meracity*, to expand trade with India as Mahmud Syah and Muhammed Syah had earlier done. He assumed he owned the boat, but the sales transaction of the *Meracity* was not well sorted out. The *Meracity* represented a substantial loss to the Sultan, who could ill afford another such set-back. Thus, once more, he wrote appeals to the authorities in India, but as in the case of the *Hydroos*, nothing came out of these.

**Cuthbert Fenwick Joins the Sultan**

Relations between Aceh and the British became increasingly difficult when Jauhar al-Alam recruited, in late 1812, a British private merchant as an adviser. L’Etoile had passed away in October 1812. The Sultan decided on Cuthbert Fenwick, a British subject, to take over as his adviser and merchant.7 Fenwick was also given command of some of the armed Acehnese ships. He was variously described then, quite incorrectly, as prime minister and sometimes as commander of the Sultan’s fleet.8 He was, in fact, the commercial agent and adviser to the Sultan. He helped the Sultan in the trade with British merchants, especially those in Penang, and for this he paid himself a 5 per cent commission. He was also said to have rented out a ship of his to the Sultan for 300 Spanish dollars a month.9 The usefulness of Fenwick, as with L’Etoile earlier on, was chiefly because of his contact with merchants in Penang and India. At the same time, the Sultan depended on him to advise on how to conduct relations with the British authorities. Fenwick was a very much older man than the Sultan, and in a very short while gained the confidence of the ruler. The Sultan even trusted him with all the correspondence and unsupervised use of the royal seal. In the end, the choice of Fenwick turned out to be an unfortunate one for the Sultan.

Fenwick, by his own account, first came out to India in 1790 as paymaster in the marine department in Calcutta.10 He later
captained a ship, the *Malcolm*, which traded along the Straits of Malacca. An account of an attack on the *Putnam*, an American ship, by Malays in Riau in November 1805 made reference to Fenwick, who was present during the incident. It is not clear from the account why the *Putnam* was attacked, but it occurred when her captain, John Carlton, was visiting Fenwick on board the *Malcolm*, which was anchored near by. After the attack, Fenwick assisted the *Putnam* in efforts to hunt the attackers. Fenwick was next reported in Penang where he hired out his ship to various merchants. One of them was Syed Hussein, the wealthy and prominent Arab trader, who sent Fenwick to trade in the Acehnese ports. One of the trips made by Fenwick, mentioned in the records, was to Susu. At various times, Fenwick also served as a pleader in the court of the recorder in Penang.

It was with this background and experience that Fenwick was recruited by the Sultan. Jauhar al-Alam decided that he would not simply have any European adviser, but rather a British subject who could advise him on matters, especially in correspondence with authorities in India, Penang, or Bencoolen. Fenwick, having been in India and more recently in Penang, must have appeared to the Sultan as most qualified. Equally important, Fenwick was a long-established merchant, having traded on his own and for others. He had the experience as well as the commercial links. It could have been during one of Fenwick’s trading trips to Aceh that the Sultan came to know him and later to offer him the appointment. Jauhar al-Alam, writing in 1814, claimed to have known Fenwick for the past twenty years. This could simply have been a way of saying that he knew Fenwick well, although it still must have been a long acquaintance.

The choice of Fenwick was unfortunate in the context of Aceh’s relations with Penang. During his stay in Penang, Fenwick had all kinds of quarrel with various prominent European merchants. MacDonald, in a report on Penang in 1796, made a reference to him.

Of Mr Fenwick I have not heard for some time, report speaks of him as a prisoner to the French; previous to his departure, I had some idea he had repented of his folly; his violence made him the stalking horse of more prudent men. The only difference between them was, he attacked openly, while they were contented to work by sap.

Many of these quarrels and disputes were brought to court. In 1806, he was involved in litigation against the company of T. Thomas, claiming that his services as commander of one of its ships had not
been paid for. Later, he was featured in a case against James Scott. In all the legal suits, the judgements went against him. His appeals, too, were unsuccessful. He came to believe, therefore, that the Penang judiciary was corrupt. Fenwick thereupon submitted memorandum after memorandum complaining against the courts and the Penang establishment, alleging that they had conspired against him. He made himself such a nuisance to the authorities that, in 1809, he was banned from residing in Penang.\textsuperscript{14}

Later, because of cases like Fenwick’s, the Penang authorities expressed its concern to India at the large number of arrivals who had moved to Penang after resigning from the various chartered companies. The government, unhappy at the disreputable character and the questionable activities of some of these Europeans, complained that they were a bad influence on the rest of society. It wanted guidelines to regulate the entry and residence of what it regarded as undesirable elements.\textsuperscript{15}

For Fenwick, Aceh offered the last opportunity to achieve what he had come to the East to seek. His position as commercial agent to the Sultan granted him access to and advantages in Aceh’s trade. Initially, he might also have been motivated by sympathy for Jauhar al-Alam, and believed that with his long experience, he could help the young Sultan recover his authority. Furthermore, the fact that the Sultan had, in his mind, been unfairly dealt with over the $Hydroos$ affair was the sort of unhappy experience he could identify with, having suffered similar treatment himself. Fenwick must have joined Jauhar al-Alam at about the time when the Sultan led his annual expedition against the west coast in 1812. Several other Europeans were recruited by the Sultan around this time too.

In late 1812, Jauhar al-Alam seemed more determined to strictly enforce the trade regulations throughout the country. He did not have much time to prepare his expedition because the pepper-harvesting season that peaked around March would also be the time when the first foreign ships came to purchase the commodity. With little prospect of military assistance from the British, upon whom he had earlier placed much hope, he had to rely on his own resources. He now had a formidable force to launch an expedition against the rebellious rajas. He had bought additional ships, some of which were well armed. Furthermore, he was strengthened by the military supplies brought by David Campbell and J. C. Lawrence.
The Pedir coast was not, at this point, a problem area for the Sultan. In the past, the region had generally been considered politically difficult, but in the previous two or three years, the Sultan had been able to exert a degree of influence over it. From Telok Samoy, his armed boats maintained surveillance of the coast and forced the rajas to comply with payment of duties and taxes. A later British report described the Sultan as acceptable to several of the chiefs there. Pedir was one of these. The Sultan had recently married the sister of Tuanku Pakeh Hussein, the ruler of the powerful Pedir district. The Sultan was also close to the very influential Raja of Shilloch, Bendahara Kamangan.

It was, therefore, to the west coast that the Sultan turned his attention in October 1812. He felt confident enough about the Pedir coast to be away for a while. As in 1809, the main targets of the Sultan were Barus and Singkil. To the Sultan, Singkil remained the most recalcitrant and difficult because Lebai Dappah, a defaulter in payment of revenue, also controlled several other pepper-producing areas. What bothered the Sultan in particular were the attempts by these ports to move out of Acehnese control and that, in opposition to the court, Barus and Singkil had signed agreements with the British.

Just as in the Pedir coast, the Sultan could still rely on the support of several rajas in the west coast. During 1812 and 1813, Analabu, Labuan Haji, Pulau Dua, and Tapus were reportedly loyal to Jauhar al-Alam. These were the four ports in the west coast which he was willing to open up to foreign ships. Notice of this concession was given to the mercantile community and to Bengal. For the expedition of 1812, the Sultan used Pulau Dua as his base. Even at Susu, known to be controlled by Lebai Dappah, the Sultan could count on some support from the more recent settlers who had migrated from Pedir. There were reports of tension between the Pedirese and the older settlers led by Lebai Dappah. The Pedirese migrants had consequently called upon the Sultan for support. In heading towards Susu in 1812, the Sultan could claim that one of his purposes was to mediate in the dispute among the various parties there.

Towards the end of October 1812, the Sultan’s fleet arrived in the west coast and began patrolling around the pepper ports that were under Lebai Dappah’s control, and as far south as Barus. The rajas of other ports surrendered port duties claimed by the Sultan. Realizing that this time the Sultan would not be content
with token payments and could be expected to attack his port, Lebai Dappah made an urgent appeal to Tapanuli for the supply of arms and ammunitions to defend himself against the expedition.16

The Seizure of the Anapoorny

When the Sultan was in the west coast heading an expedition against both Singkil and Barus, his armed vessels detained a British-registered ship, belonging to some Chulia merchants from Nagore, India, called the Anapoorny at Pulau Dua. The incident set in motion a series of events with consequences that were important, not only to Aceh’s relations with the British, but also in the politics within Aceh itself.

The Sultan was in the west coast when his ships came across the Anapoorny. Part of the goods being carried by the ship belonged to Company officials at Negapatnam. She was a new ship, launched only in September 1812. A month later, she set sail for the Sumatran west coast, heading, according to her captain, for Tapanuli. Her captain, Syed Naquedah, claimed that she was also carrying letters to W. Hayes, the resident there.17 As it turned out, her first stop was Susu, which, at this time, was already declared by the Sultan of Aceh as a state in rebellion, although it was likely that the Anapoorny did not realize this. The ship was stopped by one of the Sultan’s armed boats as she was leaving Susu, and taken to Labuan Haji where the Sultan was. The captain and supercargo of the Anapoorny later claimed that at Labuan Haji duties were demanded on the goods they carried, and when these were paid the ship was released and permitted to trade in the Acehnese west coast. According to the Sultan’s version, the Anapoorny, which was not flying British colours at the time of her seizure, although she later claimed that she did, was fined for trading in the west coast and, after being warned, was then allowed to proceed out of Acehnese waters to Tapanuli.18

The Anapoorny did not go to Tapanuli. Instead, she went to Singkil where she remained for a month before proceeding on to Tapus. According to her captain and supercargo, they decided against going to Tapanuli because of the bad weather along the coast. It was also a case of the Anapoorny, believing she had already paid duties at Aceh, trying to save on another payment at Tapanuli as this would affect its profits. While at Tapus, her captain, Syed Naquedah, went by a small boat to Tapanuli where he delivered the letters to Hayes and informed him of what had taken place.
In early March 1813, the Anapoorny left Tapus on her return voyage to Negapatnam. As she was nearing Pulau Dua, the Anapoorny was stopped once again by the Sultan’s ships. The boat was escorted to Pulau Dua where the Sultan had established his base. The Anapoorny was accused of defiantly trading in Acehnese ports which had already been declared off-limits by the Sultan. A council of Acehnese judges was convened by the Sultan in Pulau Dua to hear the case against the captain and crew of the Anapoorny. Serving as judges were several local chiefs and ulubalang. After a few sittings, the council found the captain and the crew guilty of violating Acehnese law by trading in Aceh without the Sultan’s permit. The captain was sentenced to fourteen years’ imprisonment and the other crew members were given varying jail terms. The ship and her cargo were confiscated. The Anapoorny and the crew were subsequently taken to Telok Samoy.

News of the Anapoorny’s detention took some time to reach the British authorities. It was the British ship the Sophia which, on 10 June 1813, alerted Penang of the Anapoorny seizure. But the report was sketchy. It was several weeks later that more details emerged. In July, a crew member managed to escape from detention and made his way to Penang, where he lodged a report.

The Anapoorny became a major issue between Aceh and the British. It was a matter seen by both sides as demanding a demonstration of firmness. To the Sultan of Aceh, the Anapoorny was caught trading in an area which he had placed off-limits to all foreign ships unless the procedures of duty payment and permission had first been complied with. In the case of the Anapoorny, permission had not been granted. Adding to the gravity of the matter was the fact that the ship had traded with Susu, a rebel port. Unless firm action was taken, it would show up the Sultan’s inability to enforce his trade regulations, and would badly damage his prestige.

Apparently, the Anapoorny was not simply one of the many ordinary Chulia ships that passed by. The owners of the brand-new 600-ton boat, although domiciled in India, were known to the Sultan. Furthermore, according to the Sultan, the captain traded regularly in the region and even had a house in the Acehnese capital where he had resided for some time. Many among the large Chulia community stayed for a considerable length of time at Banda Aceh, partly because ship schedules were dependent on the monsoon season. It was noted that Chulia ships arrived around August, and returned some time in April the following
year with the change of the monsoon winds.\textsuperscript{23} The schedule also allowed the Chulias to be in Aceh during the pepper-harvesting season. Furthermore, because the Chulias were engaged in retail trade—a system which involved advancing goods to Acehnese traders and planters—a longer period was needed to complete their commercial transactions. So it was not unusual that many Chulias had bought houses at the capital. Therefore, according to the Sultan, Syed Naquedah, the captain, should be familiar with the Acehnese trade practices, and could not plead ignorance.

The Sultan had observed that it was widely known that many Chulia ships had been evading payment of duties. On 8 March 1813, the Sultan had written to Penang complaining about the Chulias.

Left to my own resources I have stopped all Trade with the rebels at Acheen and Sintkell, but have left the Coast open as theretofore from Pedier to Telosomoy for all vessels, so that I hope soon to reduce the disaffected at Acheen to their allegiance and restore the trade at Acheen to its former prosperity.

Am sorry to observe that the Native Vessels from Nagapatnam and Nagore here in order to defraud me of my duties neglected going to the Ports opened to them but have gone down to Soosoo and Pulo Duah and other Ports on that Coast, subject to me, in order to evade paying the accustomed duties and contrary as they well knew to the Established Laws of my country from the earliest period of history, and long before the Europeans came to India.\textsuperscript{24}

It is possible that he decided to make an example of one of these offenders, and the Anapoorny happened to come by. It may be supposed that the Anapoorny was selected for punitive action because the Chulias were more vulnerable. At the time of the Anapoorny’s detention at Pulau Dua, there were several British-registered ships in the port. These included the Juno and the Britannia. None of these was harassed or faced problems; in fact, the Sultan traded with them and later placed the confiscated cargo of the Anapoorny on several of these ships for shipment to Penang.

When viewed more broadly, however, it is difficult to suggest that the Anapoorny seizure is evidence of victimization of the Chulias by the Sultan. At the capital, the Chulias continued to hold a major share of the trade, and past syahbandar were Chulias. Outside the capital, there were large communities of Chulias along the Pedir coast. Shilloch, Burung, Telok Samoy, and Samalanga were all described as significantly populated by Chulias, and in the first three of these, the Sultan appointed Chulias as his syahbandar.\textsuperscript{25}
It was in the west coast that there were fewer Chulia communities during this period. In 1814, Canning made no mention of them in his observations of the pepper districts. Nor was there any Chulia syahbandar. This would lend support to the Sultan's argument that Acehnese laws in the past did not allow Chulia ships to go to the west coast. But the absence of Chulia communities could also be explained by the nature of the pepper trade. In the west coast, the chief of the district was also the principal merchant. He entered into contracts with foreign ships, and he ensured delivery of the pepper. This might have reduced or eliminated the need for the kind of intermediary and retail function in which the Chulias were experienced and well connected. Nevertheless, there were some Chulia ships trading in the west coast. Although prohibited by Acehnese laws, Chulia ships were found as far south as Tapus. Padang, which was under the Dutch, was also frequented by Chulias.

On the decision to act against the Anapoorny, the role of Fenwick cannot be discounted. New to his position as adviser and anxious to be useful, Fenwick would have encouraged the Sultan to once again bring into force the regulation against Chulia traders. Where the Sultan might previously have hesitated to act against a Chulia ship originating from a British-administered territory, Fenwick must have assured him of his right to do so, from both the Acehnese and international legal framework. Fenwick prided himself on being knowledgeable in matters of law, having on several occasions dealt with the Penang judiciary. The detention of the Hydroos, and more recently the Meracity, must also have had a bearing on the Sultan's thinking. His own ships were seized and confiscated through the application of laws in the places to which they (the ships) had proceeded. Fenwick would have pointed out to the Sultan that he, too, was fully justified in insisting on Acehnese laws being respected and upheld.

There was also the revenue angle to be considered. Fenwick, as the chief merchant of the Sultan, supported a strict and wider enforcement of the trade regulations as a necessary measure to improve the Sultan's financial and commercial position. With an armed fleet at hand, an effective means of control was available. Furthermore, Fenwick was well aware that his prospects were linked to the success of the Sultan in establishing his authority.

The Sultan's Blockade of the West Coast

In the meantime, the Sultan remained in the west coast. It is not certain whether or not he made any trips back to the capital or to
Telok Samoy after October 1812. But in June 1813, his ships were still sighted in the west coast. This would be about the time he would be preparing to depart from the west coast for the betel-nut harvest in Pedir. But before leaving, the problems in Susu, Singkil, and Barus had to be dealt with. Lebai Dappah came to know of the Sultan’s intentions, and made another appeal to Tapanuli for help. Lebai Dappah’s urgent request was quickly relayed by John Prince to Bencoolen.

G. Siddons, the resident, turned down Lebai Dappah’s appeal. Siddons took the view that Singkil and all the ports as far south as Tapus were part of Aceh. He held that all the rajas and the inhabitants within that region acknowledged the Sultan as their ruler. He had learnt, for instance, that all revenue collection by the rajas was done in the name of the Sultan: ‘his [Siddon’s] having learnt that all, or most of the chiefs do actually levy a certain duty from the Planters on Pepper raised, in his [the Sultan] name (though never paid to him)’. The dispute between the Sultan and the coastal chiefs was, therefore, an internal Acehnese affair, and what was being fought over was simply the payment of revenue. Siddons felt that the basic grievance of the west coast was the onerous taxes demanded by the Sultan. He conceded that the west coast ports could justifiably feel resentful because of the extortionary nature of the Sultan’s trading methods. Payments for goods and commodities taken by the Sultan were usually inadequate, or not made at all. He had heard of similar complaints by the betel-nut cultivators in the Pedir coast. But Siddons did not want the British to interfere in what he saw as essentially an internal affair of Aceh.

Bengal approved the stand taken by Siddons. In a letter to Bencoolen, it reaffirmed the friendly relationship existing between the British and Aceh. This friendship could be harmed if arms and ammunitions were supplied by the British to coastal chiefs hostile to the Sultan. Bencoolen was urged to use its influence to help resolve the dispute between the Sultan and the Acehnese chiefs. In the meantime, the Sultan began to face strong resistance in Susu. In a later account, the Sultan was said to have landed in Susu to help resolve a local dispute among the different factions. It is not clear whether this episode took place before or after the Anapoorny incident. The atmosphere in the port was tense and even confusing. The whole affair turned out disastrously for the Sultan when some of his men, mistakenly thinking that they were
about to be attacked, fired on some Susu people. The result was that all the factions in Susu, including those that had supported Jauhar al-Alam, got together and drove the Sultan’s party away. The Sultan lost a ship and several men in the fighting.

Undaunted by this set-back, the Sultan proceeded to Singkil. On his arrival, he issued a demand for all arrears on duties due to him. According to Lebai Dappah’s version later, the Sultan offered to negotiate with Singkil. Lebai Dappah agreed, but when he went aboard the Sultan’s ship, he was immediately seized and taken to a port some distance away. Several days later, he was released after giving a pledge that he would hand over the outstanding amount due to the Sultan. One of his sons was left behind as a hostage, but Lebai Dappah chose not to honour his promise upon his release.

Jauhar al-Alam next turned his attention to Barus. In 1809, Barus was on his list of ports to visit as he claimed that the place was part of Aceh. In the end, the Sultan decided against proceeding beyond Tapus. Reports that a small contingent of troops from Tapanuli had been sent to Barus was probably the reason for his change of mind. This time, the Sultan was determined to force Barus to acknowledge his authority. The Raja of Barus certainly expected an attack from Jauhar al-Alam.

The deepening apprehension was because of a recent incident in the Barus area which the Raja feared could be used by Jauhar al-Alam as an excuse to invade. In June 1812, Tapanuli asked Barus to arrest one of its residents, an Acehnese named Nakhoda Poh Heen, who was suspected of having made a minor raid on Tapanuli earlier, and had then fled to Barus. The chief of Barus wrote back to Tapanuli, reporting that Poh Heen had retreated to the interior and could be expected to put up strong resistance. Understandably, Barus was reluctant to take action to apprehend Poh Heen. It was not only a difficult operation, but the exercise would be viewed as carrying out Tapanuli’s orders. Barus would be cast in very poor light in the region for seizing an Acehnese and surrendering him to the British. It might have been less objectionable if the wanted man was a slave or a subject of the British. With Barus reluctant to act, Tapanuli sent its own sepoys into Barus to hunt down Poh Heen.

When informed of Tapanuli’s action, the Sultan protested strongly to W. Grant, the resident of Tapanuli. He described the entry of British sepoys as an incursion into Barus territory and of committing acts of aggression against his Acehnese subjects.
Acehnese sovereignty had been infringed. Jauhar al-Alam also regarded the incident seriously enough to act against the chief of Barus. In his letter to Grant, he announced that he had appointed Teuku Poh Bye from Tapus as the Governor of Barus, with power to collect duties on behalf of the Sultan. It is not clear whether the appointment was because of the Sultan’s view that the Raja had failed to defend Barus against the British incursion, or that he suspected collusion between Barus and Tapanuli in the incident.

Prince immediately saw this appointment as a pretext by the Sultan to take over Barus. There had long been disputes and rivalry between Tapus and Barus. Tapus, a small port some 48 kilometres north of Barus, produced little pepper. It had four chiefs, who took turns to be the ruling raja. Teuku Poh Bye was the Raja at that time, and was reported to be the most ambitious and belligerent. He was also closely aligned to the Sultan. Prince believed that Teuku Poh Bye and the Sultan were set on seizing Barus.

Prince wrote immediately to Tapus, warning Poh Bye against any attempt to enter Barus. He reminded Poh Bye of the 1786 understanding between Griffith and Lebai Dappah and of the subsequent agreement between R. Broff and Lebai Gunnar in December 1787, which allowed Acehnese to settle in Tapus only under specified conditions. The settlement of Acehnese in Tapus under the terms of the agreements was about the limit the British were willing to tolerate. Prince warned Poh Bye that the British reserved the right to act, should armed men from Tapus enter Barus.

In the end, the crisis passed when Barus sent a tribute to the Sultan. It was a relatively inexpensive way to placate the Sultan. The tribute was accepted, and the Sultan was satisfied that a gesture had been made acknowledging his authority. His honour and prestige had been upheld. Furthermore, he was reluctant to test Tapanuli and to risk an armed confrontation.

The *Africaine* ‘Rescue’

Over in Penang, meanwhile, the detention of the *Anapoorny* was strongly condemned as an act of piracy. This was not the first reported case of a British-registered ship encountering problems in Aceh. There had been others, but none had so directly implicated the Sultan. The *Anapoorny* was, thus, not simply one of the unfortunate victims of common criminal elements lurking along the coasts. To Penang, the perpetrator of this offence was known: it was the Sultan of Aceh. Because it was the Sultan himself, the
incident would set a dangerous precedent if the seizure was allowed to pass without strong remonstration from the British authorities. Certainly, that was the premise upon which Penang responded. But there were other factors that explain why Penang acted as it did. First, the *Anapoorny* incident occurred at a time when a new Governor, William Petrie, assumed office in September 1812 and who, as events were to show, seemed to have developed an instant dislike of Jauhar al-Alam from the start.

Secondly, the seizure of the ship happened in a period when some of the Penang trade was drawn away by the opening of ports in British-held Java. When Raffles took over as Lieutenant-Governor, he lowered duties to promote trade in the Javanese ports. With the introduction of lower duties, these ports attracted some of the ships which would normally have gone to Penang. The latter began to feel the effects of these developments, and figures showed a drop in its trade from 1811. Thus, officials became particularly sensitive to developments that might harm the island’s trade. Certainly, one concern would be security for shipping, and the seizure of the *Anapoorny* could indeed bring into question the safety of the waters around Penang and north Sumatra. Thirdly, not only was the *Anapoorny* a British-registered ship flying British colours at the time of detention as claimed, part of the cargo belonged to two officials of the East India Company. (One of them was Francis Richardson, the commercial agent of Nagore and Negapatnam.) Both officials could have made a strong representation on the matter to the authorities in India and Penang.

The case of the *Anapoorny* was presented to the council on 19 August 1813. Petrie set the tone of debate when he spoke out at great length against the action by the Sultan. Petrie had already decided in his mind that the seizure of the *Anapoorny* was an act of hostility by Aceh against the British. His remarks did not hide his dislike for Jauhar al-Alam, and in derogatory terms, he spoke of the Sultan: ‘the young king is a flagrant, sunk into the most degrading and odious habits of manners intoxication and debauchery’. Later, writing to the supreme government, Petrie presented the seizure of the *Anapoorny* as a course of conduct ‘calculated to disturb the usual Course of friendly traffic between the King’s Dominions and this Island’. Petrie also took note of the presence of Fenwick, describing him as a bad influence upon the Sultan.

Petrie recommended the dispatch of the HMS *Africaine* to Aceh, a warship then in Penang but preparing to sail for Madras. The
commander of the ship, Captain E. Rodney, was to investigate the complaint made by the *Anapoorny*'s Penang agents. If it was found that a seizure had indeed taken place and been carried out without justification, then representation on the matter was to be made to the Sultan. Captain Rodney should obtain the release of the ship, her crew, and the cargo.\(^{44}\) He was also to warn Fenwick against further action that could harm individuals and properties protected by the British. The rest of the council went along with Petrie.

In his minute and in the instructions to the *Africaine*, Petrie stressed the urgency of securing the release of the ship, her crew, and the cargo. It was left to Captain Rodney's judgement how best to carry this out. This part of the instructions, and how it was to be interpreted, later became a point of disagreement. "The measure of rescuing the ship from the Persons who have seized her will of-course be affected as otherwise by you, as you may judge needful."\(^ {45}\) Strangely, the Penang government insisted that the instructions in no way authorized the use of force.

The decision to send a warship to Aceh risked escalating the incident. Captain Rodney was not by temperament or training a person who could patiently negotiate with the Sultan on the complexities of the case. Furthermore, although Captain Rodney was to conduct an inquiry into the circumstances of the seizure, no guidelines were given except the council minutes and the instructions. The issues of what constituted an act of piracy and what represented the authority and legitimate rights of an independent and sovereign state were not spelt out.

The papers handed to Captain Rodney had virtually ruled that the Sultan's detention of the ship was a hostile act. In his letter to the Sultan, carried by Captain Rodney, Petrie demanded the unconditional release of the captain of the *Anapoorny*. "It is incumbent upon me to recommend in the strongest manner and Capt. Rodney is also commissioned to demand in the name of the British Government that the Person of the Commander of the Ship in question who is one of Subject be immediately liberated from confinement and permitted to proceed wherever he pleases."\(^ {46}\) The Sultan must release the ship and her cargo if it was proven that the ship had abided by the laws of Aceh.

The *Africaine* left Penang with the instructions dated 20 August 1813, and arrived at Telok Samoy about five days later. On his arrival, Captain Rodney learnt that the Sultan and his advisers had just returned to Telok Samoy. The captain sent an officer from the British warship to hand over Petrie's letter to the Sultan.
The Sultan replied stating that he needed time to study the letter and to consult his advisers.  

Captain Rodney made no attempt to meet the Sultan. Neither were there efforts to enquire into the circumstances of the _Anapoorny_’s detention. Rodney simply expected one response from the Sultan: ‘I expect he would immediately give up the ship _Anapoorny_ and cargo, or the Equivalent, and to release the Noquedah and Crew of the Vessel from the confinement.’  

On 25 August, the Sultan replied to Petrie’s letter. He defended his detention of the _Anapoorny_, and reiterated that he would not tolerate any foreign power flouting his laws.  

Captain Rodney regarded the Sultan’s letter as a defiant response which justified the use of force to secure the release of the _Anapoorny_. Two days later, a small party of troops from the warship landed. There was no resistance from the Acehnese, and in a short while, they took the _Anapoorny_ and freed the crew. The cargo, however, had disappeared. After the rescue operation, Rodney sent a note to the Sultan demanding that reparation for the missing cargo be sent to Penang.  

The Sultan was helpless in the face of the action taken by the _Africaine_. Armed resistance would have been futile. What the Sultan did in response was to send two notes to Captain Rodney to explain once again why he had seized the _Anapoorny_. Of interest was his reference to William Marsden’s _History of Sumatra_ and Thomas Forrest’s volume entitled _A Voyage from Calcutta to the Mergui Archipelago_, and his efforts to use the information in them to support his position. Both studies contained references to the Acehnese commercial laws, and outlined the power of the ruler over trade. Recently published, these must have been brought to the Sultan’s attention by Fenwick.  

Captain Rodney, however, had little interest in what Marsden and Forrest had written, and saw no relevance or bearing to the outcome of his mission. He decided that he had accomplished all that he was instructed to do and sailed off for Penang, taking back under escort the _Anapoorny_.  

An Acehnese Mission to Bengal, 1813

The recovery of the _Anapoorny_ created more immediate complications than it actually resolved. First, there was the reaction of the Penang and Bengal authorities to the implications of the _Africaine_ action. Secondly, a dispute over ownership of the cargo arose
when its whereabouts were eventually traced. Both these matters created difficulties leading to further adverse consequences upon Aceh’s relations with the British.

When the *Africaine* returned with the *Anapoorny*, even Petrie himself was surprised. This had turned out to be awkward for Penang because, even from the British standpoint, the release of the *Anapoorny* from Aceh had been forcibly carried out. It could be viewed as an example of committing a wrong to correct an earlier injustice. Petrie realized that there was some explaining to do, and he, therefore, quickly dissociated the Penang government from what had taken place. Petrie maintained that his minute of 19 August 1813 and subsequent instructions to Captain Rodney could in no way be construed as sanctioning the use of force.\(^{54}\)

Realizing that the *Anapoorny* incident had taken a more serious turn than had been anticipated, the Penang government submitted all documents on the case to the supreme government, and at the same time explained that the scope of its intention and objectives had been very limited when it sent the *Africaine*.

I recommend a Letter to the above effect which in no construction or even forced construction of our language, can be perverted into any appearance of approbation of the measures pursued by Captain Rodney at Acheen. . . . It is sufficient for me to remark in this place, that the proceeding at Acheen have not been in conformity to the Minute I had the honour to record in Council nor to the Instructions which were drawn up from that Minute and delivered to Captain Rodney.\(^{55}\)

The location of the *Anapoorny*’s cargo was soon discovered. Consisting of quantities of pepper and benzoin, the cargo was traced to the warehouse of Dunbar and McGee, a prominent trading house in Penang known to have frequent dealings with the Acehnese coast. The cargo had been transported over by a number of ships that had been in Pulau Dua at the time of the *Anapoorny*’s detention. In September 1813, the two officers of the *Anapoorny* in Penang, Hussein Merican and Syed Naquedah, petitioned the Penang government, declaring that they knew where the cargo was and asking that it be returned to them.\(^{56}\) The matter was thereupon referred to the recorder, Sir Edmond Stanley, who advised that the proper procedure was for the two Chulias to sue John Dunbar.\(^{57}\)

In the hearing at the Penang Court of Judicature in early October 1813, Dunbar did not deny that his company had accepted quantities of pepper and benzoin brought by the *Britannia*,
the *Juno*, and a ship belonging to a certain Haji Cassim. Dunbar had since delivered the benzoin and part of the pepper to Che Im, a well-known Chinese merchant on the island. These were to offset debts owed to Che Im by Cuthbert Fenwick. The proceeds of the remaining pepper were credited by Dunbar and McGee to the accounts of the Sultan of Aceh and Fenwick. Part of these was subsequently used by the Sultan to purchase provisions. At the end of the hearing, the court ruled in favour of the *Anapoorny*’s officers. Dunbar was ordered to pay the Chulias a sum equivalent to the value of the original cargo.

For the owners of the *Anapoorny*, however, there were further problems. It was discovered that the physical condition of the ship, after having been detained for several months in Aceh and in Penang without proper maintenance, had deteriorated so badly that she was in danger of sinking. A government committee formed to examine the ship found that the bottom was worm-affected, thus requiring extensive repairs. Repair work was later carried out at a total cost of 11,720 Spanish dollars, which the owners were required to pay.

In the meantime, the Sultan was determined to take the *Anapoorny* and the *Africaine* issues directly to the supreme government in Bengal. Through the *Juno*, Jauhar al-Alam informed Calcutta of the *Anapoorny* event, and of the exchange of notes between Aceh and Penang. He complained about the action of the *Africaine* and stated that he had refrained from taking retaliatory action against properties of British subjects who still frequented Aceh.

An Acehnese Envoy in Calcutta

Sometime towards the end of 1813, the Sultan followed up his earlier letter by sending an envoy to Calcutta. The envoy, Tunku Haji Quallo, reached Calcutta in late October or early November 1813. As the title suggests, Haji Quallo was Acehnese. He was a member of the Council of Judges at Pulau Dua which had sat on the *Anapoorny* case. As a member of the council, Haji Quallo was not only familiar with the details of the *Anapoorny* case, he was also expected to provide credible testimony to the Sultan’s contention that the judges were independent and the trial carried out fairly.

There were other tasks for Haji Quallo in India. First, he was to sort out the very complicated case of the *Meracity* with the British authorities on behalf of the Sultan. Haji Quallo carried with him
various documents to prove that the Sultan had bought the ship from a Parsi merchant in India and that all payments had been properly made. Secondly, Haji Quallo was to negotiate a commercial treaty to govern trade, and thereby remove some of the difficult aspects that had caused misunderstandings in Aceh–British relations, of which the Anapoorny incident was the most recent example.

By this time, the authorities in Bengal had also heard from Penang about the detention of the Anapoorny. The supreme government, because of its distance, was able to be relatively detached and, therefore, viewed more dispassionately the several issues relating to Aceh. Bengal took the view that its relationship with Aceh was still cordial, and that the sultanate remained important in overall British commercial and strategic interests.

Bengal was plainly not happy with the way Penang had handled the Anapoorny incident. In a letter to Penang dated 14 January 1814, the supreme government maintained that the Sultan of Aceh had the right to regulate trade in his territories. It was a lawful exercise of authority which a sovereign state was entitled to. It regretted that Captain Rodney had used force in Telok Samoy, and that his action cancelled out the strong position in the British case in any future negotiation with Aceh on the matter. ‘Before we enter on the general subject of this dispatch we are compelled to express our regret that this step should have been taken by Captain Rodney since it has given to the King of Acheen an advantage in the discussion which but for that Circumstance would have been decidedly in favour of the British Government.’

Bengal disagreed that Penang could not be held responsible for the actions of the Africaine. It ruled that Penang’s instructions to Rodney had indeed contained such authorization.

As a result of the Anapoorny and the Africaine incidents, the Calcutta authorities became aware that recent events in Aceh warranted their attention once more. There had been too many complaints about harassment of ships in Aceh. They also realized that correspondence was a slow and unsatisfactory way to resolve differences. Because it took so long for reports to reach Bengal, a particular issue or incident could assume a different or a more serious complexion by the time the supreme government was able to deal with it. The Anapoorny incident was a case in point. Even before the report of the seizure of the Anapoorny reached Bengal, the matter had taken an ugly turn following the forcible release of the ship by the Africaine.
Bengal must have decided to act as a result of representations from sections of the mercantile community in India. Among the main investors in the *Anapoorny*’s cargo were two British officials of the Company at Nagore, and they were naturally anxious to be compensated by the Sultan. The losses were substantial. According to the captain of the ship, the original cargo, valued at 20,000 pagodas, had been traded in Sumatra for pepper and benzoin, but which if brought back to India would have fetched 40,000 pagodas.\(^68\) The two officials would certainly have lobbied influential members of the administration in Bengal.

There were other merchants and shipowners, both European and Indian, who were unhappy with the Sultan’s commercial regulations. One of the most prominent of these was John Palmer, an influential Calcutta merchant of the firm Palmer and Company, who was reportedly close to senior officials in the government in Bengal. Palmer himself had trading interests in the Acehnese west coast, and was associated through trade with John Prince and Syed Hussein. Palmer and other merchants might have been worried that their trading ships, as well as those of their partners, were increasingly exposed to the danger of seizure by the Sultan of Aceh, as had happened to the *Anapoorny*.

Prince’s complaint of encroaching Acehnese settlements south of Singkil and the Sultan’s claim over Barus were by this time also brought to the attention of the supreme government. Palmer and other merchants would have added their concern, pointing out that Acehnese behaviour and actions were detrimental to British trade. Bengal finally acknowledged that if indeed the complaints could be substantiated, then developments in Aceh were certainly serious enough to warrant action. At issue was unhindered British trade, which had to be safeguarded. Furthermore, the threat of Acehnese aggression endangered Natal and Tapanuli, the two British settlements in west Sumatra, as well as the independence of ports and pepper districts such as Sorkam, Barus, and Air Bangis with whom the British had important trading links.

In November 1813, the Sultan’s envoy Haji Quallo was still at Calcutta. On his arrival, he had handed the Sultan’s letter regarding the *Meracity* and the *Anapoorny* to the Bengal government. He also submitted a short note to clarify some points on the two issues.\(^69\) However, no progress was made in the meetings between Haji Quallo and the officials. When the question of a commercial treaty was put before him, Haji Quallo declined all efforts at discussion, claiming quite inexplicably that he had no authority to
In all, the Acehnese envoy achieved little during his entire stay. Instead, Haji Quallo, not realizing that he would have to remain longer than planned, ran out of money and the supreme government had to provide a loan to see him through the rest of his stay. Perhaps the value of Haji Quallo’s visit was that his presence as an emissary of the Acehnese sultanate gave immediacy to the issues, obliging the supreme government to make some decisions.

On the Meracity case, the supreme government deferred it to the Bombay High Court for a ruling. Bengal politely explained to the Sultan that the supreme government had no power to interfere on a matter that was still with the judiciary. But it promised to send all the relevant information on the case to Aceh once a decision was reached. On the Anapoorny issue and the proposal of a treaty between Aceh and the British, Bengal felt that it did not have sufficient information upon which to act. Haji Quallo was no help in these two matters.

At the end of November 1813, the supreme government concluded that British relations with the sultanate could best be reassessed by sending a senior official to Aceh. Bengal wanted the mission to ascertain several aspects of Aceh–British relations through an on-the-spot enquiry. The mission was entrusted with three matters in Aceh. First, the mission was to investigate the actual circumstances surrounding the seizure of the Anapoorny. If her detention was illegal according to international law, then the mission was to demand compensation and an appropriate apology from the Acehnese. Secondly, in order to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, the mission was to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Aceh, regulating trade on a basis acceptable to all sides. Thirdly, the mission was to discuss with the Sultan the issue of excluding Acehnese settlements south of Singkil. Bencoolen had brought to Bengal’s attention the matter of Barus’s independence.

The Mission of John Canning, 1814

Captain John Canning of the Murshidabad Provincial Battalion, India, was appointed to head the Aceh mission. In 1810, he was to have visited Aceh on behalf of Lord Minto. However, he had already been given an assignment that took him, once again, to the Ava court in Burma, and David Campbell went in his place. Canning was highly regarded by the supreme government because of his performance in Burma, even though the Ava mission had
been unsuccessful. His experience in Burma was thought to be particularly suited for the coming mission to Aceh.

The Canning mission left for Sumatra on 5 April 1814 on board two ships, the Helen and the Ariel, with a large complement of troops. This was specifically requested by Canning, who argued that the expedition had to be sufficiently large and impressive to accord the respect that befitted Aceh as well as to be consistent with the prestige and power of the British. In all, the Canning mission was in Sumatra and Penang for six months. Before leaving Calcutta, Canning had a meeting with Haji Qallo.

Arriving in Sumatra on 23 April 1814, Canning did not go to the Acehnese capital first. Instead, he headed directly for Tapanuli and Padang. After visiting the Acehnese west coast, he once again avoided the capital and Telok Samoy, deciding that he needed to go to Penang where he spent close to a month. He went back to Sumatra, but called first at the Pedir coast. Only after that did he proceed to Telok Samoy to see the Sultan. It was an itinerary that gave diplomatic offence to Jauhar al-Alam.

This was particularly so because Jauhar al-Alam had earlier received a letter from Bengal informing him to expect the arrival of the Canning mission. The letter explained that the purpose of the mission was to work out a treaty of commerce. The Sultan was pleased to learn of the mission. The earlier visits of Campbell and Lawrence had both been conducted in an atmosphere of cordiality. He believed that those visits had helped not only to improve Aceh–British relations, but also to enhance his standing within Aceh. The tone of the letter from Bengal was friendly. Its reference to a proposed treaty was interpreted by the Sultan as a positive response to his earlier offer communicated through Haji Qallo. A commercial agreement with the British was what he had always hoped for, and it looked as though it would finally be realized. The Sultan was confident that all the irritants and unhappiness related to trade in Aceh would be removed once this was signed. Jauhar al-Alam, therefore, looked forward to the visit of the mission.

The same could not, at this stage, be said of the Acehnese west coast and those in opposition to the Sultan. News of the Canning mission quickly became known throughout the west and Pedir coasts. The news was received with anxiety because there were accompanying rumours that the British had sent the Canning mission to support the Sultan. Later in his report, Canning blamed the Sultan for starting those rumours. But if in fact this was the
case and the Sultan did present such an impression about the mission, it was likely that he really believed so himself.

Canning Meets Prince

Canning proceeded first to Tapanuli as instructed by the supreme government, arriving on 29 April 1814. There, he sought information about the situation in Aceh and in the west coast. Bengal’s directive to Canning to go first to Tapanuli was made with the best of intentions, for it believed that British officials in Tapanuli would be in a position to supply all relevant information. It assumed, too, that the details would be fair and objective to enable Canning to negotiate effectively with the Sultan. But it is possible that certain parties in Calcutta and Nagore with links to Penang and Bencoolen were keen that Canning should meet certain officials early in the mission before he met the Sultan or committed the British in any agreement. They could have influenced Bengal to decide on Tapanuli as one of the first stops in Canning’s mission. Not surprisingly, the person Canning was instructed to meet in Sumatra was Prince. 84

On arrival, Canning was informed by Hayes, the resident, that Prince was in Natal. 85 The mission thereupon sailed to Natal where Canning was warmly received by Prince. The latter was not a disinterested observer of developments in the west coast. His companies in Tapanuli and Natal were closely involved in trade with several ports that were in opposition to the Sultan.

If at all Canning was being influenced by Prince, this was not evident at this stage. In mid-May for instance, Canning dispatched a very polite letter to Jauhar al-Alam to explain that the mission would not be able to arrive at the Acehnese capital until the middle of July.

I am happy at the same time to avail myself of the opportunity of assuring your Majesty that while a just regard will be paid by me to the interest of the British Government in General and individuals, its subjects in particular, I shall feel a pleasure on every occasion in acceding to your Majesty’s wishes and adopting a system of conciliation which I trust will be productive of permanent harmony and friendship between the two states. 86

Canning was courteous, for he realized that the Sultan was waiting.

At the time of Canning’s visit, there was British concern over the activities of several American privateers in the area. War between Britain and America had been declared in June 1812. A
few days prior to Canning’s arrival at Tapanuli, three British ships—the *Betsy*, the *Favourite*, and the *Mary*—had been captured by an American ship, the *Hyder Ally*, at the Acehnese west coast port of Labuan Haji. The *Hyder Ally* was one of four American privateers known to be operating in the area. It was a situation that worried the British, and Canning took the opportunity in his letter of 16 May to ask Jauhar al-Alam to deny all Acehnese facilities to the Americans.

Canning then spent about a week at Padang. One of those whom he was keen to interview was a Dutch private trader, a Captain Williams, who had served with Jauhar al-Alam for a brief period and who had commanded the Acehnese ship that seized the *Anapoorny*. Williams, when contacted, gave an account of events that did not differ from that of the Sultan; he insisted that the *Anapoorny* was detained because she had infringed Acehnese laws. Canning, however, dismissed Williams as a biased witness and discounted his testimony. Canning also met several Acehnese traders in Padang.

In early June, Canning returned to Natal where Prince handed over various notes on the commercial and political situation of the west coast. Prince had been busy compiling those papers while Canning was away. The six documents contained brief histories as well as basic economic information on the various places which Canning was expected to visit. The description contained in the papers revealed the depth of Prince’s knowledge and experience of the area. But the information was organized along a line of argument long-held by Prince. Principally, it was that Tapus was the limit of Acehnese authority, and that even within the so-called Acehnese sphere of influence, several ports, including those under the control of Singkil, did not accept the authority of the Sultan.

It was at this stage that Canning came round completely to Prince’s viewpoint. Canning, unfamiliar with the situation in Sumatra, knew no Malay or Acehnese. He relied on and trusted Prince, whose knowledge of the various places must have impressed him. Meeting Prince first and hearing his version of events in Aceh certainly shaped Canning’s perspective. Prince was not only very competent, but was described as a very charming person. He and his wife entertained well, and would have easily won over Canning.

The change in Canning’s views is evident in two decisions he then made. First, he agreed to take on Hayes, the resident of
Tapanuli, as part of the mission. Hayes, on his way to Nagore, had volunteered his services. Canning probably thought that there was nothing wrong in including Hayes. But as with Prince, Hayes was not an impartial observer of the local scene. He was the official to whom correspondence from the British officials of Nagore was carried by the Anapoorny. Secondly, Canning decided to change his itinerary so that he visited Barus rather than going to the capital as he had planned. Barus, Singkil, and the Acehnese west coast ports were en route to the Acehnese capital, and it could be argued that it made sense to stop at these ports first. But there were political implications. By this itinerary, the Canning mission would be calling on all those ports that were in rebellion before meeting the Sultan of Aceh. The Sultan considered this a diplomatic discourtesy, an act which he feared would encourage further dissent within Aceh.

Canning argued that he wanted to visit the west coast first so as to impartially ascertain the territorial extent of the sultanate, without having to rely entirely on the declarations of the Sultan. In this, Canning differed even from the local British officials, who were willing to concede that the Sultan had legitimate claims over all territories on the west coast as far south as Tapus. Canning suggested that the actual area under the rule of the Sultan might be far more limited, and that within the region supposedly under Aceh, there were independent districts and ports. To determine the real extent of the Sultan’s territories, Canning employed two criteria. The Sultan must not only be able to administer all laws, but also be able to effectively collect revenue and taxes due to him within a geographically defined district before it could be considered to be under Acehnese rule. Canning’s mission became an exercise under which the burden was on the Sultan to prove that he effectively ruled a district.

Canning also learnt from Prince that the ethnic feature could be an additional criterion in deciding the extent of the Sultan’s control. There were districts where the settlers were Malays, not Acehnese. In his report, Canning carefully listed all the districts where the population consisted largely of Malays. According to Canning, the people in such places usually did not recognize Acehnese rule.

**Canning Visits the West Coast**

Canning’s approach was quite unilateral; he did not plan to discuss the matter with the Sultan to find out how Acehnese rulers
delineated the extent of their territories. Even with the two criteria he adopted, there is no evidence that Canning was clear how these could be tested within the Acehnese context. He was not familiar enough with the traditional Acehnese system of administration, nor with the form and practice by which revenue was collected.  

Canning remained a few days at Natal. Just before leaving, he asked Prince to send a note to Singkil explaining the purpose of the mission, and assuring Lebai Dappah that it was neutral in the affairs of Aceh. Rumours that the mission would assist the Sultan continued to be circulated. Canning feared that such reports might harm the mission’s ability to conduct an impartial investigation, and these had, therefore, to be quickly dispelled. Accordingly, Prince wrote to Lebai Dappah.

But let me ask you in what instance you have ever known the Company to act with Deceit? What enmity is there between us that this mistrust should exist? Recall to your recollection the Conduct of the Company on every occasion and then let me know whether you have still any objection to an interview with the representative of the Governor General as a further proof that no enmity whatever subsists on the part of the Company.

The Helen and the Ariel arrived at Barus on 26 July. The village was 5 kilometres further inland from the river-mouth and, according to Canning, had a population of 15,000 under a chief referred to as Tuanku Sultan Baginda Raja. He was leader of the Bataks, and also referred to as the Raja Hulu. Barus had two rajas; the other was the Raja Hilir. Prince had earlier explained to Barus the purpose of the mission, thus a ceremonial welcome awaited Canning. The Raja of Barus voiced his fear of the Acehnese Sultan to Canning. He appealed for British protection against Tapus, which he claimed was acting in concert with the Acehnese Sultan. Barus had earlier sent several appeals for British assistance; the most recent had been submitted by a delegation to Tapanuli led by the Imam of Barus.

Canning, having been briefed by Prince, became further convinced following his discussions at Barus that the port was truly independent, and that the threat from the Acehnese was real. He decided to extend British protection to Barus, and this was only too readily accepted by the Raja. Accordingly, a treaty was signed. By granting British protection to Barus, Canning had exceeded the terms of his instructions, which only directed that he clarify the issue of Barus’s status with the Sultan of Aceh. There was no mention of a treaty.
Canning defended his decision, maintaining that it was of utmost urgency to recognize Barus’s independence and to accord it immediate protection because an attack from Tapus backed by the Sultan was imminent. If British support was not immediately extended and Barus was subsequently occupied by the Acehnese, the question of its independence would be even more difficult to deal with. Canning argued that it was easier to keep the Acehnese out of Barus than to have to expel them later: ‘whereas had I delayed asserting his independence till an acknowledgement of it could be procured from the King, intermediate possession on the part of the Achenese might have thrown unnecessary difficulties in the way’.

Having concluded an agreement with Barus, Canning proceeded northwards into what even he, at that stage, considered as Acehnese territory. But in this Acehnese region, the important issue to him was to determine the limits of the Sultan’s real influence. To help the mission decide on the legality of the Anapoorny’s seizure, the limits of the Sultan’s influence had to be accurately ascertained. Whether or not the Sultan had acted correctly within his rights depended on where the Anapoorny was seized. If the ship was detained outside the limits of his control, the British would consider the act illegal. Based on Prince’s information and from what he could gather at Barus, Canning had come to a fair idea of what the actual area of the Sultan’s authority was. To save time, Canning decided not to dwell too long in the ports that supported the Sultan. Rather, he would concentrate on those places which claimed to be independent.

Canning, nevertheless, called briefly at Tapus, even though he knew the chiefs there supported the Sultan. The visit was to warn Tapus of the British commitment, recently given, to protect Barus. At Tapus, Canning met Teuku Poh Bye, regarded by the British in west Sumatra as the most belligerent of the four ruling chiefs. The others were Tuan Haji Lebai Gunnar, Lebai Cassim, and Teuku Kucheel. He informed Teuku Poh Bye that the British had a treaty with Barus, and advised Tapus against any hostile act towards it.

To the north of Tapus was a series of ports controlled by Lebai Dappah and his family. Canning was keen to meet the Singkil chief, about whom he had heard many favourable comments, especially from Prince. The mission arrived at Singkil on 2 August. Despite Prince’s letter of assurance to Lebai Dappah, the mood at
Singkil was one of wariness. Its fortifications had been further strengthened and a large body of well-armed men from neighbouring ports, including the sons of Lebai Dappah, had gathered to reinforce the defence. Canning sent Hayes ashore with a note inviting the Singkil chief to a meeting. Hayes was acquainted with Lebai Dappah, and the latter readily accepted the invitation.

After the initial tension, the meeting between Lebai Dappah and Canning became cordial. Canning noted Lebai Dappah's insistence that the stretch of coast from Singkil to Susu no longer recognized the Sultan's rule. But there was still the puzzling fact of Lebai Dappah using the title *wakil* of the Sultan in all his correspondence, a point which had also been noted by officials in Bencoolen. Did it mean that Singkil previously accepted the Sultan's authority and hence Lebai Dappah's title, but that he no longer recognized the Sultan? Or was Singkil insisting that it had never been under Aceh? Lebai Dappah's answer that it was an old seal confirmed that it was a title given to him by the Sultan, but did not clarify the existing status.

Canning offered to renew the 1786 agreement signed between the British and Lebai Dappah. By this offer, Canning implicitly recognized the right of Singkil to enter into agreements with a foreign power. Yet when Lebai Dappah asked that Singkil be placed under British protection similar to Barus, Canning declined. He might have been unwilling to overstretch British military commitments in the region. But more likely, Canning distinguished the fact that Barus was Malay and Singkil was Acehnese. Singkil had been part of Aceh, and a commercial agreement with it was about the extent to which he was willing to dispute the Sultan's claim of authority. The matter of renewing the agreement, however, was not provided in Canning's instructions, and again, it must have been Prince who influenced Canning to take this step.

Canning moved on to briefly visit some of the ports said to acknowledge the rule of the Sultan. The port he paid some attention to was Pulau Dua, which marked the beginning of the stretch of coast loyal to the Sultan. In 1813, it was to Pulau Dua that the *Anapoorny* was taken after she was seized by the Sultan, and it was there that the trial was held.

Pulau Dua, also known as Ujong Pulau, was ruled by Teuku Merandie. It had a good harbour, and had once been a prosperous district. Sometime in 1790, Acehnese migrants from the federation of twenty-six *mukim* arrived and opened pepper plantations. But
production of pepper had declined in recent years to only 400 pikuls annually owing to soil exhaustion and general neglect. The population at the time of Canning’s visit was about 200.

At Pulau Dua, Canning met Teuku Merandie and the two chiefs of the neighbouring port of Sebadi. Both chiefs, Keucik Poh Deen and Keucik Sahloo, had sat as judges during the trial of the Anapoorny’s crew. When asked about the hearing, the chiefs claimed that they had little power as judges, and that they merely assented to what had already been decided by the Sultan. This explanation seemed an attempt to avoid making a self-incriminating admission with uncertain consequences when confronted by the British mission. Later, the rajas complained to Jauhar al-Alam that they had been intimidated into making those statements. Significantly, Teuku Merandie and the Sebadi chiefs maintained during their meeting with Canning that they remained loyal to the Sultan.

After Pulau Dua, Canning considered the west coast part of his mission completed. He was satisfied that he had collected all the information necessary to pass judgement on the Anapoorny case. He had, in fact, arrived at a decision and he wanted it to be made officially known. In a letter to the Penang government dated 3 September 1814, he declared that the seizure of the Anapoorny was not legal and, further, that the Acehnese court of law did not pass any sentence on her. Defending himself from possible criticism that he made the decision without a meeting with the Sultan, Canning argued that the Sultan’s side of the case had already been presented by ulubalang loyal to the Sultan and, further, he did not think the Sultan would have any information to add. It is difficult, however, to avoid the conclusion that Canning was simply not interested in what the Sultan had to say.

Canning also justified the obvious haste in deciding on the case by citing the deteriorating condition of the Anapoorny. He argued that a meeting with the Sultan would mean more delay, by which time the condition of the ship would be well beyond repair. That Canning was more concerned with the condition of the ship than resolving difficulties between the Sultan and the British is certainly revealing of his attitude.

Canning in Penang and Pedir

Having made that decision, Canning headed straight to Penang to submit his findings. For most of September, Canning was on the
island. While there he had a chance to meet the various officials and merchants, most of whom were highly critical of the Acehnese Sultan. Their views confirmed a perception of Aceh in Canning’s mind that had been formed following his meeting with Prince.

Meanwhile, Jauhar al-Alam received accounts of Canning’s proceedings at the west coast, and learnt that Barus and Singkil had signed agreements with the British. Annoyed already at being made to wait at the capital, the reports angered the Sultan. Then he heard that Canning had gone to Penang. This proved too much for the Sultan, and in early September, he wrote to Canning at Penang, accusing the mission of stirring up rebellion against his rule in the west coast. He stated in his letter that he would not receive Canning. ‘I therefore must decline receiving you into my presence and as soon as the season permits shall forward an intelligent man to Europe to lay this strange and unprovoked act of aggression before His British Majesty’s Ministers and the British Parliament.’

Canning considered the Sultan’s letter to be so insolent in tone that his first reaction was to end the mission and return to Calcutta. However, unwilling to abort the final part of his expedition, Canning sent Captain D. Jones, commander of the Ariel, to Telok Samoy with a message assuring the Sultan that he was keen to resolve differences between the two governments. He indicated that he looked forward to meeting the Sultan. However, Canning could not entirely hide his feelings when, in refuting accusations that he had incited rebellion, he asked the Sultan ‘to allow it for a moment to be supposed that the representative of the supreme government in India would demean himself by interfering in the concerns of petty villages on the west coast of Sumatra or descent to an attempt to stir up insurrection for the miserable consideration of a few peculs of benjamin or pepper’.

Captain Jones left on 19 September and arrived at Telok Samoy five days later. There, he met the Sultan and Fenwick. The atmosphere was friendly, and Jones was accorded all due respect. He came away with a favourable impression of the Sultan. The meeting cleared some of the Sultan’s unhappiness with the mission’s proceedings, and in a more conciliatory tone, the Sultan, in a letter to Canning, conceded that he might have been misinformed by the reports. He hoped that he would soon be able to receive Canning.

After Penang, Canning headed for the Pedir coast, arguing, as he did in the case of the west coast, that he needed to find out the
extent of the Sultan's control there before meeting Jauhar al-Alam. There was, in fact, another reason why Canning wanted to go to Pedir first. While in Penang, Canning learnt of a betel-nut monopoly awarded by the Sultan to John Dunbar and T. McGee. 

This had led to bitter complaints from other merchants on the island. The leading merchants of the island, Europeans and locals, submitted a memorandum to Canning urging that he take up their grievances with the Sultan. There were also reports that the enforcement of the monopoly by the Sultan had resulted in unrest all along the Pedir coast where betel-nut was produced. Canning was keen to find out if this was true, and how widespread the dissatisfaction there was. Revising the itinerary once again meant a further delay of his trip to the capital. He had earlier postponed a meeting till July, and there was no way now that he could see the Sultan before October.

Pedir, Shilloch, Samalanga, Burung, Sawan, and Pasai were the principal districts on the Pedir coast during this period. These districts acknowledged the authority of Jauhar al-Alam despite unhappiness with the Sultan's control of trade. The Sultan's syahbandar were accepted at Burung, Telok Samoy, and Samalanga. As in the west coast, there were rivalries and disputes among the various districts. Invariably, the Sultan was able to take advantage of the disunity to maintain some influence in the region. Pedir, Shilloch, and Samalanga were the districts regarded as the most loyal of supporters of the Sultan.

Canning spent a much shorter time on the Pedir coast than he did on the west because the more important part of the mission—the Anapoorny case and the Barus treaty—had already been disposed of, and there was no specific assignment in Pedir. He arrived at Pedir on 22 October 1814 but did not immediately meet Tuanku Pakeh Raja Hussein, the ruler of the district, because of disagreement over protocol. Tuanku Pakeh Hussein expected Canning to call on him but, as the British envoy pointed out, in all the other ports the local chiefs had paid their courtesies first to the British mission. Tuanku Pakeh Hussein's reluctance to go on board to meet Canning was partly due to fear for his personal safety, and he sent his brother. Only when he received Canning's assurance that the British intended him no harm did Tuanku Pakeh Hussein agree to visit the mission.

While Canning was in Pedir, there were reports of dramatic political developments in the capital. News reached Canning that in mid-October 1814, Jauhar al-Alam had been overthrown and
that the three Panglima Sagis had called on all *ulubalang* to join in the war against the Sultan. The Pedir chief himself had received a letter from the Panglima Sagis, and in his meeting with Canning, he briefed the British envoy of the latest happenings at the capital.

**The Mission Concludes**

At the end of October 1814, Canning finally sailed to Telok Samoy. This was well over seven months after the Sultan was first informed by the supreme government to expect the mission, and nearly three months past the re-scheduled date of July when Canning was supposed to arrive at the capital. The Sultan had accepted the first postponement. But two further postponements had tested his patience.

As the *Helen* and *Ariel* sailed into Telok Samoy, Canning took exception to the fact that the Acehnese fired no guns to salute his arrival. Soon after the ships had anchored, Canning sent two officials ashore. They were met by the Sultan’s men, comprising Arabs, Chulias, and some Europeans but, as far as could be determined, no Acehnese. The officials of the mission were taken to a building intended as a residence for Canning. There was a letter from the Sultan awaiting Canning. The Sultan was not present, and attempts by the British officials to arrange an audience with him failed. Eventually, the officials handed over Canning’s note.

The Sultan’s refusal to meet the mission was an expression of his annoyance at Canning’s conduct in the west coast. Furthermore, he would have learnt by this time of the rebellion at the capital, and he had little doubt that this was somehow connected to the Canning mission. Earlier, Jauhar al-Alam had waited patiently at the capital to receive the mission and two of his armed vessels were stationed at Telok Samoy to meet Canning in case he turned up there, to escort him to Banda Aceh. But weeks passed without any sign of the mission. The Sultan became worried at the delay, especially when reports reached him that Canning had gone to Tapanuli and Natal. This was followed by the even more disturbing news that the mission had proceeded to Barus and Singkil, and that treaties had been signed between the British and the chiefs there. The Sultan could not but conclude that what was earlier thought to be mere discourtesy by Canning was, in fact, a display of hostility.

The Sultan left the capital in mid-July 1814 and returned to Telok Samoy, partly because the betel-nut harvesting season in
the Pedir coast had begun. But there was another reason. With the mission’s arrival delayed, it had also become politically embarrassing for Jauhar al-Alam to remain at the capital. The impending visit of the mission had earlier been widely publicized by the Sultan at the capital. This had caused the ulubalang to be very suspicious about the purpose of the visit, and there were even rumours that the Sultan ‘intend to sell the Country to the English’. But the Sultan began to look very foolish in the eyes of the orang kaya and ulubalang when he was made to wait while Canning was meeting the Rajas of Barus and Singkil.

At Telok Samoy, the Sultan, in a letter to Canning dated 21 October, regretted that Canning had meetings while in the west coast and in Penang with individuals who were his opponents. He specifically mentioned Hayes from Tapanuli and two Penang merchants, Syed Hussein and James Carnegy, all of whom he accused of continually evading trade duties. He had also come to know that Canning was bearing a letter from Syed Hussein to the Panglima Polim, the leader of the federation of twenty-two mukim who in the past had been hostile to the court, and this distressed him greatly. The Sultan was suspicious about the letter and the purpose of the errand. The Sultan ended the letter angrily:

I want not your commerce ... a commerce that has been nothing but a scene of fraud, murder, and robbery which I am determined while I am King of Acheen shall never take place again. Other nations are willing to pay me Duties and conform to the Laws of the Country, and conduct themselves [with] fidelity, they will suffice for all our wants.

Canning, in turn, was angered by the content and tone of the Sultan’s note. He immediately demanded that the Sultan withdraw the two letters and apologize for having sent them. Only then would a meeting take place. No reply came from the Sultan. On 23 October, Canning wrote to Jauhar al-Alam, declaring that his findings showed that the seizure of the Anapoorny was illegal. The Sultan had, therefore, to pay compensation to the owners of the ship amounting to 102,605 Spanish dollars to cover loss of cargo, repair costs, and interest calculated from March 1813, the date of the ship’s detention.

The Canning mission stayed in Telok Samoy for only three days. On 25 October, the ships set sail for Pedir. Canning was keen to catch up with the latest news on the unrest at the capital. He again met Tuanku Pakeh Hussein, who reported that the rebellion had turned out to be more serious than was earlier thought, and that
some supporters of the Sultan were fleeing the capital. There was tension along the Pedir coast as rumours spread of an impending march by the three Panglima Sagis against the Sultan at Telok Samoy. Canning left Pedir two days later and sailed for India.

Canning submitted a very lengthy report to the Governor-General, containing 146 long paragraphs together with over 50 enclosures. All these provided useful descriptions and information on the Acehnese west and Pedir coasts. In his summing-up, Canning considered the mission as having achieved most of its objectives, although a commercial treaty aimed at resolving some of the existing differences with Aceh had not materialized. He blamed this failure on the Sultan, whose attitude and treatment of the mission he thought were hostile and 'little short of an open declaration of war'. He called for strong action against the Sultan for the discourteous behaviour shown to the mission. Canning recommended four measures against Aceh.

First, Canning called for the destruction of the Sultan's fleet of armed vessels. This would put an end to the Sultan's harassment of trade along the Acehnese coasts. Secondly, Canning proposed the stationing of British cruisers to force the opening up of the Pedir trade to all British merchants. This would make it difficult for the Sultan to implement the betel-nut monopoly. Thirdly, Canning recommended the temporary occupation of Telok Samoy to extract compensation and concessions from the Sultan. If need be, Telok Samoy, with its excellent shelter, could be kept for use by British warships during the monsoons. Finally, Canning advised the expulsion of Fenwick, who was held responsible for introducing policies that had been so damaging to British interests. Canning even suggested a pension for Fenwick if he left Aceh voluntarily.

The recommendations were harsh, and designed to be punitive. Canning's judgement had been too strongly influenced by British officials and merchants in Sumatra and in Penang who disliked the Acehnese rulers, and had always insisted on free access to Aceh's ports. If the proposals were indeed to be implemented, they would strike at the Sultan's attempts at trade control and monopolies. But did Jauhar al-Alam's past actions warrant such retaliation? It could be argued that if there had been offence, this was committed only towards the end when he did not receive Canning. Even this has to be judged against what the Sultan regarded as a series of indignities and even hostility shown towards him by the mission in the west and Pedir coasts. Even Bengal, while expressing satisfaction at Canning's performance in
Aceh, considered the recommendations unduly harsh. They were also impractical. Despite the current difficulties, the supreme government certainly did not consider Aceh a hostile state. By the time Bengal received Canning’s report, the situation in Aceh had become too politically fluid to act.

2. Sultan of Aceh to Lord Minto, 28 October 1811 (FWCP 3 January 1812), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 119, Vol. 42.
3. Sultan of Aceh to Lord Minto, 1 August 1811 [encl. 21] (FWCP 3 January 1812), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 119, Vol. 42.
4. Lord Minto to Sultan of Aceh, 3 January 1812 (FWCP 3 January 1812), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 119, Vol. 42.
5. Sultan of Aceh to Penang, 8 March 1813 (FCCP 10 June 1813), SSFR, Vol. 39.
6. Hormanjee Bomamjee, Bombay trader, to Sultan of Aceh, dated as May 1812, Encl. in letter from Tuanku Haji Quallo to Bengal, undated (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.
7. Sultan of Aceh to Penang, 8 March 1813 (FCCP 10 June 1813), SSFR, Vol. 39.
9. ‘Memorial from Certain Persons from Acheen’ [Europeans who served in Aceh], 23 February 1816 (FCCP 2 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.
10. In a letter denying the accusation of Penang that he had come to Asia on his own, Fenwick provided some background to his career: ‘I received yours and to my great surprise am informed in it that I am in India without the Honourable Company’s License. I was sent out by the Honourable Court of Directors in 1790 to the Appointment of Marine Paymaster and Storekeeper . . .’ C. Fenwick to Penang, 25 September 1815 (FCCP 25 September 1815), SSFR, Vol. 51; London to Bengal, 18 April 1789, Despatches to Bengal (Original Drafts), 1753–1833, Vol. 19 E/4634.
12. G. Siddons to Court of Directors, 10 May 1815, Sumatra, Vol. 28.
15. Penang to Bengal, 4 February 1807, Board’s Collection, F/4/261 3835.
16. W. Grant, Resident of Padang to Bencoolen, 8 May 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 1.
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20. Deposition of Coomba Toomby and Noor Mahomed, 24 July 1813 (FCCP 24 August 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40. Also, deposition of N. Y. Reano, Commander of Sophia, 10 June 1813 (FCCP 24 June 1813), SSFR, Vol. 39.


23. ‘The Chulia Cling or Moorish vessels come yearly from Porto-novo, on the coast of Coromandel, and other places, to the number of 12 or 15 sail of snows, generally of 200 and 300 tons. They come in August and September, and return in February, March, and April, during the fine weather’, T. Forrest, A Voyage from Calcutta to the Mergui Archipelago, London, J. Robson, 1792, p. 40.


25. There is a brief contemporary reference in the Prince of Wales Island Gazette, probably by a Penang trader, of the Chulias along the Pedir coast. ‘Many people from Nagore also intermarry and reside, their progeny are known by the name of Orang Dangan; these people are in general employed by the different Rajahs as writers, accounters, etc.’ Prince of Wales Island Gazette, 5, 213 (June 1819).

26. Bencoolen to Bengal, 2 June 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 1.

27. G. Siddons to Bengal, 28 July 1813 (FWCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

28. Bengal to Bencoolen, 20 August 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 1.

29. J. Prince to G. Siddons, 9 June 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

30. Raja of Barus to J. Prince, undated but probably in June 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

31. Bencoolen to Bengal, 20 July 1813 (FWCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

32. Sultan of Aceh to Tapanuli, undated but possibly late May or early June 1813 (FWCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

33. J. Prince to C. Fenwick, 6 June 1813 (FWCP 20 August 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

34. J. Prince to Poh Bye, Raja of Tapus, undated but probably in June 1813 (FWCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

35. Agreement between R. Broff, Resident of Natal, and Lebai Gunnar, 28 December 1787 (FWCP 12 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.


39. Candapati Chitty, owner of Anapoorny, to Francis Richardson, commercial resident of Nagore and Negapatinam, 24 June 1815, Encl. in letter from Secretary of the Supreme Government, Bengal, to Penang, 10 November 1815 (FCCP 3 February 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.
40. Petrie (-1816) began his career as a writer of the East India Company in 1765, becoming a senior merchant in 1778. Around 1790, he was sent to Madras where he rose to be a member of the council. In 1807, he acted for three months as Governor of Madras. He was appointed Governor of Penang in 1809, and served there until his death in 1816. C. E. Buckland, *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1906, p. 335.


42. Penang to Bengal, 26 August 1813 (FCCP 26 August 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40.

43. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 19 August 1813 (FCCP 26 August 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40.

44. Penang to the Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's ships in the East Indies, 19 August 1813 (FCCP 26 August 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40.

45. Instructions to Capt. E. Rodney of *HMS Africaine*, 20 August 1813 (FCCP 20 August 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40.

46. W. Petrie to Sultan of Aceh, 26 August 1813 (FCCP 26 August 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40.


48. Ibid.

49. Sultan of Aceh to Capt. E. Rodney, 27 August 1813; Sultan of Aceh to Capt. E. Rodney, 28 August 1813; both letters were enclosures in letter from Capt. E. Rodney to Penang, 30 August 1813 (FCCP 2 September 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40.


57. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 30 September 1813 (FCCP 30 September 1813), SSFR, Vol. 41.


59. Che Im held the Penang opium revenue farm in 1811 and 1812.

60. Committee on the ship *Anapoorny* to Secretary of Penang Government, 21 January 1814 (FCCP 27 January 1814), SSFR, Vol. 43.
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61. Sultan of Aceh to Bengal, 20 August 1813 (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

62. Bengal to Penang, 14 January 1814 (FCCP 18 June 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.

63. Ibid.

64. Credential of the King of Acheen's ambassador, 20 August 1813 (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

65. Bengal to Penang, 10 September 1813 (FCCP 15 November 1813), SSFR, Vol. 44.


68. The Anapoorny carried 183 cowans of salt, 180 bales of piece-goods, and a quantity of earthen- and copperware. On her return voyage to Negapatnam, the ship was carrying 450 pikuls of benzoin and 400 pikuls of pepper. The vessel was valued at 20,000 pagodas. Deposition of Syed Naquedah and Hussein Merican of the Anapoorny, 16 September 1813, Penang (FCCP 23 September 1813), SSFR, Vol. 40; Encl. in W. Petrie's minute of 10 August 1814 (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.

69. Haji Qallo to Bengal, undated, Encl. 4 (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

70. J. Monckton, Persian Secretary to Government, to Government, 5 November 1813, Encl. 3a (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

71. Capt. J. Canning, Commissioner to Aceh, to Secretary to Government, 30 December 1813, Bengal Political Consultations, 31 December 1813, Range 120, Vol. 6.

72. Bengal to Bombay, 19 November 1813 (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

73. Bengal to Sultan of Aceh, 12 November 1813, Encl. 19 (FWCP 19 November 1813), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 5.

74. Instructions to Capt. J. Canning, 14 January 1814, Encl. in dispatch from Bengal to Penang, 14 January 1814, SSFR, Vol. 44.

75. Bengal to Bencoolen, 14 January 1814 (FWCP 14 January 1814), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 8.


81. C. Fenwick to P. Carnegy, 13 June 1814; C. Fenwick to Ogilvie and Hutton, 14 June 1814, [Encl. in] memorial from Penang merchants to Penang Government, 23 July 1814 (FCCP 30 July 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
83. Capt. J. Canning to Bengal, 13 May 1814, Encl. 1 in report of Capt. J. Canning to the Secretary to Supreme Government, Bengal, on his mission to Aceh, 24 November 1814, Sumatra, Vol. 27.
84. Bengal to J. Prince, Resident of Tapanuli, January 14 1814 (FWCP 14 January 1814), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 8.
90. Ibid., para. 10.
92. J. Prince to Lebai Dappah, 10 July 1814, Encl. 7 in report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814.
98. J. Griffith to Fort Marlborough, 10 July 1786 (FMC 23 August 1786), Sumatra, Vol. 89; agreement between R. Broff, resident of Natal and Tuanku Haji Lebai Gunnar, 28 December 1787, Encl. 23 in report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814.
103. Capt. J. Canning to Bengal, 18 September 1814, Encl. 38; also Capt. J. Canning to Secretary of Government, Fort St George, Madras, Encl. 40. Both enclosures in report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814.


113. Canning provided no description of Tuanku Pakhe Hussein. Some idea of his appearance was given by George Lindsay, who traded in Sumatra in August 1816 and met the Pedir chief. According to Lindsay, Tuanku Pakhe Hussein 'is a young man about 24 or 25 years of age, stout and strong made and of rather a dark complexion, he generally wear a small chequered cap on his head and he has no beard or Mustaches.' Statement of G. C. Lindsay during hearings before committee of enquiry on the Elphinstone affair, Penang, 27 September 1816 (FCCP 28 September 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.


115. Ibid.


A Sultan Overthrown, 1814–1815

Jauhar al-Alam Dethroned, October 1814

The long political disenchantment against Jauhar al-Alam in the Acehnese capital finally erupted into open rebellion. On 10 October 1814, the three powerful Panglima Sagis marched into the capital with their armed men. According to one account, it was the Queen Mother who had called on the Panglima Sagis to gather at the capital to help defend it against the Canning mission. It seemed that the Sultan had earlier left the capital when Canning had still not shown up. Soon afterwards, Fenwick gave the alert that the mission was about to arrive but there were also reports that it had come to attack the Sultan. This news was credible since it must have been known by then that Canning had signed treaties with Barus and Singkil. Nervous and unsure, the Queen Mother appealed to the Panglima Sagis for help. As it turned out, they seized the opportunity of being at the capital to move against the Sultan. They summoned a gathering of the other important orang kaya, ulubalang, and ulama of Aceh, and then proclaimed the overthrow of the Sultan, citing his un-Islamic behaviour as the main reason.

The Panglima Sagis then turned against the Queen Mother, an act against the entire royal family to prevent any subsequent retaliation. The attack failed as the Queen Mother, certainly feeling betrayed, held out at the palace and maintained contact with Jauhar al-Alam by controlling access to the sea.

The rebellion against the Sultan did not come as a surprise to contemporary observers. There had already been increasing reports of unrest against the Sultan as he tried to tighten control over the country’s trade. So long as he contented himself with collecting nominal port duties, his action was tolerated. But when he sought larger and fuller payments, the opposition grew.

The Politics at the Acehnese Capital

The move against Jauhar al-Alam in October 1814 was a conjunction of several factors. Each by itself might not have been sufficient...
to cause the revolt. Of these factors, the tension between the court and the Panglima Sagis was certainly significant. The conflict between the two sides had eased during the reign of Muhammed Syah and the early part of the reign of Jauhar al-Alam. Yet the difficult relations were always there, as both continually sought to redefine the parameters of their power and authority. Despite inadequate data, it is possible to explore the source of this discord. From what can be gathered, it appears that while Jauhar al-Alam’s allegedly un-Islamic and un-Acehnese behaviour was used against him, there were other equally important reasons for the moves to dethrone him.

The matter which probably gave rise to frequent disputes between the Sultan and the Panglima Sagis was the collection of taxes and duties. In theory, the Sultan had the right to a major share of the taxes, tolls, and port duties, but the mechanics of collection and the apportionment of the proceeds were worked out among the Sultan, the principal orang kaya, the ulubalang, and the Panglima Sagis. The income of the ulubalang, as with those chiefs in the outlying districts, came largely from the duties and taxes they helped collect. The Panglima Sagis and ulubalang collected taxes in the name of the Sultan and retained part of these. In the agrarian interior of Aceh, taxes were levied on forest and agricultural produce. Jauhar al-Alam, for instance, claimed that in the past rulers were entitled to a tenth of all forest products collected and varying rates of taxes on the padi harvest, on the place of residence, and on all agricultural produce. After the period of the Acehnese queens, some of these taxes were probably given to the ulubalang in exchange for their support. Collection and mining of economic products were also farmed out. The Hikajat Potjut Muhamat describes the Panglima Polim of the federation of twenty-two mukim asking for the sulphur concession in return for his support against Jemal Syah. Snouck Hurgronje listed some fourteen different categories of taxes and tributes that were the entitlement of the Panglima Sagis. One of the most important of these was the collection by the Panglima Sagis and the ulubalang of a third of the harvest on all padi land under their jurisdiction. But none of these taxes was as lucrative, or as accessible, as the duties and other collections imposed at the ports. As trade grew, it was likely that the ulubalang and the Panglima Sagis demanded a share of this revenue, more so when the agricultural sector in Aceh declined in prosperity in relation to the pepper and betel-nut districts along the coasts.
Events during this period indicated that the Panglima Sagis enjoyed a share of the port duties. One reference came from a report of Captain John Coombs, who was in Aceh in 1818. Coombs mentioned that the Panglima Sagis had sent a sum of 3,000 Spanish dollars to the Sultan as the latter’s share of port duties. ‘I was also told that a few weeks ago a public remittance of three thousand Dollars was made by the Sagis to the King being his portion of the duties of this Port on certain Commercial transactions here with some Chulia vessels and that shortly a further remittance would be made [to] him.’ Thus, the Panglima Sagis not only had a share, but also participated in the collection of port duties.

There is evidence to suggest that, in the early years after Jauhar al-Alam took over, a dispute over revenue collection had arisen between the Sultan and the Panglima Sagis. This is deduced from the murder in the capital, sometime between 1808 and 1810, of the Sultan’s syahbandar by an Arab merchant, Haji Abdul Rahim. The latter was also described as the leader of a rebellion against the Sultan in 1808 or 1809; both events were probably closely linked. He was later given protection by the Panglima Polim, who then helped to install him as the new syahbandar. As the position of syahbandar was closely connected with the collection of port duties, the replacement of the Sultan’s man by someone backed by the Panglima Sagis reflected a tussle for control.

One issue which could have led to serious dispute was the distribution of the proceeds. The fact that sharing out of port duties was a constant problem was shown a few years later when it figured in a succession dispute. In 1824, the Principal Queen explained that the three Panglima Sagis wanted to divide the proceeds of the duties into four parts. The Panglima Sagis claimed three parts, while the fourth was offered to her son. The Queen’s letter did not, however, specify what duties were referred to. If the Queen’s allegations were true, it lent support to the argument that dividing the port duties had been a contentious issue over the years, and was a source of conflict between the Sultan and his orang kaya and ulubalang.

Of the three Panglima Sagis, that of the federation of twenty-two mukim—the Panglima Polim—usually played a leading role in this matter. He was militarily and politically the most powerful of the three. Although ruling over the interior, the Panglima Polim seemed to have considerable interests at Banda Aceh and in the trading circle during this period. At this time, the Panglima Polim was Tjoet Amat. He moved closely with Haji Abdul Rahim and
Shaik Salim, another Arab trader.\(^9\) Within the Banda Aceh area, a number of *orang kaya* and *ulubalang* were related to him, including Tuanku Kampong Baru, who was his brother. The Panglima Polim was also the brother-in-law of the powerful chief of Telok Samoy, Tengku Karuat.\(^10\)

In pushing for greater control over trade and revenue collection, Jauhar al-Alam could have caused disgruntlement among the *orang kaya* and *ulubalang* at the capital. The shift from Banda Aceh to Telok Samoy signified in some ways his determination to free himself from their restraints and influence. The new measures were intended to reassert the Sultan’s dominant role in commerce and in revenue collection. Furthermore, some of the *ulubalang* might have been displaced as collectors of revenue when European mercenaries were deployed instead. In the past, there were people in such positions as *laksamana* and *panglima laut* serving as the *wakil* of the Sultan. Recent appointments by the Sultan threatened not only the political power of the *orang kaya* and *ulubalang*, but also to reduce their economic opportunities as well. This came at a time when there was already a decline in trade at the capital, with much of it shifted to other Acehnese ports. For the Panglima Sagis and many merchants, the person they blamed for some of the economic difficulties was Jauhar al-Alam, who therefore had to be removed.

There were suggestions that the powerful Arab and Chulia merchants at the capital were openly turning against the Sultan. The Arab merchants were concentrated in a part of the capital known as Kampong Arab. R. Caunter, in his report to Coombs, referred to the place as ‘a quarter of the city inhabited mostly by Arabs, and also the residence of some of the principal merchants. Here was likewise the Shahbundar’s private house.’\(^11\) The *syahbandar*, Haji Abdul Rahim, was an Arab. Cuthbert Fenwick, in a letter to a Penang merchant dated 13 June 1814, complained that the Sultan listened to the Arabs when he was at the capital since they had been paying duties. As events showed, this happy relationship between the Sultan and the Arab merchants did not last. The Arabs felt their commercial position threatened by the Sultan’s attempts to monopolize the trade. Tension between the Sultan and the Arabs was noted in the letter of 13 June 1814 from Fenwick, who claimed that the Arabs were seeking to dominate the trade of Aceh. ‘There are [sic] here a strong party of Arabs who wish to get the trade into their own hands.’\(^12\)

Just as crucial was the stand of the influential Chulias, who must
have also swung against Jauhar al-Alam. The Sultan was not as close to this community as were the two previous rulers, and it is of some significance that there is no reference during his reign to any Chulia being appointed as a close adviser. The seizure of the Anapoorny might have alienated many Chulias. The owner of the ship was well known and probably well connected at the Acehnese capital and in Nagore. Governor William Petrie, in the Penang Council meeting of July 1814, spoke of the unhappiness among Chulias in India over the Sultan's trade policies. The mood among the Arabs and Chulias was crucial. They were so integrated into the distribution and credit system in Aceh upon which so many orang kaya and ulubalang were dependent that, even though they were foreign communities, they must have had some political input. A shift in their support could make a significant difference in the finely balanced political equilibrium in Aceh.

The anti-Sultan moves were initially hesitant, despite the growing dissatisfaction. The Sultan's military position had improved as he had acquired a number of new armed ships in the past few years. He also had several European advisers with some naval and military experience. For a brief while too, the presence of the European advisers, as well as the visits of the Campbell and Lawrence missions, gave the impression that the Sultan was close to the British. This might have led to some caution, especially among the Chulia merchants unwilling to offend the British authorities. But it soon became clear to the merchants at the Acehnese capital that the Sultan's relations with the British were strained. Canning's visit to Barus and Singkil made this apparent to all interested Acehnese. His mission had the immediate effect of undermining the Sultan's prestige in Aceh, and of indirectly encouraging the anti-Sultan forces in Aceh.

The Impact of International Conflicts

International conflict, a matter well beyond the control of the Sultan, also had an impact on Acehnese domestic politics and economics. With the Napoleonic Wars still going on, European markets for British pepper remained closed, contributing to a fall in the world price of pepper. There was also the threat to shipping in the Sumatran west coast because of the presence of French privateers. The disruptions became even more serious and trade unsafe when war was declared between Britain and America in June 1812. British naval power operating in the Sumatran west coast also
caused a reduction in the number of American ships arriving in the region. This had a serious effect on the pepper trade, considering that between 1802 and 1804, seventy-one American ships visited the west coast. The decline would have occurred anyway, because of the glut in the world pepper market and the resulting low price, but the situation worsened because of the war. In 1809, no American ship came, while four ships arrived in 1810, and five in 1811 with the recovery of the pepper market. However, with British enforcement of a naval blockade from 1812, only one American ship, the *Perseverance*, made it through during the entire 1812–14 period.\(^{14}\)

Conditions in the Acehnese west coast became even more difficult for trade when American privateers began harassing shipping during this period of Anglo-American hostilities.\(^{15}\) Largely intended to disrupt British trade and naval activities, the privateers preyed on trading ships and seized cargo, particularly pepper, as booty.\(^{16}\) The most dangerous of these to British shipping was the *Hyder Ally*, a 550-ton American privateer with 22 guns and a crew of 55, which sailed out of Boston on 22 January 1814. In April, she captured a British brig, the *Favourite*, sailing from Calcutta for Australia.\(^{17}\) On 7 May, she took the *Jupiter* at Labuan Haji, but released the ship after removing her cargo of pepper. The next day, the *Hyder Ally* captured the *Mary*, a British ship from Calcutta, and the *Salamanny*, a ship belonging to an Arab from Bombay. A day later, the *Betsy* was taken at Pulau Dua. On 12 May, the American privateer seized the *Maria Chunea*, a ship owned by John Prince.\(^{18}\)

Alarmed by the spectacular success of the *Hyder Ally*, the British sent warships to hunt her down. The *Salsette*, a frigate accompanying the Canning mission, detached herself from her escort duty for a short while to pursue the American privateer. On 12 June 1814, a British frigate, the *Owen Glendower*, succeeded in tracking down and capturing the *Hyder Ally* off the Nicobar islands. She was taken to Penang and put up for sale, and shortly afterwards bought by the British company of Forbes and Brown.\(^{19}\)

The absence of American traders and the general insecurity of the Sumatran coast had a devastating effect on the demand for and the price of pepper. This can be gauged from the fact that, in 1803, American ships took between 30,000 and 36,000 pikuls, or about half the total production of pepper on the west coast. In 1805, American ships had loaded 70,000 of the 80,000 pikuls produced that year. Without the Americans, large quantities of pepper were left unsold. The effect was such that the price of pepper
in the west coast fell to 4 Spanish dollars per pikul from the previous high of between 8 and 10 Spanish dollars, and remained at that level until 1815. Low prices and unsold pepper led to a decline in earnings at a time when the region was just recovering from the 1805–9 period of poor prices, during which some planters had abandoned their pepper gardens. These were then hard times for the Acehnese pepper planters and traders.

At the best of times, the Sultan’s demands were regarded by the west coast as an imposition. But in the circumstances after 1812, they had become even more burdensome. On his part, too, the Sultan had, for the same reasons, experienced a decline in earnings in his trade and port duties. This forced him to be more determined in enforcing his trade control, and in insisting on the recovery from the west coast of duties from previous years that had not been paid, so as to make up the shortfall.

The Pedir Factor

In the final analysis, it was really events in the Pedir coast that explain how all these developments came to a head and led to the overthrow of the Sultan. The Pedir coast had all along been loyal to Jauhar al-Alam, despite the fact that the Sultan had deployed his armed revenue vessels. But even here, the presence of the Sultan, long tolerated, was finally challenged when Jauhar al-Alam intensified his surveillance of the coast in mid-1814. The reason for this move was connected with the Sultan’s decision earlier in the year to grant a monopoly of Aceh’s betel-nut trade to the company of J. Dunbar and T. McGee. (This award was a compensation to the Penang company for losses suffered when the Penang court ruled against it over the ownership of the Anapoorny cargo. Dunbar and McGee had bought the cargo from the Sultan, but the court ruled in favour of the ship’s owners.) The monopoly arrangement also placed the Sultan in a more dominant position in Aceh’s trade with Penang. To make the betel-nut monopoly effective, the Sultan increased patrolling by his armed vessels off the Pedir coast where betel-nut was cultivated.

The Sultan used the occasion of the Dunbar and McGee monopoly agreement to tighten control of the Pedir coast by introducing trade regulations said to have been in force during Iskandar Muda’s period. These regulations granted extensive trade and revenue rights to the rulers. By referring to Iskandar Muda’s trade regulations, Sultan Jauhar was reminding everyone, including the British, that there was nothing arbitrary in the commercial
policies he was adopting. He wanted the provisions of the traditional laws to be used as a basis for any future commercial agreement with the British. Copies of the regulations were sent to Bengal in April and to Penang in May 1814. Although he had talked about applying the Acehnese commercial laws, this was the first time he gave details and made available copies of these regulations. Nevertheless, Sultan Jauhar al-Alam was open to suggestions for modifications, and he also announced that he would reduce import duties for most items from the traditional 12 to 6.25 per cent. The import of some items, such as salt and opium, remained the monopoly of the Sultan.

Writing to Penang in May 1814, the Sultan announced that as of 15 June, trade in Aceh would be allowed only at Banda Aceh and Telok Samoy. In early June, Fenwick wrote to Penang, enclosing translated extracts of Acehnese commercial laws. He also gave details of the duty rates for which all traders were now liable. Prahus bringing pepper from the west coast into the main port were subject to a duty of 6.25 per cent. This rate also applied to all other goods coming in from the outlying districts. Pepper sold to waiting ships had to pay a 6.25 per cent export tax. No export duty was levied on boats taking the commodity to Penang. Fenwick warned that after 15 June all Acehnese prahus not in possession of port clearance from Aceh or Telok Samoy would be confiscated. No mention was made of betel-nut, but one could assume that the rates and conditions would be similar to those applicable to pepper.

**Penang Merchants’ Grievances Against the Deposed Sultan**

There is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that at this point in time, influential sections of the mercantile communities in Penang and Aceh decided that Jauhar al-Alam was proving very difficult, and thus saw in his removal as Sultan a convenient and even necessary course for safeguarding the Penang–Aceh trade. The larger firms such as Forbes and Brown, Scott and Company, and Carnegy and Company sent ships to different ports in Aceh, as well as buying from the Acehnese prahus arriving at Penang. The new trade regulations directly affected the interests of these influential Penang merchants, and events point to the fact that they partly encouraged, if not participated in, the dethronement of Jauhar al-Alam. It was well known to Penang merchants that the Sultan was growing increasingly unpopular in Aceh.
Syed Hussein no doubt played a key role in the move against Jauhar al-Alam. He was a wealthy trader, and a substantial part of his business was with Aceh. His ships collected pepper from the Acehnese west coast and betel-nut from the Pedir coast. He also brought in opium and piece-goods from India, and sold part of these goods to Aceh. Syed Hussein’s trade with Aceh had benefited from his claimed royal lineage, for he was granted exemptions from various taxes and trade duties by Jauhar al-Alam. But this privilege was subsequently withdrawn when Syed Hussein took the Sultan to the Penang court over a debt.  

On 23 July 1814, Penang merchants submitted a memorandum to the government, complaining about the Acehnese trade regulations and the Acehnese grant of the betel-nut monopoly to Dunbar. The memorandum drew the attention of the authorities to the fact that such monopolies and trade regulations were against the practice of free trade. It alleged that under the monopolistic control, the Sultan was paying the betel-nut cultivators only half of what was usually offered by other traders for the commodity. The memorandum urged that the matter be taken up by the Canning mission when it met the Sultan of Aceh. Thirty merchants signed the memorandum, including both European and local traders.

Even as the Penang Council debated on the matter, two prominent Penang merchants chose to openly challenge the monopoly, and to ignore the Sultan’s trade regulations. James Carnegy and Syed Hussein had been signatories of the memorandum, and they now planned to send their ships into Aceh. The ships were reportedly well armed, and clearly aimed to openly defy the Sultan.

At the council meeting in July 1814, debate on the merchants’ memorandum sharply divided the members. The discussion in the council also gave an idea of the extent and value of Aceh’s betel-nut trade with Penang during this period, and the possible impact of a monopoly or enforcement of the Sultan’s blockade on trade in Pedir. Governor Petrie contended that in the betel-nut trade between Pedir and Penang, there were thousands of traders, boat owners, and crew members involved in collecting, transporting, and selling it. Furthermore, the Acehnese used their proceeds obtained in Penang to purchase opium, piece-goods, and other items in the bazaars. All of them, as well as the bazaar stall operators, were already badly hit by the monopoly. There were other implications. Since betel-nut was exchanged by Acehnese traders for goods in
Penang, very little cash was actually taken away. On the other hand, the Dunbar monopoly could lead to an outflow to Aceh of an estimated $40,000 from Penang annually at a time when the island was suffering from a shortage of specie.

Finally, Petrie warned that the betel-nut monopoly could cut off the Chulias from this trade, and should this happen they might decide to stay away from the region altogether. He claimed to have received reports from Porto Novo of unhappiness within the trading community about the Sultan’s deal with Dunbar. If the Chulias stayed away, this would have a negative impact on Penang’s economy. Penang was the destination of Chulia ships en route to or from Sumatra; they brought items such as piece-goods, salt, and tobacco, and took away pepper, tin, betel-nut, dammar, rattan, as well as various goods imported from China. Petrie also noted that each year a large number of Chulias who came with the traders stayed behind to work as labourers and boatmen in Penang.29

J. Erskine, a senior member of the council, took a moderate and even-handed stand by presenting the issue from both the viewpoint of the Sultan’s concern and the interests of the Penang merchants. Erskine pointed out that trade regulations were the prerogative of the Acehnese sultanate, and wondered if the Penang government had the right to interfere.30 He reminded the council that some time back, the Acehnese government had sent Penang a set of proposals on trade regulations, and the authorities had asked for comments from the Penang merchants. According to Erskine, there was, disappointingly, no response from the merchants. On the betel-nut monopoly, Erskine thought that when viewed from Penang’s overall interests, it was not altogether a bad idea. At the very least, the Dunbar contract ensured that the entire Acehnese betel-nut supply would be directed to Penang, thereby forcing traders from other regions to buy the commodity from the island. He added, too, that the price of betel-nut in the Pedir coast had, until the Anglo-American hostilities, been rising because of competition from American traders, but with the monopoly, it could now be stabilized.

Erskine did not believe that the Dunbar monopoly would lead to an outflow of specie to Aceh exceeding the previous level. Even in the past, Acehnese traders bringing betel-nut to Penang received a third of the payment in cash, and the balance in opium and other goods. This ratio was likely to continue. Erskine proposed that a comprehensive trade arrangement be worked out with Aceh by the
Canning mission, to the benefit of both sides. Through appropriate provisions in the proposed treaty, for instance, the Company’s commercial rivals could be kept out of north Sumatra.

The Penang mercantile community, likewise, was split on the Aceh trade regulations. Petrie, in the council proceedings, pointed out that the Sultan’s regulations and monopoly had the support of a number of merchants on the island, who evidently stood to gain from them. Among them were, obviously, Dunbar and his associates.

In the meantime, the Sultan came to know of moves to defy his commercial rulings. In early August, the Sultan complained to Penang that Carnegy and Syed Hussein were planning to send armed ships to Aceh. A short while later, a second letter warned that ships violating Aceh’s trading laws would be seized. Upon receiving the letters, Petrie, in the council meeting of 8 August, called on the Penang mercantile community to refrain from any action that might create further problems between the Penang authorities and Aceh. In particular, he did not want any incident that could complicate the progress of the Canning mission to work out an acceptable commercial arrangement with the Sultan.

Petrie’s own action on a similar subject was, however, not consistent with the advice he gave. On 1 August, the government received a letter from Syed Hussein, notifying it that he had already sent a ship to Pedir. He had instructed his captain to abide by all regulations in Aceh, but to defend the ship if she was attacked. Rather surprisingly, Petrie wrote back approving of Syed Hussein’s action. The reasons he gave were unconvincing, and he ignored his earlier appeal to Penang merchants against taking unnecessary risks in Aceh because of the uncertain political situation. On this occasion, he considered the sending of a ship by Syed Hussein as a normal activity, no different from what the latter had done in the past. He also approved Syed Hussein’s instructions to the ship’s captain: ‘You may rely on every assistance which the Government can afford to your Commercial interest and with my best wishes for your success.’ The other two senior members of the council, Phillips and Erskine, were less ready to sanction Syed Hussein’s plan. Phillips regretted the decision (of Syed Hussein), and feared that any attempt to force trade in ports other than those designated by the Sultan could lead to undesirable consequences. Erskine, likewise, expressed regret at the action, and urged that the recent Acehnese commercial laws and rulings be widely publicized.
The Penang Council's tolerance of Syed Hussein, especially by Petrie, can be explained by the Arab's influential position in the island community. Through his wealth and philanthropic contributions, he emerged as leader of the Arab and Muslim communities. The authorities' sanguine response to his move could also have been because most merchants had, in the past, paid little heed to similar advice from the Penang government or the warnings of Aceh. Furthermore, despite the Sultan's trade regulations and the ongoing naval campaign against the rebel ports, Penang merchant ships had so far not been really endangered. In fact, such risks as did exist during this period came not from the Acehnese, but from American privateers operating in the Sumatran region.

It was around this time that forces in Aceh opposed to the Sultan might have made contact with Syed Hussein, who was well known in the sultanate where he had developed trade links. One of the groups he must certainly have established connections with was the influential Arab community. Two Arab merchants whom Syed Hussein became close to commercially were Haji Abdul Rahim, the syahbandar, and Shaik Salim. Haji Abdul Rahim, as it was later revealed, was Syed Hussein's commercial agent in Aceh. Through him, Syed Hussein must have passed word to the Acehnese merchant community that officials and traders in Penang were just as unhappy with the Sultan's policies, and that Jauhar al-Alam was poorly regarded by the British. Syed Hussein's decision to send a ship to Aceh was not only an open challenge to Jauhar al-Alam, but also a signal to Acehnese merchants that he had the backing of the British. The fact that his ship was allowed to leave Penang for Aceh by the authorities would lend weight to such a supposition.

It is not known whether or not Syed Hussein had any direct role in planning the revolt of the Panglima Sagis. Certainly, in October 1814, the Sultan made the accusation that Syed Hussein had been in touch with the Acehnese ububalang, and alleged that Canning was carrying a letter from Syed Hussein to the Panglima Polim.38 The timing of the correspondence, if true, was significant, because it was made during the weeks when the rebellion took place. Lending weight to the suspicion that Syed Hussein had a hand in events at the capital was the fact that the two key figures in the rebellion were Haji Abdul Rahim and Shaik Salim. Since they were both closely linked to Syed Hussein, it is fair to assume that the latter must therefore have played an important part in events at the Acehnese capital.
But to justify the dethronement of a ruler and to gain popular backing for the move, the reason had to be more than a mere dispute over trade control, sharing of revenues, or monopolies. Jauhar al-Alam’s behaviour gave his opponents grounds to move against him. He was accused of un-Islamic behaviour, and of neglecting the practices of his religion. These were serious charges in Aceh where Islam had always been an important element in society. The Sultan’s consumption of alcohol was criticized, and his preference for Europeans as advisers offended many. Arrayed against Jauhar al-Alam were men with claims to religious respectability, such as the Panglima Sagis, the ulama, and the Arab merchants. A significant proportion of the Muslim Chulias at the capital must also have been alienated by the Sultan.

The dethronement of Jauhar al-Alam was proclaimed in a formal gathering attended by principal orang kaya, ulubalang, and ulama. The last reported dethronement of a Sultan had taken place some forty years earlier, in 1773, when Mahmud Shah was overthrown. After the formal dethronement of Jauhar al-Alam, a jihad or holy war was declared against him, and this was endorsed by the ulama present.

Jauhar al-Alam’s Coastal Forays for Revenue, 1815

Shifting Alignments in the Pedir Coast

Jauhar al-Alam was in Telok Samoy when the rebellion broke out. There was no immediate reaction from him as he remained at the Pedir coast, probably to assess how events would shape up. At the capital, the Panglima Sagis accepted no one as the new Sultan for the moment. None of the Panglima Sagis or the other prominent orang kaya and ulubalang, secure within their respective domains, bid for the throne, but preferred to play king-maker. Moreover, there did not appear to have been any territorial chief, including the Panglima Sagis, strong enough or possessing sufficient legitimacy to claim the title without arousing the combined opposition of the others.

Those opposing the Sultan were, however, not entirely united. They had the appearance of an alliance of very disparate individuals, joined together only by their common opposition to the Sultan. In the west coast, even though there were ports which supported the rebellion, others remained loyal to the Sultan. Then there were ports such as Singkil and Susu which were reluctant to be directly involved in the rebellion. They rejected not just Jauhar al-Alam, but
Acehnese control whoever the ruler might be. The disorder at the capital was seen as offering a possible respite from the Sultan’s armed revenue vessels. The same pattern of alignment was true along the Pedir coast.

Among those opposed to Jauhar Al-Alam, having a common cause did not reduce the rivalry and conflict within their ranks. The rebellion, moreover, complicated some of the existing political alliances. This was particularly the case in the Pedir region where there were four major chiefs at this time—Tuanku Pakeh Hussein of Pedir, the Laksamana of Sawan, Bendahara Kamangan of Shilloch, and Tengku Karuat of Telok Samoy. At the time of the rebellion in October 1814, the Laksamana was the only major chief openly supporting the Panglima Sagis. The other three chiefs traditionally sided with the Bugis line of rulers including Jauhar Al-Alam. Tuanku Pakeh Hussein of Pedir was probably closest to the Sultan. But later, at different times, all these major chiefs switched sides to support the rebellion. Pedir and Shilloch, however, later shifted allegiance back to Jauhar Al-Alam. The alignments were thus liable to alter with the changing fortune of the conflict.

The political shifts of Shilloch under Bendahara Kamangan were because of expediency. Bendahara Kamangan had a long-standing conflict with the Laksamana, and for some time had been expecting an attack from Sawan. The outbreak of rebellion against Jauhar al-Alam gave Sawan an additional reason to attack Shilloch. The Laksamana was said to be waiting for troops of the Panglima Sagis to arrive before marching against Telok Samoy where the Sultan was residing. Should this happen, the invasion force from the capital and Sawan had to pass through Shilloch. Hostilities could be expected to break out the moment troops of the Panglima Sagis and the Laksamana entered Shilloch, and the invasion of Telok Samoy would become a cover to attack Bendahara Kamangan as well. In the end, Bendahara Kamangan, unwilling to face the combined forces of the Laksamana and the Panglima Sagis, declared his support for the rebellion. There was also little to be gained in fighting on the side of the Sultan. The trade of Shilloch, as with other ports along the Pedir coast, was hurt by the Sultan’s blockade of the coast. But Shilloch’s alliance with the Panglima Sagis was at best tenuous, given the continuing conflict between the Laksamana and the Bendahara Kamangan.

The shift in alliance that most damaged the Sultan’s position came from Pedir and Telok Samoy. Tuanku Pakeh was probably...
the most powerful of the Pedir coast chiefs, and his backing of Jauhar al-Alam had helped sustain the Sultan’s political position in the past. However, Tuanku Pakeh’s trade was affected by the Sultan’s attempt at monopoly of the betel-nut trade. Canning estimated that in the years immediately before the new trade regulations, about 200–300 prahus crossed to Penang annually with betel-nut. But in 1814, not more than two or three succeeded in making it to Penang. This might have been an exaggerated assessment, but the effects were obviously telling. “Tuanko Puckier informed Mr Hayes that he has now in his possession a vast quantity of Beetlenut which the King of Acheen it is true prevents his disposing, but which he would rather see all perish than that a nut or the Duty on one should fall into his hands so long as Fenwick is with him.”

Then, in June 1815, a boat belonging to Tuanku Pakeh was seized by the Sultan. She was sending a consignment of betel-nut to the Royal George, a Company ship waiting in Penang, in exchange for bales of cotton bought earlier from the ship’s captain, Charles Gribble. The betel-nut was not ready when the Royal George was in Pedir. Under an agreement, Tuanku Pakeh was to gather the betel-nut and send it to Penang. Gribble had given a letter declaring that the consignment belonged to him. But it turned out to be insufficient to protect the vessel. After the seizure, both Tuanku Pakeh and Captain Gribble complained to the Penang government.

It is not clear why the Sultan took the risk of antagonizing Tuanku Pakeh with the trade blockade. It may be that he did not expect Pedir to be so alienated as to join up with the Panglima Sagis. But Tuanku Pakeh, furious with the Sultan over the blockade and seizure of his boat, persuaded his sister, the wife of Jauhar al-Alam, to return to Pedir. When Jauhar al-Alam learnt of this, he sent a group of men to rescue the Queen. According to an account, the attempt failed when the boat, together with the crew, was captured. Another account attributed the break to Jauhar al-Alam’s taking a new wife. This had offended Tuanku Pakeh. But if true, this might only be one more reason for the break in relations between Tuanku Pakeh and Jauhar al-Alam. Tuanku Pakeh’s shift to the side of the rebels could also have been because of his own marriage to the sister of Haji Abdul Rahim, the syahbandar of Aceh.

The defection of Tengku Karuat of Telok Samoy to the side of the Panglima Sagis also hurt the position of the Sultan. In this case, the Sultan’s trade policies might not have been the main cause.
In fact, the Sultan had been directing all trading vessels to Telok Samoy, and Tengku Karuat, who received a share of all the revenue collected, gained from this directive. Tengku Karuat, however, was said to be the brother-in-law of the Panglima Polim, and it was not unexpected that, once the Panglima Sagis came out against Jauhar al-Alam, he should join them. Tengku Karuat would consider it foolhardy to remain with the Sultan and to face a likely invading force against Telok Samoy. The other reason was the business connection between Syed Hussein and Tengku Karuat. The link was through Haji Abdul Rahim and Shaik Salim, as later events were to show.

The Sultan Attacks Susu

Meanwhile, Jauhar Al-Alam seemed unperturbed by events at the capital, and instead turned his attention to the west coast. Certainly by the end of 1814, he would have learnt of the Panglima Sagis’ declaration of war against him. But there was little he could do against the rebels, especially as he had barely any support left at the capital. Since becoming Sultan, Jauhar Al-Alam had spent only very short periods of time at Banda Aceh. He decided that for the moment there was little purpose in attacking the main rebel group at the capital. Besides, it would also be a difficult and dangerous operation.

The Sultan chose instead to launch an expedition once again against the west coast. It was the pepper-harvesting season and ships would be arriving. There was revenue to be collected from the pepper-rich ports, and this was sorely needed to maintain his fleet of armed ships and fighting men. Resources were especially required at this critical time when he was being challenged. The small coastal ports would also be easier to deal with, and the expected success of the expedition would bolster his authority, and at the same time serve as a warning to rebels elsewhere in the country.

In March 1815, the Sultan and his armed fleet arrived at Susu. As on past occasions, he immediately threw a blockade around Susu and also Singkil, Trumon, and Sebadi. He placed these ports out of bounds to all ships. No trade was allowed until they submitted to his authority. The arrival of the Sultan’s fleet once again alarmed many of the west coast ports. The last time he visited with his armed ships in 1813, the chiefs of the west coast had been forced to deliver tributes and duties. There were those who had hoped that the dethroning
of Jauhar al-Alam and the ensuing civil war would so preoccupy the Sultan that they would be spared from the revenue demands. But there was to be no such relief.

Lebai Dappah, in particular, was worried. In the last expedition, the Sultan had attempted to take Susu.\textsuperscript{49} Lebai Dappah himself had been seized by the Sultan, and his son taken hostage. This time, Lebai Dappah feared not only heavier demands, but that punitive measures might be launched against Singkil and Susu for continued defiance and possible charges of treason. Lebai Dappah had been accused by the Sultan of a serious political offence because of his meeting with Canning in early 1814, and his offer to place Singkil under the protection of the British. Thus, Lebai Dappah, alerted to the impending arrival of the Sultan’s fleet, sent a desperate appeal to Padang and Tapanuli for military help.\textsuperscript{50}

G. Siddons, who had taken over as acting resident of Bencoolen in 1813, wrote to both C. Holloway, resident at Padang, and J. Prince at Tapanuli, cautioning against committing the British to the aid of Singkil.\textsuperscript{51} He reminded them that on 8 May 1813, a similar request from Lebai Dappah was received and had been passed on to the supreme government in India. The Bencoolen authorities had still not heard from India, and pending a decision, the British should not be drawn into an Acehnese internal dispute. There was no treaty obligation with Singkil, and Lebai Dappah could not therefore claim to have been abandoned by the British.\textsuperscript{52}

The same could not be said, however, of Barus. Like Singkil, it wrote to Tapanuli for help. The chiefs there were fearful that the Acehnese would try again to extend their influence to Barus through Tapus. They invoked the provisions of the treaty which they had signed with Canning, under which the British were obliged to come to the assistance of Barus if attacked.\textsuperscript{53}

Prince, who had moved to Natal as resident, recognized the gravity of the situation. He immediately rushed northwards to Tapanuli, to be close at hand to deal with the threat posed by the Acehnese Sultan.\textsuperscript{54} The blockade announced by the Sultan was endangering not only the west coast, but also his interests. Those ports were all important sources of pepper for Tapanuli. For instance, Lebai Dappah’s letter of March 1815 appealing to Prince for help mentioned a consignment of pepper for Tapanuli waiting to be collected at Trumon. ‘I also beg to inform you that my Debts for Pepper is now ready at Troomoon, but as all Communication by Sea is dangerous how do you propose to take it away? For there
are two of the King’s vessels which keep constantly cruising from Pooloo Dua across to Puloo Bananeale. Prince further learnt that the Sultan’s armed ships were cruising around the island of Nias. This was worrisome to Prince because Nias supplied all of the rice requirements of Tapanuli and Natal. Prince, reporting to Bencoolen on the Acehnese blockade of the west coast, pointed out that Natal and Tapanuli imported 4,000 Spanish dollars worth of rice annually from Nias.

By April 1815, news that the Sultan had begun attacking Susu reached Bencoolen. There were also unconfirmed reports that the Sultan’s boats had reached Sorkam and were threatening Barus. Soon afterwards, Prince wrote to Bencoolen claiming that the Sultan had stationed two of his boats at the entrance of the river leading into Barus. Events on the coast were tense and dramatic, and even Siddons viewed the latest turn of events with grave concern. What was particularly disturbing was that Bencoolen itself had inadequate naval capability to deal with any contingency should the situation worsen. He immediately wrote to Sir Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant-Governor of Java, for two cruisers to be sent to the Sumatran west coast for naval duties.

**Siddons Disapproves of Prince’s Actions**

The matter took on an even more serious and dangerous complexion when an encounter occurred between two Acehnese armed ships and a cruiser belonging to Prince. The two Acehnese boats had been sighted close to Tapanuli. Prince took the offensive and detained one of the ships. He then wrote to the Sultan of Aceh and to Fenwick, informing them of the seizure and issuing a strong warning against further Acehnese provocation of Barus. Barus, he reminded them, was under British protection and an attack on it would have serious consequences.

Siddons adopted a more restrained approach to what was happening along the west coast. As with Prince, he was apprehensive, particularly with regard to the safety of the two British settlements. He also accepted that the treaty obligations to protect Barus must be honoured. But he differed from Prince in assessing the Sultan’s intentions on Barus. Writing to Prince on 10 May 1815, Siddons pointed out that in the Sultan’s blockade proclamation, Barus was not mentioned as one of the ports placed out of bounds to ships. Despite the reports that the Sultan’s boats were near Barus, Siddons...
did not believe that the place was in any immediate danger. Siddons took a less alarmist view of the situation, and referring to past dealings with Aceh, he was sure that the Sultan respected British power in the area.

Siddons also questioned Prince's action in seizing one of the Sultan's armed boats off Tapanuli. He pointed out that, from his own information, the Acehnese cruisers had been forced by bad weather to enter Tapanuli. At the time of the detention, the ships had not committed any offence, nor had they acted in a manner that could be deemed belligerent and hostile. Siddons reminded Prince that the Sultan's armed fleet had so far been operating well within Acehnese territorial waters. Outside Acehnese waters, there had been no reports of the Sultan attacking vessels that were under the protection of the British.

Siddons acknowledged that the activities of the Sultan's expedition could be disruptive to trade along the west coast. But the Sultan had given advance notice to the British that he was acting to bring rebellious ports into submission. It was a matter in which the British could not interfere. Siddons further reminded Prince that both the supreme government in Bengal and Canning felt that the British should take a neutral stand in disputes between the Sultan and his subjects on the west coast. Prince's detention of the Sultan's cruiser was considered by Siddons to be interference of an unfriendly nature against Aceh, and could not therefore be condoned.

Siddons was critical of Prince for persisting in sending his ships into areas where hostilities between the Sultan and rebel ports were imminent. At least one cruiser, the *Phoenix* from British-administered Padang, was known to have been sent into such an area. Not only was he exposing the boats to unnecessary risks, there was a danger that such incidents could lead to conflict between the Company and the Acehnese. Siddons was aware that Prince's antipathy towards the Sultan was connected to the trade of the Natal Concern. Prince's commercial activities were well known, and Siddons's main objection was that the resident was using the Company's resources to advance his own interests and that of the Natal company. The separation of his private function and official status, as with even the assets, was blurred. Siddons insisted that these should be kept separate. 'I cannot consider either your own or Mr Holloway's boats in any other light than the craft of private Merchants. These boats certainly do not belong to you or to Mr Holloway as residents or public officers of Government.'

While critical of Prince's actions with regard to the recent...
Acehnese expedition, Siddons chose also to be firm in dealing with the Sultan. He shared Prince’s view that the security and independence of Barus had to be protected as a buffer against a possible Acehnese threat to Tapanuli, and also because there was a treaty obligation. Siddons therefore wrote to Jauhar al-Alam informing the Sultan that Barus had come under British protection. He protested that two ships flying British colours had recently been harassed in the vicinity of that port. Siddons advised the Sultan, therefore, to refrain from actions that might force Bencoolen to take retaliatory measures against Aceh.

Jauhar al-Alam responded immediately to the letter. He professed surprise at the treaty arrangement between Barus and the British, and stated that he learnt of this only from Siddons’s letter. The Sultan claimed that it was his father who sent Acehnese to help develop Barus. Since then, Barus had submitted tributes annually to Aceh. Nevertheless, Jauhar al-Alam was willing to accept the newly signed treaty between Barus and the British. But he expected that in return, the British should recognize his authority in the territories he claimed, and noted that Siddons at least acknowledged that Acehnese territory extended south to Trumon. The Sultan reminded the British that all traders were required to abide by Acehnese laws when they were in Acehnese territories.

In June 1815, a British warship, the Owen Glendower, made a transit stop at Tapanuli. Prince saw a chance to deal effectively with the threat from the Acehnese; he asked the commander of the Owen Glendower to cruise northwards to drive away the Acehnese armed vessels. The commander turned down Prince’s request, stating that such a mission exceeded his orders. He offered, however, to refer the matter to Bencoolen when he reached there.

Meanwhile, Bengal made known its disapproval of Prince’s recent action in the west coast. Writing to Bencoolen, it concurred with Siddons’s view:

It was not proper that a Gentleman in Mr Prince’s subordinate situation should address the Govt of an independent Prince (for such is the King of Acehen whatever may be the actual condition of his Power) on a subject involving the issues of Peace and War without reference to any superior authority, or still less should he have anticipated as he has in his letter to Mr Fenwick, the determination of the British Govt respecting the course of conduct to be pursued toward the King and his cruisers. In fact the intimations contained in Mr Prince’s letter amount to a declaration of War.

The Bengal letter further acknowledged that the Sultan of Aceh
Relations between Siddons and Prince continued to be strained over developments in the Acehnese west coast. Siddons soon began to have doubts about the reliability of Prince’s assessments and comments on events in the region, and concluded that some of the information was intended to cause alarm and thereby influence Bencoolen to take measures that would benefit the long-term interests of the Natal Concern. He also felt that Prince’s actions exceeded his authority, such as when he sent an armed cruiser to waters around Barus and the detaining of the Sultan’s revenue ships without reference to Bencoolen.

Siddons pursued the matter of Prince’s insubordination and action without consultation of superior authority. In a letter to Bengal, he disclosed that Prince had, without the knowledge of Bencoolen, signed a series of treaties with local rulers, whereby Prince promised support and protection to them in return for supplies of produce such as pepper, camphor, and benzoin at negotiated prices and quantities. Under the agreements, no one could trade in those commodities except the chiefs. In the case of Barus, Bugis troops of the Company were assigned to prevent any Malay or Acehnese from going into the interior to collect the jungle items. Only Barus Bataks had access. Siddons managed to obtain copies of some of these agreements, which he sent to Bengal. The agreements were with Barus, Ampallo, Ujung Gading, Passaman, and Si Kilang. Siddons resented the fact that Prince was expanding his own private interests at Tapanuli and Natal by using the Company’s name and resources.

Bengal took note of Siddons’s complaint. In December 1816, Prince was in Calcutta on a business visit. The Bengal government was anxious to have him answer in person some of Siddons’s charges. But before he could be called, Prince had left for Sumatra. Writing to Siddons, Bengal agreed that there was an urgency ‘of requiring from that Gentleman an Explanation of his proceedings and a statement of his sentiments generally regarding the existing system of administration in the settlement of Tappanooly and of the outsettlements in the Island of Sumatra.’ However, Prince was not without supporters who admired the manner in which he brought the Natal Concern back to profitability, as well as maintaining some law and order in the waters around Tapanuli. He had not hesitated to act against what he regarded as common criminal and piratical activities or the intrusion of the Sultan’s armed
ships. In 1813, he had sent sepoys into Barus to hunt Poh Heen, an Acehnese, and in 1816, he asked for additional sepoys to be sent to Badiri, a district in Tapanuli where the chief, an ally of his, had been murdered.

Following his return from Calcutta in January 1817, however, Prince pursued a less vigorous course in political events on the Acehnese west coast. He became preoccupied with his own business problems. Furthermore, he had not entirely recovered from the devastation of the French attack on Tapanuli in 1809, and in subsequent years, he reportedly had to clear the heavy debts suffered both by him personally and by the Natal Concern.74

Meanwhile, the campaign of Jauhar al-Alam against the west coast ports was running into stiff resistance. In Susu, the inhabitants held out against the Sultan’s attack of March 1815, despite suffering heavy damages.75 Unable to defeat Lebai Dappah’s people, the Sultan withdrew and headed instead towards Singkil, the main object of his expedition.76 But he found Singkil too heavily fortified. The Sultan decided not to be drawn into any protracted fighting, and shifted his attention instead to the smaller ports. Here, he was more successful, and he took as prisoners several chiefs who had opposed him.

Despite the Sultan’s campaign, there was reportedly minimal disruption to trading activities in the area. In the ports acknowledging the Sultan, trade proceeded as usual. This was further helped by the return of American traders. Hostilities between the British and the Americans had ended in February 1815, and the British blockade of Sumatra was lifted. Demand for pepper picked up again in Europe, and with that the price of the commodity also rose. In 1815, some nine American ships turned up in the Acehnese west coast.77

**The Detention of the *Hyder Ally***

There remained the risk of ships being captured by the Sultan. There was, in fact, one such detention of a British-owned ship in the west coast at the time of the Sultan’s campaign. The ship was the same *Hyder Ally* which, as an American privateer, had caused problems to British shipping in the area. In May 1815, the *Hyder Ally* was sent by her new owners to trade in the west coast. At Labuan Haji, the ship was stopped by the Sultan.78 The vessel was not boarded and, seizing an opportunity, she made her escape. But she left behind the captain and seven other crew members,
who eventually made their way back to Penang. The incident took place as the Sultan and his expedition were preparing to leave the west coast, and sometime in June 1815, the pull-out was completed.

Coming so soon after the Anapoorny incident, as well as what was regarded as the discourteous treatment shown to the Canning mission, Governor Petrie, without any hesitation, sent the Company cruiser *Ariel* under Lieutenant Jones to demand an explanation from the Sultan of Aceh about the brief detention of the *Hyder Ally*.\(^79\) It was certainly to remind the Sultan of the willingness of the British to act decisively to protect their subjects and their shipping. The *Ariel* had earlier been part of the Canning mission, and Jones had had the opportunity of meeting Jauhar al-Alam when in September 1814 he was assigned by Canning to carry a letter to the Sultan.

The *Ariel* first touched at Telok Samoy, but Lieutenant Jones learnt that the Sultan was not there.\(^80\) The warship then proceeded to Banda Aceh, reaching there on 27 June 1815. There, the *Ariel* found the Sultan who had arrived with his fleet the day before. Lieutenant Jones learnt that the capital had by this time fallen completely into the hands of the rebelling *orang kaya* and *ulubalang*, and that the Queen Mother had fled to Pedir. When the Sultan turned up at Banda Aceh, he was prevented from landing by the Panglima Sagis. The Sultan’s fleet was, however, allowed to obtain provisions.

Jones went on board the *Munsoor* to meet the Sultan. He noted that besides the *Munsoor*, the flagship of the fleet, the Sultan had four or five other vessels. During the meeting, the Sultan admitted that there was an insurrection, and that several west coast chiefs had revolted against him. Jones recorded: ‘All the Chiefs on the west coast [refused] to Comply with the King’s demands of the revenues, excepting the Chiefs of Analaboo, Tampatuan, and Pulu Dua, to whom it appears the King is much pleased with.’\(^81\) The Sultan narrated how he had launched attacks on those who opposed him, taking them one at a time. There had been stiff resistance at Singkil and Susu. At Tellapoor, which previously had acknowledged his authority, the Raja, Dato Besar, made an attempt on his life. The Sultan claimed that, overall, his expedition had been successful. As Jones observed, ‘There were several chiefs on board the King’s vessel confined in Iron, and who I understood will be hanged in a short time.’\(^82\)

The discussions then turned to the matter of the *Hyder Ally*. According to the Sultan, the new owners of the ship, Forbes and Brown, owed him 17,500 Spanish dollars and he had been unable
to have that claim settled. In a letter to the Penang government handed over to Jones, the Sultan elaborated that Forbes and Brown had taken goods from Aceh on credit, but had still not paid for them. The Sultan wrote, ‘Certainly sir, you will not dispute my right to make ships trading to my country pay for the goods they purchase either of myself or any other living under my protection.’

Having raised the matter of the Hyder Ally with the Sultan and obtained an explanation in writing, Lieutenant Jones left Banda Aceh on 29 June and returned to Penang.

The Election of Syed Hussein as Sultan, April 1815

In April 1815, the Panglima Sagis finally found a new ruler. The man chosen to succeed as Sultan was Tuanku Syed Hussein Aideed, usually known as Syed Hussein, a wealthy Arab merchant residing in Penang. The Panglima Sagis declared that Syed Hussein was the descendant of a previous Sultan of Aceh, and therefore had legitimacy to the throne. The reference was to Sultan Jemal al-Alam Badr al-Munir, who ruled Aceh from 1703 to 1726, said to be the grandfather of Syed Hussein. He was overthrown in 1726 by the three Panglima Sagis. It was, in one sense, ironic that about ninety years later, the Panglima Sagis should try to enthrone Sultan Jemal’s grandson. The Panglima Polim of the federation of twenty-two mukim involved then was the father of the present chief.

The Panglima Sagis Decide on Syed Hussein

There were several reasons why the Panglima Sagis invited Syed Hussein to be the new Sultan. One of these was the desire on the part of the Panglima Sagis to defeat Jauhar al-Alam decisively. The dethronement had been announced in October 1814, but Jauhar al-Alam had remained defiant and managed to hold out with a formidable force at Telok Samoy. More than that, he was still able to take a military initiative, as seen in the offensive he launched against the west coast. There was, as yet, no direct military encounter between the Panglima Sagis and the Sultan.

The Panglima Sagis believed that appointing a new Sultan would destroy the lingering support and affection which Jauhar al-Alam could still command. In the absence of a new ruler, Jauhar al-Alam could always expect to win back the acceptance of former supporters, those presently opposed to him. The Sultan still enjoyed certain prerogatives valued within the Acehnese society and which
no orang kaya, ulubalang, or panglima sagi could exercise, even though, in practice, many of these powers were greatly diminished. The Sultan was also needed to deal with foreign powers as he was the only one with the authority to represent the sultanate. Finally, the institution was still revered, and there were those who remained loyal to Jauhar al-Alam simply because he was Sultan.

A new Sultan was also necessary as a rallying point against Jauhar al-Alam. The Panglima Sagis and the ulubalang were too divided, and no one among them was strong enough or sufficiently trusted to be undisputed leader in this challenge. It had therefore to be someone new, and from outside the existing order of orang kaya and ulubalang. There had been some discussion that someone from the present royal family might be installed to replace Jauhar al-Alam. But the Sultan’s children were still too young. Jauhar al-Alam’s uncle Teuku Chut, the brother of Muhammed Syah, was said to have passed away. The whereabouts of Teuku Chut’s two sons were not known.85

Syed Hussein fitted some of the requirements expected of a serious contender to the throne. As a descendant of a past Sultan, he claimed legitimacy to the throne. Thus, he would be acceptable to the ordinary Acehnese who valued such credentials. As an Arab and a Syed, he belonged to a community highly respected in a Muslim society such as Aceh. If the reason for Jauhar al-Alam’s dethronement was his un-Islamic behaviour, then the replacement should be someone regarded as religiously correct. Furthermore, Syed Hussein had, over the years, maintained links with Aceh through trade. As someone from outside the mainstream of Acehnese politics and uninvolved in the rivalries and disputes, he was acceptable to the Acehnese orang kaya and ulubalang.

Other important considerations included Syed Hussein’s wealth and influence in Penang. To fight Jauhar al-Alam required vast resources, which the orang kaya and ulubalang did not have or were unwilling to expend. Jauhar al-Alam’s position was supported by a naval capability unmatched by any of the ulubalang, and which the Sultan used quite tellingly against settlements along the coasts. The forces of the Panglima Sagis were largely land-based. Only Syed Hussein had the money and the armed ships to challenge those of Jauhar al-Alam.

Finally, there was Syed Hussein’s influence, particularly his friendship with European officials and merchants. Generally, the Panglima Sagis were known to be distrustful of foreign powers to
the point almost of xenophobia. This time, they were willing to tolerate the European links enjoyed by Syed Hussein. This was shown by the fact that they wrote directly to the Penang government in April 1815, informing officials there of the dethronement of Jauhar al-Alam, and later to announce that Syed Hussein had been invited to be Sultan. The difference this time could have been that the Panglima Sagis had been briefed on the fact that the backing of Penang officials was crucial, not only against Jauhar al-Alam, but also against the European mercenaries around him. Accordingly, the protocol of announcing a change in regime was made.

It is likely, too, that Syed Hussein was a choice made first by the mercantile community in Aceh, and that the Panglima Sagis were subsequently persuaded, with little difficulty, to accept the selection. The two men at the capital who mobilized the merchants against Jauhar al-Alam, and who provided the vital link between Syed Hussein and the Panglima Sagis, were Haji Abdul Rahim and Shaik Salim, prominent Arab merchants. Both were also business associates of Syed Hussein. It is very likely that it was these two who played a most important part in engineering the nomination of Syed Hussein. Having secured the appointment of Syed Hussein, the two men would have advised the Panglima Sagis to write to Penang. It was out of character for the Panglima Sagis to communicate with an outside authority on what was essentially an internal Acehnese matter, unless it was someone else who had given them the idea.

Syed Hussein was a very prominent merchant in Penang, and certainly one of the wealthiest. His family left Aceh in the 1770s for Riau, and later settled in Kuala Selangor where they built up a flourishing trading business. When Penang was established, Syed Hussein shifted his trading base to the island and became one of the first settlers. He soon became associated with several European merchants, and later established ties with John Palmer of Calcutta. Known as the prince of merchants, Palmer was a most influential figure in official circles in Calcutta.

Syed Hussein's wealth was based largely on his trade in Aceh. He was granted trading privileges by the Acehnese court, and these included exemptions from payment of certain port duties. This privilege was evidently given because of his royal descent, and might have been made either by Muhammed Syah or Tuanku Raja when he was Regent. There is also a report that the privileges were
conferred by Jauhar al-Alam. These exemptions helped Syed Hussein’s business, and he soon acquired a fleet of ships. His ships called regularly at Susu and Singkil, and through this, he must have established links with Lebai Dappah. 89

From the start, Syed Hussein was accepted as leader of the local Muslim community. He also counted among his acquaintances officials on the island. The *Prince of Wales Island Gazette* reported the occasions when he threw parties to which the local European dignitaries and merchants were invited. His wealth and influence on the island are illustrated by the fact that in July 1815 when the Penang government was short of ready cash, it turned to Syed Hussein for a loan of 50,000 Spanish dollars. Syed Hussein agreed to the loan at 12 per cent interest. 90 In August 1816, the Penang government obtained a second loan of 30,000 Spanish dollars from him. 91 Furthermore, the official residence of the Governor was rented from Syed Hussein.

Syed Hussein’s influence in the Penang community was such that in May 1815, he was mentioned as a leader who could assist the authorities in the defence of the island from a possible attack by American privateers. Given the presence of several American armed vessels in the area, there was concern about a surprise raid. The defence of Penang was still inadequate, and local support might have to be mobilized. British officials felt that Syed Hussein was the only person who not only could gather the Malays, but also keep them under control. ‘Syed Hussein may be called upon to collect and keep within his own compound as many Malays as possible, when under his eye armed with expectation of their active service being called for, the probability of them committing excesses within the town will be best guarded against.’ 92 This assessment was made just two months before he was invited to be Sultan of Aceh.

Relations between Syed Hussein and Jauhar al-Alam had turned acrimonious a few years earlier over a disputed debt. Syed Hussein had taken the matter to the Penang courts. Annoyed that the matter was brought before a foreign authority, Jauhar al-Alam withdrew all trading privileges previously granted to Syed Hussein. It is also possible that Syed Hussein’s close trading links with Lebai Dappah were a factor which further strained relations between the two men, especially at a time when the Sultan was attempting a trade blockade of Singkil and Susu. The Sultan might have been displeased with the Syed’s commercial links with rebellious Singkil, and the Syed, in turn, must have been unhappy that his trade on the west coast
had to face increasing restrictions. Syed Hussein's ships were now subjected to the same duties as other trading vessels, although whenever possible they evaded payment. By late 1814 when the Sultan introduced new commercial regulations and deployed armed ships, the situation in the Acehnese coasts had become very inconvenient and difficult for the trade of Syed Hussein. The alternative, which was to simply ignore the new ruling, was more tempting, although risky. Syed Hussein and Carnegy attempted to do just that in August 1814. But for ships trying to get past the surveillance, there always remained the danger of capture by the Sultan. The Anapoorny and the Hyder Ally were examples of the high risks involved.

Given the known unhappiness of Penang and some Acehnese merchants, Syed Hussein could have encouraged or even instigated groups at the capital to dethrone Jauhar al-Alam. He might also have indicated his willingness to be considered a candidate for the vacant throne after a decent interval had lapsed. Thus, what had started off initially as objections to the Sultan's trade regulations became an ambitious drive to take power in Aceh himself. In this, some European merchants might have expressed to him their backing.

Syed Hussein Prepares to Leave for Aceh

In July 1815, Syed Hussein received a formal invitation from the Panglima Sagis to become Sultan of Aceh. When the news became known, it probably caused some excitement in Penang society. Syed Hussein behaved correctly, and dutifully notified the Penang authorities. He had been expecting the invitation, having indicated his willingness to accept the title, and certainly was in regular touch with the opponents of Jauhar al-Alam in the days just before the rebellion.

On 11 August, he invited J. MacInnes, the Malay translator of the Penang Council, to his home to inform him of the invitation he had received. He briefed MacInnes of his plans, and explained that because of his age and his business involvements in Penang he was declining the offer. Nevertheless, he intended to send his second son, Syed Abdullah, who was only sixteen years old, to be the Sultan.

Later in the month, Syed Hussein announced that he was making a trip to Aceh. His stated purpose was to call on his aged sister, and to visit the tombs of his ancestors. But he also let it be known
that if the Panglima Sagis insisted that his son Syed Abdullah be installed as the Sultan while they were in Aceh, he would comply with the request. It was clear to all, given the timing and the nature of his preparations, what the real purpose of Syed Hussein’s trip was. He was already busy fitting out a fleet of armed ships that was more suited for war than for a social visit.

Syed Hussein’s statement was cautiously worded. The trip was described as a social one so that there would be no difficulties with the Penang authorities. He was aware that, although he had sympathizers within the Penang government, if it was admitted that the purpose was to contest the Acehnese throne, there might be objections raised from other quarters. Questions might be asked as to why the Penang authorities allowed a trip that was known to be politically motivated and hostile to a neighbouring state.

At this stage, a majority of Penang officials and merchants were warm towards the idea of Syed Hussein as the new Sultan of Aceh. Jauhar al-Alam was, in recent months, regarded by these groups as most troublesome and unfriendly. There was hope that Syed Hussein, as the new ruler, could restore political stability in Aceh and help create better conditions for trade. Relations between Aceh and the British authorities were also expected to greatly improve, given the fact that Syed Hussein was on good terms with various government officials. His friends and trading associates also anticipated the opening up of new opportunities for themselves, should Syed Hussein take over the rulership.

On 14 August 1815, the Penang Council approved Syed Hussein’s trip to Aceh. There is no doubt that most Penang officials were fully aware of the real purpose of the visit. Despite this, there was no move to prevent him from leaving the island, except to issue a caution that he should not engage in any activity in Aceh that was military in nature. The caution was given without real conviction, and Syed Hussein probably sensed this. He assured the authorities that he had no plans to assemble a military force against the deposed Sultan, but few really believed him even then. He insisted that he was just an ordinary merchant, and had no vessels of war. For the forthcoming trip, he was arming his vessels merely against possible attacks at sea by pirates.

Syed Hussein took out four ships from his merchant fleet, and armed three of them heavily. These were the Kota Java, the Fattelraman, and the Ghurib. There were also reports that he managed to assemble about 200 former sepoys, and placed them under the command of a Penang Arab named Syed Mohamed. It
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was a small force, but formidable enough against Jauhar al-Alam. In any case, Syed Hussein expected that much of the fighting, should there be any, would be borne by the Panglima Sagis and other ulubalang in Aceh.

As Syed Hussein and his fleet were about to sail, a ship of Jauhar al-Alam, the *Revolutionaire*, turned up at Penang. She was commanded by Captain N. Hamm, said to be an Englishman. Hamm soon came to know of Syed Hussein’s preparations to leave for Aceh. He immediately lodged a complaint with the Penang authorities, claiming that Syed Hussein had loaded his ships with vast quantities of military equipment and supplies for use against Aceh.

Since a complaint had been made, the authorities had to take up the matter, and Petrie immediately instructed R. Caunter, the Superintendent of Police, to make the necessary investigation. Caunter together with W. Wright, the Deputy Master Superintendent, inspected Syed Hussein’s ships. Both men reported to the government that they found no military equipment or supplies on board the ships in excess of what was necessary for defensive purposes. The question, of course, was how much arms constituted defensive purposes, and on this occasion, the committee’s definition favoured Syed Hussein. With that, Syed Hussein received clearance from the Penang authorities to leave.

Syed Hussein departed shortly afterwards, and headed towards Pedir. There was, by this time, no pretence that the expedition was anything but political in objective. After a voyage of about a fortnight, the fleet arrived at Pedir where Syed Hussein was welcomed by Tuanku Pakeh Hussein. At Telok Samoy, Tengku Karuat, the chief of Telok Samoy, also pledged his support. Telok Samoy, long used by Jauhar al-Alam, now became an ally of Syed Hussein and his son.

Syed Hussein’s Son Is Enthroned as Saif al-Alam

Syed Hussein then sailed for the capital. There, he was warmly received by Haji Abdul Rahim, Shaik Salim, the Panglima Sagis, and those orang kaya and ulubalang opposed to Jauhar al-Alam. According to an account, Syed Hussein was installed as the new Sultan in a ceremony conducted a few days after his arrival. In accordance with tradition, the new Sultan gave presents of gold to the Panglima Sagis and other Acehnese dignitaries. About three days later, he dutifully abdicated, and Syed Abdullah was appointed

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by the Panglima Sagis as the new Sultan, taking the title of Sultan Syarif Saif al-Alam Syah. Once more, presents of gold were distributed. One of the first tasks of Saif al-Alam as Sultan was to write to Penang in November 1815, informing the authorities of his enthronement and extending the friendship of Aceh.\textsuperscript{103} Syed Hussein himself wrote in the same month to John Palmer of Calcutta, informing him that his son had been installed as the new Sultan. The letter was significant as it confirmed the close links between Syed Hussein and Palmer. The commercial character of the link was reflected in Syed Hussein's reference to an opium deal with Palmer. 'I have no additional instruction to give you regarding the purchase of my opium at the ensuing rate. When I get to Penang I shall make you further remittances.'\textsuperscript{104} Syed Hussein took the opportunity to ask Palmer to send thirty sepoys, some muskets, and several barrels of gunpowder, requesting that these be sent directly to Aceh, and that the expenses be charged to his account.

Syed Hussein's letter to Palmer made reference to Scott, a Penang merchant and also a trading partner. Since there were a number of traders by the name of Scott on the island, it is not clear which one of them he was referring to. The two most likely were William Scott and Robert Scott, merchants in Penang who had traded for a long time in Aceh. Robert Scott, in particular, was respected for his knowledge of the Malays and of affairs in Sumatra.\textsuperscript{105} He was evidently in the Syed Hussein–Palmer circle, and, being in the confidence of Syed Hussein on the Aceh affair, might even have been consulted in the planning of the offensive. There is, therefore, a suggestion of wider participation in the move against Jauhar al-Alam by the Penang mercantile community. Thus, to Palmer, Syed Hussein added: 'I shall not enter into any particulars regarding the affairs of Acheen as my friend Mr Scott will inform you fully on that head.'\textsuperscript{106} From the letter, it is clear that, even though Syed Hussein was still in Aceh and the installation had just taken place, Scott already knew the details of the political challenge to Jauhar al-Alam.

Palmer, on receiving the letter, immediately sought permission from the supreme government to send the military supplies to Aceh. In December 1815, he submitted a list of items requested by Syed Hussein.\textsuperscript{107} However, the supreme government turned down Palmer's application. The authorities reminded him that the British still recognized Jauhar al-Alam, and that the present struggle for power was strictly an internal affair in which the British should not interfere.\textsuperscript{108}
Meanwhile, having been formally installed as Sultan, Saif al-Alam, together with his father, turned his attention to the elimination of Jauhar al-Alam. By this time, Syed Hussein was further strengthened by the arrival of four more of his ships from Penang. Jauhar al-Alam was reported to have been sighted somewhere along the Pedir coast. Accordingly, Syed Hussein's fleet sailed to Pedir, Samalanga, and Telok Samoy in search of him. Then a report came that the deposed Sultan had fled to Pasai. Upon this, Tuanku Pakeh offered to march overland against Pasai, with Syed Hussein coming in with naval support. As it turned out, Jauhar al-Alam had already left Pasai and was heading towards Penang.

**Jauhar al-Alam in Penang, 1815–1816**

Even as Syed Hussein and his armed ships were on their way to Aceh, Jauhar al-Alam was already preparing to leave for Penang and Bengal. He planned to call on the Governor-General, to bring before him issues affecting Aceh–British relations. He headed first for Penang, to obtain fresh supplies of arms and ammunition. Such supplies, as well as various provisions, had to be replenished for a renewed campaign against the west coast, and to deal with the rebellion at the capital. Penang was the one place conveniently close by where such essentials could be acquired.

There were other reasons for the visit. The Sultan wanted an opportunity to sort out business matters with merchants he had been dealing with. Accounts had to be squared and bills settled. These had become all the more pressing given recent developments. He needed to assure the merchants that he was still the Sultan, and that all contracts remained binding. Arms were an important item of purchase by the Sultan in his trade with Penang merchants, although, as he complained, the consignments he received were sometimes not quite the quality that he had expected.109

Jauhar al-Alam was also keen to meet Penang officials to clarify issues, especially the matter of the commercial regulations, which were affecting Aceh–Penang relations. These matters had to be resolved, perhaps more so at a time when he was seeking Penang's assistance against his opponents.110 Finally, Jauhar al-Alam was hoping that he could persuade the Penang government to restrain Syed Hussein from continuing his offensives against him, convinced that it had the power to stop Syed Hussein as the latter was a subject of Penang.

The poor physical condition of the European advisers was another
reason why Jauhar al-Alam and his party travelled to Penang. The long campaign in the west coast had taken a toll on the Sultan’s men. Fenwick reported that many of those under him, including Europeans, had fallen ill and died. Dysentery and cholera were the two sicknesses described in his letters. Fenwick wrote that he himself was ill, and several of the Europeans who arrived at Penang several weeks earlier had come to seek medical treatment and recuperation.

The arrival of Jauhar al-Alam and his fleet of eight ships surprised Penang, and proved awkward to the authorities. The civil war in Aceh was being followed closely by the Penang community, and had become a favourite topic of conversation, especially among the merchants, because the outcome was bound to have implications on Penang’s trade. Earlier, most people in Penang had expected the war to end very quickly in favour of Syed Hussein, and that Jauhar al-Alam would be in full retreat. Instead of fading from the political scene, he now showed up in Penang.

After anchoring at Penang harbour, the Sultan sent a note to the Penang government seeking a meeting with the Governor. Jauhar al-Alam was probably the first ruler from any of the surrounding states to ever turn up at Penang for a visit. In other circumstances, a welcome befitting a Sultan’s status would have been laid out. Moreover, regular contact had been maintained with Jauhar al-Alam since he became ruler, effectively from 1805, and Penang itself had sent J. C. Lawrence bearing gifts to him in 1811. The Sultan’s assistance had been sought by the British in the campaign against the French, and in the Java expedition, Jauhar al-Alam had readily offered help.

Instead of according him a welcome, the Penang government, because of recent events, refused to allow him to land. J. MacInnes was sent to advise the Sultan that he was not to come ashore, and that his ships were not to move from their positions in the harbour. The Penang government would see to it that necessary provisions were sent to the Sultan. Erskine, the member of the council known to be most sympathetic to Jauhar al-Alam, proposed that the Sultan should not be charged for the provisions. The reason given by Governor Petrie to the council on 9 December 1815 for not allowing the Sultan to come ashore was that Jauhar al-Alam had recently shown disrespect to the Governor-General by not receiving the Canning mission. As such, Penang could have no cordial dealings with Jauhar al-Alam until fresh instructions were received from Bengal. The Governor also held that as the outcome
of the civil war in Aceh was still unclear, the position of Penang had to be one of neutrality. Therefore, it could not have any communication with Jauhar al-Alam which might be construed as support for him. As events were to show, the declared neutrality of Penang officials was questionable, especially since some of the decisions made so far had favoured Syed Hussein.

The Penang government further defended its decision on the grounds that there were several merchants waiting to take the Sultan to court over various business disputes and these could turn out to be very unpleasant for all sides. This was indeed true, and one purpose of the Sultan’s visit to Penang was precisely to resolve such differences with the merchants concerned. Hints of this aspect of the visit were revealed when Fenwick himself sought to recover money from various European merchants. At this time, Anthony Dragon, a well-known trader, was acting as the principal commercial agent on behalf of the Sultan in Penang. Merchants mentioned as having business links with the Sultan were David Brown, John Dunbar, John Ogilvie, Thomas Hallyburton, and James Carnegie, among the most prominent of the European merchants on the island. The Sultan also traded with European merchants in Malacca, including the owners of one of the largest firms there, Patrick Clarke and Alexander Hare.

These business connections were not without problems and misunderstandings. Some of these difficulties arose from non-performance of contracts. Goods were sometimes not delivered by one party, or payments were not made. The practice of settling debts by allowing one merchant to take over the claims of another against a third party, including those involving Jauhar al-Alam, led to much misunderstanding. Thus, the Sultan discovered that he was in debt to Forbes and Brown for a deal which he originally made with the firm of Clarke and Hare. In all these, the Sultan saw himself as a victim of unfair practices or non-fulfilment of contracts. Therefore, some of the detentions of ships by the Sultan had arisen from such disputes, resulting in European traders complaining of piracy and seeking recourse from the Penang government. Yet considering the large volume and frequency of commercial transactions, the number of such commercial disputes was indeed small.

As Jauhar al-Alam waited in the harbour in December 1815, Syed Hussein returned to Penang with four of his ships. Sailing past the deposed ruler’s fleet, Syed Hussein was well satisfied that he had accomplished what he had set out to do in Aceh, with his
son installed as Sultan. There was his business in Penang now to take care of, especially with new opportunities open to him in Aceh. More importantly, he wanted to be in Penang to mobilize resources to ensure the complete defeat of Jauhar al-Alam. The cultivation of links with local officials had also to be continued.

Jauhar al-Alam took the occasion of Syed Hussein’s return to lodge a complaint against the Arab with the Penang government. The deposed Sultan urged the authorities to investigate the recent doings of the Syed in Aceh. The complaint of Jauhar al-Alam was, however, turned down with no discussion in the council.

His European Advisers Desert Him

There were more set-backs for the Sultan. In early January 1816, Fenwick and the few remaining European advisers quit the service of the Sultan. This was not a sudden decision on their part. The signs were clear to the mercenaries during the previous year that there were troubled times ahead in Aceh. With Jauhar al-Alam deposed, the prospects in Aceh were no longer promising to the mercenaries. At the best of times when Jauhar al-Alam was Sultan, conditions in Aceh already held many hazards, such as disease and death. What had kept them was the prospect of profit, but even this now seemed bleak.

The Sultan was shocked and dismayed by this decision of his European advisers, and undoubtedly saw this as an abandonment of his cause. In disappointment, he reassessed Fenwick as someone unreliable and untrustworthy. In fact, a rift between the two had already developed back in Aceh. In October 1814, Fenwick’s message to the Queen Mother about Canning’s mission precipitated developments that provided the Panglima Sagis an excuse to gather at the capital, and subsequently to dethrone the Sultan. Jauhar al-Alam was angered by Fenwick’s poor judgement on that occasion, and by his hasty action in contacting the Queen Mother. Jauhar al-Alam also came to realize that his close association with Fenwick had been used by his opponents to dethrone him.

What caused the two to finally split was the discovery by Jauhar al-Alam, on the morning of 6 January 1816, of a letter to the Penang government prepared by Fenwick in his name. The Sultan had not been briefed on the contents of the letter. In many ways, Jauhar al-Alam had been too trusting, to the point of being naïve and careless enough to allow Fenwick to handle much of his official correspondence without supervision. By his own admission, Jauhar
al-Alam did not care to check what was written in many of the letters sent. On this occasion, when the royal seal was about to be affixed, the Sultan, unhappy with Fenwick’s recent action in Aceh, asked about the contents. When Fenwick became evasive, the Sultan became more insistent. When the letter was reluctantly shown to him, Jauhar al-Alam claimed that he was shocked by what was written. Later, in a letter of his own to the Penang government, he described his horror at discovering that the contents and the tone of the letter were contrary to his own views and feelings. According to Jauhar al-Alam, the letter in question was antagonistic in tone and would have further harmed relations between him and Penang.

Fenwick retaliated by writing to the Penang government, but he made no reference to the allegations made by Jauhar al-Alam. In seeking to absolve himself from all blame, he wrote that the Sultan was solely responsible for all the difficulties he was presently in. He accused the Sultan of muddling through his own affairs and squandering his money among bad company. According to Fenwick, the Queen Mother and the large number of relatives and retainers were extravagant in their lifestyle and spent whatever revenue the Sultan could obtain. Fenwick claimed credit for the recently improved revenue of the ruler.

The dispute between the Sultan and Fenwick further demoralized a sickly and dispirited group of European mercenaries, and they decided that the time had come for them to leave Jauhar al-Alam. The European advisers came out in support of Fenwick, and in a joint letter on 23 February 1816, they made much the same allegations against the Sultan.

The Penang government duly took note of the letters received. The turn of events did not entirely surprise Penang officials and merchants. This seemed a replay of the occasions when the European mercenaries similarly deserted Sultan Muhammed Shah. Many of the officials were acquainted with Fenwick and the other European mercenaries, and their departure at a time when things were looking bad for Jauhar al-Alam was not totally unexpected.

The break with Fenwick did not change the overall attitude of Penang towards Jauhar al-Alam. There was some sympathy expressed for the deposed Sultan, and a feeling that he had probably been well-meaning but very naïve. But they also felt that they had been proven right in their warnings all along about the European mercenaries. Petrie acknowledged Jauhar al-Alam’s letter of complaint against Fenwick with some kind words of advice. But
beyond this, the reaction was that Jauhar al-Alam had very much himself to blame for the political mess he was in, and for the poor relations between him and the British authorities. There was now the question of what to do with Fenwick, who in 1809 had been barred from residing in Penang. The Penang Council decided to send Fenwick to India, but he appealed against the decision, pleading that he was very ill. He was subsequently allowed to go to Malacca, where he died shortly afterwards. 126

He Seeks Support among Penang Chinese

As Fenwick had resigned, Jauhar al-Alam wrote to the Penang government on 8 February 1816, asking for the secondment of an adviser. This was turned down. 127 Another request made on 15 February met with the same response. 128 With Fenwick and other Europeans gone, Jauhar al-Alam was anxious to get replacements. Not only was he looking for men more reliable than his former European mercenaries, but through this official channel he hoped to recruit a person acceptable to Penang, and in a position to help repair relations. But with so much bad feeling built up against Jauhar al-Alam over the last few years, and with the prospect of a new Sultan with a Penang background likely to be firmly established in Aceh, the government was reluctant to entertain such requests. 129

In April 1816, Jaufar al-Alam decided not to proceed to Bengal, but to return to Aceh. He had been away from Aceh for nearly four months. The pepper-harvesting season in the Acehnese west coast had begun, and trading ships should be arriving. It was time, therefore, that he return with his fleet to enforce the collection of duties. There was also the challenge of Saif al-Alam and the rebellious ulubalang. They had to be dealt with, and further absence would make his task more difficult later on.

Despite the failure to gain access to the Penang authorities, the visit was not altogether a fruitless one for Jauhar al-Alam. He had managed, at least, to obtain fresh provisions for his ships and, reportedly, to have somehow replenished his stock of military equipment and supplies. 130 In early April, a complaint was made to the Penang authorities, presumably by supporters of Syed Hussein, that he had taken on board his ships large quantities of military supplies. 131 The government ordered an immediate investigation, but a check showed no supplies in excess of what had originally been brought. There were persistent reports
that the Sultan bought cannons and other military supplies from the company of David Brown.\textsuperscript{132}

What was, however, more significant were the later accounts that Jauhar al-Alam had enlisted the support of several Penang Chinese. The most prominent among them was Koh Lay Huan, more popularly known then as Che Wan.\textsuperscript{133} It was said that Koh and about twelve other Chinese from the island had joined the Sultan, and were to sail on the \textit{Fatta Salim} for Aceh. Several more Chinese were expected to leave later. How Jauhar al-Alam managed to establish contact with these Chinese is unclear, considering that the authorities had barred him from landing. One Acehnese account described how Jauhar al-Alam frequently managed to slip off the boat at night disguised as a member of the crew. Fenwick gave a less flattering account, of Koh, an arak farmer, bringing regular supplies of liquor to the Sultan: ‘Since the wretched dastardly Man the King of Acheen came here Mr David Brown’s slave Debter Cheewan the Arrack Farmer was sent to him to supply his wants and furnish him with that for which he would sacrifice a thousand Kingdoms vizt. ardent Spirit.'\textsuperscript{134} The arrangement between the Sultan and Koh to recruit Chinese fighting men could also have been made through the Queen Mother, who was allowed to go ashore where she had rented a house.

Koh was described by the Penang government as a revenue farmer of arak. He obtained the liquor farm for Jamestown in 1806, and for Georgetown for the 1810–11 period.\textsuperscript{135} Koh was Kapitan Cina of Kuala Kedah in the 1780s, and was one of the first settlers when Penang was established. Later, Francis Light made him Kapitan Cina in Penang. It is likely that Koh had come to know Jauhar al-Alam earlier through trade.\textsuperscript{136}

The involvement of Koh on the side of Jauhar al-Alam indicated the beginning of a split in opinion within the Penang mercantile community over the civil war in Aceh. It was a division referred to in Petrie’s minute of 28 July 1814, in which he spoke of the lack of consensus among Penang merchants in response to the Sultan’s introduction of commercial regulations. This split arose because some merchants who already enjoyed trading ties with the Sultan hoped to benefit further from the new regulations. They, therefore, did not raise objections to the regulations. Koh and several well-known Europeans did not sign the petition of 23 July 1814 against the Sultan’s regulations. Koh could even have been part of a merchant group that was in competition with Syed Hussein and his associates.
Koh’s involvement on the side of Jauhar al-Alam was significant. As Kapitan Cina, Koh commanded the resources and support of many Chinese. He belonged to the Chingchew Hokkiens, one of the dominant groups in Penang at that time. He was also a member of several revenue farm syndicates, and through these was linked to other wealthy and powerful Chinese merchants on the island.

Koh’s relationship with the Sultan, thus, suggested that the politics of the Acehnese civil war had begun to get entangled with the alignments and divisions in Penang society. First, within the Chinese community, there were competing groups, of which Koh represented one powerful segment. Among the Penang Chinese, rival groups were beginning to fight for control of certain lines of economic activities. The most important of these were the revenue farm rights and trade. Koh’s support of Jauhar al-Alam could have been an attempt by his faction to expand into the trade of Aceh. There were, at this time, references to two other Chinese trading with Aceh. They were Che Seong and Che Toah, both of whom were prominent merchants who controlled several revenue farm syndicates of which Koh was also a member. Like Koh, they were Chingchew Hokkiens. Che Toah and Che Seong were not only traders, but also deeply involved in Penang’s revenue farms. In 1816, they made a successful bid for the arak and opium farms. Except for the 1827-8 period, their syndicate dominated these two revenue farms up to 1830. Che Toah was leader of the group until he was murdered by rival secret society members in 1827. (It is possible, too, that Che Im, mentioned earlier in the Dunbar-McGee betel-nut monopoly of Aceh, was part of the Chingchew group.) It appears, therefore, that for commercial reasons the faction of the Chingchew Hokkiens represented by Che Seong, Che Toah, and Koh sided with Jauhar al-Alam.

Secondly, there are indications, inadequate though these may be, that business links between European and Chinese merchants were a factor in explaining the different alignments in the Aceh dispute. More is known about those who supported the Sultan. For instance, during the Dunbar trial of 1813, it was revealed that the Anapoorny cargo kept at Dunbar’s warehouse was sold to Che Im, a prominent Chinese merchant on the island. Che Im dealt not only with Dunbar but, as testified in court, also with Fenwick. Part of the Anapoorny cargo was used to settle an account which Fenwick owed Che Im. Thus, through Che Im, there was a tie-up between the Sultan and Dunbar.

Similarly, Koh was a trading partner of Brown. Since Koh dealt
with the Sultan, it was not surprising that Brown himself should eventually come into the picture. Such a link was, in fact, alleged in one of Fenwick's letters to Penang, and there were rumours at that time that Brown had sold arms to the Sultan. Another known connection was that between James Carnegy and two Chinese, Che Seong and Che Toah. It is possible that there were some business tie-ups between the Chingchew Hokkiens and the Europeans, and at the same time, a Chingchew link with the Acehnese Sultan. The two tie-ups could not be entirely separated, and together they form a broader context of the involvement of Chinese and European traders at this juncture of the political conflict in Aceh.

Koh's involvement with Jauhar al-Alam could also have been through an association with Stamford Raffles, who must have known Koh when he was serving as secretary to the Penang government. Both were prominent within their communities, and must have come into some contact in the small society on the island. That there was a friendship is supported by the fact that in January 1819, Koh's eldest son, Koh Kok Chye, accompanied Raffles on his historic trip to Singapore. Was it because they already knew one another that they soon developed the same sympathy and support for the position of Jauhar al-Alam, or was it their links with Jauhar al-Alam, developed quite independently, which later helped build a friendship between Raffles and Koh? What remains uncertain is when the friendship began. What is underlined in all these relationships is the fact that Aceh was an issue far more relevant and topical during these few years in Penang society than is generally realized.

2. Deposition of Nicholas Fischer, 20 November 1814 (FCCP 26 November 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44. Fischer, from Danzie, went out to Bengal in 1807, and later tried a career as an indigo planter. When this failed, he sailed to Aceh where, in February 1813, he joined the Sultan. He claimed to be a member of the Sultan's council, and was in Aceh at the time of the rebellion led by the Panglima Sagis. He defended his role in Aceh and was very critical of Fenwick, whom he blamed for the Sultan's difficulties. Fischer left Aceh and arrived in Penang in November 1814.
7. He was also referred to as Haji Abdul Rahman, but was better known in Aceh as Teuku Haji Brahim. His father was Apri Saleh. T. J. Veltman, ‘Nota over de Geschiedenis van het Landschap Pidie’, *TBG*, 58 (1919): 15-157.
8. ‘Panglima Polim sent a letter to me, which my friend will look at, that letter is in the hands of Mr Poynton, and the Governor will observe what is written in it. The two [sic?] Sagis receive the duties—three parts of which they retain and one fourth they proposed giving to my son but the Mother of the king ordered this fourth to be divided into six shares . . .’ Puteri Siharibulan (Principal Queen of Aceh) to Governor of Penang, 20 February 1824 (FCCP 19 February 1824), SSFR, Vol. 94.
9. Capt. John Coombs reported in January 1818 that Panglima Polim, who came to Banda Aceh to meet the British mission, stayed with Shaik Salim. ‘I was afterwards told that he had brought not more than 5 or 600 hundred followers and had himself come down the river in a small canoe rather than create any delay. He went to reside with Sheikh Sallem a worthy merchant here.’ Diary of Capt. J. Coombs, Saturday, 22 January, SSFR, Vol. 137.
10. ‘. . . [Saiful al-Alam] after his departure from here was persuaded to remain at Tulloh Samowy the chief of which is Tuankoo Graoot, the brother in law of Tuankoo Mooda Sri Perkasa [Panglima Polim], the most powerful of the Sagis Chief . . .’, R. Caunter to Capt. J. Coombs, 19 January 1818, Encl. in report of Capt. J. Coombs, 1 February 1818, SSFR, Vol. 137.
12. C. Fenwick to J. Carnegy, 13 June 1814 (FCCP 30 July 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
14. Instructions had been sent out by the supreme government at Bengal to seize all American ships in territories under British control. Penang responded by informing India that ‘the necessary instructions have been issued at this Presidency and to the commanding officers at Malacca for the seizure and detention of all American Ships and vessels entering any of the ports subject to the authority of this Government and for the safe custody and preservation of every part of the cargo conformably to the orders to that effect from the Supreme Government.’ Penang to Bengal, 20 March 1813, SNL, Vol. D4.
15. Capt. P. C. Foster, Commander of the *Gloster*, to Penang, 10 June 1814 (FCCP 18 June 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
16. At least five such privateers were reported, among which were the *Jacob Jones*, the *Hyder Ally*, and the *Constitution*. 

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Capt. P. C. Foster, Commander of the *Gloster*, to Penang, 10 June 1814 (FCCP 18 June 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
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18. General letter from Penang to senior officers of His Majesty’s ships and vessels lying in Madras Road, 8 June 1814, SNL, Vol. D10. In June 1814, Penang sent out letters providing intelligence to British shipping in India of the movement of sighted American privateers.
23. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam to Penang, 15 May 1814 (FCCP 25 June 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44. It is likely that the copy of the ‘Adat Aceh’ presented to Penang, and subsequently deposited at the India Office Library in 1819, was sent either along with this letter or not too long afterwards. It could only have been within this context that the ‘Adat Aceh’ was sent. See G. W. J. Drewes and P. Voorhoeve, Adat Atjeh, VKI, 24, ’s-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1958.
24. C. Fenwick to Secretary of the Penang Government, 4 June 1814 (FCCP 18 June 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
26. Memorial from Penang merchants, 23 July 1814 (FCCP 30 July 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
27. F. Baptist, Acting Secretary to Sultan of Aceh to Penang, undated (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
29. ‘The second class of our inhabitants consists of the Chooliars or people from the several ports on the Coast of Coromandel. The greater part of these have long been inhabitants of Queda and some of them born there, they are all shopkeepers and Coolies, about one thousand are settled here, some with families, the vessels from the coast bring over annually 1,500 or 2,000 men, who by traffic and various kinds of labour obtain a few dollars with which they return to their homes and are succeeded by others.’ Francis Light to Governor-General of India in Council, 25 January 1794, in ‘Notices of Penang’, JIAEA, 5 (1851): 9.
30. Minute by J. Erskine, 28 July 1814 (FCCP 30 July 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
31. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 8 August 1814 (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
32. F. Baptist, Acting Secretary to Sultan of Aceh to Penang, undated (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
33. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 8 August 1814 (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
34. Tunku Syed Hussein to Gov. W. Petrie, undated (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
35. Gov. W. Petrie to Tunku Syed Hussein, 1 August 1814 (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
36. Minute by W. E. Phillips, 9 August 1814 (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
37. Minute by J. Erskine, 9 August 1814 (FCCP 10 August 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.
38. ‘You were, I also am informed, furnished with a letter through the
machinations of Syed Hussain to Pungamallec Pollam [Panglima Polim] an inland
chief, who has no commerce or no interest in any commerce . . .’ Sultan Jauhar al-
Alam to Captain J. Canning, 21 October 1814, Encl. 45 in report of Capt.
J. Canning, 24 November 1814.
Tarich Aijeh dan Nusantara, Medan, Pustaka Iskandar Muda, 1961, p. 415;
40. Panglima Polim to Tuanku Pakeh Hussein, undated, received on 15 October
42. ‘Account of the Coast of Pedier and Acheen from Personal Observations’,
Prince of Wales Island Gazette, 5, 213 (June 1819).
43. Tuanku Pakeh Hussein to Capt. J. Canning, 10 October 1814, Encl. 42 in
report of Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814; Tuanku Pakeh Hussein to Capt.
J. Canning, undated, received together with above letter, Encl. 43 in report of
Capt. J. Canning, 24 November 1814.
45. Tuanku Pakeh Hussein to Penang, 19 June 1815 (FCCP 7 September
1815), SSFR, Vol. 50; Capt. Charles B. Gribble, Commander of the Royal George,
to Penang, 24 October 1815 (FCCP 28 December 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.
46. ‘Tjarita Asal Sultan jang Sakarang ini Poenja Bangsa dari Boegis’,
Unpublished manuscript, National Museum (Bat. Gen. 221), Jakarta.
47. ‘The King of Acheen and Mr Fenwick left this place some months back in
two or three small vessels owing to the disaffected state of the Inhabitants,
immediately after their departures, their houses were pulled down. We are now
building a small Battery of three Guns for the protection of the place.’ This was
expressed by Tengku Karuat to Lieut. D. Jones, Commander of Ariel, to Penang,
21 June 1815 (FCCP 27 June 1815), SSFR, Vol. 49.
48. Proclamation of Sultan of Aceh to all merchants and captains of trading
ships, 15 March 1815, SSFR, Vol. 30; J. Prince to C. Fenwick, 28 April 1815
(FWCP 11 July 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.
49. Bencoolen to Bengal, 4 April 1815 (FWCP 11 July 1815), Bengal Political
Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.
50. Lebai Dappah to Tapanuli, 24 March 1815, Encl. in letter from J. Prince
to Fort Marlborough, 25 March 1815, Sumatra, Vol. 28.
51. G. Siddons to C. Holloway, 11 April 1815, Encl. in letter from Bencoolen
to London, 10 May 1815, Sumatra, Vol. 25.
52. G. Siddons to J. Prince, 11 April 1815, Encl. 5 in letter from Bencoolen to
London, 10 May 1815, Sumatra, Vol. 27.
53. Bencoolen to Bengal, 4 April 1815 (FWCP 11 July 1815), Bengal Political
Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.
54. J. Prince to Bencoolen, 5 May 1815 (FWCP 11 July 1815), Bengal Political
Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.
55. Lebai Dappah to J. Prince, 24 March 1815, Sumatra, Vol. 28.
56. J. Prince to Bencoolen, 28 April 1815 (FWCP 4 July 1815), Bengal
Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.
57. Lebai Dappah to C. Holloway; C. Holloway to Lebai Dappah, 31 March 1815, Encl. (FWCP 11 July 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

58. Raja of Barus to J. Prince, undated, Encl. in letter from J. Prince to Fort Marlborough, 28 April 1815 (FWCP 23 August 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

59. G. Siddons to T. S. Raffles, 2 May 1815 (FWCP 23 August 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 32.

60. J. Prince to Fort Marlborough, 14 May 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

61. J. Prince to C. Fenwick, 15 May 1815; C. Fenwick to J. Prince, 6 June 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

62. Fort Marlborough to J. Prince, 10 May 1815 (FWCP 23 August 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

63. G. Siddons to J. Prince, 6 June 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

64. G. Siddons to J. Prince, 11 April 1815 (FWCP 11 July 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

65. G. Siddons to J. Prince, 10 May 1815 (FWCP 23 August 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.

66. G. Siddons to Sultan of Aceh, 2 May 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 30.


68. J. Prince to Capt. B. Hodgeson, Commander of Owen Glendower, 8 June 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 33.


70. Bengal to Rear-Admiral Sir George Burlton, Commander-in-Chief, 13 September 1815 (FWCP 13 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 33.

71. Bengal to Bencoolen, 4 July 1815 (FWCP 4 July 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 33.

72. G. Siddons to Bengal, 30 September 1815 (FWCP 27 January 1816), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 39.


74. Personal Records of John Prince, 1/0/6/19, 10L, pp. 867–915.


76. Bencoolen to Bengal, 6 June 1815 (FWCP 15 September 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 33.

78. Deposition of Nathaniel Peny, Chief Officer of *Hyder Ally*, 30 May 1815 (FCCP 1 June 1815), SSFR, Vol. 48; Forbes and Brown to Secretary to Penang Government, 27 May 1815 (FCCP 1 June 1815), SSFR, Vol. 49.

79. Penang to Sultan of Aceh, 10 June 1815 (FCCP 10 June 1815), SSFR, Vol. 48; Penang Government to Lieut. D. Jones, 10 June 1815 (FCCP 10 June 1815), SSFR, Vol. 49.


82. Ibid.

83. Sultan of Aceh to Penang, 20 June 1815 (FCCP 12 July 1815), SSFR, Vol. 49.


85. One of the sons was said to be in Malacca.


87. The Panglima Sagis to Penang, 20 July 1815 (FCCP 11 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.


91. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 17 August 1816 (FCCP 31 August 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.

92. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 27 May 1815 (FCCP 1 June 1815), SSFR, Vol. 49.

93. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 15 May 1816 (FCCP 21 June 1816), SSFR, Vol. 44.

94. J. MacInnes to Secretary of the Penang Government, undated (FCCP 11 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.

95. Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 13 August 1815 (FCCP 24 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.

96. Minute by W. Phillips, 14 August 1815 (FCCP 24 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.

97. Penang to Bengal, 21 August 1815 (FCCP 24 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50; W. Bennet to J. MacInnes, 19 August 1815 (FCCP 24 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.

98. Syed Hussein to Penang, 21 August 1815 (FCCP 24 August 1815), SSFR, Vol. 50.

99. Sworn testimony of Syed Mohamed, 19 October 1816 and 30 October 1816, Court of Judicature of Prince of Wales Island (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 59.

100. Capt. N. Hamm, commander of *Revolutionaire*, to Penang, 13 October 1815 (FCCP 19 October 1815), SSFR, Vol. 51.

101. R. Caunter and W. Wright, Deputy Master Superintendent, 15 October 1815 (FCCP 19 October 1815), SSFR, Vol. 51.
102. Haji Abdul Rahim to Tunku Syed Hussein, undated, written from Aceh after the installation of Saif al-Alam; Haji Abdul Rahim to Tunku Syed Hussein, 6 June 1816; Tunku Syed Hussein to Mahomed Putay, 8 July 1816. All these letters were produced before the Court of Judicature as Exhibit Nos. 4, 5, and 6 respectively to show that Syed Hussein was installed as Sultan of Aceh (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.

103. Sultan Saif al-Alam Syah to Penang, 22 November 1815 (FCCP 17 February 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54. See also P. H. van der Kemp, 'Raffles' Atjeh Overeenkomsten van 1819', BKI, 51 (1900): 159–68.

104. Syed Hussein to J. Palmer, November 1815 (FWCP 23 December 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 37.

105. Mr Petrie who desirous of obtaining the best possible information from Gentlemen here who having been long in the habit of intercourse with the people on the coast of Pedier were likely to be conversant with the Character and disposition of the Malays requested from Mr Robert Scott a Memorandum on the Subject in order to throw some light on the late Melancholy occurrence near Burong'. Extract of undated letter from Capt. J. M. Coombs to Acting Gov. W. Phillips submitted to council meeting of 13 November 1816 along with memorandum by Robert Scott on the Pedir coast (FCCP 13 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.

106. Syed Hussein to J. Palmer, November 1815 (FWCP 23 December 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 37.

107. J. Palmer to Chief Secretary to Supreme Government, Bengal, December 1815 (FWCP 23 December 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 37.


109. ‘Mr Brown and Dunbar have this year served me much the same. Mr Ogilvie here purchased a quantity of Gin and Tar, was to pay in muskets, the landing of them was delayed until dark when examined none but men lost not only to all care of shame but of humanity would have exposed such muskets for sale the firing of which must be attended with the loss of Life . . .’ Sultan of Aceh to Penang, 4 January 1815 (FCCP 11 January 1815), SSFR, Vol. 48.


111. ‘I have been in common with all our men who resided in the Fort at Acheen dangerously ill, we lost many men after I fell sick when I could no longer attend to their wants . . .’, C. Fenwick to P. Carnegy, 13 June 1814 (FCCP 30 July 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44. The letter was written in Telok Samoy, and Fenwick’s reference to his stay at Banda Aceh could be when he was there waiting for the arrival of the Canning mission.


113. Sultan of Aceh to Governor of Penang, 6 December 1815 (FCCP 13 December 1815), SSFR, Vol. 51.

114. J. MacInnes to Gov. W. Petrie, 8 December 1815 (FCCP 13 December 1815), SSFR, Vol. 54.


116. Forbes and Brown to Acting Secretary to Government, 4 January 1816,
with enclosures of various bills (FCCP 6 January 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.


120. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam to Penang, 16 January 1816 (FCCP 19 January 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54. Fischer alleged that Fenwick was getting the Sultan to sign letters without the latter checking their contents. Deposition of N. Fischer, 20 November 1814 (FCCP 26 November 1814), SSFR, Vol. 44.


122. C. Fenwick to Penang Government, 18 March 1816 (FCCP 23 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.

123. Memorial from European advisers attached to Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah, 23 February 1816 (FCCP 2 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54. Among those who signed were J. Guadart, J. Baptist, J. Rodríguez, N. Hamm, and W. Francisco.


127. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam to Penang Government, 8 February 1816 (FCCP 2 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.

128. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam to Penang Government, 15 February 1816 (FCCP 2 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54; Penang to Jauhar al-Alam, 19 February 1816 (FCCP 2 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.


130. The Sultan’s fleet consisted of 7 small ships. These were the Munsoor, Fatta Salim, Passangan, Polee, Omara, Bintang Timor, and Abdoola. The Passangan was sent to India on a trading voyage. The Omara, which was used by the Queen Mother while in Penang, was sold and the Fay bought from Carnegie as a replacement.

131. J. Maclnnes to Penang Government, 1 April 1816; Minute by Gov. W. Petrie, 2 April 1816 (FCCP 13 April 1816), SSFR, Vol. 55.


134. C. Fenwick to Penang, 18 March 1816 (FCCP 23 March 1816), SSFR, Vol. 54.

135. Che Wan probably ran into some financial difficulties during this period as he was reported to have even defaulted in the payment of revenue from the farms. ‘The Chinese Che Wan has long been an Inhabitant of Penang and is at this time a Defaulter to the Company for arrears of revenue, in fact a Runaway from the process of the law.’ Penang to Court of Directors, 1 July 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182.


The Combat in Aceh

JAUHAR AL-ALAM returned to Aceh in April 1816, and for the next three years fought Saif al-Alam in a militarily inconclusive campaign for the Acehnese throne. He shifted his base to Pasai following the switch in allegiance of Telok Samoy, which became a stronghold of Saif al-Alam. Pasai, some distance further to the east, was adequate as a base for Jauhar al-Alam. From there, he could maintain a partial watch over the Pedir coast, and try to extend protection to ships friendly to his cause. The chief of Pasai was Tuanku Bawa, whom the ‘Tjarita’ described as a descendant of Panglima Chut.1 Leaving Penang, the Sultan’s fleet made for Pasai where Jauhar al-Alam immediately strengthened its fortifications.

Soon afterwards, he made preparations for a naval expedition against the capital. Having refitted his fleet of armed ships, Jauhar al-Alam headed towards Banda Aceh. By his own account, he was met off Samalanga by ships of Saif al-Alam.2 A battle took place, lasting for most of the day until a storm late in the evening scattered the ships. The ‘Tjarita’ recounted that one of the Sultan’s ships was forced off to Malacca, while another reached Penang. Jauhar al-Alam turned back for Pasai with Saif al-Alam in unsuccessful pursuit.3

Except for this first encounter, there were few reports of direct combat between the two contenders. Neither side was strong enough to launch a full-scale offensive against the other, and for the most part seemed content to hold on to areas deemed friendly or loyal. The ‘Tjarita’ is the only account that deals at some length with this part of the conflict and narrates some events on the Acehnese scene. In this account, Haji Abdul Rahim was portrayed as the villain in the revolt against Jauhar al-Alam, encouraging Syed Hussein to lay claim to the throne. The ‘Tjarita’ provides insight into family links to explain the nature of political alliances in the civil war. It refers to the marriage ties between Jauhar al-Alam and Tuanku Pakeh, and those of the latter with Haji Abdul
Rahim. There is mention of Tengku Karuat as the brother-in-law of the Panglima Polim, which helps to explain the political switch of Telok Samoy.

**Jauhar al-Alam Rallies Resistance**

Despite the serious challenge from Syed Hussein and desertions in his ranks, Jauhar al-Alam managed to hold on remarkably well in both the political and the military arena. On the Pedir coast, he still had significant support among the dozen or so ports and villages that were of some significance. Moving eastwards from the district of Pedir, the important districts in the region were Shilloch, Burung, Airlabu, Sawan, Murdoo, Samalanga, Pasangan, Junka, Telok Samoy, and Pasai. Other ports were no longer as prosperous as they used to be. Silting was cited as a reason why some were no longer frequented. Ports in the Pedir coast traded largely in betel-nut, and Shilloch, Burung, and Sawan were said to be the largest producers. A large part of the betel-nut harvest was carried away by ships from India, and the trade was conducted mainly by communities of Chulias, particularly in Shilloch and Burung. In both these places, Jauhar al-Alam appointed Chulia *syahbandar* for the collection of port duties.

Besides Pasai, Jauhar al-Alam enjoyed varying degrees of support from Shilloch, Burung, Samalanga, and Murdoo. Shilloch, under Bendahara Kamangan, was the largest district after Pedir in this part of the coast, and was said to have twenty-nine *mukim*. The chief had permitted the Sultan to appoint a Chulia *syahbandar*. In Samalanga, the chief was Tuanku Muda, whose sister later married one of Jauhar al-Alam’s sons. Pedir under Tuanku Pakeh Hussein subsequently switched its support back to Jauhar al-Alam.

On the west coast, Jauhar al-Alam received the backing of most of those districts that had, in the past, accepted him as Sultan. These included Tapus, Labuan Haji, Pulau Dua, Mangin, and Muki. There were no reports of any serious defection. In fact, accounts indicated that Tapak Tuan, which had opposed Jauhar al-Alam’s attempt in 1813 to collect revenue there, supported him this time against Saif al-Alam. But Singkil and Susu continued to oppose Jauhar al-Alam, and were reportedly inclined towards Saif al-Alam.

The staunchest of Jauhar al-Alam’s supporters in the west coast was Chut Buntar, the chief of Mangin. In 1816, Jauhar al-Alam appointed him to take charge of the collection of revenue in the
west coast ports while he was away. Chut Buntar thus played a role resembling that of past panglima laut. The appointment was probably made when Jauhar al-Alam had to be in Penang for four months. Chut Buntar had a small fleet of ships which he deployed along the coast. Among these, reportedly, was an armed Chinese junk from Penang.

Jauhar al-Alam’s struggle against Saif al-Alam and the Panglima Sagis was boosted by the support of Koh Lay Huan and other Chinese from Penang. There were later reports that while at Penang, Jauhar al-Alam had received a large sum of money from Koh, and it is likely that such financial support continued. But the importance of the Penang Chinese was more in their keeping open the trade between the pro-Jauhar al-Alam districts and Penang. Trade was important to generate the revenue needed by Jauhar al-Alam. This was especially critical during the period when the Penang government discouraged ships from leaving for Aceh. The ban appeared to have affected the European companies most, while the Chinese and other local vessels managed to evade the ruling.

One such boat was the Lam Hin belonging to Che Toah and Che Seong, two Penang Chinese. In 1816, the Lam Hin, under a Chinese known only as Attai, sailed for Padang, the declared destination, but it was to the Acehnese west coast that the ship headed. For nearly a year, the Lam Hin traded in Mangin, Labuan Haji, Tapak Tuan, Muki, and Pulau Dua. During the time she was in the west coast, the owners sent a second junk with a fresh consignment of goods for the Lam Hin, and took back commodities such as pepper, benzoin, camphor, and gold-dust that had been collected. The Lam Hin also supplied a quantity of pepper to a ship belonging to Penang’s Carnegy and Company which arrived on the west coast. The Lam Hin, therefore, functioned as a floating trading factory, serving ships from Penang which for various reasons could stop only briefly in the west coast. The operation of the Lam Hin in ports supporting Jauhar al-Alam strongly suggests that her owners—Che Toah and Che Seong, who belonged to the influential Chingchew Hokkiens—were on the side of the deposed Sultan. If so, it would confirm that Jauhar al-Alam had linked himself with an increasingly influential Chinese group and their European associates in Penang.

Jauhar al-Alam also accepted as an adviser at this time Nathaniel Sabat, an Arab and a former translator of the London Bible Society. Jauhar al-Alam recruited him in Penang, and took him back to Aceh. Sabat had studied in Baghdad where he was converted to
Christianity. He then worked with Henry Martyne, a well-known Bible scholar and translator, in India. With Martyne, he helped translate the Bible into Arabic. Sabat went through a spiritual crisis, and his faith alternated between Christianity and Islam. He soon left the Bible Society and became a trader in Rangoon. At that he was not successful, and he sailed from Rangoon to Penang in early 1816. At Penang, he stayed with an Armenian trader referred to in J. MacInnes’s account only as Johannes. He was very likely to be Johannes Simon, who is mentioned in the records as one of thirty merchants who submitted a memorandum to the Penang government against Jauhar al-Alam’s trade regulations in 1814. Through Johannes Simon, Sabat became acquainted with W. Milne of the London Missionary Society. Sabat’s religious commitment remained unclear, for even as he developed a close friendship with Simon and Milne, he joined Muslims in prayer at the local mosque. It was also through Simon that Sabat came to know Jauhar al-Alam. Simon must have begun dealing with the Sultan in commerce at this time.

The involvement of Sabat in Aceh is a little-known and forgotten episode. There is hardly any mention of him in the official records. But his presence in Aceh reveals a little more about Jauhar al-Alam and his trusting nature. Deserted by his European advisers, Jauhar al-Alam willingly accepted offers of assistance from anyone. Sabat’s friendship with Simon and Milne might have led the Sultan to assume that the Arab had good links with the European community on the island. The Sultan might not have been aware of Sabat’s troubled religious background. MacInnes, the Malay translator, recorded that Sabat, after joining Jauhar al-Alam, assumed a lot of responsibilities and influence. Given the fact that he was a very well-educated and extensively travelled Arab, Sabat could have impressed the Sultan and gained his confidence. But employing Sabat was bound to alienate the Acehnese orang kaya, the ulama, and the ulubalang even more once the Arab’s religious experience and associations became known. This might further explain why the Panglima Sagis remained implacably opposed to Jauhar al-Alam right to the end.

**Saif al-Alam’s Campaign Falters**

Meanwhile, Jauhar al-Alam’s resistance was helped by the inability of Saif al-Alam to fully mobilize whatever backing and resources had been promised earlier by the major chiefs. The initial declaration
of support so enthusiastically given was not translated into tangible military or financial outlay. Most of the fighting had to be borne largely by Saif al-Alam. To help out, Syed Hussein had released several of his trading vessels and recruited a number of fighting men from Penang. Several Acehnese chiefs demanded money from Syed Hussein in return for their participation. When Syed Hussein got tired in the end of disbursing further funds as there was no progress in the civil war, some of these ulubalang shifted sides. The most notable of these, and the first to do so, was Tuanku Pakeh Hussein.

Saif al-Alam, despite his initial welcome at the capital, failed to establish a convincing political presence. He was an outsider and, besides his very young age, was also new to the place. Most important of all, even those orang kaya and ulubalang who backed the new Sultan were unwilling to surrender their power or influence, whether it was to Jauhar al-Alam or to Saif al-Alam. Saif al-Alam thus faced the same resistance as Jauhar al-Alam had when he tried to exercise authority, such as in the collection of duties and taxes. Saif al-Alam felt even more vulnerable and exposed when Syed Hussein returned to Penang. The newly enthroned Sultan decided to shift from the main fort in the town centre where he felt insecure to the one at Marasa which was strategically close to the sea. In September 1817, he withdrew from the capital altogether, and moved to Telok Samoy where Tengku Karuat was more trusted.

Given the circumstances, Saif al-Alam could only rely on the men recruited from Penang. The man who was given overall command of his fleet was Syed Mohamed, an Arab from the island. There were a few foreigners. One of them, an American, was mentioned as having charge of one of Saif al-Alam’s ships. For many years already, Syed Hussein had employed Europeans to command his trading ships. In addition, Saif al-Alam was backed by 200 armed men recruited from Penang by Syed Hussein.

In the early phase, many of the chiefs, including those in the west coast, did not find the civil war too disruptive or difficult to cope with. The ulubalang expected the two contenders to be too embroiled in the war to bother them. They probably did not expect that there would be an expedition from Jauhar al-Alam for quite a while. Lebai Dappah, relieved that his long-time adversary was dethroned, was reported to have sent a token tribute to Saif al-Alam, and expected a relaxed commercial policy from the capital.
After all, Lebai Dappah had known Syed Hussein, and dealt with his ships in Susu.

As the struggle dragged on, however, the two rivals turned their attention more towards gaining control of the coastal trade and on exacting revenue and tributes than on defeating their opponent. The situation thus turned out to be more hazardous and burdensome in some regions because where previously there was only one ruler making demands, there were now two. Both Jauhar al-Alam and Saif al-Alam were urgently in need of funds for their campaigns.

Syed Hussein, in the meanwhile, had become so frustrated at the continuing stalemate in the war and the lack of a decisive victory that, according to the 'Tjarita', he resorted to employing an assassin against Jauhar al-Alam. However, the plot was discovered and the attempt foiled. This was evidently not the first occasion that Jauhar al-Alam had survived the attack of an assailant.

Sabat, meanwhile, was becoming disenchanted with his stay in Aceh. He had always had difficulties settling in any one place for long. The civil war conditions, too, offered bleak prospects, and he decided to leave. While trying to return to Penang, he was captured by Saif al-Alam. He was imprisoned on board one of the ships. Desperately, he appealed to Maclnnes in Penang for help. Penang took no action, arguing that he was not a British subject. Later, Sabat was put to death in Aceh by his captors, who considered him too dangerous to be left alive. It was said that he was put in a sack and thrown into the sea.

The Acehnese Civil War and the Penang Trade

Given the unsettled political conditions in Aceh, the Penang government in July 1816 declared the sultanate an unsafe place for trade and shipping. The government also feared that with the two contenders levying duties, Penang traders were exposed to the demands of both sides. There was, therefore, twice the previous danger, plus the risk that Penang ships might be caught in the crossfire of the fighting. No port clearance was to be issued to ships leaving Penang for the Acehnese coast.

The decision began to hurt Penang merchants involved in the Aceh trade. As the ban continued with no prospect of an early end to the conflict, the merchants became frustrated and unhappy at the non-issuance of port clearance. As early as July 1816, the
company of David Brown, which traded in Acehnese products, wrote to the Penang government, appealing that its ships be allowed to leave for Pedir. In his letter, Brown pointed out that the effects of the ban were more far-reaching than had earlier been thought. The resulting decline of the Pedir trade led to Penang merchants having difficulties in supplying sufficient pepper and betel-nut to ships calling at the island, particularly those plying the India-China trade route. If this continued, the reputation of Penang as a trading centre would be damaged.

Brown warned that American ships were benefiting from Penang's ban on its own ships. The war with America had ended, and according to him, 'several American ships at this moment, some of which have cleared out from here, are now purchasing Betelnut there and carrying on that trade which used to be almost exclusively carried on by vessels belonging to the Port to the great advantages of the Honourable Company's revenue and benefits of the Island.' Brown argued that the ban was unnecessary as there was no real danger in Aceh to Penang ships because both contenders were basically not hostile to the British.

The Penang government turned down Brown's appeal. Phillips reminded the council that Jauhar al-Alam had warned in several of his letters that he would seize all vessels caught trading with rebel Acehnese ports. Trading in Aceh would be highly risky so long as the conflict continued. All the council members agreed that, given the situation, the ban on shipping should stay.

Figures on customs duties compiled by the Collector's Office in Penang showed a marked decline in exports and imports between Penang and Aceh during the period of civil war (Tables 8.1 and 8.2). Exports to Aceh from Penang in the trading year of 1810/11 were valued at 463,117 Spanish dollars, declining sharply to 154,801 Spanish dollars in 1814/15, the year when Jauhar al-Alam was dethroned. Exports recovered in the following trading year to reach 245,471 Spanish dollars. But they fell back to 147,924 Spanish dollars in the following year. The worst year was 1817/18 when the value of exports was registered at 84,568 Spanish dollars. In the next two years of conflict, the export figures remained low.
### TABLE 8.1
Value of Penang's Exports to Aceh, 1810/11–1823/24  
(Spanish dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810/11</td>
<td>463,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811/12</td>
<td>388,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812/13</td>
<td>355,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813/14</td>
<td>165,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814/15</td>
<td>154,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815/16</td>
<td>245,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816/17</td>
<td>147,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817/18</td>
<td>84,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818/19</td>
<td>142,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819/20</td>
<td>171,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820/21</td>
<td>200,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821/22</td>
<td>454,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822/23</td>
<td>317,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823/24</td>
<td>445,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 8.2
Value of Aceh's Exports to Penang, 1810/11–1822/23  
(Spanish dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810/11</td>
<td>216,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811/12</td>
<td>118,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812/13</td>
<td>143,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813/14</td>
<td>223,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814/15</td>
<td>150,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815/16</td>
<td>181,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816/17</td>
<td>125,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817/18</td>
<td>122,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818/19</td>
<td>106,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819/20</td>
<td>166,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820/21</td>
<td>164,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821/22</td>
<td>175,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822/23</td>
<td>193,972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Import figures for pepper and betel-nut, the two main Acehnese products traded by Penang merchants, are just as revealing of the effects of the civil war. Figures for pepper available from the 1814/15 trading year show an import of 21,645.48 pikuls, which was already a drop from the previous year's quantity (Table 8.3). Imports remained at that level in the next year, but declined sharply in 1816/17 to 11,272.87 pikuls. They recovered slightly the next year, but then fell steeply again in 1818/19 when only 8,572.12 pikuls were imported. Figures for the betel-nut trade show a less consistent pattern, and might have fluctuated for reasons other than political events in Aceh. In the trading years of 1811/12 and 1812/13, only 11,060 and 14,580 pikuls, respectively, were imported (Table 8.4). This increased sharply to 76,840 pikuls in 1813/14, and was maintained at that level until 1815/16. The high figure could be due to the monopoly obtained by Dunbar and McGee. Imports dropped to 42,697 pikuls in 1816/17, and to 27,163 pikuls in 1817/18. Imports improved in 1818/19, but did not recover to the amounts of the 1813-15 years. In short, the various sets of figures all confirm that trade between Aceh and Penang was most badly affected in 1817 and 1818.

Nevertheless, there continued to be a sizeable volume of trade between the two places, even during the worst years of the civil war. Some trade was carried out because a number of traders from both Penang and Aceh took the risk in making the crossing. Ships evaded the ban by declaring that their destination was Padang, a Dutch settlement that had temporarily come under British administration. It was also likely that both Jauhar al-Alam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>East Coast (pikuls)</th>
<th>West Coast (pikuls)</th>
<th>Total (pikuls)</th>
<th>Value (Spanish dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1814/15</td>
<td>2,846.99</td>
<td>18,798.49</td>
<td>21,645.48</td>
<td>118,163.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815/16</td>
<td>2,404.03</td>
<td>19,723.71</td>
<td>22,127.74</td>
<td>151,284.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816/17</td>
<td>1,748.00</td>
<td>9,534.87</td>
<td>11,272.87</td>
<td>88,803.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817/18</td>
<td>1,861.35</td>
<td>11,564.77</td>
<td>13,426.12</td>
<td>106,809.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818/19</td>
<td>5,514.39</td>
<td>2,957.73</td>
<td>8,572.12</td>
<td>79,640.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819/20</td>
<td>8,205.62</td>
<td>13,433.95</td>
<td>21,639.57</td>
<td>180,825.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820/21</td>
<td>15,667.14</td>
<td>15,988.72</td>
<td>31,655.86</td>
<td>290,486.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821/22</td>
<td>21,790.40</td>
<td>14,670.02</td>
<td>36,213.42</td>
<td>278,539.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822/23</td>
<td>30,277.51</td>
<td>8,373.48</td>
<td>38,650.99</td>
<td>303,290.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and Saif al-Alam offered protection for vessels trading in ports that acknowledged their authority. Some trade was also carried out by Chulias and British-registered ships coming out from India en route to Penang.

The Attack on the Elphinstone

The risks referred to by Penang officials did exist, and reminders came when reports of attacks on ships in Acehnese waters were received. Attacks on small local boats generally went unreported to the British authorities. The first British-registered ship to become a casualty was the Elphinstone, an East India Company ship that had sailed into Aceh from India in September 1816, apparently unaware that a civil war was in progress. The Elphinstone and another British ship, the Wexford, reached the Pedir coast on 2 September. There, Captain T. Haviside of the Elphinstone and Captain C. Barnard of the Wexford met Saif al-Alam, who was introduced as the new Sultan.21

The two ships made an agreement to buy quantities of betelnut from Saif al-Alam, and an advance in cash was paid. But Saif al-Alam failed to deliver the agreed quantity on the due date and this was, perhaps, an indication of the balance in the conflict tilting away from the Penang challenger. The captain of the Elphinstone demanded the return of the money, and when that was recovered sailed to Burung, which Saif al-Alam had declared a rebel port.
Captain Haviside ignored the warning and, arriving in Burung, the *Elphinstone* traded with the mainly Chulia merchants who handled the betel-nut trade there. At that time, there were two Penang ships trading at Burung, clearly showing that there were merchants ignoring the directive of the British authorities. The transaction proceeded without incident until a ship belonging to Saif al-Alam, and commanded by an American named Captain Richard Glassume, arrived to ask the *Elphinstone* to leave Burung and to trade instead in Sawan. The *Elphinstone* refused. A few days later, while the crew of the *Elphinstone* was onshore at Burung, they were suddenly attacked. According to Saif al-Alam in a letter to Penang, the ship’s doctor and the second mate were killed and several others, including the captain, were seriously wounded.

Soon afterwards, the *Elphinstone* and the *Wexford* made their way to Penang. They made no report of the incident, and the Penang government only learnt of the attack later through Saif al-Alam’s letter. It was thought that the *Elphinstone* made no report in order to hide the fact that she had been to Pedir. However, the captain of the *Wexford* later explained that they were waiting for Captain Haviside to recover from his serious injuries before making the report. Having been informed of the incident, the Penang government set up a commission headed by J. Erskine to look into the *Elphinstone* attack. Since it happened in Burung, a pro-Jauhar al-Alam area, some officials thought that the findings would cast the deposed Sultan in an incriminating light.

Testimonies were recorded from the crew members of the *Elphinstone* and the *Wexford*. Despite a lengthy sitting, the Penang court of enquiry could come to no conclusion as to why the attack was made on the *Elphinstone*. Erskine put forward the theory that Saif al-Alam had acted in retaliation for the insult he felt when the *Elphinstone* abrogated the contract and, as a further humiliation to him, traded with Burung, a port allied to his enemy. The incident had shown that he lacked the authority to gather the betel-nut agreed to in the contract. Furthermore, by attacking the *Elphinstone* at Burung, the blame would be placed on Jauhar al-Alam or his supporters. Erskine could have been right. But the attack might also have been due to a minor misunderstanding not related in any way to the civil war. While ashore at Burung, the crew of the *Elphinstone* had cut down a tree for repairs on the ship without first obtaining permission from the raja. The local inhabitants had begun gathering around the scene, and shortly afterwards, the crew was attacked.
The court of enquiry, however, returned an open verdict on the case.\(^\text{26}\)

The *Elphinstone* incident, as with the Muki incident in 1803, suggests that some of the violence that occurred during this period, which sometimes was described as piracy, had really more to do with the failure of one side to understand local culture and sensitivities. This resulted in retaliatory attacks from those who felt offended. These incidents might initially have had nothing to do with the larger political backdrop of events.

There was soon a series of reports of ships being harassed in Acehnese waters. A month after the *Elphinstone* affair, the *Pancholong*, a vessel from the Malabar coast, alleged that she was detained briefly by Saif al-Alam along the Pedir coast.\(^\text{27}\) Jauhar al-Alam also came in for a fair share of the blame for attacks on trading ships. One of the vessels he was said to have stopped was the *Jan de Bareas* belonging to Syed Hussein, with a cargo valued at $5,000.\(^\text{28}\) But as all these incidents happened in Acehnese waters, the Penang government, after the *Anapoorny* incident, was reluctant to intervene, except to issue reminders to Penang merchants about the dangers of trading in Aceh.

All these attacks highlighted the problem once again of the need to ascertain the limits of Acehnese territorial waters and, in the context of the civil war, the extent of each contestant’s influence. British authorities in Penang and Bencoolen had all along disputed the claims of the Sultan to large stretches of the west and Pedir coasts, and in recent years, problems and misunderstandings in British-Aceh relations had arisen precisely because it was thought that Jauhar al-Alam was trying to exercise authority in places where Acehnese rulers had long lost control. For this reason, there had been partiality towards Saif al-Alam and Syed Hussein, who were expected to make more reasonable territorial assertions. As it turned out, Saif al-Alam proved to be no different, laying claim to an extent of authority similar to that of Jauhar al-Alam.

### Syed Hussein Is Held for Piracy

Not everyone on the island was of the view that there was nothing Penang could do regarding the series of alleged piratical attacks. No doubt, Jauhar al-Alam and, to a certain extent, Saif al-Alam could defend their actions by insisting that they were sovereigns of independent states exercising their right to regulate trade. There
were merchants, however, who pointed out that this could not be said of Syed Hussein, who remained a resident of Penang. He was not protected by the same privilege. Since it was widely known that he was behind the campaign of Saif al-Alam, and was in control of much of the happenings in Aceh, it was thought that a case could be made against him. He was liable for offences committed against British ships, even if these were in Acehnese waters, if it was proved that the vessels accused had acted on his instructions.

Charges of piratical acts were, in fact, brought against Syed Hussein not long afterwards. It started from proceedings in a civil case which had, in the beginning, nothing to do with allegations of piracy. In September 1816, agents of the Toofie, a ship from Bombay, filed a suit against Syed Hussein for not honouring a bill of exchange made out in his name. The Toofie, under Nakhoda Tuckereedeen, carried bales of cotton goods belonging to two Bombay companies, Moolechund Ameechund and the firm of Forbes. The ship called at Banda Aceh in May 1816, and Tuckereedeen was presented by Syed Mohamed to Haji Abdul Rahim, who was introduced as the syahbandar and as the commercial agent of Syed Hussein in Aceh. On this understanding, the Toofie unloaded about 205 bales of cotton worth 8,200 Spanish dollars. The syahbandar presented a bill of 8,044 Spanish dollars made out against Syed Hussein. But when this was subsequently submitted in Penang by agents of the Toofie, Syed Hussein, for some undisclosed reason, refused to honour it. Upon this, the agents sued Syed Hussein. It was very likely that Syed Hussein, already quite frustrated that no progress was being made in the war, was tired of having to settle all sorts of bills from Aceh. He might also have suspected that some of the claims and transactions carried out by the syahbandar were not entirely honest.

The case was heard before the recorder, Sir Edmond Stanley, in October 1816. The charge was that Syed Hussein had refused to pay for goods delivered according to a contract properly made with his commercial agent, Haji Abdul Rahim. Witnesses for the plaintiffs testified that Haji Abdul Rahim was indeed the agent of Syed Hussein while holding the position of syahbandar in Aceh. Syed Hussein was, therefore, liable for all contracts and transactions made in his name by the syahbandar. As the hearing progressed, the evidence unravelled a complex picture, depicting Syed Hussein as exercising a predominant control
of affairs in Aceh. The authority of government was only nominally under his son Saif al-Alam. One of the key witnesses was Syed Mohamed, the man who commanded Saif al-Alam's forces. According to him, Syed Hussein made most of the appointments in Aceh and had the final say in all matters of importance. Syed Hussein's active participation in the civil war was thus exposed. Syed Mohamed further claimed that Syed Hussein provided military equipment and supplies to his son's forces in Aceh, and that his own ships regularly cruised between Aceh and Penang.

To these allegations, Syed Hussein offered no defence. Instead, he made an application to have the case adjourned, arguing that Haji Abdul Rahim, the syahbandar of Aceh, was a key witness and that he be made available to the court to give evidence. The plaintiffs successfully objected to any postponement, pointing out that Syed Hussein, having been given notice of the suit in August, could have arranged for Haji Abdul Rahim to be present, and that the defence was simply trying to delay the case. Sir Edmond agreed with the plaintiffs' contention and ordered the hearing to continue. The recorder later awarded the case to the plaintiffs. In addition, Syed Hussein was ordered to bear the costs of the hearing.

There was to be further drama. At the end of the trial, the recorder ordered Syed Hussein to be detained to facilitate investigations into possible charges of piracy. In the course of the trial, several incidents of attacks on ships along the Acehnese coast were mentioned as part of the evidence. Various witnesses for the plaintiffs accused Syed Hussein of being responsible for some of these attacks. The recorder ruled that there was sufficient evidence to institute charges against Syed Hussein, and that the offences were serious enough to have him placed under custody. With that, Syed Hussein was escorted to the jail-house.

The arrest of Syed Hussein caused a major stir in Penang. Here was a highly respected figure in society and leader of the island's Muslim community subjected to the humiliating experience of being dragged to jail like a common criminal. Only three months earlier, the Penang government had to turn to him for a loan of 30,000 Spanish dollars. It was even more awkward for the government because it had given him permission to go to Aceh, this implicitly approving his challenge to the throne. Furthermore, even though the government had professed neutrality in the civil war, it had not taken serious steps to stop Syed Hussein from using
Penang as a source of military supplies and support for Saif al-Alam, and his role in Aceh was widely known.

The Penang government was informed of Syed Hussein’s arrest, and the reasons for it, by the recorder on 8 November 1816. The government was taken back by the recorder’s decision, and the next day, it urged Sir Edmond to take a more lenient approach to the case. Its note explained that Syed Hussein was of Acehnese royal descent, and that he had been invited by the Panglima Sagis to become Sultan of Aceh. The government felt certain that Syed Hussein had not intended to break the laws of Penang. It accepted the claim of Syed Hussein that Saif al-Alam was Sultan, and that if action had been taken against certain ships, this was an exercise of his rightful authority as ruler. It is interesting to note that for this particular case the Penang government conceded to a distinction between the exercise of a Sultan’s authority and an ordinary act of piracy, a concession which it was unwilling to grant to Jauhar al-Alam earlier in the incident of the Anapoorny.

On the same day, a petition signed by more than thirty prominent Muslims of Penang was handed to the government. The petition claimed that during the first two days of his detention, Syed Hussein had become ill and depressed. The petitioners appealed for Syed Hussein to be allowed bail, and offered themselves as security.

That evening, Sir Edmond replied to the Penang government and to the petition. He clarified that the court had neither convicted nor sentenced Syed Hussein to imprisonment, an impression held by the Penang government. He was merely detained until such time as a proper authority could look into the charges of piracy, which indeed was a serious offence. He agreed that the political dimension of the case could not be ignored, but he rejected the point made by the government that Syed Hussein was invited by the Acehnese to be Sultan. The recorder questioned the need of Syed Hussein to wage such a long and costly war if he had indeed been asked by the Acehnese to be their ruler.

Early the next morning, Sir Edmond went to the jail where Syed Hussein was remanded and released him. A few days later, he tendered his resignation as recorder of Penang. He gave no reasons, but there is no doubt that it was because of his objection to what he considered to be government interference in the Syed Hussein case. He left for India where he went on to become a Supreme Court judge in Madras.
The arrest of his father did not in the least deter Saif al-Alam from continuing his attacks against ships found trading in areas supporting Jauhar al-Alam. Among these was a Penang ship, the Lam Hin, which became one of the casualties. In early 1818, one of Saif al-Alam’s armed vessels, the Kurta Raja, sighted the junk on the west coast and succeeded in capturing her. In August 1818, the vessel arrived in Penang on her way to Malacca with a cargo of rice. Che Toah and Che Seong, two Penang Chinese traders, claimed through Attai, the ship’s captain, that the vessel was the Lam Hin, and that they were the rightful owners. The Kurta Raja was also at Penang at that time, and her captain and crew members came forward to testify that the junk was part of the deposed Sultan’s fleet seized as a prize of war by Saif al-Alam.

The Penang authorities accepted the testimonies of the Kurta Raja’s crew. The appeal of the two Chinese merchants was dismissed, and a strong admonition handed to them for making a false report. Phillips, in his minute, accepted that the vessel under dispute was spoils of war seized from one Acehnese chief by another in Acehnese territory, and that the Kurta Raja had broken no British law.

The Board considers that the Petitioner (Attai) has imposed on the Government a false and unwarranted statement with regard to the seizure of the Junk as it is fully proved by the Depositors that she was acting as an armed vessel in the employ of one of the Acheen Chiefs, that she had no cargo on board and that the Brig which captured her belonged to another of the chief...

Another Penang ship, the Anna, owned by a Penang Portuguese, Jeronimo Pereira, was captured by the Catarina, an armed vessel belonging to Saif al-Alam, in 1818. The 40-ton brig sailed the Penang–Pedir–Coromandel coast route regularly, and had made two trips to Pedir to bring back betel-nut. On her third trip in June of that year, she carried a number of Chinese from Penang to Pedir. In Pereira’s deposition, the Chinese were described as workers recruited by Tuanku Pakeh to build a residence for Jauhar al-Alam at Kota Sriduli. The Anna was stopped by Saif al-Alam because she traded with what he regarded as rebel ports. It was also possible that he had some suspicion that the Chinese brought out from Penang were not workers, but possibly fighting men supplied by Koh Lay Huan.

Nothing resulted from the complaint by the Anna. It became clear to the authorities that many of the incidents could not be
viewed simply as piracy. The earlier case of Syed Hussein and the later charges of piracy were instructive to them. The increasing number of piracy cases clearly had a political dimension, and these had therefore to be resolved within that framework.

The Mission of John Coombs, 1818

Penang Deliberates on the Acehnese Conflict

As the war in Aceh dragged on and the trade between Aceh and Penang continued to be affected, merchants on the island became convinced that the British authorities should take some initiative to end the disturbances in Aceh. However, since the start of the conflict, the Penang government had taken the stand that until it received instructions from the supreme government, its policy should be one of neutrality and non-interference towards Aceh. But given that many officials were openly sympathetic to Syed Hussein’s cause, this policy, as well as some of Penang’s actions, could not but be interpreted as tacit support for Saif al-Alam.

There was, none the less, a discernible split within the Penang government, just as there was in the mercantile community, on the subject of Aceh. Governor William Petrie and Phillips remained opposed to Jauhar al-Alam. Their position was shared by a large number of merchants, many of whom (business associates of Syed Hussein) had earlier looked forward to an early Saif al-Alam victory in expectation of generally improved trade and, individually for themselves, additional business opportunities. On the other hand, J. Erskine, a senior member of the Penang Council, became increasingly critical of Syed Hussein’s role in Aceh. Erskine represented the thinking among a growing section of the mercantile community who realized that an Aceh under Saif al-Alam might not, after all, be an improvement on that of Jauhar al-Alam, and that there would be the same trade control and restrictions. It might even be worse, especially if Syed Hussein exercised influence in Aceh to favour his business partners as seemed most likely. With such a division in opinion, the Penang government found it difficult to agree on a course of action.

In October 1816, Bengal finally wrote to Penang on the subject of Aceh. This was well over two years after the start of the Acehnese civil war, and there had, during that period, been no instruction on the matter from Bengal, which had been kept very much up to date throughout. Canning’s report dated 24 November 1814 had
mentioned the dethronement of Jauhar al-Alam. Also, in November 1815, the supreme government would have known through John Palmer of Saif al-Alam’s challenge for the title. It is possible that Bengal had thought the conflict would be a short one, and had, therefore, decided to wait for the final outcome. In a broad review of its policy towards Aceh in its letter of October, Bengal indicated that it had no particular preference for either of the contestants and was prepared to recognize whoever should emerge as winner.

Looking forward to the time when official ties with Aceh could be established, Bengal considered the different options to take, depending on the outcome of the war. Should Jauhar al-Alam return to power, Bengal would insist as a condition for the restoration of ties that he tender a formal apology for his discourtesy to the Canning mission. Jauhar al-Alam would also be required to pay compensation to the owners of the Anapoorny. On the other hand, a victory by Saif al-Alam would simplify matters, and there would be none of the conditions such as those required of Jauhar al-Alam. Relations between Aceh and the Company could very quickly be re-established. For the moment, Bengal preferred the British to stay out of the conflict as there was no clear trend as to the eventual victor.46 It also informed Penang that moves to restore ties with Aceh would have to be put off until the situation became more stable.

By the time the letter reached Penang, Phillips had taken over as Acting Governor following the death of Petrie on 29 October 1816. In February 1817, Phillips tabled Bengal’s letter of October 1816 in the council. In the meeting, he retraced the difficult course in past Aceh-British relations. Nevertheless, Phillips expected the civil war to end very soon, and held that the expected political changes in the sultanate would be a good time to improve ties with Aceh.50 As a first step to regularizing trade so as to avoid the earlier problems, he proposed a commercial treaty with Aceh. Penang had finally come around to the idea of a treaty, towards which its officials and merchants had long been cool. In recent months, Phillips had held informal discussions with officials and merchants, and had prepared a draft treaty based on their views.

The draft contained six articles, all dealing mainly with trade. One of the articles stipulated that all trade duties levied should be applicable to both Acehnese and non-Acehnese. The rates were to be uniform, and revisions could only be made if prior notification was given. Another article disallowed the granting of trade monopolies of Acehnese produce to any European or American.
This was to prevent a recurrence of the Dunbar and McGee betel-nut monopoly affair. The draft also stipulated that there should be free access to all ports in northern Sumatra, irrespective of whether these places acknowledge the authority of Aceh or not. Finally, the draft required Aceh to forbid any European or American to reside in Aceh or any of its dependencies.

The draft treaty was important, because it reflected some of the main concerns of Penang merchants and of the Penang government. It also became the basis upon which subsequent negotiations with Aceh were made. J. MacAlister, newly appointed to the council, and Erskine supported the provisions in the draft. MacAlister, however, reminded the council that the agreement could be effective and binding only when there was a stable government in Aceh. As such, a British resident should be appointed to assist the Acehnese court. MacAlister referred the council to the opinions expressed by earlier British missions to Aceh that no ruler there could ever hope to have peace and order without some British support in the unstable circumstances then prevailing. MacAlister, therefore, recommended sending a British resident to Aceh, whose responsibility was to watch over British interests and to advise the Sultan. With a resident backed by troops, the Sultan would have no reason to recruit mercenaries or to seek assistance from other foreign powers.

J. Erskine, sympathetic to Jauhar al-Alam, wanted the council to ascertain the situation in Aceh so that the treaty would be signed with the true victor of the contest. He was aware that Phillips leaned towards Saif al-Alam and might therefore deal with the challenger. Erskine pointed out that recent reports reaching Penang rated Jauhar al-Alam as being most likely to win the war, and that if this was true, then Penang should sign the treaty with the deposed Sultan. Given that information on Aceh continued to be unclear, he proposed sending a Penang official to find out what was really happening. He did not think that such a mission violated Bengal’s instruction of non-involvement.

Some reports reaching Penang affirmed Erskine’s contention that events were not going well for Saif al-Alam. Word later reached Penang that a number of powerful ulubalang had already shifted their support from him. Their defections lent credence to earlier allegations that their backing had largely been paid for by Syed Hussein. But in recent months, Syed Hussein had evidently not been generous with his allocation of funds, and their loyalty to Saif al-Alam had accordingly waned.
One of the first *ulubalang* to defect from Syed Hussein was Tuanku Pakeh Hussein, who realized that even with a new Sultan, and one whom he initially supported against Jauhar al-Alam, he was not spared from onerous taxes and port duties. Surveillance was carried out all along the Pedir coast by Saif al-Alam. In October 1816, he complained that one of his vessels was seized by Saif al-Alam. But the issue that led to a final parting of ways was over some payments which Tuanku Pakeh insisted were due to him. The Pedirese chief claimed in early July 1817 that he was asked by Syed Hussein to mount an operation against Jauhar al-Alam. Subsequently, a bill for the campaign, amounting to 26,195 Spanish dollars, was submitted but Syed Hussein refused to pay. In retaliation, Tuanku Pakeh seized Syed Alloway, a son-in-law of Syed Hussein who had turned up in Pedir just at that time to collect port duties on behalf of Saif al-Alam.

By this stage, Syed Hussein realized that his Aceh campaign was more expensive than he had expected. Large sums of money had been spent in Aceh, but there was still no sight of an early victory. He was getting tired of paying the *ulubalang*. John Anderson, the Malay translator to the Penang government, described meeting Syed Hussein several times during this period and seeing how depressed he had become. 'The poor Syed’s ambition for sovereign power led him into much difficulty, and the writer has often seen him weep with mortification and chagrin when he found himself obliged to expend large sums of money and little was coming in.' Fed up with the demands of Tuanku Pakeh, Syed Hussein refused to pay the ransom for the release of Syed Alloway. To rescue his son-in-law, he dispatched several armed vessels against Pedir some time after July 1817. The rescue attempt failed, and in the process, Syed Hussein lost one of his ships. Syed Alloway remained in captivity for more than seven months. During his confinement, he wrote to Penang for a loan, pledging his property in Penang, to get himself freed from Pedir. It is doubtful that he obtained the loan, but he was eventually released by Tuanku Pakeh Hussein.

News that Jauhar al-Alam might regain power also reached Bengal. In May 1817, Bengal responded to Phillips’s proposal of a commercial treaty with Aceh. The supreme government supported the idea, but shared MacAlister’s apprehension that given the weak and unstable nature of Acehnese governments, commercial agreements were of little value. To ensure that the agreements were enforceable, assistance should be given to build
a stable Aceh. There might be need, therefore, of a defensive military agreement allowing the stationing of a small contingent of troops in Aceh. A Sultan supported by a credible military force would become more effective. The number of troops, as well as the share of expenses to be borne by Aceh, were issues to be worked out in any future negotiations. Bengal also touched on the possibility of the British taking charge of the external affairs of Aceh to effectively keep out foreign advisers who had been such a hindrance to potentially good relations between the two sides. This move would also place the British in an advantageous position to deal with threats, commercial or political, posed by the Americans and the Dutch. Aceh, over time and guided by British advice, should evolve into a ‘settled and regular Government with an Authority strictly defined in its extent’.  

With more signs of a possible return to power by Jauhar al-Alam, Bengal expressed readiness to deal with him. It was even prepared to revise the conditions required of Jauhar al-Alam in order to help improve relations. Bengal was willing to settle for just an apology from Jauhar al-Alam for past Acehnese offences against the British. The question of compensation to the owners of the Anapoorny was not insisted on. Bengal thereupon gave instructions that Penang carry out a study of the situation in Aceh.

Phillips did not share Bengal’s assessment of Jauhar al-Alam’s political resurgence. His response to the directive was, therefore, less than enthusiastic. Nevertheless, the Penang Council asked one of the merchants from the island, a Mr Hutton, who was leaving for Calcutta, to call at Banda Aceh. He was to find out what was happening at the capital, and to report his findings to the supreme government. However, there is no record of Hutton’s report, and there was no further action from Penang. The subject of Aceh came up once more for discussion in the council on 16 October 1817 during which Phillips gave a long review of the situation in Aceh. Again the meeting ended inconclusively. At this juncture, Phillips was only the Acting Governor as the new appointee had still not arrived.

**Bannerman Appoints Coombs to Head Mission**

It was only with the arrival of J. Bannerman to take up his position as Governor of Penang that some initiative was finally taken on the Acehnese question. Bannerman was a director of the East
India Company immediately before coming to the Penang posting. With this background, he was more confident in dealing with those matters which his predecessors had hesitated over. After settling in, Bannerman placed Aceh high on his agenda. He considered the subject important because he was particularly worried about competition from the Americans then frequenting the Sumatran pepper coast. He feared that the Americans might take advantage of the unrest in Aceh to establish a more permanent presence. Bannerman also spoke of a threat from the Russians, whose ships were reported to have been sighted in the region. He raised the subject of Aceh in the December council meeting, a month after assuming his post.

Bannerman informed the council that, in compliance with the earlier instructions from Bengal, he had decided to send Captain John Coombs on a fact-finding mission to Aceh. In this assignment, Coombs was to gather the views of the orang kaya and ulubalang, as well as assessing which of the contestants commanded the most support. At the end of the enquiry, Coombs was to discuss details of a treaty with the contestant most widely accepted by the Acehnese chiefs.

The choice of Coombs is of significance, and offers insight into Penang politics and society at that time. Coombs was seen by some, including Raffles, as a protégé of Petrie, the previous Governor. It was a relationship that had hints of business links involving other prominent merchants. There was correspondence between Coombs and Palmer of Calcutta. Palmer was at this time acting as the commercial agent in India for the Penang government. It is most likely that Palmer also represented other Penang merchants in Bengal. Certainly, one of them, and the most well known, was Syed Hussein. Some Penang officials such as Coombs and Petrie could either have had interests in business connected with Palmer or they were very close to merchants in Penang who dealt with Palmer.

It was known that it was Coombs who prepared Phillips’s lengthy reviews of Aceh presented to the council, particularly that of the 16 October 1817 meeting. The council minutes clearly showed the preference of Coombs and Phillips for Syed Hussein and Saif al-Alam in the contest in Aceh. It was a review which Bannerman largely relied on as a background paper to familiarize himself with the Aceh issue. It is not known how much Bannerman was influenced by the views of Phillips or that he had already formed
an opinion back in London. But certainly in December, he took much the same position as Phillips, who later became his son-in-law. The selection of Coombs to lead the mission, therefore, came as no surprise to many, given that Bannerman and Phillips shared the young official’s judgement on Aceh.

At this stage, Bannerman already took the view that the British should recognize Saif al-Alam. He believed that Syed Hussein—the father of the new Sultan—as a resident of Penang was favourably disposed towards the British, and so long as he was in Penang, his son Saif al-Alam could be expected to implement policies acceptable to the British. Syed Hussein, for his own business and political good, would want to see harmonious relations between Aceh and the British. Jauhar al-Alam, on the other hand, had proven to be difficult in the past. Furthermore, should Jauhar al-Alam be recognized once more as Sultan despite his past unfriendly acts, neighbouring Malay states might interpret this as a lack of firmness on the part of the British.

Bannerman’s remarks in the proceedings further deepened the differences within the council and the mercantile community over the Aceh question. As many as there were those supporting Syed Hussein, there were also those who were now nervous at the prospect of his winning in Aceh. A victory in Aceh would place Syed Hussein in a strong trading position in Aceh and in Penang. This would explain why there were some who began to favour Jauhar al-Alam’s position. As Erskine argued, ‘Syed Hussein’s aim and object is to obtain a local, personal and pecuniary control over the Revenues and Resources of the whole, or part of the Coast of Aceh.’

The civil war was so keenly followed and discussed in Penang that a very annoyed Bannerman complained that information and comments on Aceh made in confidence in the council had been leaked out to the public.

The task before Coombs in Aceh was not easy. He spoke little Malay, and had to rely on R. Caunter as interpreter. His familiarity with Aceh was largely through the council proceedings and from partisan views expressed by the mercantile community on the island. To ascertain which contestant was the stronger of the two required him to meet all the orang kaya and ulubalang in Aceh. But given the unsettled situation in Aceh, a fair and broad survey would not be easy. Coombs decided not to meet either of the contestants at the early stage of his mission. This meant bypassing Telok Samoy, where Saif al-Alam had his stronghold,
and Pasai, where Jauhar al-Alam had gathered his forces. He decided that Banda Aceh, the capital, was the place to go to first.

Coombs in Aceh

The HMS *Vestal* carrying Coombs and the mission arrived at the Acehnese capital on 17 January 1818. The capital was not neutral in the conflict as had been assumed by Coombs. The *syahbandar* was still Haji Abdul Rahim and he, together with the leading *orang kaya* and *ulubalang* in the capital, was a supporter of Saif al-Alam. The *Vestal* was not met by any Acehnese official on her arrival. The men at the capital were cautious, for they seemed unsure of the purpose of the mission and on whose side it was. Coombs then sent an official ashore to announce the mission’s arrival to the *syahbandar*. Haji Abdul Rahim turned up only on the afternoon of the next day. The *syahbandar* carefully described himself as an official appointed by the three Panglima Sagis. He thought that this was a safe reply until such time as more was known about Coombs’s mission. When Coombs asked about the Sultan, the *syahbandar* replied that he was not at the capital, and again cleverly avoided all references to the name of the ruler, fearing that to do so would unwisely reveal his own involvement in the contest.

Coombs noted in his report that the *syahbandar* exercised considerable influence at the capital, and was a person useful in any future negotiations on Aceh-British relations. Coombs expressed his reservations about the reliability of his character. The *syahbandar* had certainly been evasive earlier on about his stand in the conflict. The recent arrest of Syed Hussein in Penang must have been a shock to Banda Aceh, and had probably created some confusion about the British stance in the civil war. But much of the *syahbandar*’s apprehension was dispelled during the meeting with Coombs. He quickly sized up Coombs, and shrewdly decided that the mission was sympathetic to Saif al-Alam. The *syahbandar* agreed, therefore, to arrange a meeting between Coombs and the Panglima Sagis. This was scheduled to be held ten days later, on 28 January 1818. In the meantime, Coombs sent Caunter ashore to find out about conditions and the mood at the capital. Caunter visited the Arab section of the city and met several *ulubalang*, all of whom spoke in support of Saif al-Alam. A few days later, at the invitation of the *syahbandar*, the British mission set up camp
onshore. In the next few days, Coombs had a chance to meet several Acehnese chiefs.

On the evening of the scheduled meeting, Coombs was escorted by the syahbandar to the Arab section of the city where the discussions were to be held. The meeting place itself was a square in the front of the main mosque. The three Panglima Sagis had already gathered there, flanked by thirty Acehnese said to be high-ranking orang kaya and ulubalang. Another fifty stood at one other side of the square. Members of the mission were led to a small wooden platform placed before the assembly.

Coombs commented in his report that the physical appearance of the orang kaya and ulubalang was far from distinguished. A point of some significance was that no introduction was made of the Panglima Sagis or of any senior orang kaya or ulubalang to Coombs. Coombs described the Panglima Polim as follows: 'The Person seated to the Right was pointed out as Panglima Polim. He was without a turban or any covering on his head but a common scull cap and that very dirty and with nothing but a cloth around his loins, making an appearance in no respect different from that of an ordinary person or peasant.' After the ulubalang had settled down, Coombs addressed the gathering. Caunter explained what had been said earlier to Haji Abdul Rahim, who then interpreted this to the assembly. Coombs assured the gathering that it was not the intention of the British to interfere in the internal affairs of Aceh. However, the civil war had seriously affected British trade in the region. For this reason, the British were anxious to help end the conflict, and to negotiate with the new Sultan an agreement that would regulate and protect its trade with Aceh.

At the end of Coombs's address, one of the ulubalang responded on behalf of the gathering by declaring that they acknowledged only Saif al-Alam as Sultan. A second speaker then took up the matter of Coombs's complaint about attacks on British vessels in Acehnese waters. He pointed out that such incidents occurred in areas where the Acehnese government was weak and unable to fully exercise its authority. He proposed that a trade arrangement be worked out based on the old Acehnese commercial laws requiring all trade to be restricted to Banda Aceh. This would facilitate control and ensure safer shipping, as well as protecting Aceh's legitimate rights.

The point raised by the second speaker is significant. The proposal had been consistently insisted upon by Jauhar al-Alam. It was primarily because Jauhar al-Alam had attempted to carry
out what was now proposed by his Acehnese opponents that his differences with British authorities had arisen. Now, supporters of Saif al-Alam were no less anxious to enforce what was regarded as Aceh’s traditional prerogatives, and just as keen to get the British to recognize Acehnese commercial law.

Coombs came away from the meeting convinced that Saif al-Alam was the most widely supported claimant. Nevertheless, even in his own report, some doubts were raised as to how representative and broad-based the gathering had been. Coombs estimated that about eighty ulubalang attended. There was no way for Coombs to know the rank and status of the ulubalang present, or the regions they represented. Most of the principal ulubalang were merely pointed out to him without being formally introduced. The gathering was organized by the syahbandar, an agent of Syed Hussein’s, an interested party, and a person whose character Coombs himself had earlier expressed doubts about.

An encounter on the following evening should have raised doubts in Coombs’s mind as to how truly representative the gathering had been. On the night of 29 January, two Acehnese slipped into the camp of the mission. They identified themselves as Tuanku Nepecha and Tuanku Kitchie. Tuanku Nepecha was from the federation of twenty-five mukim, and had come to ask for medicine. Whether their furtiveness in approaching the camp was because of the medical purpose of the visit or because they were supporters of Jauhar al-Alam was difficult to judge. Tuanku Nepecha explained to Coombs that he and those ulubalang known to be backing Jauhar al-Alam were not invited to the previous evening’s gathering. Coombs thought lightly of this new information, and made no effort to recheck his data before making his recommendations.

Having decided that Saif al-Alam was the proper claimant to deal with, Coombs got ready to proceed to Telok Samoy to negotiate a commercial treaty with him. He decided to call at Pedir on the way to deal with two other matters. During his short stay at the capital, Coombs received reports that a Chulia ship, the Calianasoodan, had been seized by Tuanku Pakeh Hussein of Pedir. The other matter was Syed Alloway, the son-in-law of Syed Hussein who was still held hostage at Pedir. Friends and family members in Penang must have asked Coombs to intervene. Coombs thought that there might be a chance to secure the release of Syed Alloway and the ship.

The Vestal arrived at Pedir on 8 February 1818. Coombs sent
an official with a letter to Tuanku Pakeh Hussein. It called on the Pedir chief to release Syed Alloway and to provide an explanation for the attack on the Calianasoodan. It warned Tuanku Pakeh of dire consequences for continued unprovoked acts of aggression against British subjects and properties.

The Pedir chief immediately sent a reply in which he explained that Syed Alloway would be released once Syed Hussein settled his debt. He stated that the Calianasoodan was attacked because the ship had traded in Banda Aceh without the permission of the Sultan. Tuanku Pakeh also declared that he supported Jauhar al-Alam as Sultan, and offered to arrange a meeting between Coombs and the deposed ruler.

The letter was polite, and revealed a side of Tuanku Pakeh that is rarely reflected in most contemporary descriptions of him. Tuanku Pakeh was generally made out to be violent and aggressive. Perhaps having heard of his reputation, Coombs, declined to go ashore to meet the Pedir chief or to accept the offer of a meeting with Jauhar al-Alam. In his report, Coombs defended his decision to leave Pedir, pointing out that the Vestal did not have the military capability to respond to Tuanku Pakeh in the eventuality of any hostility.

It must have been soon after Coombs left Pedir that Tuanku Pakeh was assassinated. According to the ‘Tjarita’, Haji Abdul Rahim, angered by the defection of the Pedir ruler, visited the unsuspecting Tuanku Pakeh. Left alone without the guards around, the syahbandar killed Tuanku Pakeh. Haji Abdul Rahim himself was put to death by Pedirese armed men shortly afterwards. Following the assassination, Pedir was ruled by Tuanku Pakeh's younger brother, Tuanku Ali, who acted as Regent for Tuanku Pakeh Dalam, the young son of the slain Pedir Raja.

On 10 February 1818, Coombs arrived at Telok Samoy. The place was heavily fortified, and Coombs was informed that additional cannons had been placed by Tengku Karuat against any attempt by Jauhar al-Alam to return. Coombs was welcomed by Saif al-Alam, who during all this time must have been kept informed by the syahbandar of the mission’s proceedings. In the discussions, Coombs asked Saif al-Alam if he was willing to sign a treaty should the British recognize him as Sultan. Saif al-Alam was delighted with Coombs’s proposal, which was tantamount to British recognition of his claim. This would most certainly tilt the political and possibly military balance in his favour, and help end the protracted war. Saif al-Alam agreed to the offer of a treaty,
but insisted that there should be a clause providing him with British support to consolidate his authority.

A draft of the treaty was worked out between Coombs and Saif al-Alam. Overall, it was similar to the one outlined by Phillips in February 1817 in the Penang Council. Two articles in the draft are worth noting. First, the treaty provided for a British resident in Aceh. A piece of land was to be set aside for facilities that would include living quarters for the resident and his staff as well as for a factory. Secondly, the independence of Barus was reaffirmed.

On 13 February 1818, the Vestal left the Pedir coast. Coombs proceeded to Bengal where he submitted his report, and awaited further instructions from the supreme government.

3. ‘Tjarita Asal Sultan’, p. 35.
5. In Shilloch, the man was Sauhab Natore Allum, and in Burung, he was identified as Paynton Abdullah.


18. Ibid.

19. Minute by W. E. Phillips, 3 July 1816; also minute by J. Erskine, 3 July 1816 (FCCP 6 July 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.


22. These were the *Hyder Ally*, a ship belonging to James Carnegie, and the *Eliza*.

23. T. Haviside, Captain of *Elphinstone* to C. Barnard, 2 September 1816, Encl. in letter from C. Barnard to Penang Government (FCCP 28 September 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.


30. Testimony of Syed Mohamed, 19 October 1816, Court of Judicature, Prince of Wales Island (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57.

31. Testimony of Syed Mohamed, 30 October 1816, Court of Judicature, Prince of Wales Island (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57.

32. Statement of Syed Hussein, 21 October 1816, Proceedings of the Court of Judicature, Prince of Wales Island (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57, Appendix C.

33. Statement of Tuckereedeen, 27 October 1816, Proceedings of the Court of Judicature, Prince of Wales Island (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57, Appendix C.

35. R. Caunter, Superintendent of Police, to Secretary of Penang Government, 12 November 1816 (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57.


41. R. Ibbetson, Sheriff of Penang, to Secretary of Penang Government, 10 November 1816 (FCCP 14 November 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57.


43. Sir Edmund Stanley studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and was a Member of Parliament in Ireland between 1793 and 1800. After leaving Penang in 1816, and becoming a Supreme Court judge in Madras, he retired as Chief Justice there in 1825. He died in 1843. C. E. Buckland, Dictionary of Indian Biography, London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1906, p. 399.

44. Petition from Che Seong and Che Toah, 28 July 1818 (FCCP 6 August 1818), SSFR, Vol. 66.

45. Fort Cornwallis Consultation, 6 August 1818, SSFR, Vol. 66.

46. Memorial of Jeronimo Pereira to Governor, Prince of Wales Island Council, 6 August 1818, SSFR, Vol. 66.

47. Deposition of Jeronimo Pereira at the police station, Georgetown, 10 August 1818, SSFR, Vol. 66.

48. Penang to Court of Directors, 8 July 1816, SSFR, Vol. 181.

49. Bengal to Penang, 12 October 1816 (FCCP 26 December 1816), SSFR, Vol. 57.


51. Minute by J. MacAlister, undated (FCCP 6 March 1817), SSFR, Vol. 60.

52. Minute by J. Erskine, undated (FCCP 6 March 1817), SSFR, Vol. 60.


57. Bengal to Penang, 10 May 1817 (FCCP 24 July 1817), SSFR, Vol. 61.

58. Ibid.


61. Minute by J. Erskine, dated October 1817 only (FCCP 6 November 1817), SSFR, Vol. 62
62. Phillips was the most senior of the council members. He arrived in Penang as secretary to Sir George Leith. He had been Acting Governor of Penang on three previous occasions. The first time was for five months from December 1810 to May 1811.
64. Minute by J. Bannerman, 18 December 1817 (FCCP 18 December 1817), SSFR, Vol. 62.
68. Minute by J. Erskine, dated October 1817 (FCCP 6 November 1817), SSFR, Vol. 62.
69. Report of Capt. J. M. Coombs to the Secretary of Prince of Wales Island Government on his mission to Acheh, 1 February 1818 (FCCP 26 February 1818), SSFR, Vol. 137, para. 4. Coombs kept a detailed diary of his mission which was enclosed in the report.
70. Ibid., paras. 6–7.
71. Ibid., para. 12.
75. Draft of proposed commercial treaty between Acheh and the East India Company, Encl. in further report of Capt. J. M. Coombs, 13 February 1818.
The continuing civil war in Aceh became significant as it served to draw the attention of Bengal and London not only to what was happening in the sultanate and its adverse effects upon British trade there, but also to the broader context of important changes taking place in the Malay Archipelago. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the British handed captured territories in the region back to the Dutch. But there was soon concern among some British officials that the Dutch, after recovering Java, Malacca, and Padang, planned to expand their control over the rest of the archipelago, with the intention of keeping out other traders. Aceh was therefore vital; it was one of the few remaining states which had not come under Dutch influence, and if a treaty could be quickly signed, Dutch expansion could be checked there and British presence in the region ensured. It became urgent, therefore, that the British should intervene in Aceh and negotiate with the victorious claimant.

Raffles’s Vision of the British Role in the Archipelago

A new initiative to help end the civil war emerged at this point from Bencoolen, a move which surprised many in Penang and Bengal. There had been a long association between Bencoolen and the Acehnese west coast. But this interest was limited to that stretch of coast around Singkil. Beyond this, Bencoolen cared very little. Its prime concern was its residencies of Tapanuli and Natal, and that they should continue to trade unhindered with the west coast pepper ports. This stretch, together with the non-Acehnese districts of Barus, Air Bangis, and Sorkam, was an important source of trading commodities (including rice) to Bencoolen. The concern of officials such as John Prince was that the politics and power struggle in Aceh should be kept out of the Singkil region. They regarded Singkil and several of the other pepper ports as politically independent, in the way they held Barus and Sorkam to
be. Since they wanted to keep Aceh out, there was little reason why they would want to involve themselves in the capital’s politics.

Thus, since the start of the civil war in Aceh in October 1814, Bencoolen had kept itself from any involvement in the political contest. Furthermore, beginning from 1805, British affairs in the north Sumatran region, including Aceh, came within Penang’s sphere of responsibility. The volume of trade between Penang and the Acehnese ports had been growing much more rapidly than that between Bencoolen and Aceh, and many more merchants in Penang had direct interests in the pepper and betel-nut trade. Of the two establishments, Penang was nearer to many of the Acehnese coastal ports frequented by British traders.

This posture of Bencoolen was to change for a brief while, and even so, it really involved an individual rather than the establishment. In April 1818, a new Lieutenant-Governor arrived at Bencoolen. His views on Aceh and events there differed quite significantly from those of his predecessors. The new man was Sir Stamford Raffles, who was Lieutenant-Governor of Java from 1811 to 1816. When Java was returned to the Dutch, Raffles went back to London where, in 1817, he was knighted. After a short stay, he returned to the East to take up the post of Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen.

Raffles was not happy that the island of Java was given back to the Dutch. His new appointment in Bencoolen was far less important and prestigious than the one he had held. If he had been disappointed at being given a posting with less glamour and power, he recovered from it on his arrival at Bencoolen where he felt energized once more by a determination to bring into reality his dream of an expanded British presence in the archipelago. In the very month of his arrival, Raffles turned his attention to the subject of Aceh. First, he wrote to Jauhar al-Alam, whom he regarded as the rightful ruler of Aceh. It was to him an act of courtesy to a neighbouring ruler on taking office. According to Raffles, the letter extended greetings. His critics saw more sinister designs.

Next, he conveyed his views on the situation in Aceh in a letter to the court of directors. The context, and immediate concern, was the imminent return to the Dutch of Padang, a port of some significance just south of Natal, which since 1795 had been occupied by the British. With Padang reverting to the Dutch, both Natal and Tapanuli would once again be isolated from Bencoolen, and thus vulnerable from the security point of view. In
anticipating such an eventuality, Raffles in his letter proposed that the British bring Aceh under their control so that Natal and Tapanuli, which were almost contiguous to it, could be merged with the sultanate to form one administrative region. Raffles added that the ports of Pulau Dua and Tapak Tuan, which had good sheltered harbours, could be expanded into British naval bases to protect the pepper trade of the Acehnese west coast.

It was a very ambitious proposal which in one move would protect the British pepper trade and at the same time gain influence in Aceh. One of Raffles’s worries at this point was the competition from the Americans in the pepper trade. He commented on the increasing number of American ships calling at the west coast, and estimated that the Americans bought up no less than 5,000 or 6,000 thousand tons of pepper annually. This was indeed a very large quantity. Raffles was also disturbed by reports of the presence of an American commercial agent at Banda Aceh for several months. There were no independent accounts to substantiate this, although there was at least one American serving with Saif al-Alam at this time, and he could be the person referred to by Raffles.  

Raffles even claimed that the Russians were interested in Aceh. In August, he reported to the secret committee in London that he had received information that some time in 1815, Sultan Jauhar al-Alam, upset by the hostile attitude of Penang towards Aceh, had on the advice of those around him written to the emperor of Russia. The Sultan allegedly offered facilities, including a factory, in Aceh in exchange for military assistance from the Russians.  

I have recently received information that about three years since the King of Acehen, offended at the measure of the Government of Prince of Wales Island, was advised to address a Letter to the Emperor of Russia offering to that Country a settlement in his Dominions with such privileges as might be required on condition of the Emperor assisting him to maintain his authority at Acheen.  

This rumour was widely circulated and gained some credence, and J. Bannerman himself also made reference to this in his report.  

Raffles’s approach to Aceh has to be understood within the framework of his vision of a larger British role in South-East Asia. Raffles had, since 1810, supported the idea of expanding British control over the archipelago. He had endeavoured to help bring this about, such as in the Java campaign. But the return of Java to the Dutch was a major set-back to this dream. Although disappointed, Raffles was not discouraged. Now that he was back in
the region, he was revitalized; he began energetically once again to
devising new strategies to achieve that vision. One of these called for
the appointment of residents at the major ports of the various
independent Malay states to pre-empt the returning Dutch from
extending their influence in the archipelago. Raffles's proposal
was immediately turned down by the authorities, who saw the
danger of a collision course with the Dutch if such steps were
indeed adopted.  

In 1817, Raffles, in a paper addressed to G. Canning, president
of the Indian Board of Control, called for the setting-up of an
entrepôt centre in Riau or in the west coast of Sumatra. Raffles
thought that a new entrepôt centre situated more favourably than
Bencoolen or Penang was urgently needed to facilitate the
expansion of British trade in the Malay Archipelago. He warned
of aggressive Dutch political and commercial expansion, which he
saw was aimed at excluding the British from the area. According
to him, the Dutch had already sent missions to every possible spot
in the archipelago likely to be used as a free port by the British.  

Upon his appointment as Lieutenant-Governor in Bencoolen,
Raffles turned his thoughts to extending British control over the
entire island of Sumatra. He argued that having conceded Java to
the Dutch, the British should at least claim Sumatra. As first steps
towards this goal, Raffles made determined attempts to establish
British influence in Samanghan Bay and in Palembang, but these
failed. His insistent effort to retain Padang was objected to, not
only by the Dutch but also by the British authorities.  

Thus, only Aceh and the Riau Archipelago, where there was no
Dutch presence, were the remaining prospects in Raffles’s
proposal of creating a British entrepôt centre. Of the two, Aceh
was regarded by Raffles as the more urgent to be dealt with as the
civil war there had dragged on for too long. Raffles saw the conflict
as a real chance for Britain to play an effective role, not only in
shaping the course of events there, but also in advancing British
interests. Raffles was familiar and well-informed about Aceh. While
assisting Lord Minto in the Java campaign, he had collected much
information on the region. He had in the past communicated with
Jauhar al-Alam, and in 1811 was conferred an Acehnese award.
This was the first decoration he had received from any ruler. Such
was the value he placed upon it that he had the emblem of the
award included in his family coat of arms commissioned in 1817.  

On the Aceh civil war, Raffles had already formed an opinion.
He supported Jauhar al-Alam. Aside from the personal links of
the past, it was Raffles's belief that the integrity and authority of the rulers of the various Malay states should be upheld. This was in the interests of the British because the erosion of the Sultans' authority would result in instability and disintegration of the states. In turn, this could only lead to lawlessness and piracy in the region's waters, with the consequence that trade would suffer. He had presented this argument to Lord Minto in 1810. The same arguments were conveyed in a letter to Penang Governor William Petrie in 1814.

The principles of my suggestions on this subject have been that nothing can tend so effectually to the suppression of piracy, to the encouragement and extension of lawful commerce, and to the civilization of the inhabitants of the Eastern Islands, as affording a steady support to the established native sovereigns and assisting them in the maintenance of their just rights and authority over their several chiefs and along the shores dependent upon their dominions.¹⁴

It could well be that he had Aceh in mind when the letter was written. The prevailing unrest in Aceh had already wrought considerable damage to British trade, and the sultanate was, to Raffles, an example of a central authority increasingly enfeebled against territorial chiefs as well as heads of coastal ports, who had become economically and politically strong and were seeking more autonomy or independence.

For all the enthusiastic energy and interest shown by Raffles on the Aceh subject and on what he proposed, there was only indifference from India and London. Indeed, a belated response he received dated 7 January 1819 was a sharp reminder from the court of directors that Aceh was outside Bencoolen's sphere of responsibility. He was asked, therefore, to refrain from further interference in affairs concerning the sultanate.¹⁵

Raffles's interest in Aceh had also come to the notice of Penang, whose officials were naturally annoyed at this encroachment into their sphere of concern.¹⁶ Raffles's past relations with some officials there had not been good and the unhappy feelings had lingered on. There must also have been a certain amount of resentment and jealousy among Penang officials when Raffles was made agent to Lord Minto in 1810, and later promoted as Lieutenant-Governor of Java. In turn, Raffles did not hide his poor opinion of the competence of the Penang government and had been openly critical of its handling of the *Hydroos* affair which involved Jauhar al-Alam.
In April 1818, Raffles had once again written to Bengal on the American threat in the Acehnese coast and the Dutch proceedings in the eastern part of the archipelago, and he sought permission to visit Calcutta to discuss the two matters. In July, the Governor-General of India, the Marquis of Hastings, in response to the various papers and memoranda received from Raffles, invited him to Calcutta to hear him out. By this time, Bengal itself was beginning to feel disturbed by reports of Dutch activities, and acknowledged that these moves could harm British interests in South-East Asia, which in turn would have broad consequences on the India-China trade.

The Raffles-Coombs Mission Appointed

Meanwhile, Coombs was still in Calcutta waiting for instructions from the supreme government after submitting his report on the recent mission to Aceh. It had been nearly six months, and yet the Bengal government had made no decision. The affairs of Aceh were certainly never considered to be of high priority in India. The delay also suggested that the Bengal government was unsure as to what an appropriate course of response should be. This may appear odd, since there was Coombs’s report with its recommendations. He had proposed that Saif al-Alam be recognized as Sultan, and a treaty signed with him. This was a course of action which might well have ended the civil war. The Penang government, likewise, also favoured Saif al-Alam in its regular reports. Finally, there was John Palmer, an associate of Syed Hussein who was influential within official circles in Calcutta, and who would have been a persistent lobby for Saif al-Alam.

Bengal’s hesitance might be explained by the arrival of news that Jauhar al-Alam was regaining support. These reports (among which was one from Penang merchants), however, could not be verified. It is possible that these were, as later alleged, deliberately put out by factions in Penang and Calcutta who were hoping that Jauhar al-Alam would win. News came that around this time Jauhar al-Alam had advanced to Sriduli, a port close to Pedir. In the assessment of observers, this was a significant military gain by the deposed Sultan. These reports cancelled out the advice which might have been submitted to the supreme government by Palmer. At this time too, Palmer could have lost some of his influence in Calcutta as he began to suffer serious business setbacks.
Who were the Penang merchants who might have expressed support for Jauhar al-Alam? These were those with commercial links to Jauhar al-Alam. There are few details of these links, although some information can be gleaned from the records. Of these, the more prominent ones were David Brown and James Carnegie, who owned two of the largest trading firms in Penang. Interestingly enough, Jauhar al-Alam was said to have owed a large sum of money to Brown and Company in 1818. It was a debt which was taken over from the company of Clarke and Hare of Malacca. The Malacca company was significant here. Alexander Hare, one of the partners, was a merchant in Calcutta who had shifted to Malacca in 1807. Through trade, he came to know several local rulers, and soon after his arrival at Malacca, he must have dealt with Jauhar al-Alam. Hare became an acquaintance of Raffles. They first met at the end of 1807 when Raffles spent a short time in Malacca to recuperate from illness. Hare proved helpful to Raffles in 1811 when the latter was preparing the expedition against Java. Through Hare, Raffles made contact with emissaries from several local rulers. Clarke, the associate, had a brother who was the main partner of Farlie, Fergusson and Company at Calcutta. Farlie in turn was a brother-in-law of Carnegie of Penang. There was, therefore, a network of links among the European merchants, and within these groups, some were friends of Raffles. It became an open secret in Penang that merchant groups with Calcutta links were influential and interested parties in the outcome of the Acehnese civil war.

Raffles arrived in Calcutta in September 1818. During their meetings, he convinced Lord Hastings of the seriousness of the Dutch threat to British interests in the archipelago. There was an urgency to act fast to counter moves already made by the Dutch to expand their influence. As a first step, Raffles called for British intervention to end the civil war in Aceh, and to sign a treaty with whoever was the accepted ruler. Obtaining a British base there would give the British a strategic command of the Straits of Malacca. Secondly, he proposed establishing another base at the southern end of the Straits of Malacca. The successful implementation of the two proposals would ensure British control of the straits.

Even as Raffles was presenting his arguments, news reached Calcutta that the Dutch had foiled Major William Farquhar's efforts to sign commercial treaties with rulers in east Sumatra, Riau, and west Borneo. Then came a letter from Bannerman which confirmed
the failure of Farquhar at Pontianak in Borneo. The signing of these agreements would have given the British some access to the archipelago. The reports all lent weight and urgency to Raffles’s warning. Thus persuaded by Raffles, the Governor-General agreed to the immediate sending of a mission to Aceh.

Lord Hastings explained in a detailed minute of 25 October that his decision was for the sake of protecting existing British interests in South-East Asia rather than engaging in any new expansion of territories. Furthermore, it was a move that complied with the court’s general letter of 1805 which had called for the establishment of a British presence in Aceh. He elaborated that British interests were served by the abundant pepper supply in Aceh, which was so essential for the China trade. Furthermore, Aceh was a market for opium and British cotton goods. But British trade in Aceh was now threatened by the Americans and the Dutch, and already in the previous year (1817) some forty-three American ships had visited Aceh. There were signs that the Americans were also emerging as serious competitors in the opium trade: ‘[I]t is understood to be the intention next year [of the Americans] to bring Turkey Opium and to deliver to Acheen at a lower rate than the Bengal Opium.’ Hastings also commented on the strategic position of Aceh, a place which the French had used in the past against the British. A similar danger remained should war break out again. There was urgency because the Americans and, particularly, the Dutch were showing interest in Aceh. The influence of Raffles was clearly evident in Lord Hastings’s arguments.

Raffles and Coombs were appointed to lead the new mission to Aceh. Coombs was included because he had just come from Aceh, and there might be those in Calcutta who wanted someone to act as a check on Raffles. However, while they had joint responsibilities, Raffles was made the senior commissioner. In disputes on the interpretation of the instructions, Raffles was given the deciding say. In retrospect, it could be seen that granting this status of seniority to Raffles virtually decided, in Calcutta, the outcome of the Aceh mission. Given such divergence of views and the strong feelings held, it was unlikely that the two commissioners could come to an agreement on many of the issues, including the crucial question of which claimant the British should eventually recognize. But Raffles was in a stronger position to push for Jauhar al-Alam, who was known to be his choice.
Bengal was reluctant, fearing heavy expenses, to be committed to a military presence in a post-civil war Aceh. But it was willing, in the event that the Dutch had made overtures to Aceh, to consider some modest form of military assistance as a counter to Dutch offers. Even then, such aid was to be limited to helping the Sultan of Aceh defend himself against domestic opposition. To protect British interests in Aceh and the Straits of Malacca, the mission was to arrange the stationing of a British resident at the Acehnese capital. Furthermore, Bengal wanted a clause in the treaty to exclude other foreigners from residing in Aceh. This covered nationals of America and other European nations. The clause was to keep out of Aceh adventurers who in the past had been a nuisance to the British authorities, and to prevent the encroachment of other foreign powers.

At the completion of the mission and the signing of a treaty, Captain Coombs was to remain as British resident in Aceh. Besides watching over British interests, he was to offer advice when sought by the Sultan. Such advice was only on matters related to Aceh’s external relations. Coombs was not to interfere in the internal affairs of the sultanate.

Should it turn out that the Dutch had beaten the British to Aceh and had already signed a treaty, Raffles and Coombs should then seek from the Sultan an assurance that British subjects would be granted privileges and rights similar to any other European power in Aceh. Finally, the mission was to avoid entering into engagements with Aceh that could lead to conflict between the British and the Dutch.

Just as the mission was about to sail for Aceh, a note containing additional instructions was handed to Raffles. In it, Raffles was directed, on the completion of the Aceh mission, to proceed to the Riau islands to explore possibilities of a British settlement there. With these new instructions, Raffles gained Bengal’s approval for the two projects in the Straits of Malacca which he had advocated.

The Mission Stops at Penang

On 7 December, the Vestal and the Minto, the ships assigned to the mission, left Calcutta. They reached Penang on the last day of 1818. Raffles was met with an openly cold reception from the Penang government. Bannerman was clearly unhappy with Bengal’s
decision because he saw no reason to send another mission to Aceh so soon after that of Coombs. To Bannerman, the earlier Coombs mission had determined that Saif al-Alam was the more widely accepted claimant. Accordingly, Bannerman had written in November 1818 to the supreme government to be allowed to sign a treaty with Saif al-Alam and to send a detachment of troops to help him establish his authority. Furthermore, contrary to news that had reached Calcutta, reports received more recently in Penang supported Coombs’s observation of continuing broad support for Saif al-Alam. Bannerman was in agreement with Raffles only on the urgency of signing a treaty with Aceh before other Europeans intervened.

Both believed that the aim of the Dutch was to close off the archipelago to British traders. They also shared the view that the Straits of Malacca was an important route to China, and that the ports along it should be kept open. Bannerman himself had sent Farquhar to negotiate with Malay rulers in the region to ensure British access to their ports. However, with the Dutch swiftly anticipating British moves, there was hardly a port left open to the British. Riau, Johore, and Pahang had all signed treaties with the Dutch. Bannerman did not believe that the alternative was to develop another uninhabited island as a new entrepôt centre, citing costs as a deterring factor.

To Bannerman, the time for opening a British base in the southern stretch of the straits had passed. Such a move would only provoke a confrontation with the Dutch. In fact, any attempt would merely spur the Dutch to intensify their expansionist efforts in the archipelago. He believed that the interests of the British could best be advanced through negotiations by the two governments in Europe to demarcate clearly their respective spheres of influence in the archipelago. For these reasons, Bannerman was opposed to the Raffles–Coombs mission.

Bannerman was especially annoyed at Raffles’s interference. In December 1818, Bannerman wrote to Bengal pointing out that it was Penang which had so far been dealing with the present crisis in Aceh, and he wondered why there had been a sudden reversal of that understanding through the involvement of the Bencoolen Lieutenant-Governor, simply on the basis of a rumour of Jauhar al-Alam’s political resurgence. In a council meeting called on 18 January, Bannerman told members that Raffles, as a former secretary to the Penang Council who had handled the island’s correspondence with Aceh, should have fully realized that since
1805, the affairs relating to the north Sumatran state came under the jurisdiction of Penang.\textsuperscript{34}

Bannerman had earlier taken this matter up with London. The court of directors agreed with him. In January 1819, it wrote a strongly worded letter to Raffles, an extract of which was sent to Penang, reminding him not to interfere in the affairs of Aceh. London reaffirmed that Aceh came within the purview of Penang and India. But the letter allowed Raffles to act on Aceh if there were instructions from Bengal.

\ldots you are aware that the Affairs of Acheen have for some time past been [a] matter of discussion between the Government at Prince of Wales Island, and the Governor General in Council, by whom, the question of the Company's connection with that state has recently been submitted for the court's consideration.

You will therefore not interfere in any manner whatsoever in the affairs of Acheen without the express directions of the Bengal government.\textsuperscript{35}

What Bannerman found particularly hard to accept was the appointment of Raffles as the senior commissioner. Bannerman pointed out to the council that Jauhar al-Alam was a friend of Raffles, and therefore, the latter could not be expected to be impartial. The Acehnese award to Raffles was mentioned as evidence of that friendship. As further proof, Bannerman disclosed that Raffles had recently been in touch with Jauhar al-Alam and that, prior to leaving for Bengal, he had written to assure the deposed Sultan of Britain's support.

I hope I need not assure your Lordship's honourable mind that I have not a shadow of personal interest in the Establishment of either of the rival Kings of Acheen. But at the same time I conceive it my conscientious duty to declare that Sir Stamford Raffles having already opened a correspondence with Jowaher Allum Shah the presence and influence of that Gentleman at Acheen will only serve to raise and form a partial support of the ex-King which will eventually I am certain throw the whole country into convulsion.\textsuperscript{36}

Raffles denied the accusation made by Bannerman when he came to hear of it later. He admitted that he had written to Jauhar al-Alam, but it was merely to extend greetings from Bencoolen on his arrival to take up his post. "The only letter written to the King by Sir Stamford was complimentary and from Bencoolen, advising his having taken charge of that settlement and the desire to continue on the same friendly terms as had previously existed between His Highness, and the British Government."\textsuperscript{37} In the council, Bannerman
commented once again on the interest shown by the Penang public in the Acehnese civil war. He believed that several prominent traders were doing business with Jauhar al-Alam, and were therefore anxious to have the deposed Sultan reinstated. He identified, in particular, Brown and Company as well as Carnegy and Company. Bannerman claimed that those who had dealings with Jauhar al-Alam expected to benefit from his generosity and gratitude if he won. Others simply hoped that Jauhar al-Alam would win reinstatement, if only to be in a position to repay all the loans. If he was defeated, many merchants would suffer losses. Bannerman claimed that such merchants had provided Raffles with distorted information, and it was from these data that the latter had prepared his paper to the supreme government. Later, Bannerman made an even more serious charge when he imputed that one of Raffles’s concerns during the proceedings in Aceh was to make sure that Jauhar al-Alam not only returned as Sultan, but also that he was granted the financial means by the British to clear several debts owing to Penang merchants.

Bannerman informed Raffles and Coombs that he had written to Bengal on the matter of the mission. Until a reply came, which was expected soon, they should wait in Penang. Raffles reluctantly agreed. The delay gave the mission time to prepare for the trip to Aceh. While waiting in Penang, notes were exchanged between Raffles and Bannerman, and their dislike for each other was reflected in the correspondence as they expressed divergent views on various aspects of the mission. Even on matters such as the number of accompanying troops and personnel, there were sharp differences. Raffles wanted only a small force, probably fearing that a very large one could provoke unpredictable reactions from the Acehnese ulubalang. Bannerman, on the other hand, was concerned about the safety of the mission and had suggested a larger force. Furthermore, Raffles objected to the inclusion of R. Caunter, who had served as interpreter to Coombs in the last mission. Caunter had expressed views similar to Coombs, and Raffles was not willing to have him along this time.

There were other reasons why Bannerman objected to the Aceh mission. Foremost was his view that, as a former director of the Company, his opinion ought to have more weight than that of Raffles. He was disappointed that his recommendations on Aceh had not been accepted. Even if his former position was not to be considered, there was the status of Penang, whose opinion should
count, but little regard had been given to that simply because of Bencoolen's interference. Writing later to London, Bannerman complained that the mission 'make[s] me the instrument of assisting that Gentleman to aggrandize his own name and settlement; at the expense of the character, dignity and local influence of this Government'. Disturbing to Bannerman, too, was the prospect of Jauhar al-Alam returning to power, now almost certain with Raffles's involvement in the commission. It spelt defeat for Saif al-Alam, a contestant whom he and many other officials preferred. It would also be a major set-back to Syed Hussein, the island's prominent merchant. More than that, Aceh under Jauhar al-Alam would in future look more to Raffles and to Bencoolen rather than to Penang for advice.

... I at the same time earnestly entreat your Lordship to consider for a moment if much of the local weight or dignity of the Government is not sacrificed by giving the Lieutenant Governor of Bencoolen the opportunity and great advantage of teaching the person who may be chosen King, to look hereafter upon him as the friend and patron of his fortune.

Meanwhile, Raffles was impatient to get on with the task in Aceh. At Penang, Raffles had received disturbing reports that the Dutch had just occupied the Riau islands in what seemed part of their relentless effort to close off the archipelago to the British. To Raffles, there was now even greater urgency to proceed southwards to carry out the second part of his mission before further Dutch moves, even if this meant re-ordering the Schedule of the mission.

Bannerman came to hear of Raffles's intention, and immediately wrote on 3 January 1819 to remind him that Aceh was the first task of the mission, and only after its completion could Raffles proceed to the second assignment. Bannerman pointed out that the instructions 'distinctly order Acheen to be the first object of your mission, and desire you will prosecute their ulterior plans after the conclusion of the negotiations at Acheen'. Raffles claimed, in reply, that the supreme government, in a subsequent instruction, gave him the discretion to decide on the sequence of the mission. To this, Bannerman argued that the second part of Raffles's mission was now nullified by reports that the Dutch had signed a treaty with Riau, by which Johore, Riau, and the neighbouring islands had come under the Dutch. Bannerman pointed out that the seat of the Johore government was Riau and 'that the Dutch flag was actually flying at Johore'.

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Since Bannerman had raised the issue about the proper sequence of the mission’s tasks, Raffles set about to get the Aceh part of his assignment cleared up quickly so that he could go on to Riau. There were also dramatic reports that a Dutch fleet had been sighted moving northwards from Malacca, and speculations were that it was heading towards Aceh. Raffles considered it imperative to forestall this latest Dutch move, and he set 19 January as the date of departure for Aceh. Bannerman, on learning of this, immediately sent a note urging Raffles to further delay his departure until they heard from Bengal. He assured Raffles that he expected any day to get a reply to his letter of November 1818. To persuade Raffles that there was really no urgency with the Aceh issue, Bannerman informed him that according to new intelligence the Dutch fleet observed near Malacca had in fact stopped at Perak, and it had since turned back to Malacca.

Bannerman’s note turned out to have consequences of historic importance on the course of British imperial history. After Raffles read his note, he sent a polite reply agreeing to comply with Penang’s request. He accepted the Governor’s assurance that there was no immediate danger of Dutch intervention in Aceh. But preparations for the trip to Aceh had already been completed on the evening of 18 January 1819. He therefore informed Bannerman that, while waiting for further instruction from Bengal, he would follow Major Farquhar to the Carimon islands on a reconnaissance voyage instead of idling in Penang. Farquhar had only just departed, and Raffles notified the Governor that he would sail immediately after him.

Raffles did not send the note immediately to Bannerman, although he informed Coombs and others that the trip to Aceh had been put off at Bannerman’s request. In the early hours of the next morning, Raffles sailed. Only after the ships were out of the Penang harbour did Raffles’s letter of 18 January reach Bannerman.

Whether or not Raffles’s real priority all along had been to go south is debatable. If it was so, then his preparations to leave for Aceh on 18 January would have been a clever manoeuvre to mislead the Penang authorities. Or that having made preparations to sail on 19 January, he seized upon Bannerman’s call to further delay the Aceh trip to proceed quickly southwards to the Johore–Riau area, which he seemed keener to do. Bannerman was naturally furious that Raffles had left for the south despite his
earlier advice against it. While Coombs, the other commissioner of the mission, was informed of the postponed Aceh departure, he was certainly not briefed on Raffles's change of plan to head south. According to Bannerman later, there was no need for Raffles to hurry after Farquhar because the latter was still in Penang harbour on the morning of 19 January. What angered Bannerman further was that a day after leaving Penang, Raffles had sent the Minto to Pedir with a message for Jauhar al-Alam. Again, Coombs was not consulted. Bannerman claimed that the Minto was sent not only to assure Jauhar al-Alam of British support, but also to retrieve a letter which Raffles had allegedly written to the Sultan which could raise doubts about his impartiality.

There was really another reason for sending the Minto to Pedir. Even as Raffles was speeding towards the south, he had the gnawing worry that the Dutch might, in the meantime, pre-empt him in Aceh. He had heard reports that the Dutch had written to Jauhar al-Alam. Raffles, therefore, directed Lieutenant Criddle of the Minto to find out the nature of the Dutch communication to the deposed ruler. He was also to inform Jauhar al-Alam that the mission would shortly arrive in Aceh, and that in the meantime, he was not to deal with any European power. Jauhar al-Alam was assured that he could expect the mission to be fair.

On 13 February, Raffles returned to Penang after acquiring the island of Singapore for the East India Company through a treaty signed with the Temenggong of Johore. Having completed one part of Bengal's instructions, and satisfied that the new settlement was strategically placed to protect British interests in the Straits of Malacca, he was prepared to address the Aceh issue. However, the letter from Bengal had still not arrived. By this time, Raffles viewed his next task in a less urgent and threatened atmosphere.

Twelve days after Raffles's return, the long-awaited letter from Bengal finally came. In it, the supreme government reaffirmed its original instructions to the mission, stating that there was no reason for any amendments. However, if, as reports had suggested, Riau and Johore had come under the Dutch and if because of this development, Raffles had returned to Bencoolen, Coombs was to continue the mission to Aceh on his own. The supreme government assured Bannerman that with a British resident appointed to Aceh, whoever was to be the Sultan would not need to consult Bencoolen, a concern expressed by Penang earlier.

On receiving Bengal's letter, Bannerman reconciled himself to the mission proceeding to Aceh as planned. He offered the mission
a military escort from the First Battalion of the 20th Bengal Infantry Regiment, a contingent of troops sailing from India to Ceylon, whose ship had been forced by bad weather to Penang. As there was no urgency for the force to be in Ceylon and he was also worried at the expense of keeping such a large number of troops on the island, Bannerman suggested that they be deployed with the Aceh mission. Raffles turned down the offer, but accepted the smaller force originally assigned.

It was not until after Raffles and Coombs had sailed from Penang that another letter from Bengal arrived, addressing some of the points raised by Bannerman. Bengal expressed annoyance that the mission should have been held back simply because Penang wanted further clarification. The supreme government dismissed Penang’s contention that all that needed to be known about the Acehnese civil war had been obtained by Coombs. Bengal explained that it had originally planned to send Coombs back to Penang, and to allow the authorities there to act on the findings of his report. But fresh reports that reached Bengal gave a different picture of the situation in Aceh. Bengal contended that because this new information was relevant but could not be verified, it had become necessary to send a second mission. The letter sharply reminded Penang that the supreme government had the jurisdiction and competence to deal with the Aceh question. At the same time, Bengal took a serious view of Raffles’s action in sending the Minto to Pedir. If the allegations could be substantiated, then Raffles had acted against the spirit and letter of the instructions. Impartiality had been expected. Penang was asked to furnish details of Raffles’s Pedir action, and Raffles was also required to answer the allegations.

Bengal, in its approach, certainly tried to be balanced.

The Raffles–Coombs Mission in Aceh, 1819

As the mission proceeded to Aceh, it was clear that the protracted conflict in Aceh could not be resolved quickly if left to the participants themselves. Neither combatant possessed adequate military capability to destroy the challenge of the other. Both were well defended in their bases—Jauhar al-Alam at Sriduli and Saif al-Alam at Telok Samoy. The strongholds of both claimants, on the north-east coast, were close to Penang where supplies could be conveniently obtained and diplomatic contact was not too far away.
Jauhar al-Alam was greatly encouraged by the recent turn of events. The appointment of Raffles to Bencoolen as Lieutenant-Governor led him to expect a sympathetic hearing from that direction, especially with regard to problems in the west coast pepper districts. In the past, the British in west Sumatra had sided with those rebelling against him, and since 1809, this had created political complications. With Raffles in charge, the Sultan expected things to be different.

Contact was re-established between the Sultan and Raffles. Jauhar al-Alam was hopeful that, through Raffles, his relations with the British could be restored. It did not seem so long ago that Lord Minto had written seeking Aceh’s assistance and later, in appreciation, sent some military supplies as a gift. To Jauhar al-Alam, all these must count for something to the British, should they review the Aceh situation. The arrival in late January or early February 1819 of the *Minto*, a name which evoked memories of happier days in dealing with the British, was therefore warmly received by the deposed Sultan.

The Mission at the Acehnese Capital

It was to the capital that the Raffles–Coombs mission first headed. The mission left Penang on 8 March 1819 and arrived at Banda Aceh a week later, on 14 March. The atmosphere in the capital was tense, a typical response whenever a foreign mission turned up. On this occasion, there was further apprehension as it was known in the capital that one of the commissioners was not only sympathetic to Jauhar al-Alam, but had probably communicated with him already. Rumours had also begun circulating that additional British forces had assembled in Penang and, in collaboration with Jauhar al-Alam, were preparing to attack Aceh to reinstate the deposed Sultan. Men like Shaik Salim and those associated with the late Haji Abdul Rahim were in regular touch with Penang, and would have come to know of increased troop movements, but which had nothing to do with developments in Aceh.

After anchoring at the harbour, the mission sent word to the *syahbandar* announcing its arrival, and seeking a meeting with the leading *ulubalang*. By this time, the Panglima Sagis had gathered at the capital. Amidst mounting tension, they sent back a message accepting the invitation for a meeting, but suggested that this be held a week later. In the meantime, the commissioners and crew
of the *Indiana* were forbidden to land. There was an underlying mood of hostility and distrust towards the mission by the *ulubalang*. Despite this, the leading *ulubalang* were willing to hold discussions.\(^{51}\)

Raffles and Coombs spent the time on board the ship studying the notes and documents they had brought with them on the Aceh dispute. They prepared arguments and exchanged papers. Both Raffles and Coombs painstakingly tried to make out a case for the candidate they each believed ought to be recognized, and with whom the treaty should be signed. In what was described as a paper war, well over 1,000 pages of notes were exchanged between the two men.\(^{62}\) On most of the major points, Raffles and Coombs took divergent positions.

Raffles held the advantage in the exchanges. As the senior commissioner, his decision prevailed whenever there was disagreement. Coombs could only record a note of dissent on all those points in the final report, but it had no impact on the outcome. Raffles was also better prepared, and was able to marshal his arguments well. He had a deeper knowledge of Aceh's long history as well as a better sense of the prevailing political conditions in the region than Coombs. It was an understanding cultivated since he first arrived in 1805 as secretary to the Penang government. He had also studied the history and culture of the region, and he certainly displayed a better grasp of the local scene.

Raffles presented the case for recognizing Jauhar al-Alam on three grounds. First, he contended that Jauhar al-Alam had legitimacy to the throne, having come from a long line of rulers. According to Raffles, there had been eight earlier rulers in the royal line to which Jauhar al-Alam belonged, and the names of these Sultans were engraved in the Acehnese seal and in the book of prayers used in all mosques in Aceh. Raffles did not specify who the eight rulers were, and Coombs did not know enough to have pointed out that there were only three other rulers before Jauhar al-Alam in the Bugis line. Such a matter would not have influenced the outcome in any case.

The regular succession of Kings is certain, it is a matter of as public notoriety as that of any European Potentate, and the names of the eight Sovereigns through whom he [Jauhar al-Alam] traces his descent, are engraved on the great seal, and written in the Book of Prayer which are read aloud in all the Mosques throughout his Dominions.\(^{63}\)

To strengthen his arguments, Raffles pointed out that Jauhar al-Alam had occupied the throne for about ten years before the
dethronement by the Panglima Sagis. Raffles cast doubt on Syed Hussein's legitimacy and his so-called line of royal descent. Syed Hussein's claim to the throne was that his father, although a commoner, had married the daughter of Sultan Jemal Syah. While this might have been true, Syed Hussein was not the offspring of that union. Raffles believed that the mother of Syed Hussein was, in fact, a commoner. Raffles further contended that Saif al-Alam's mother was a slave girl and not the wife of Syed Hussein, and this further weakened his claim.

Secondly, Raffles disagreed that the Panglima Sagis had the authority to depose or elect a ruler. Raffles contended that the Panglima Sagis were low in the Acehnese political order, and that their presence on the occasions when rulers were installed was only to add pomp to the occasion. Raffles held that election to a vacant throne was made by the princes, the Council of Wuziers, and the ulubalang of all the districts. He seemed to argue that there was no mechanism to removing a ruler. This being the case, if Jauhar al-Alam was not dethroned, then by implication Saif al-Alam was not properly installed.

Coombs failed in his report to rebut Raffles regarding the status of the Panglima Sagis. He could have pointed to their influential position, and how in the past they had overthrown rulers. Raffles probably took the view that within the Acehnese political hierarchy, the orang kaya and the ulubalang at court were placed higher. In formal terms, this might be true, but in practice, the Panglima Sagis certainly exercised more power.

Finally, Raffles submitted to Coombs a tabulation of the mukim in Aceh, listing those which supposedly supported Jauhar al-Alam and those which were with Saif al-Alam. Raffles's table claimed that of the 228 mukim in Aceh Proper, Pedir, and other districts along the Pedir coast, Jauhar al-Alam had 196 on his side, while Saif al-Alam had only 32. Furthermore, there were unconfirmed reports that two of the Panglima Sagis had switched their support to Jauhar al-Alam. They were the Paduka Sri Setia Ulama of the federation of twenty-five mukim and Teuku Imam Muda of the federation of twenty-six mukim. This later turned out to be totally untrue. Raffles conceded that there were a few ulubalang under these two Panglima Sagis who still opposed Jauhar al-Alam. But this was balanced by the seven mukim under Tunku Bahi, in the Panglima Polim's federation of twenty-two mukim, said now to be loyal to Jauhar al-Alam. Raffles also contended that there were other powerful ulubalang who were with Jauhar al-Alam. Among
them, he listed Teuku Kali, Choo Adjut (the Laksamana), and Panglima Lambeuchury. Teuku Kali could be Teuku Kali Malikon Ade, traditionally a high-ranking *orang kaya* in the Sultan’s council who controlled four strategic *mukim* at the capital. How Raffles got the figures and information is not clear. It is likely that these were provided by Jauhar al-Alam or his supporters. But there was no way to verify their accuracy.

Raffles observed that the fundamental problem in Acehnese politics was the weakened position of the rulers, due to the inability of the court to collect revenue. Raffles had noted that except for a small land-rent, the revenue of the Sultan was made up entirely of proceeds from port duties. Coombs agreed with Raffles, and argued that the claimant eventually recognized had to be aided by the British if he were to recover authority. There must be a British resident backed by a sufficiently large number of troops. Otherwise, the pattern of weak rule in Aceh would recur. This was an argument long held by Raffles.

In supporting Jauhar al-Alam over Saif al-Alam, however, Raffles took the line that Syed Hussein was the main cause of the ongoing conflict in Aceh, and that removing Saif al-Alam would end the civil war. Coombs disagreed, and traced a sequence of events prior to Syed Hussein’s involvement to show that there had been earlier opposition to Jauhar al-Alam. Simply recognizing one claimant without removing the real sources of instability in Aceh would not solve the problem. In this, Coombs was to be proven right.

Coombs had not been intimidated by his more illustrious and senior colleague. He had earlier come under strong criticism from Bannerman for his allegedly inept performance in Calcutta, which had allowed Raffles to convince the Governor-General to set aside the findings of the (Coombs) mission to Aceh. Even before the mission set out for Aceh, Coombs had recorded dissent with Raffles. On the matter of a troop escort, Coombs had favoured accepting Penang’s offer of the Ceylon-based battalion. He believed that the existing military accompaniment was of insufficient strength to protect the mission.

For every view I have taken of the subject either professionally as an officer or formed on the experience of my former mission has impressed me with the conviction more and more confirmed by reflection of the impolicy and hazard of leaving at a time in such a country as Acheen, so limited and inefficient a force as that going with the Commission as an Escort.
In Aceh, Coombs disputed with Raffles on most points, and tried to defend the conclusions he had made in the previous year (1818). In the end, the issue that appeared to have swung Coombs to Raffles's point of view was the genealogy of Syed Hussein. Raffles had succeeded in casting doubt on the claims of Syed Hussein. From the British point of view, Syed Hussein had no real claim to royal connections. On accepting this, Coombs could not support Saif al-Alam.\textsuperscript{70}

As the commissioners debated, onshore activities of a militarily hostile nature were observed by the \textit{Indiana}. Additional fortifications at the entrance of the Aceh River were being built amidst tense anticipation at the capital. Reports were also received that the Panglima Polim had gathered a large number of armed men around the palace, presumably anticipating that it would be the first place that Jauhar al-Alam, in a joint action with the mission, might want to attack.\textsuperscript{71} The Panglima Polim and his men had taken possession of the palace and a nearby fort when Jauhar al-Alam, and later Saif al-Alam, left the capital some time back. On 24 March, the commissioners wrote to the Panglima Sagis, expressing concern about the military preparations observed and the possible intent behind them.

The Panglima Sagis sent a polite note assuring the mission that, while indeed there was construction work and that cannons were being moved to the river-mouth, there was no hostile intention. They appealed to the mission not to listen to rumours. Once again, the Panglima Sagis offered to meet the mission.\textsuperscript{72}

By this time, Raffles had decided to abandon plans to disembark, and instead to leave Banda Aceh for Sriduli. He did not trust the Panglima Polim, and feared for the safety of the mission. With the gathering of armed Acehnese at the capital, a meeting was dangerous.\textsuperscript{73} He was also told that Shaik Salim had recruited a number of mercenary troops for deployment at the capital. Raffles realized that the Panglima Sagis remained strongly opposed to Jauhar al-Alam, and he privately had doubts that he could persuade them to accept the deposed ruler again. He suspected that any meeting would merely confirm the earlier findings of Coombs, and this was not what he wanted. Raffles was particularly anxious to avoid any unpleasant incidents that could later be used to discredit the mission and his role. There had already been an incident. Some crew members from the mission’s ships had earlier gone ashore to do some bird-shooting. They were confronted by some armed
Acehnese, who detained them briefly. They were released, but their guns were confiscated by the Acehnese.

The date scheduled for a meeting had come and gone, and the Panglima Polim became increasingly impatient as he waited for some response from the Indiana. Finally, he wrote to Raffles and Coombs that if the mission did not land by the next day, its members would not be allowed into the capital at all. Anyone from the mission, including crew members, found onshore after that would be killed. The Panglima warned that a notice to this effect had been made public throughout the capital. The note also informed the mission that the Panglima Sagis had declared their support for Saif al-Alam to Coombs in the previous year, and they reaffirmed that position.

In the meantime, arrangements by the mission to visit Saif al-Alam fell through. The mission had sent word seeking a meeting with him. But Saif al-Alam, disappointed that the agreement with Coombs made the previous year was now unlikely to be honoured, refused to meet the mission. He had an inkling of the likely outcome of any fresh negotiations. For the mission, the remaining task in its assignment was a meeting with Jauhar al-Alam.

**Signing a Treaty with Jauhar al-Alam**

The mission left Banda Aceh on 5 April, and arrived the next day at Sriduli where Jauhar al-Alam was patiently waiting. Together with him were the new ruler of Pedir and Bendahara Kamangan of Shilloch, the two most powerful ulubalang on the Pedir coast. Their presence was undoubtedly to lend some credibility to Jauhar al-Alam’s claim of support.

The mission had by now decided to recognize Jauhar al-Alam as Sultan. But it went through the formality of ascertaining the situation, and discussions with the deposed Sultan were held over several days. In one of the meetings, Jauhar al-Alam produced a packet of letters which he claimed were sent by ulubalang from all over Aceh pledging loyalty. The authenticity of the letters was not questioned, and Raffles acknowledged that no pledges came from the Panglima Sagis, Tengku Karuat of Telok Samoy, and Lebai Dappah of Singkil. In the meeting, Jauhar al-Alam expressed regret for past actions that might have offended the British. Raffles considered this an adequate apology, thereby allowing both sides to have a fresh start in relations.
Discussions then moved to the question of a treaty. On 22 April 1819, after nearly seven weeks in Aceh, the commissioners signed a treaty with Jauhar al-Alam granting him British recognition as Sultan of Aceh. Two articles in the treaty were framed specifically to help end the war and to restore order. Under Article 2, Jauhar al-Alam was to grant a pension to Saif al-Alam. The British, on their part, would see to it that Saif al-Alam left Aceh and did not interfere in its future affairs. Subsequently, there was disagreement as to who ought to pay Saif al-Alam’s pension. Coombs argued that as it was an Acehnese conflict, the costs of such a settlement must be borne by the Sultan. Raffles, on the other hand, pointed out that Saif al-Alam was a British subject and the East India Company had a responsibility, having negotiated the treaty, to persuade him to abandon the campaign and to use the pension as an inducement. In Article 8, the British agreed to provide Jauhar al-Alam with military assistance, the details of which were to be worked out later.

The rest of the articles were similar to those in the draft agreed upon earlier between Coombs and Saif al-Alam. In foreign affairs, Aceh was not to enter into treaty arrangements with other nations without the consent of the British. To ease British concern about American trade competition, the treaty required Aceh to exclude all other Europeans and Americans from residence or settlement in the sultanate.

The significance of the 1819 treaty was that a formal agreement setting out terms for Aceh-British relations was finally signed after several exploratory attempts made since 1771. The treaty had some immediate political impact on events in Aceh. But the long-term significance and overall value were limited. For Aceh, the treaty effectively ended Saif al-Alam’s challenge for the throne. With no prospect of British recognition and support, Saif al-Alam had eventually to withdraw from Aceh. Jauhar al-Alam, without the complications of a rival claimant to the throne, had only the orang kaya and ulubalang to cope with. Through the agreement with the British, Jauhar al-Alam received military supplies on at least two occasions. In the treaty, the British also conceded that Jauhar al-Alam had the right to stop ships in Acehnese waters found carrying illicit military supplies.

Having completed its task, the mission returned to Penang. Just before leaving, Raffles provided Jauhar al-Alam with some military supplies and a loan of 50,000 Spanish dollars. But the mission
appointed no resident as had been proposed. Coombs was to have acted as an interim resident until a proper appointment could be made. Raffles did not favour having a resident for the moment, arguing that Jauhar al-Alam did not require such an adviser. Perhaps Raffles really believed that Jauhar al-Alam had sufficient support to re-establish his position without the aid of a British resident, and that the civil war would quickly end once Saif al-Alam was removed.81

It could also have been that Raffles considered a resident and a British settlement in Aceh as no longer of priority now that Singapore was established. Singapore was more strategically located for controlling the Straits of Malacca. It also did not have troublesome ulubalang to deal with. Presumably, Raffles wanted the British to concentrate on developing Singapore, and not to be distracted and preoccupied with a settlement in Aceh.

There was disapproval in Bengal and in London of the proceedings of the mission in Aceh. The authorities accepted the treaty signed with Jauhar al-Alam but without much enthusiasm, noting that very little could be expected from it. Raffles was censured by both authorities for some of the decisions he had made. In July 1819, Bengal wrote to the two commissioners to acknowledge receipt of the main report and various other papers. In the letter, Raffles was censured for sending the Minto with a message to Jauhar al-Alam because the action was calculated to lead the deposed ruler to expect the mission’s support, and that by this action, the impartiality of the mission could be called into question. It also expressed disapproval that Raffles had not consulted Coombs on the Minto trip. Bengal also regretted that Raffles declined to meet the Panglima Sagis after they had accepted the invitation to a meeting, and described the behaviour of the mission as ‘so unconciliatory and insulting’.82 Furthermore, while accepting the mission’s decision not to recognize Saif al-Alam, it doubted the wisdom of signing a treaty with Jauhar al-Alam. A treaty was of no urgency given the weak political position of the deposed ruler. Finally, Bengal wondered why a loan to Jauhar al-Alam was deemed necessary.

London, in its letter of May 1819 to Bengal and in its review of the Aceh proceedings, was just as critical. Bengal itself did not escape London’s displeasure over the manner in which the whole affair was handled. In particular, it questioned Bengal’s decision to send the mission at all. Commenting on Lord Hastings’s argument that Bengal was merely carrying out the 1805 directive
of London, the court pointed out that its earlier instruction to occupy Aceh was given at a time of war with France when there had been a danger to British interests. But in a period of peace, the court did not approve of using political means to advance its commercial objectives. London was especially opposed to moves that risked a conflict with the Dutch in South-East Asia.\(^{83}\)

Raffles later came in for some sharp criticisms from the secret committee in London. In its letter of 14 August 1819 to Bengal, it observed that Raffles had contravened the instructions of Bengal ‘both in letter and in spirit’. Raffles had gone against the letter of the instructions by proceeding to Singapore before completing the Aceh mission, and by communicating with Jauhar al-Alam even before the mission visited the Acehnese capital; in spirit, because Raffles’s action risked creating a conflict situation between the British and the Dutch in the Straits of Malacca. Raffles replied to these criticisms, and from Bencoolen he wrote to explain his actions.\(^{84}\)

**In the Aftermath of the Treaty, 1819–1824**

It was several months before some of the provisions of the treaty began to take effect. Of these, the most important was the forced withdrawal of Saif al-Alam from the contest by the British. Under the treaty, Saif al-Alam was entitled to a pension on condition that he left Aceh within three months. But his withdrawal did not end the civil war immediately. Soon after the signing of the treaty, the Panglima Sagis wrote to Penang complaining about the mission’s proceedings in Aceh, and reaffirming the *ulubalang*’s allegiance to Saif al-Alam. To the Panglima Sagis and other *ulubalang* at the capital, Jauhar al-Alam remained deposed and was no longer Sultan. It was only from the British viewpoint that Jauhar al-Alam had regained the throne. Given this stubborn resistance, Jauhar al-Alam could not return to the capital, and he remained at Sriduli. Indeed, for some months, Saif al-Alam held on in Aceh and continued to use Telok Samoy as his stronghold.

Penang disagreed with the decision of the mission to recognize Jauhar al-Alam as the Sultan, but accepted the outcome of the Raffles–Coombs agreement. In June 1819, the Governor graciously sent a note offering congratulations to Jauhar al-Alam on his return to the throne. At the same time, some military supplies were sent to the Sultan as agreed to in the Sriduli agreement.\(^{85}\)
Continued Resistance to Jauhar al-Alam

There was scepticism in Penang among some officials and merchants that Jauhar al-Alam could indeed gain effective control of Aceh once again. There had been no significant changes in the balance of power in Aceh, which was still weighted against Jauhar al-Alam.\(^{86}\) Writing to London in July 1819, Penang reported that there were still unrest and political uncertainty in Aceh, and that unless Jauhar al-Alam won back the support of the Panglima Sagis, he would never have real authority as Sultan.\(^{87}\) Penang further argued that immediately following the signing of the treaty, a resident should have been appointed to Aceh if indeed it was British intention to bring peace and order to Aceh. Phillips claimed that Penang could have quite easily dispatched 1,000 troops to assist Jauhar al-Alam at that time if instructions had come from Bengal.

Soon afterwards, Penang, on its initiative, assigned William Sartorius to be agent on Acehnese affairs.\(^{88}\) There had been efforts to appoint a local Muslim to the task so that he could also act as an adviser to the Sultan, but no one qualified could be found. Sartorius, a member of the Raffles-Coombs mission to Aceh, was to have stayed behind in Aceh as assistant to the British resident.\(^{89}\) But since there was not to be a resident, Sartorius's function was scaled down so that he assisted the Penang government on Acehnese affairs, and acted as a link between the British and Aceh. When there was a need, he was to visit the sultanate as well as to handle all correspondence. Thus, Sartorius was to assume in Penang some of the functions which were to have been exercised by a resident in Aceh.\(^{90}\)

The first news of Jauhar al-Alam received by Penang since the Raffles-Coombs mission was in June 1819. The ship *James Scott*, on her return voyage from India, was driven by bad weather to Pedir, and its captain a certain O'Halloran, had a chance to meet Jauhar al-Alam at Sriduli. According to O'Halloran, Jauhar al-Alam had a number of Chulias around him. The Sultan spoke hopefully of his plans to raise an army of 500 troops, and to march overland to the capital once funds and military supplies arrived from Penang.\(^{91}\)

In July 1819, Sartorius was sent to Aceh to find out how Jauhar al-Alam was getting on. At Pedir, he learnt that the Sultan was still at Sriduli. When he finally met the Sultan, Sartorius observed that little had changed since he was last there.\(^{92}\) From Sartorius's
point of view, affairs at Sriduli had gotten worse; he was especially disappointed at the quality of men surrounding the Sultan. The person on whom the Sultan had come to rely most at this time was Koh Lay Huan. Koh had played a significant role in sustaining Jauhar al-Alam’s fight against the challenge of Saif al-Alam. Revenue for the war was substantially derived from the trade conducted through Koh and some Penang Chinese.

Doubts about Koh’s suitability as adviser to the Sultan appeared to be well founded when a month after Sartorius’s visit to Sriduli, the Chinese turned up at Penang to redeem bills with Carnegy and Company. The bills worth 42,000 Spanish dollars were part of the loan given to the Sultan by the mission. Alerts to the matter, the government asked Sartorius to check on the transaction. After making enquiries, Sartorius learnt that Koh was about to return to Aceh, taking back only 10,000 Spanish dollars in cash and 6,000 Spanish dollars worth of opium. On being questioned, Koh acknowledged that he was keeping the balance, but insisted that this was a sum which the Sultan owed him.

The Penang government took the opportunity to bring up in council the whole question of Raffles’s loan to the Sultan. Officials suspected that this had been given to allow the Sultan to clear his debts. The creditors were said to be all friends of Raffles. A sum of 16,000 Spanish dollars in cash and the rest in bills of exchange redeemable with Carnegy and Company was handed directly to the Sultan; there was no way, therefore, for the British authorities to monitor how these were spent. Penang felt that it would have been more prudent to dispense the loan through its treasury for proper accounting. Instead, a substantial part of the loan had been siphoned off through questionable transactions. Carnegy and Company, for instance, honoured half of the bills in cash. The rest were exchanged for opium which came from Carnegy’s own store. Sartorius alleged that the opium was sold to the Sultan at a price higher than that prevailing in the market. The commodity was, in fact, experiencing a downturn in demand. Besides Carnegy, several other Penang merchants to whom the Sultan owed money also recovered part of their loan.

Meanwhile, Saif al-Alam reluctantly withdrew to Telok Samoy to ponder over his options. The commissioners to Aceh had written to both Saif al-Alam and Syed Hussein immediately after the signing of the treaty to notify them that the British recognized Jauhar al-Alam as Sultan. Saif al-Alam was informed that he would be paid a regular pension calculated from the date he left Aceh.
Clearly disappointed with the proceedings of the Raffles-Coombs mission, Saif al-Alam nevertheless wrote back stating that he would abide by the decision.\(^97\) He wanted immunity from all claims that might later be made against him for his actions as Sultan of Aceh. On 2 July 1819, he wrote to the Penang government.

It is known to the governor, I am rajah of the country of Acheen, and am engaged in war with my enemies, viz ... the rajah who was formerly deposed and I have been in the habit of capturing the property of the deposed rajah, and the deposed rajah of making captive of those belonging to me, for this long time past, because we are at war.\(^98\)

Syed Hussein, who was asked to see to it that Saif al-Alam returned to Penang, wrote back to assure that he would comply with the directive.\(^99\)

But in Aceh itself, opponents of Jauhar al-Alam did not accept the 1819 treaty, which to them was not binding. Towards the end of 1819, there were rumours that Saif al-Alam and the Panglima Sagis were preparing a major assault on Sriduli. Penang, determined not to allow the conflict in Aceh to flare up again, summoned Syed Hussein. He and members of his family were warned to stop interfering in Aceh. Through Syed Hussein, Penang could place pressure on Saif al-Alam. There was no attack on Jauhar al-Alam, suggesting that it was probably a wild rumour or that Penang’s warning was an effective deterrent.\(^100\)

Sometime in early 1820, Jauhar al-Alam managed to return to the outskirts of the Acehnese capital. He took advantage of an outbreak of cholera in Banda Aceh to establish a foothold there.\(^101\) But that was to be the extent of his success because he failed to capture it. He built a fortified stockade close to the entrance of the Aceh River, thereby giving him a strategic position at the town’s outskirts. With access to the harbour, he carried on some trade and sent his revenue ships to the Pedir and west coasts.

Early in 1820, Penang was again alerted by reports that increased activities were observed in Telok Samoy, and that Saif al-Alam had suddenly departed. Once again, there were strong rumours that he was planning to launch a major offensive against Jauhar al-Alam. Fearing that this flare-up could rekindle the conflict and not having much information to act upon, the Penang government asked the *Dauntless*, a British warship to call at Aceh. The *Dauntless* could not make the trip. But a Company ship, the *Sylful*, brought back news that there was no attack, and that Jauhar al-Alam was still holding out at his fortified position.
What had been observed in Telok Samoy was, in fact, the departure of Saif al-Alam for Calcutta where he planned to appeal against the decision of the Raffles–Coombs mission. Saif al-Alam realized that, ultimately, it was British power and influence, once seemingly remote from Acehnese affairs, which could restore him to power, in as much as it had effectively checked his present bid through the Raffles–Coombs mission. Support from his backers in Penang was now extremely difficult to obtain. His influence, especially among the merchants and the ulubalang in Aceh, had dwindled. Still a young man barely in his twenties, Saif al-Alam could not entirely give up until he had presented his case to the supreme government.

Saif al-Alam arrived in Calcutta in February 1820, and sought to see the Governor-General. In a letter, Saif al-Alam wrote:

I beg leave to state with the utmost respect and devotion that I have arrived from Acheen to Calcutta merely for the purpose of waiting on the Gov-Gen, the fame of whose justice and equity has reached every quarter of the Globe.

I present my respect and compliments to the Lordship and I beg he will honor me with an interview after which I will cheerfully and willingly conform to whatever he may be pleased to order with regard to me.  

The appeal failed, and Saif al-Alam finally had to be content with the compensation of a pension paid not by the Acehnese government but by the Bengal administration. Unsuccessful in India, he sailed back to Penang, arriving in July 1820. Saif al-Alam never returned to Aceh.

Despite the departure of Saif al-Alam from the Aceh contest, Jauhar al-Alam was still unable to end the conflict. He regained the support of a number of powerful ulubalang, but not that of the Panglima Sagis. Fighting between the two warring sides probably tapered off. The continuing conflict underlined the fact that, while Syed Hussein and Saif al-Alam had been important players in Acehnese affairs, their recent entanglement did not lead to any fundamental change in the sultanate’s politics, and the causes and the nature of instability remained as they had been when it first began.

In contrast to Jauhar al-Alam, the Queen Mother appeared to have worked out some political reconciliation with the Panglima Sagis, and once again held some influence at the capital. The renewed contact between the Queen Mother and the Panglima Sagis probably helped reduce tension at the capital and the level
of hostilities, and allowed the resumption of normal everyday life. Trade had been affected at the early stage of the civil war, but had gradually resumed, although probably at a curtailed pace. In any case, much of the active trade in pepper and betel-nut was conducted on the west and Pedir coasts.

Penang’s Disappointment with the Treaty

From the British viewpoint, the political situation in Aceh had not improved as much as had been hoped for. There were still occasional reports of attacks on British-registered ships along the Acehnese coast. One of these was the *Johnny*, attacked in May 1820 at Analabu on the north-west coast of Aceh. A week after the *Johnny* report, another was received of an incident off the coast of Pedir during which a British subject was killed.\(^{104}\)

Penang felt that the treaty and its own modest efforts to assist Jauhar al-Alam had not, after a year, brought peace and stability to Aceh. There was as yet no political or military breakthrough that indicated possible improvements in Aceh in the near future. Unless something dramatic happened, Penang saw no point in being too preoccupied with the politics in Aceh. In fact, Phillips, who took over from Bannerman in August 1819 as Governor, did not place Aceh high on Penang’s agenda of concern, and expressed the view that all the fuss and attention over the previous year or so had been quite unnecessary.\(^{105}\) In June 1820, therefore, he announced the abolition of the post dealing with Acehnese affairs held by Sartorius.\(^{106}\)

 Barely a month after that, Penang received a ratified copy of the 1819 treaty from Bengal with instructions that it be delivered to the Sultan.\(^{107}\) Phillips immediately arranged to send Sartorius to Aceh with the treaty, and also to get an update on the situation there. He gave instructions that the handing over of the treaty should be carried out with appropriate pomp and ceremony in keeping with the dignity of the occasion and to accord Jauhar al-Alam proper respect aimed at impressing his opponents.\(^{108}\) It was to be a demonstration to all in Aceh of British support for the Sultan, and that they would fully honour the provisions of the treaty.

Sartorius was instructed to visit all the Acehnese ports from Singkil on the west coast to Tamiang on the east to collect political and economic information.\(^{109}\) In surveying the Acehnese coast, he was to take note of the trade potential.\(^{110}\) He was also to meet the *ulubalang* of the various ports, and to encourage
reconciliation between them and the Sultan. But where it was ascertained that a place was truly independent, Sartorius was to sign a commercial agreement with the raja.\textsuperscript{111}

Sartorius left Penang on the *Norfolk* on 8 August 1820. On the way, he received news from a passing ship that there was trouble again in Aceh, and that the Panglima Polim had massed armed men around the capital. In fact, soon after he had set sail, an urgent appeal to Penang for assistance was received from the Sultan. Jauhar al-Alam asked for 500 sepoys and some military supplies for use against the Panglima Sagis.\textsuperscript{112}

Penang replied to the Sultan that it could not send troops to Aceh without authorization from the Bengal government, but it was willing to provide some military supplies.\textsuperscript{113} In addition, the government would have no objection to the Sultan recruiting mercenary troops from the island. At the same time, Penang assured Jauhar al-Alam that the arrival of Sartorius would by itself discourage any attack from the Panglima Polim.

This was not all of the Sultan’s problems. A letter from the Sultan shortly afterwards accused Koh Lay Huan of having cheated him of a substantial part of the British loan. He complained that Koh had left him with less than half of the 50,000 Spanish dollars that had been given by the mission.\textsuperscript{114} The Penang government was not at all surprised by the Sultan’s complaint, having been suspicious earlier of Koh’s handling of the bills of exchange. Advice was the only consolation that Phillips could give to the Sultan. ‘I think it right to caution my friend in the strongest terms against affording his countenance to disreputable Europeans, and others who can speak and write a little English, and hope to render such knowledge subservient to their own selfish views, and not to the advancement of my friend’s honour and interest.’\textsuperscript{115}

The *Norfolk* bringing Sartorius sailed into the harbour at Banda Aceh in early September 1820. A salute was fired by the ship, and this was reciprocated by the Sultan’s cannons onshore. On landing, Sartorius, accompanied by troops, was met by the Sultan’s brother-in-law, who was styled the military commander.\textsuperscript{116} They were escorted to the Sultan’s temporary residence. The Sultan had prepared a ceremonial welcome appropriate for the occasion. Acehnese troops mounted a guard of honour, and Sartorius was impressed by the 120 men in new uniforms, patterned after those used by the Bengal sepoys.

Sartorius was met by the Sultan and led to the place of the meeting. He was disappointed at the sight of the building which
he described as a small hut, 'such a one as a native [in Penang] on a monthly salary of 15 or 20 dollars would object to occupy'. After a short speech, Sartorius handed over the ratified copy of the treaty to the Sultan. At a prearranged signal, the Norfolk’s guns boomed out a salute.

Sartorius set up camp where he remained for a few days. The Sultan was encamped in a stockade at the entrance of the river. Some 5 kilometres further away, he controlled another military post where 100 of his troops were stationed. There were reports of occasional fighting between the Sultan’s men and those of the federation of twenty-two mukim. The situation remained tense during the time Sartorius was in Aceh. The Sultan had apparently made several unsuccessful attempts to gain control of the capital.

The Sultan visited Sartorius on several occasions. On the first night, he turned up just as Sartorius was finishing dinner. Sartorius described him as having on a dirty silk sarong round his loins, a coarse banny on that had once been white, and a Lascar’s worsted cap on his baldhead which gave him so grotesque an appearance, that it was with the greatest of difficulty we could preserve our gravity. The Sultan explained that he had returned from an inspection of his troops and that he shared watch duties with his brother-in-law. The Sultan conversed in English with the mission most of the time. He affected to want some Wine medicinally and helped himself to some Noyean which seemed to suit his palate exactly—he then took out a Cheeroot and sat with us for an hour.

The mission was forced to cut short its stay in Aceh after a few days when a number of its members were struck down by cholera. This cholera outbreak in Aceh had continued unabated for some time already. Sartorius decided not to proceed to the west coast as originally scheduled. Instead, the Norfolk hurriedly sailed for Penang. Sartorius himself came down with cholera, and died on the voyage.

In reviewing the Sartorius mission, the Penang government once again expressed frustration with the lack of progress towards a return to normalcy in Aceh. Phillips felt frustrated that, having signed the 1819 treaty, the situation in Aceh had remained unchanged and British relations with the sultanate had not moved forward significantly. While British interests in Aceh had been delegated to Penang, the island had received no further instructions on the subject from Bengal or London, and it seemed as if both authorities had once again forgotten the matter. Phillips urged that the British should either stay out of Aceh affairs completely, a
position he rather preferred to take, or intervene to help Jauhar al-Alam put a decisive end to the rebellion. The 1819 treaty placed certain obligations upon the British, and at the same time created unrealistic expectations on the part of Jauhar al-Alam. The Sultan had commented to Sartorius, 'It is true I am weak, but the name of the Company is great and powerful and I trust to that.'

For the moment, all that Penang could do was to keep a check on Syed Hussein's family lest its members try once more to interfere in Aceh's politics. But even in this, there was very little for Penang to do. Having spent so much money in the unsuccessful challenge, Syed Hussein had lost all interest in the Acehnese throne, and he was only anxious to recoup his losses by concentrating on his business. Thus, on 15 January 1821, Syed Hussein notified the Penang government that he was sending a ship to Susu. He declared that he was no longer interested in seeking power in Aceh, and appealed to the government to restrain Jauhar al-Alam from harming his vessels, 'for my son and myself being residents do not wish to fight any more with Johar Alam'. In reply, Phillips advised Syed Hussein that, as the situation in Aceh was still very unsettled, it was best that neither he nor his vessels should go to Aceh just yet.

A few months later, a legal action served to remind Syed Hussein and his family of the costs and complications of his previous adventure. Sometime in May 1821, a Penang Chinese, Auw San, alleged that as Sultan in Aceh, Saif al-Alam had attacked and seized his vessel. Worried by the case and concerned that many more might follow, Saif al-Alam applied to the Penang government for immunity from all actions carried out during the period he was in Aceh. Governor Phillips readily granted him a letter of immunity, but this was not accepted by the recorder during the case. Bengal agreed with the stand of the Penang government. On 26 November 1821, it issued a certificate declaring that it recognized Saif al-Alam as Sultan of Aceh from 1815 to 1820. His acts therefore, being those of a sovereign, were not subject to the laws of another country. 'We consider the acts of the Said Saiful Allum Shah in relation to the subjects of the independent states and Sovereigns, from the year 1815 to the year 1820, whence he so departed from Acheen, as the acts of a Sovereign Prince, cognizable by the Laws of Nations and not by the municipal laws of any other Country.' With that, the suit of Auw San was dismissed.

In the next two years, there was hardly any news from Aceh nor was there contact with the Sultan. In February 1822, Phillips
wrote to Jauhar al-Alam inquiring how he was getting on. In reply, the Sultan assured Penang that most of the ulubalang had finally accepted his authority. After that note, contact between Jauhar al-Alam and Penang lapsed again for the next two years. It was likely that the political troubles of the Sultan had eased somewhat as all sides were tired out by the past years of conflict. It had been disruptive, and no party had gained from it. Jauhar al-Alam's health was also failing; he was thus unable to actively pursue his previous campaigns against the west and Pedir coasts.

The Death of Jauhar al-Alam

In January 1824, reports were received in Penang of the Sultan's death. Phillips immediately sent the Jessy under Commander John Poynton to Aceh to check the veracity of the reports. Poynton confirmed that Jauhar al-Alam had passed away on 1 December 1823 after a long illness. He never regained entry into the capital, although he was within sight of it in the last four years. Right to the end, the Panglima Sagis fought him and refused to recognize him as Sultan again. As late as December 1822, the Panglima Sagis still wrote to Penang declaring that they recognized only Saif al-Alam as Sultan.

The death of Jauhar al-Alam helped to end the conflict between the Acehnese court and the Panglima Sagis. Jauhar al-Alam left behind six children. Two were by the Principal Queen, and four by his other wives. In his will, he named as heir to the throne Abdul Muhammad, a six-year-old boy whose mother Puteri Siharibulan had earlier been made the Principal Queen. But Tengku Daud, an elder son of Jauhar al-Alam but of a different mother, seized power and assumed the title of Sultan Ala'ad-din Muhammad Daud Syah. Muhammad Daud, about twenty-two years of age, was supported by the Queen Mother, with whom he had grown up. Through the Queen Mother, he gained the acceptance of the Panglima Sagis. Tuanku Ibrahim, a brother of the new Sultan from the same mother, accepted Muhammad Daud as the ruler, and was given the title of Raja Muda.

For a while, the threat of another conflict in Aceh loomed. The Principal Queen tried to rally support for her young son. She received the support of a few orang kaya and ulubalang, including those who refused to accept Muhammad Daud as Sultan, and those who wanted less control from the centre. Tengku Karuat, formerly a long-time ally of Jauhar al-Alam, remained implacably
hostile to the Acehnese court. Telok Samoy's stand also reflected
an attempt to preserve its growing importance as a port on the Pedir
cost with links to Penang. Tengku Karuat was, therefore, prom-
inent in the resistance to Muhammad Daud, and gave sanctuary
to the Principal Queen and her two children. Some attempts were
made to resolve the crisis when the Panglima Sagis offered the
Principal Queen a share of the port revenue. She refused, and wrote
to Penang calling for British intervention on behalf of her son.\textsuperscript{134}

The appeal of the Principal Queen was brought before the
council, and Phillips stated that the time had come for another
review of British policy towards Aceh. Relations had so far been
indifferently conducted, and contact had fallen off except for the
occasional letter. Phillips complained that council discussions on
relations with Aceh in the last year or so had been taken up with
largely frivolous matters and comments. There remained the
unfulfilled promise of change that had been expected of the 1819
treaty, and there was now only disappointment among the
Acehnese and the British. Thus, Phillips wanted some decisions
to help guide future British contact with Aceh more purposefully.
Phillips warned that British inaction might open the way for the
intervention of other powers in Aceh, and the threat from the
Dutch this time was very real. Once again, the fear of intervention
by other foreign powers was raised.\textsuperscript{135}

Even as Phillips was making known his concern, the Aceh issue
was, in fact, being included in the larger Anglo-Dutch discussions
being completed in London over delineation of their respective
spheres of influence in the Malay Archipelago. Britain was more
concerned about the balance of power in Europe, and did not
want a weak Netherlands. Thus, it was willing to accept the
Straits of Malacca as a line to divide the Malay Archipelago, and
concede the much larger part of it to the Dutch. The British
retained Penang, Singapore, and Malacca, and handed over
Bencoolen to the Dutch.

This decision was to have a profound effect upon Aceh-British
relations because, under the partition, the north Sumatran
sultanate fell within the Dutch sphere. With that, Britain no
longer considered Aceh an area of special political interest, and
the 1819 treaty was no longer applicable. Yet because there had
been the Sriduli agreement and Aceh was still important to
Penang's trade, the British insisted on a provision in the 1824
treaty that the independence of Aceh be upheld, and that no
changes be made to its status by the Dutch without prior
consultation with London. British traders were to be given continued access to Aceh. The signing of the 1824 treaty in the immediate years did not create a state of affairs in Aceh different from what Penang had gotten used to in all these years, and which it was able to tolerate. Furthermore, with Anglo-Dutch rival interests in the region sorted out and the domestic situation in Aceh improving, trade between the sultanate had picked up significantly and had grown in importance. Aceh no longer represented a problematic area of concern to the British.

Sultan Muhammad Daud managed eventually to establish his authority. In this, he was strongly supported by the Raja Muda. The challenge from Abdul Muhammad did not last. The Raja Muda had played a part in bringing about a reconciliation between the Sultan and the Principal Queen. This took place when the Raja Muda moved to Samalanga where he married the sister of the new Raja. There had been reports that Samalanga’s allegiance to the new Sultan was wavering, and the marriage was probably intended to forge a political alliance. On securing his influence there, the Raja Muda allowed Samalanga to be a home to the Principal Queen and her children.

Within Aceh, the new Sultan gradually received the recognition of the major orang kaya, the ulubalang, and the Panglima Sagis. It was an acceptance which his father, Jauhar al-Alam, had not quite attained. Fatigue from the long war and the death of their old adversary moved many of the orang kaya and ulubalang to accept his son. Resistance flared occasionally in some of the outlying districts, such as Telok Samoy and Junka.

4. T. S. Raffles to Court of Directors, 12 April 1818, Sumatra, Vol. 47.
5. Richard Glassume was an American who commanded a ship belonging to Saif Al-Alam. T. Haviside, Commander of Elphinstone, to C. Barnard, Commander
of Wexford, 2 September 1816, Encl. in letter from C. Barnard to Penang Government (FCCP 28 September 1816), SSFR, Vol. 56.

6. T. S. Raffles to Secret Committee, London, 5 August 1818, Sumatra, Vol. 47. It is almost certain that Raffles was referring to a private communication of 1815 written by John Prince, then resident at Natal and Tapanuli, to G. Siddons when Jauhar al-Alam was in the west coast. Siddons wrote: ‘I am privately informed by the Resident at Nattal and Tappanuly that Mr Fenwick has addressed a letter to the Emperor of Russia by the order and in the Name of his Master in which an offer is made of the surrender of the Acheenese Dominions as Tributary to His Imperial Majesty provided that support and protection be given to the King against all his enemies. The letter was sent by a Russian vessel which took in cargo on the coast of Pedier at the close of last year.’ G. J. Siddons to Bengal, 2 May 1815 (FWCP 23 August 1815), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 120, Vol. 32.


10. Wurtzburg, Raffles, pp. 454–64.

11. T. S. Raffles to J. Bannerman, 1 January 1819, Encl. 9, SSFR, Vol. 182A.


15. Court of Directors to T. S. Raffles, 7 January 1819, Sumatra, Vol. 41.

16. J. Bannerman to Bengal, 2 December 1818 (FWCP 12 December 1818), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/305.

17. Wurtzburg, Raffles, p. 453; T. S. Raffles to Bengal, 24 April 1818 (FWCP 26 June 1818), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/297.


22. Minute by J. Bannerman, 14 January 1819, Encl. 40 in Penang to Court of directors, 4 March 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

23. Raffles was later accused by Bannerman of consulting only those merchants sympathetic to Jauhar al-Alam. ‘Sir Stamford Raffles, however, leaving all
his fellow servants in this Establishment whether senior or junior to himself, has sought (I understand from himself) the opinion of our Merchant community and of those only who have distinguished themselves as partizans of Jowaher Allum Shah', Minute by J. Bannerman, 14 January 1819, Encl. 40, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

24. Wurtzburg, Raffles, pp. 454–64; Bengal to Penang, 28 November 1818, Encl. 3, SSFR, Vol. 182A.


28. Secretary of the Bengal Government to T. S. Raffles, 28 November 1818 (FWCP 28 November 1818); Bengal to Penang, 28 November 1818, Secretary of the Supreme Government to T. S. Raffles, 5 December 1818, (FWCP 5 December 1818), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/304.

29. J. Bannerman to T. S. Raffles, 31 December 1818, Encl. 6, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

30. J. Bannerman to Bengal, 9 November 1818, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

31. Penang to Bengal, 26 June 1818, Encl. 1, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

32. J. Bannerman to T. S. Raffles, 3 January 1819, Encl. 10, SSFR, Vol. 182A; Penang to Bengal, 19 September 1818, Encl. 2, SSFR, Vol. 182A. Elsewhere, he had commented: ‘I repeat it as my decided conviction that the period for direct negociation with the Malay states below Malacca is past, that the ground which has been lost can be regained only by negociation in Europe.’ Minute by J. Bannerman, 7 January 1819, Encl. 17, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

33. J. Bannerman to Bengal, 2 December 1818, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

34. Minute by J. Bannerman, 14 January 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

35. Extract of letter from Court of Directors to Sir Thomas S. Raffles, 20 January 1919, Encl. in letter from Court of Directors to Governor, Penang, 29 January 1819, SNL, Vol. Cl.

36. J. Bannerman to Governor-General, Bengal, 2 December 1818, Encl. 37, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

37. T. S. Raffles and J. Coombs to J. Bannerman, 10 January 1819, Encl. from an extract of the Proceedings of the Commissioners to Aceh, 11 January 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.

38. ‘Now it will be recollected that Jowaher Allum Shah, in the pleniture of his power combined like all Malay Prince, the office of principal Merchant with that of King at his Posts, and failing in some of his commercial speculation, became deeply indebted to many European traders in sums amounting to upwards of a Lac of Spanish dollars as reported to the Board by Messrs Brown and Company.’ Minute by J. Bannerman, 14 January 1819, Encl. 40, SSFR, Vol. 182A. The Sultan was said to have owed Clarke and Hare some 47,000 Spanish dollars.


40. Penang to London, 8 March 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.


42. J. Bannerman to Court of Directors, 4 March 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.
43. J. Bannerman to Governor-General, Bengal, 2 December 1818, Encl. 37, SSFR, Vol. 182A.
44. J. Bannerman to Raffles, 3 January 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A; J. Bannerman to Bengal, 1 January 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A; Wurtzburg, Raffles, p. 473.
45. T. S. Raffles to J. Bannerman, 4 January 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.
46. Penang to Governor-General, Bengal, 30 December 1818, SNL, Vol. D6, p. 152.
47. Penang to Bengal, 30 December 1818, SNL, Vol. D6, p. 152.
49. T. S. Raffles to J. Bannerman, 18 January 1819, Encl. 52, SSFR, Vol. 182A.
50. ‘The Honourable the Governor in Council however deerns it proper to notice to the Supreme Government that the abruptness of Sir Stamford’s departure was as unnecessary as it was extraordinary. It could be no other than to prevent all possibility of the Government calling him back to the letter of his Instruction which presented Acheen as the primary place of his negociations . . .’ J. Bannerman to Governor-General, Bengal, 22 January 1819, Encl. 53, SSFR, Vol. 182A.
51. Minute by J. Bannerman, 19 February 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A; Penang to London, 8 March 1819; J. Bannerman to Bengal, 18 May 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.
53. Bengal to Penang, 26 December 1818 (FWCP 26 December 1818), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/305.
56. Bengal to Penang, 8 April 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A; Bengal to T. S. Raffles, 8 April 1819 (FWCP 8 April 1819), Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/307.
57. T. S. Raffles to the Secret Committee in London, 5 August 1818, Sumatra, Vol. 47.
60. Raffles–Coombs report, para. 25.
61. Ibid., para. 11.
63. Raffles–Coombs report, para. 22.
64. Ibid., paras. 23–4.
66. Ibid., paras. 16–18.
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70. Additional comments by Capt. J. Coombs, appended to Raffles–Coombs report.

71. Raffles–Coombs report, para. 27.

72. Ibid., para. 28.


75. Raffles–Coombs report, paras. 41–2.

76. Ibid., para. 66.

77. Ibid., para. 45.

78. Ibid., para. 66.

79. Ibid., para. 66–8.

80. Ibid., para. 60–1.

81. Raffles to Sir Robert Harry Inglis, 12 June 1819, in Raffles, \textit{Memoir}, p. 397.

82. Bengal to the Commissioners to Aceh, 10 July 1819, Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, P/Ben/Sec/309.


85. Penang to London, 1 July 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182.


89. Bengal to Penang, 31 October 1818, Encl. 35, SSFR, Vol. 182A; Instructions to Raffles and Coombs, 31 October 1818, Encl. 36, SSFR, Vol. 182A.


94. Memorial by Che Wan, agent to the Sultan of Aceh, 9 June 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A; W. Sartorius to Governor of Penang, 10 June 1819, SSFR Vol. 182A; Minute by J. Bannerman, 11 June 1819, SSFR, Vol. 182A.


102. Translation of a note from Saif al-Alam, received 21 February 1820 (FWCP 4 March 1820), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 122, Vol. 11.
104. Memorial of Thomas Bacon, commander of Johnny, undated (FCCP 18 May 1820), SSFR, Vol. 75; Penang to Jauhar al-Alam, 9 May 1820 (18 May 1820), SSFR, Vol. 75.
105. Palmer had earlier been even more caustic in his comments on events in Aceh. Raffles had sent him a copy of the Raffles-Coombs report on the mission to Aceh, which came to well over 1,000 pages. In acknowledgement Palmer wrote, 'How a subject so comparatively simple could have produced such a waste of time and paper is, to me, a riddle; but it shall so remain until an honest judgement can be formed from the materials which construct the Fabric of Acheen negotiations.' J. Palmer to Sir Thomas S. Raffles, 18 June 1819, 'Selected Letters of John Palmer', Vol. 2, pp. 71-2, Unpublished manuscript, University Library, Cambridge.
107. Bengal to Penang, 3 April 1820 (FCCP 15 June 1820), SSFR, Vol. 75.
110. Additional memoranda of the principal heads of enquiring and observations required of Mr Sartorius, undated (FCCP 10 August), SSFR, Vol. 76.
111. Instructions to Sartorius, 5 August 1820 (FCCP 10 August 1820), SSFR, Vol. 75.
112. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah to Penang, 24 July 1820 (FCCP 7 September 1820), SSFR, Vol. 76.
113. Penang to Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah, 4 September 1820 (FCCP 5 October 1820), SSFR, Vol. 76.
114. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam Syah to Penang, 12 August 1820 (FCCP 5 October 1820), SSFR, Vol. 76.
116. Diary of W. Sartorius’s proceedings in Aceh, 1 September 1820 (FCCP 3 November 1820), SSFR, Vol. 77.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
120. Minute by Gov. W. E. Phillips, 27 October 1820 (FCCP 3 November 1820), SSFR, Vol. 76.
121. Diary of Sartorius’s proceedings.
126. Bengal to Penang, 16 November 1821 (FCCP 7 February 1822), SSFR, Vol. 84.
133. Tuanku Rajah Mooda Mamoho Ally Begadeen to Penang, 12 August 1825, SNL, Vol. F4, pp. 105–6. Mamoho Ally Begadeen would be Tuanku Muhammed Ibrahim. The name of their mother was given as Kichot Trong.
134. The Queen Consort of Aceh to Penang, 20 February 1824, SSFR, Vol. 94; Tootree of the City Boolung to Bengal 15 Shawwal 1239 [14 June 1824] (FWCP 1 October 1824), Bengal Political Consultations, Range 123, Vol. 77. Tootree of the City Boolung would be Puteri Siharibulan.
Conclusion

As the study has attempted to show, there was a short period when contact between Aceh and the British was of some significance, and certainly more important than has been realized. It began with much promise for both sides. There had been high expectations that the relationship could bring about the objectives each desired.

For the English East India Company, the late eighteenth century marked the beginning of an expanded role in the Straits of Malacca region. It started with a search for an entrepôt centre and refitting station to serve a growing trade with China. In this search, Aceh was relevant because of its strategic location. With a well-sheltered harbour, Aceh offered port facilities that were of commercial and military value. Aceh was also important commercially because it supplied commodities that were in demand for the China and India markets.

Despite these endowments of Aceh, the East India Company did not establish a permanent presence there. This was not for lack of interest or effort. The preceding chapters showed that between 1760 and 1819, there were no less than six British missions to Aceh. Many of these were entrusted with the task of establishing a base there. The failure of these efforts was due to two important factors: first, the nature of Acehnese politics, and secondly, the shifting priorities of British policy in the Malay Archipelago.

The politics within the sultanate during the period under study were characterized by a weak Acehnese court that periodically attempted to reassert its authority over the orang kaya and ulubalang. A manifestation of this tussle occurred in the area of revenue collection, as well as in trade control. This was a source of conflict that led to rebellions against rulers seeking to exercise these prerogatives. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the rulers had to further cope with the emergence of the pepper ports along the Acehnese west coast and the betel-nut districts on the Pedir coast that prospered through international trade.
The Sultans wanted this trade to be regulated from the capital to ensure effective collection of revenue and customs duties, to determine the price of the export commodities, and to prevent ports in the outlying districts from becoming too wealthy and independent. These were no easy tasks as the rulers had to cope with changing patterns and forms of trade, of new groups of traders, new commodities, and even new production districts and ports. The Sultans, therefore, sought demarcation and enforcement once more of their rights and entitlements. Towards this end, the rulers mobilized armed ships under a Panglima Laut and, in later years under European mercenaries. The Sultans also looked to the British for assistance in dealing with resulting internal problems. But they were constrained by the hostile reaction from their ulubalang, as well as that of the influential Chulia and Arab mercantile communities. While both Mahmud Syah and Muhammed Syah were willing to offer trade privileges, they were not in a position to accede entirely to the British requests. It was only Jauhar al-Alam who was willing to grant substantially larger concessions in return for British military assistance. He felt he had to do so, for it was during his reign that the full impact of the opening of Penang and the development of the west coast pepper trade upon the trading pattern and political balance of Aceh became most evident.

There were British officials who regarded the situation in Aceh, and the overtures from its rulers, as an opportunity to open up contact and to establish a stronger presence in the sultanate. Aceh was always seriously thought of as suitable for a British settlement. The strategic value of Aceh became even more evident during the period of Anglo-French conflict when French warships reportedly used the sultanate's port facilities to their advantage. Ultimately, however, the weakness of the Acehnese court was a deterrent to further British initiatives. The British realized that fulfilling obligations in any treaty with Acehnese rulers required the deployment of troops in Aceh. Even then, it would not be easy given the hostility of the powerful orang kaya and ulubalang, made all the more daunting by the difficult terrain in Aceh. The reluctance to be drawn into expensive and dangerous local wars discouraged Company officials from moving into Aceh. It was not that the Company was unwilling to embark on tough military operations to safeguard its trade or its settlements, a point illustrated by the incidents in Tapanuli and Muki in 1786 and 1803, respectively. As the retaliatory attacks showed, British military operations had to be specific and limited in scope.
The Sultans’ continuing attempts at delineation of their power, as expected, provoked strong and angry reactions from at least two directions. First, resistance came from the *ulubalang* in Aceh and the chiefs of the outlying districts who saw the Sultans’ moves as harmful to their economic and political positions. Some pepper and betel-nut districts resented paying duties or sending their produce to the capital. They preferred a loosening of control from the centre.

In the course of this confrontation, the waters around Aceh became a battleground. Trading vessels were exposed to demands from all sides, and there occurred a spate of piratical attacks. Many of these, however, were simply victims of common piracy, attacks committed by Acehnese in search of plunder. But some of the detentions were the actions of *ulubalang* in the outlying districts. Others, including a number of British-registered ships, were detained on the orders of the Sultans. All these incidents were labelled by the British as examples of Acehnese piracy. Yet even during this period, there were doubts as to whether or not some of these incidents could be properly termed piracy. There were British officials willing to concede that in some cases, the seizures were well within the rights of the ruler of a sovereign state, particularly when these happened in Acehnese waters. Much of the communication between the Acehnese and the British then revolved around determining the extent of the sultanate’s territories and surrounding waters, as well as the prerogatives of the ruler.

Secondly, opposition to the Sultans’ trade regulations came from the British private traders dealing directly with the west coast pepper ports and the Pedir betel-nut districts, as well as from officials in Penang and Bencoolen. Many were not particularly concerned with the prevailing political weakness of the Sultans. In fact, they argued against any British intervention that could change the political balance in Aceh, thus evolving a strong central authority. There were, in fact, a few officials who approved of Acehnese ports seeking to loosen ties with the centre, as in the case of John Prince’s backing of Singkil. Others were even prepared to see Jauhar al-Alam overthrown and replaced by a challenger from the Penang mercantile community. Most simply ignored the Acehnese trade regulations altogether.

The dissatisfaction within Aceh against the Sultan turned to rebellion. Forces in Aceh resisting the Sultan’s attempts at enlarging his sphere of authority found common cause with outside merchants unhappy with the trade regulations. But the overthrow of Jauhar
al-Alam did not resolve the problem, either for Aceh or for the British. Given the continuing weakness of the court, the new Sultan, Saiful al-Alam, adopted a policy similar to that of Jauhar al-Alam.

Aceh-British relations became complicated with the entry of Stamford Raffles on to the scene. Raffles always regarded the long-term interests of the Company in the archipelago as linked to an Aceh that was firmly under the authority of its rulers. A disintegrating Aceh would result in lawlessness in its surrounding waters, and be open to intervention by the Dutch.

The threats to British interests in the Malay Archipelago from other major powers were a factor of mixed significance in Aceh-British relations. There was, throughout the period, an underlying fear of Aceh coming under the French, the Dutch, and even the Americans. The danger was thought to be sufficiently real as to cause London and Bengal, at different times, to act. This danger turned out to be less serious than had been made out, or was nullified by other developments. Each time the threat from these powers, such as the French, the Dutch, or the Americans, receded, the subject of Aceh became less urgent. More importantly, the founding of Penang in 1786, and of Singapore in 1819, effectively rendered Aceh less important from both the strategic and commercial points of view.

In the end, it was the British who helped bring the contest for the throne in Aceh to an end. Saif al-Alam who, for five years was recognized by the three Panglima Sagis and tacitly by the British, was persuaded under the Raffles-Coombs negotiation to withdraw from Aceh. Under the 1819 treaty, Jauhar al-Alam was regarded by the British once again as the Sultan. But this was not recognized by the Panglima Sagis and the ulubalang. Long after the treaty, the Panglima Sagis, in their letters to the British, continued to reaffirm that Saif al-Alam, whom they had enthroned, was the Sultan. But having decided on Jauhar al-Alam, the British ensured that Saif al-Alam no longer had a role in Aceh.

The irony, however, was that the signing of the Aceh treaty in 1819 marked the beginning of British disengagement from Sumatra. British interest in the archipelago was assured by the founding of Penang and then Singapore, both of which were more favourably located and without the political encumbrances of Aceh. Negotiations were completed in London in 1824 under which the Dutch and the British demarcated their respective spheres of influence in
the Malay Archipelago in order to avoid conflict. Tired of maintaining a losing concern in Bencoolen and also in line with its policy in Europe to ensure a strong Netherlands, the British withdrew all its interests from Sumatra. Bencoolen and all other British settlements in Sumatra were handed over to the Dutch, in exchange for Malacca on the Malay Peninsula. Such a move had long been advocated by Penang officials. In 1805, R. Farquhar had called for withdrawal from Bencoolen and concentration on Penang where the British could obtain all the pepper they needed. On the treaty itself, John Bannerman had argued that the rivalry and conflict between the British and the Dutch could only be effectively resolved through negotiations in Europe.

Some provisions in the 1819 Aceh treaty were incompatible with the 1824 London treaty. The Aceh treaty, therefore, had to be replaced with a simple commercial agreement. Unwilling, however, to appear to have abandoned Aceh or its commitment to the 1819 treaty, a provision was included in the London treaty under which the independence of Aceh was acknowledged. This status could not be altered without prior consultation with the British. Furthermore, British right to trade in Aceh was not to be prejudiced by the London treaty.

Forgotten in the London discussions, however, was the agreement signed between John Canning and Barus in 1814. In 1827, the son of the Barus chief who negotiated with Canning wrote to Penang seeking advice on the status of the district, claiming that the British had earlier granted recognition to Barus as a free and independent state. Barus raised the matter in the face of Dutch expansion in Sumatra and in the hope of using the 1814 treaty to get British protection. Penang did not take up the matter. Canning’s agreement with Barus was made largely with the threat of the Acehnese in mind. That status had no relevance within existing Anglo-Dutch understanding.

Aceh’s significance within British colonial history, beyond that of a partner engaged in a valuable trade, was in attracting the attention of London and India to the political and commercial opportunities in the Malay Archipelago. Between 1771 and 1819, there was always the possibility that, presented with the right opportunity and favourable circumstances, the British would establish a factory in Aceh. This did not materialize despite the missions sent to the sultanate, but in the process, Penang and later Singapore, two largely uninhabited islands, were chosen instead. Arising from
these events, the history of the Malay Archipelago was profoundly affected.

Within Aceh’s history, the British had a significant impact for a while. British traders and settlements enjoyed close commercial interaction with the outlying areas on Aceh’s west and Pedir coasts. But it was a contact that threatened to become a centrifugal force loosening those distant districts from Aceh. The high point of this extensive British involvement in Aceh was perhaps the challenge for the throne by a resident of Penang. For five years, the politics of the Acehnese capital was strongly influenced by Penang and India.

Yet the political coherence of the sultanate was maintained, and the rulers upheld some semblance of authority despite the various stresses pressing from outside. It might well be that, in the end, the presence of outside forces helped check the drift away from the centre when some districts felt more vulnerable and exposed. There existed also ethnic, economic, and political cleavages within the ranks of the ulubalang in Aceh and in the outlying districts, and through these, the rulers were able to play a pivotal role in balancing the delicate political equilibrium.

Finally, what happened to some of the principal figures in the Acehnese civil war? Tuanku Pakeh Hussein of Pedir and Haji Abdul Rahim were killed in 1818. Sultan Jauhar al-Alam died in December 1823. Saif al-Alam, after withdrawing from the contest, retired to Penang. He passed away in 1828, at a relatively young age, while on his way to Mecca. He had gone to India hoping to buy a ship to take him on a pilgrimage. Syed Hussein died in 1826 and was buried beside a Penang mosque along Acheen Street. Another of his sons, Syed Akil, tried unsuccessfully to become Sultan of Deli between 1826 and 1827. Not much was heard of Lebai Dappah after the civil war. But with Raffles as Lieutenant-Governor in Bencoolen, he could not call on the British to support him against the Sultan. There is evidence to suggest that by 1824, Singkil was complying with the Sultan’s demand for revenue.

Raffles returned to Bencoolen after the Aceh mission. He served there until 1824 when he was replaced by John Prince, who then went on to Singapore. In Penang, Phillips continued as Governor until August 1824 when he retired to England. J. Erskine, probably the only senior British official other than Raffles sympathetic to Jauhar al-Alam, passed away in 1826. Cuthbert Fenwick, who was quite sick when he arrived in Penang at the end of 1816, died shortly afterwards. Koh Lay Huan expanded his business and influence
in Penang, especially within the Chinese community. He died in 1826, and his descendants continue to occupy important positions in Penang society.


3. Raja of Barus to Penang, 10 February 1827, SNL, Vol. F1, p. 34.


5. Sultan Ala‘ad-din Muhammad Daud Syah of Aceh to Penang, 13 October 1826, SNL, Vol. F5, p. 15. The Sultan complained that Syed Akil was trying to seize Deli, which was claimed to be part of Aceh.
# Appendices

**APPENDIX 1**

The Sultans of Aceh, 1496–1823

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sultan</th>
<th>Reign Begins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ali Mughayat Syah</td>
<td>1496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Salah as-Din ibn Ali</td>
<td>1528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ala’ad-din al-Qahhar ibn Ali</td>
<td>1537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ali Riayat Syah (Hussein)</td>
<td>1568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Muda (a few days)</td>
<td>1575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sri Alam</td>
<td>1575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Zain al-Abidin</td>
<td>1576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ala’ad-din of Perak (Mansur Syah)</td>
<td>1577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ali Riayat Syah (Raja Boyong)</td>
<td>1586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah</td>
<td>1588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ali Riayat Syah</td>
<td>1604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Iskandar Muda</td>
<td>1607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Iskandar Thani</td>
<td>1636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Taj al-Alam Safiyat ad-Din binte Iskandar Muda</td>
<td>1641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Nur al-Alam Nagiyat ad-Din</td>
<td>1675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Anayet Syah Zagiyyat ad-Din</td>
<td>1678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Kamalat Syah Zinat ad-Din</td>
<td>1688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Badr al-Alam Syarif Hashim Jamal ad-Din</td>
<td>1699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Perkasa Alam Syarif Lamtui</td>
<td>1702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Jemal al-Alam Badr al-Munir</td>
<td>1703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Jauhar al-Alam Amin ad-Din (a few days)</td>
<td>1726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Syams al-Alam (a few days)</td>
<td>1726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Ala’ad-din Ahmad Syah</td>
<td>1727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Ala’ad-din Jehan Syah</td>
<td>1735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Mahmud Syah</td>
<td>1760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Badr ad-Din Juhan Syah</td>
<td>1764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Mahmud Syah (restored)</td>
<td>1765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Sulaiman Syah (Udana Lela)</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Mahmud Syah (restored)</td>
<td>1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Ala’ad-din Muhammed Syah</td>
<td>1781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah (period of regency until 1802)</td>
<td>1795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Tunku Syed Hussein Aideed (abdicated after 3 days)</td>
<td>1815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Syarif Saif al-Alam Syah</td>
<td>1815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah</td>
<td>1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Ala’ad-din Muhammad Daud Syah</td>
<td>1823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

The Governors of the Presidency of Penang, 1786–1829

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governor</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francis Light</td>
<td>July 1786</td>
<td>October 1794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip Mannington</td>
<td>October 1794</td>
<td>1795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbes Ross MacDonald</td>
<td>14 May 1795</td>
<td>1799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir George Leith</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>January 1804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. T. Farquhar</td>
<td>January 1804</td>
<td>September 1805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip Dundas</td>
<td>20 September 1805</td>
<td>8 April 1807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry S. Pearson</td>
<td>8 April 1807</td>
<td>16 October 1807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman MacAlister</td>
<td>16 October 1807</td>
<td>21 March 1810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles A. Bruce</td>
<td>21 March 1810</td>
<td>28 December 1810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. E. Phillips (acting)</td>
<td>28 December 1810</td>
<td>8 May 1811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archibald Seton</td>
<td>9 May 1811</td>
<td>11 May 1811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. E. Phillips (acting)</td>
<td>11 May 1811</td>
<td>28 January 1812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archibald Seton</td>
<td>28 January 1812</td>
<td>27 July 1812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. E. Phillips (acting)</td>
<td>27 July 1812</td>
<td>28 September 1812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Petrie</td>
<td>28 September 1812</td>
<td>29 October 1816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. E. Phillips (acting)</td>
<td>29 October 1816</td>
<td>24 November 1817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John A. Bannerman</td>
<td>24 November 1817</td>
<td>11 August 1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. E. Phillips</td>
<td>11 August 1819</td>
<td>20 August 1824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Fullerton</td>
<td>20 August 1824</td>
<td>13 November 1829</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Beginning from Phillip Dundas in September 1805, the heads of the Penang administration were referred to as Governors.*

APPENDIX 3

Acehnese Commercial Regulations, May 1814

1st. That, without a special license, no vessel of whatever description shall be permitted to trade at any of the ports of His Majesty’s dominions, saving that of Acheen [Banda Aceh], and during the continuance of the westerly monsoon, at Telusamoy; but at the latter they are permitted only to deal in betelnut, rice, and paddy; any person offending against this regulation will incur such fine as his Majesty may be pleased to impose.

2nd. The master of any vessel, the property of an European or Christian, visiting the port of Acheen, is required to present to His Majesty an offering of one piece of broad cloth, and a barrel of gun-powder. If such person reside on shore, he will be provided with meat, ghee, and rice.

3rd. Any person landing goods at the port of Acheen, and having them marked with the seal of His Majesty, in token of the royal dues arising
from them having been levied, may dispose of such goods wherever he may please, having a house for that purpose, excepting the article of opium, which is permitted to be sold by His Majesty alone.

4th. That goods shall yield a duty of six and a quarter per cent, viz. goods imported in prows from Pinang or Malacca, shall pay three dollars and a half per cent. The duty charged on tobacco is three mayain on each bahar.

5th. Any person importing gunpowder, saltpetre, or fire-arms, without giving notice thereof to the proper officer appointed by His Majesty to take cognizance of the same, shall forfeit the articles thus clandestinely imported, and of which His Majesty in all cases reserve to himself the exclusive monopoly.

6th. The duties of anchorage are as follows, viz. for a ship, sixty dollars; for a brig, forty dollars; and a sloop or one-masted vessel, twenty dollars.

7th. No vessel touching for water, or to supply any such want, shall be subjected to any charge.

8th. His Majesty reserves to himself the exclusive monopoly of salt.

9th. The duty on betelnut is established at ten per cent.

10th. It is ordered by His Majesty, that all vessels, laden with pepper or any other merchandize coming to Acheen, shall pay a duty to His Majesty of six and a quarter per cent; and in like manner, any goods sold on board of vessels in harbour, shall bear a duty to His Majesty at the same rate.

APPENDIX 4

Text of the Aceh Treaty between Sultan Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah and the English East India Company, 22 April 1819

TREATY of friendship and alliance between the Honourable English East-India Company and the kingdom of Acheen, concluded by the Hon. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, Knt., and Captain John Monckton Coombs, agents to the Governor-General, in the name and on behalf of the most noble Francis Marquess of Hastings, Knight of the most noble Order of the Garter, one of his Britannic Majesty’s most honourable Privy Council, Governor-General in Council of all the British possessions in India, on the one part; and his highness Sri Sultan Alla-ud-deen Johar Alum Shah, King of Acheen, for himself, his heirs and successors, on the other.

In consideration of the long and uninterrupted peace, amity, and good understanding, which has subsisted between the Honourable English East-India Company and his highness’s ancestors, the kings of Acheen,
and in order to perpetuate and improve their friendship, to the advantage and prosperity of their mutual states and subjects, it is hereby agreed and determined—

1. There shall be a perpetual peace, friendship and defensive alliance between the states, dominions, and subjects of the high contracting parties, neither of whom shall give any aid or assistance to the enemies of the other.

2. At the request of his highness, the British Government engages to require, and to use its influence to effect, the removal of Syful-Alum from his highness’s territories; and of his family, as far as they may be subject to their authority, from doing or committing, in future, any act or acts, tending to prevent or impede the full establishment of his highness’s authority. His highness the king engages himself to place at the disposal of the Supreme government of British India, such pension or annuity, as it may in its wisdom deem meet to recommend, for the said Syf-ul Alum, on the condition of his retiring to Pinang, and engaging to relinquish all claims to the sovereignty of Acheen, within three months from the date hereof.

3. His highness the king grants to the British Government the free trade of all his ports, and engages that the duties on merchandize, levied at those ports, shall be fixed and declared, and shall also be payable by the resident merchant. His highness likewise engages not to grant or authorize a monopoly of the produce of his states by any person whatever.

4. His highness engages, whenever the British Government may desire it, to receive and protect an accredited agent of the British Government, with a suitable establishment, who shall be permitted to reside at his highness’s court, for the purpose of conducting the affairs of the Hon. Company.

5. In consideration of the injury which might result to the British trade from its exclusion from the ports of his highness’s state, not at present subject to his authority, his highness agrees and consents, that the ships and vessels of Great Britain shall continue their commercial intercourse with the ports of Acheen and Teluksamoy in the same manner as heretofore, unless a temporary blockade of these ports, or either of them, shall at any time be established by and with the consent of the British Government, or resident authority. It is clearly understood, however, by the contracting parties, that no warlike stores, or arms of any kind, shall be furnished, given, or sold by the vessels so trading to the aforesaid ports, under penalty of confiscation of ship and cargo.

6. His highness Sri Sultan Alla ud-deen Johor Alum Shah agrees, promises, engages himself, his heirs and successors, to exclude the subjects of every other European power, and likewise all Americans, from a fixed habitation or residence in his dominions: he also engages not to enter into any negotiation, or to conclude any treaty with any power, prince, or
potentate whatsoever, unless with the knowledge and consent of the British Government.

7. His highness engages not to permit the residence in his dominions of any British subject to whom the resident agent shall offer any objection.

8. The British Government agrees to give and furnish to his highness, without delay, all the arms and military stores which are detailed in the paper appended to this treaty, and signed by his highness. The British Government likewise agrees to advance to his highness the sum of money therein mentioned, as a temporary loan, to be paid by his highness at his earliest convenience.

9. This treaty, consisting of nine articles, has this day been concluded, subject to the ratification of the Governor-General within six months from the date hereof; but it is to be understood, that the several provisions herein contained may be carried into immediate effect, without awaiting the said ratification.

Done at Sreduli, near Pedir, in the country of Acheen, the 22nd day of April, in the year of our Lord 1819, corresponding with the year of the Hegira, 1234, and the 26th day of Jemadil Aker.

(Signed) T. S. Raffles

J. M. Coombs
Glossary

adat custom and tradition
arak arrack, fermented rice drink
balai audience hall
bicara discussion, deliberation, court case or hearing
chest about 150 pounds (of opium)
Chulia Indian, especially Muslim traders from the Coromandel coast
comptoir a VOC post headed usually by a governor or resident
dalam the ruler’s palace
Dato, Datuk a title often associated with an important non-royal chief
factory a merchant company’s foreign trading post
haj pilgrimage to Mecca
Haji title given to a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca
hikayat story or account
hilir downstream
hulu, ulu upstream
Imam leader of a congregation at prayer in a mosque; religious leader
jihad a holy war
kafir infidel
kampong a village or settlement
kati equivalent to about 603 grams
keramat a tomb; shrine
kota a fort, usually of stone
kris Malay dagger
kuala river-mouth, estuary
kubu an earth stockade
Laksamana minister in charge of river shipping and the coast; leader of the sultan’s fleet
lebai mosque official
mukim administrative district around a common mosque
nakhoda captain of a vessel
orang kaya lit., rich man: important chief or nobleman
padi unhusked rice
pagoda about 8 shillings
**Panglima** a title associated with military commanders

**Panglima Laut** commander of the sultan’s naval fleet

**Panglima Sagi** leader of one of the three federations of *mukim* in Aceh

**penghulu** head of a district

**pikul** equivalent to 133 pounds

**prahu** boat, small vessel

**puteri** daughter of royalty; princess

**Sayid, Syed** (from Arabic *sayyid*) master, lord, prince, a title for reputed descendants of the Prophet Muhammad

**sepay** used for Indian soldier of the East India Company or in the employ of local rulers

**Seri** an honorific meaning ‘illustrious’, used as a prefix to some titles

**Spanish dollars** about 2 sicca rupees and, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, about 5 shillings

**specie** coin money

**Syah** in Aceh, an honorific suffix to the personal name of a reigning sultan

**syahbandar** harbour master and controller of imports and exports

**Syarif** a title of male descendants of the Prophet through Hussain

**Tengku** prince or princess, a title used (instead of raja) from the early eighteenth century before the names of royalty

**Teuku** honorific title of high rank in Aceh

**Tuanku** title given to important Islamic teacher; honorific title used by leading west coast chiefs; honorific title of persons of very high rank in the Acehnese court

**Tuanku Laut** prince of the sea

**ulama** Muslim religious leader

**ulubalang** war leader; military officer; head of a *mukim* in Aceh

**wakil** deputy; representative
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