RESISTANCE FROM WITHIN: THE IMAM ASSOCIATION OF KELANTAN (PEKEMAS) AND THE MAJLIS

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INTRODUCTION

This article is largely aimed at looking into the manner in which religious village leaders, that is the Imams, expressed themselves at state level through formal association. This is done by analyzing in some details the workings of the Imam Association of Kelantan as it existed in the 1960s and 1970s. Broadly, it can be argued that the need on the part of the Imams to be heard at the state level through formal association was in a sense mirrored an increasing need on the part of relatively informal, traditional leaders to move onto a formal organizational plane. To them this endeavour was deemed necessary in the wake of the modernization process and concomittantly increased bureaucratization process. It was the Imam's life and society in general which compelled the Imams, through the association, to have a rather uneasy relationship with the Majlis, the state religious body that looked after them. Instances of convert resistance were channelled in the forms of demands (tuntutan) and their willingness to ignore some of the Majlis's directives.

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1 To my knowledge nothing was yet been written on the Imam Association of Kelantan. My materials for this article were principally drawn from my several interviews, in late 1970s, with the president of Imam of Padang Enggang, Wakaf Che’ Yeh, Kota Bharu. Inductively, a study of the Imams in Kelantan may have political relevance, nationally. Many researchers, local and foreign, have been fascinated with Kelantanese politics. Kelantan, a state in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia (formerly Malaya) is the base for the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) who controlled the state from 1959 to 1978 and again from 1990 till the present. Roff (1967) an historian and an authority on Kelantan rightly noted that “those who control the Imams control the state”.

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PEKEMAS: THE FORMATIVE YEARS
The Imam Association of Kelantan (Persatuan Kakitangan Masjid dan Surau Kelantan or in abbreviation, PEKEMAS) was formed in 1954. It was formally registered as a society two years later in 1956.

The PEKEMAS was founded on the initiative of Haji Nik Abdul Rahman of Sungai Budor, Kota Bharu. Haji Nik Abdul Rahman was at this time a religious official at Masjid Muhammadi in Kota Bharu. The Masjid was and still is under the direct supervision of the Majlis. Haji Nik Abdul Rahman and a friend who worked for the Majlis helped to shape the seminal ideas regarding the formation of the PEKEMAS.

The formation of the PEKEMAS had a direct relevance to the nature of the Imam's, relatively autonomous roles especially in the rural areas. The relative autonomy afforded the Imams since they had undergone a less and relatively late process of bureaucratization, particularly in comparison with the Penghulu, the secular village heads.

The Majlis had long been concerned to curb the ‘free-floating’ spirit of the Imams as had happened in an incident which took place in the early 1930s. At that time, the Majlis was under the supervision of then well-known Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Kelantan, Dato’ Perdana. There was an Imam in Kedai Lalat, a place about 10 miles Southeast of Kota Bharu, the capital, who was critical of the Majlis's role in its relation to the Imams. The Majlis found it necessary to present him with an offer that he could not have refused! He was employed by the Majlis to be its Secretary with an annual salary of RM200. The rather cautious, sometimes distrustful relationship between the Majlis and the Imams in general seemed to be the dominant theme well before the inception of PEKEMAS in 1954. Up until 1960s this suspicion and ambivalence persisted.

The PEKEMAS, according to its Constitution drafted in 1949, was aimed at providing and initiating roles such as:

1) to strengthen moral as well as physical ties between the Imams and other Mosque Officials;

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2 Henceforth, I will be using the abbreviated version of PEKEMAS or Association. The term PEKEMAS has nothing to do with a former political party headed by the late Dr. Tan Chee Khoon.

3 From an interview with the president of PEKEMAS on 25/3/76.

4 This is the writer's own translation and a summarized version of this PEKEMAS's Constitution from its original Malay version.
2) to spread the teachings of Islam in their respective mukims throughout Kelantan;

3) to initiate the formation of business undertakings, for example, in the form of cooperatives, as approved by Islamic teaching and the rulings of the Government;

4) to administer each mukim according to Islamic rules and regulations;

5) to help members of the Associations who are in great need, for example, those involved in serious accident; and

6) to protect the purity of the Islamic religion in relation to the prevailing political, economic, and societal arrangement.

It is rather important to stress that out of the six stated aims of the PEKEMAS, as embodied in its Constitution, the third aim which seeks to initiate the formation of business cooperatives according to Islamic principles, seems to surface, above all others, in the 1960s. This can be interpreted as a direct response to the pervading ‘business fever’ making inroads into Kelantan in the same period.

The sixth stated aim — to protect the purity of the Islamic religion in relation to the prevailing political, economic and societal order — seemed to emerge intermittently and can be seen as a form of rationalization in the face of their increased frustration in their battle against the changing environment around them. The Imams were being systematically alienated by the process of bureaucratization which seems to be more advantageous to the interest of the penghulus. The Imams felt that they were none other than government’s anak tiri (step-sons). The inevitable bias in favour of the Penghulus was largely due to the state government’s adherence to things central. The relative unimportance of the Imams’ role in the western states of West Malaysia was taken as a measure of the relative unimportance of the Imams role in Kelantan. This comfortable assumption, is at best, injurious to the Imams’ position, especially the rural ones, who hitherto, and even presently enjoy a rather high standing among the rural folks (anak mukims).

In delineating the dominant of the PEKEMAS activities, the year 1962 presented an important departure. Although choice of 1962 as a starting point, admittedly, is rather fortuitous, in the sense that the written materials were made available to me from the period, however, it was in the sixties that the ‘dynamic’ of the PEKEMAS was clearly manifested. This is so since nothing
significance emerges from the inception of the PEKEMAS in 1954 until the early sixties. This is not surprising as Haji Nik Abdul Rahman, a man dedicated to the Majlis’s interests, was the PEKEMAS’ first Chairman.

**PEKEMAS AND THE MAJLIS: THE INITIAL STIRRINGS**

This section principally aims to examine the PEKEMAS’s relations and/or reactions to the wider social order especially as regards its rather ambivalent relationship with the Majlis.

As early as July 1962 the PEKEMAS fixed its muscles in the sense of being critical of things which beset its autonomous existence. The members from Pasir Mas District, an area well-known for pondok-religious education in Kelantan, asked the then Secretary of the PEKEMAS, Haji Mohammad Nor, the Imam of Kenali, to resign over his failure in negotiations with the Majlis regarding a rise in the percentage of zakat collection from 20 to 30 per cent.5

This was the first major cleavage within the PEKEMAS and brings forth two important points. First, regionalistic sentiments among the Imams are one of the factors that one cannot easily dispense with. The pressures from the Pasir Mas members asking Haji Mohammad Nor of Kenali to resign is a clear indication of this. Pasir Mas is regarded as the most important district as far as Islamic religious learning is concerned.6 Kenali, in contrast, came to prominence due principally to one man, Haji Mohammad Yusuf, usually known as Tok Kenali, a man who in the early 1900’s was instrumental in the formation of the Majlis.7 Haji Mohammad Nor is a distant relative of Tok Kenali. Second, the reason behind the failure of Haji Mohammad Nor was the drifting (hanyut) quality of his leadership.

Haji Mohammad Nor though an Imam simultaneously a Tok Guru or

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5 Roff (1967) has rightly pointed out that as early as 1917, an attempt by the Majlis to centralize and systematize the collection of zakat-fitrah would only be met with some form of resentment (p. 136). As we shall see, it was in the late 1960s that such resentment was made explicit. From an historical perspective, there is then, to use Roff’s own words, “institutional continuity”, within the religious bureaucracy — rather than a radical transformation of it — that made possible the continuance of such resentment.

6 Much of the fieldworks done in Kelantan by Nash (1964 and 1969), Raybeck (1968-69), Winzeler (1966) were carried out in the District of Pasir Mas.

7 For details on the life history of this man, see Abdullah al-Qari Haji Salleh’s Sejarah Hidup Tok Kenali, Pustaka Aman Press, Kota Bharu, 1967.
informal religious leader, had his own pondok (or informal religious school) at Kenali. Being a Tok Guru he was naturally a doctrinally-inward looking Imam as opposed to the sort of person expected to be the leader of an organization — a robust, worldly-instrumental man needed in facing the harsh realities of life. The position of Haji Mohammad Nor Kenali was very interesting. His position in the PEKEMAS from 1962 to 1967 fluctuated from holding a position as high as Chairman to the position of being an ordinary Committee-Member. Haji Mohammad Nor’s case clearly reflects the general dilemma of social orientations, specifically Kelantanese: the dilemma of having to make a choice in determining what level and degree the much-treasured religious behaviour (of being soft-spoken and ‘quiet’) should be incorporated into the changing social framework largely determined by instrumental change — the dilemma of incorporating the much-treasured traditional value-systems into the ‘modern’ value-system. This feature will be made clearer when we confront, as from 1966, a different Chairman who took over the administration of the PEKEMAS, a Chairman who can be regarded as a cunning (liar) leader.

The strength of the Imams from Pasir Mas District as in July 1962, can be seen from the fact that out of 8 executive positions in the PEKEMAS, 4 belonged to them. The breakdown, by Districts, the Executive-Committee as on 28th of July 1962 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pasir Mas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachok</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kota Bharu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanah Merah</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Krai</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total = 8

At this time the PEKEMAS was under the Chairmanship of Haji Wan Ismail bin Yaakob of Rantau Panjang, who was considered to be a rather ‘mild’ leader more akin to Haji Mohammad Nor of Kenali. He also suffered, to a large measure, from the ‘fluctuating’ leadership pattern within the PEKEMAS.

A further ‘brush with the authorities’ occurred in September 1962, when the Chairman received a letter from the Menteri Besar rejecting
PEKEMAS’s demand for an increase in the ‘habuan tahunan’ (annual commission). The Menteri Besar’s letter indicated the following patterns for the payment of habuan tahunan:

- Imam Tua = RM55
- Imam Muda = RM50
- Khatib = RM40
- Bilal = RM35

But, for their performance as ‘Collectors of Zakat and Fitrah’ and as ‘Registrars of Muslim Marriages and Divorces’, they were allowed to have up to 35 per cent out of the total collection. As far as zakat was concerned, this meant a 15 per cent increase, that is, 5 per cent more than Imams formerly demanded in July 1962. What angered the Imams most of all was that while denying outright their original memorandum, the letter from Menteri Besar also indicated that the Imam Tua had to pay a yearly tax of RM15. At the outset, the original demands made by PEKEMAS were as follows:

- Imam Tua = RM60
- Imam Muda = RM50
- Khatib = RM50
- Bilal = RM40

And the Imams also asked for a 50 per cent commission from the total collection for both zakat and fitrah and the marriage and divorce fees.

The level of resentment against the Menteri Besar was so serious that two possible alternatives were suggested by the PEKEMAS. Firstly, the letter from the Menteri Besar should be printed in the daily national newspaper so that it would raise public awareness that the Imams were being treated unfairly. Secondly, that a Special General Meeting (Mesyuarat Agung Tergempar) was to be held to consider ways of rejecting the offer made by the Menteri Besar.

An interesting question that could be asked at this juncture is: why did the Menteri Besar involve himself with the Imams? After all, Imams were not directly under him since the appointment of an Imam was made by the

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8 As from January 1968 the percentage increased to 40.
9 As for Khatib and Bilal, if in mosque or surau there were two people responsible for the position, the habuan has to be divided equally.
The above question is best answered by realising that the Imam’s relationship with the Majlis was such that it gives the Imams little room for disagreement and manoeuvring. On many occasions the demands made by the PEKEMAS were ‘silenced’ by the Majlis on the grounds that the final say rests with the Sultan who is the religious leader of the state, and he is also directly responsible for the Majlis’s performance. It is this very respect — a lack of room for manoeuvre — that inclines the Imams to be more willing to be identified with the Mahkamah. Faced with this unsolved dilemma the Imams turned to the Menteri Besar for help, who, after all, regarded the Imams as a reservoir for PMIP support. To be sure, the Menteri Besar himself was a PMIP member. Viewed from this perspective, his turning-down of the Imams’ demands seemed to be contradictory.

The PEKEMAS, despite its rather diffused and altruistic aims, was essentially an exclusive body, which was primarily concerned with looking after the interests of its members. There was, for instance, a case where in November 1962 an Imam in Pasir Mas District who was removed from his position by the Majlis was re-instated through PEKEMAS’s effort. In yet another case, an Imam accused of killing a former Penghulu in his village was given a sum of RM20 by the Association, in helping meeting his court expenses.

In the meetings and discussions for the 1962-1963 period the issues and ideas were always ‘hotly debated’ (hangat, panas). It was within this ‘hangat’, highly emotive atmosphere that some of the constructive ideas suggested during the meetings more often than not effervesced. The ideas were often defeated because of the Imams’ own consistent preoccupation with the need to raise the percentage of zakat-fitrah collection and nikah-cerai fees.

It is worthwhile looking at some of the ‘constructive’ ideas that were brought forward for discussions during the 1962-1963 period. Some of the ideas were:

(a) the Imams were to have a special dress;

10 The penghulus are directly under the Menteri Besar since it is the Menteri Besar who signatured their Surat Kuasa (letter of authority) though the appointment is made with the mediation of District Officers and Penggawas of the district concerned.

11 The Imams are indirectly under the Mahkamah (Syariah) in their capacity as Registrars of Marriages and Divorces.

12 The secretarial reports that were available to me were rarely free of terms such as “dewan begitu hangat sekali” (the hall is hot), and the word “tergempar” (emergency) frequently appeared.
(b) a closer cooperation with other societies and the media;
(c) the PEKEMAS should have their own printing press;
(d) the Imams should undergo special training in order for them to be more efficient as administrators; and
(e) all the khutbah (Friday sermons) read should be compiled and sold to the public with 30 per cent of the profit going to the Association.

What is apparent from the above suggestions and ideas are of two major themes. Firstly, the need to see the Association as an exclusive body reserved only for the benefit of the members. This was clearly expressed in ideas (a) and (d) above, i.e. the need to have a special dress and special training in order to raise their standing in society. Secondly, the need to see the Association being active economically, for instance, by selling printed khutbah to the public. What is all the more important is that all the above ideas were from the thinking of one man, Imam Mohammad Fauzi Haji Ahmad. At the time of research, was the Chairman of the Association. His influence was so great that in a sense, the PEKEMAS can be considered as his Association.

At one General Meeting held on the 24th of August 1963, the Secretary after unabashedly admitting that he worked very hard throughout the year made explicit the fact that the PEKEMAS relationship with both the Majlis and the State Government was far from improving. Most of their letters sent to either Majlis or State Government were not taken note of. At this stage the PEKEMAS relationship with the Majlis and the State Government was rather strained. On one occasion during the meeting an Imam suggested the idea that it was only responsible and proper for the Majlis to give to each and every Imam a copy of Pengasuh the Majlis’s publication, free. Others questioned whether Pengasuh solely expresses the opinion of the Majlis, if so, were prepared to discard the idea totally from the agenda. In the end of a resolution was adopted: that they would first write to the Majlis to ascertain

13 At their first Preliminary General Meeting, after the PEKEMAS was frozen (dibekukan) in late 1967, held on Saturday 13.3.76 at Mahad Muhammadi, I personally suggested the idea of allowing the people from other professions to join the Association which could have been beneficial, but the Acting Chairman rejected the idea outright!
14 Pengasuh is the official publication of the Majlis and is said to be the first journal published in Kelantan.
whether *Pengasuh* solely expresses *Majlis* opinion. Such was the suspiciousness!

A similar, almost too cautious an approach, was adopted by the *PEKEMAS* in its relationship with the State Government. In November 1965 they agreed to print the news of the Government’s delayed payment of their annual bonus. The news was to be printed in *Utusan Melayu*, the national daily newspaper.

Their over-sensitivity to the *Majlis* and the State Government perhaps stems from the fact that both the *Majlis* and the State Government were rather unconcerned with many of the *PEKEMAS*’s demands.

It was in 1963 that the idea that the *Imams* should be regarded as Government Servants was first suggested. I particularly mention this, since this was a prominent preoccupation of the *PEKEMAS* in 1976. This is not to suggest that in 1976 the fundamental ‘dual demands’ made by the *PEKEMAS* — the higher percentage for *zakat-fitrah* and *nikah cerai* collections — ceased to be the driving force, so to speak, of the *PEKEMAS*. This important feature, in 1976, was still there, but the need to be identified as government servants seemed to be the first item on their agenda. The shift from what can be termed economic-oriented demands (for example, in the percentage of *zakat-fitrah* collection) to status-oriented demands (to be identified as government servants), on the surface, leads one to see fundamental shift in the ‘nature’ of their demands. But in fact the ‘nature’ of their demands remain essentially intact: that is the drive, principally, for material gain.

**THE 1967 INCIDENT: THE COVERT CONFRONTATION**

Essentially, the 1967 incident was made possible by the *Majlis*’ and State Government’s rather conscious and persistent ignorance of the problems and inspirations voiced, consistently by the *Imams*. The 1967 incident, fundamentally, was the culmination and ‘explosion’ of this deep-seated frustration which could no longer be contained.

**EVENTS LEADING TO THE 1967 INCIDENT**

The 1962-1963 period of the *PEKEMAS* under the Chairmanship of Haji Wan Ismail Yaakob of Rantau Panjang can be considered as a ‘normal’
period constantly featuring the need to be consistently preoccupied with the ‘dual demands’ of raising the percentage of zakat-fitrah collection and nikah-cerai. The 1962-1963 period also saw some constructive ideas being put forward, albeit hesistantly, primarily aiming at making the Imams an exclusive group, and raising the Imams’ own economic standing.

In the period 1963-1964, under the leadership of Haji Mohammad Nor of Kenali, PEKEMAS' activities seemed to be dormant. The fact that Haji Mohammad Nor was chosen as Chairman was primarily due to his birth place — Kenali. As a committee member for the 1962-1963 period he attended only one of the five Executive Committee Meetings held. As Chairman for the period 1963-64, he lacked organizational dexterity and held only two committee meetings. The first was held on 28th September 1963, and the second was held on the 10th of June 1964. Under his leadership, the dewan (hall) was no longer ‘hot’, and notions like bersemangat (spirited) gave way to apathy. No perkara-perkara berbangkit (matters arising) were discussed and most of the items put forward were delayed in their implementation (ditunda), even those concerning the membership fees! Thus Haji Mohammad Nor belongs to the drifting (hanyut) category of leaders largely influenced by his being, simutaneously, a Tok Guru. Most Tok Gurus are lacking in organizational skill. Organizational skills, for example, of how to handle and conduct meetings — important for the smooth running of an association — are alien to the majority of Tok Gurus. In the case of Haji Mohammad Nor, much of the Association’s work for the period of 1963-1964 was done by the Secretary, Wan Mohammed bin Wan Ahmad, who managed to retain his posiiton unopposed.

The Annual General Meeting held on the 1st of August 1964 at Maahad Muhammadi was the first Annual General Meeting which was devoid of any ‘hot’ issues. The meeting was chaired by Haji Mohammad Nor, the Chairman. Two reasons can be given for the relatively quiet Annual General Meeting. Firstly, the members saw Haji Mohammad Nor more as a Tok Guru than as the leader of the Association. Before, a Tok Guru one is to behave by talking in a low-toned voice, dictated more by respect (hormat), than by anger (amarah). Secondly, following from the first reason, by being introverted and reserved one is apt to produce non-controversial ideas and hence lack spirited responses from the floor.

This period (1963-1964), though low in posture, is important for at least one thing. It was at this time that ‘misunderstandings’ between the
Imams and the Khadi (the formal district religious judge), occurred for the first time. Thanks to the energetic Secretary, Wan Mohammad, the tension between the Imams and the Khadi were peacefully solved. At the outset, it is important to determine what the misunderstandings were. The misunderstandings were, essentially with regard to the payment of fees for conducting marriage ceremonies. The Khadi of Pasir Putih, for one, refused to accept the sum of RM13, being his share after deductions were made to the Imam concerned (35 per cent of the total fee). A meeting was later held at Masjid Ibrahimi, Pasir Putih, and was attended by the Secretary of the PEKEMAS. He managed to convince the Khadi to accept the sum of RM13. This is crucial feature in Imam-Khadi relationships since in the 1970s, the relationship between the two is only short of marriage. The reason for this rather intimate relationship was basically due to the intense need on the part of Imams to be identified as ‘government servant’. The Khadi, being the religious official for the Mahkamah, the religious court, which is under the state bureaucracy is himself a ‘government servant’. The Imam’s closer relationship with the Mahkamah, furthermore, is less bureaucratized and indirect, in contrast to their more bureaucratized and direct relationship with the Majlis.

The other issue, closely related to the first, which disturbed the relationship between the Imam and the Khadi was concerning the performance of the marriage ceremony itself. The Khadi of Tumpat, for example, complained that most of the Imams in the Tumpat District performed marriages without prior consultation with him. This misunderstanding was also ironed out by the Secretary of the PEKEMAS.

The other important feature to manifest itself during this time was the initiation of the idea that the PEKEMAS should confront the Menteri Besar directly. A delegation consisting of five members was to be chosen for the purpose.

The 1964-65 election for Executive Committee members saw once again the re-election of Haji Mohammad Nor of Kenali. What is interesting at this stage was the appointment of Mohammad Fauzi Haji Ahmad as the Vice-Chairman of the PEKEMAS. He had proved himself to be an energetic and out-spoken ordinary committee member since 1962. He was responsible, as we realised, for feeding into the PEKEMAS a lot of unorthodox ideas which were totally dissimilar to that of the somewhat archaic and mundane ‘dual demands’. This period also saw the downfall of Haji Wan Ismail of
Rantau Panjang, who used to be the Chairman. He was relegated to the position of an ordinary committee member. Also of equal importance was the shift from being a Pasir Mas — dominated Association to that of a Kota Bharu one (from the point-of-view of the composition of the committee members). The shift was important, since, in a sense, the PEKEMAS was increasingly identifying itself with things urban.

It was also during this term (1964-1965) that the district branches (cawangan) of the PEKEMAS were initiated beginning with the Pasir Puteh Branch founded on the 27th of September 1964. The eight branches (for eight districts) were all answerable to the Central Committee.

As noted earlier on, a delegation of five members were to see the Menteri Besar: and the date for the occasion was to be on 23rd of March 1965. The five-member delegation chosen was:

1) Haji Mohammad Nor, the Chairman
2) Mohammad Fauzi Haji Ahmad, the Vice-Chairman
3) Wan Mohammad an Ahmad, the Secretary
4) Mohammad Yaakob bin Abdul Rahman, a committee member
5) Ramli ahmad, a committee member

These five Imams were proposed by the Central Committee to represent the PEKEMAS. After the selection was made, two of the five immediately backed down. There were the Chairman and Mohammad Yaakob Abdul Rahman. It was not known whether the scheduled meeting with the Menteri Besar took place or not. From my conversation with the present Chairman (the then Vice-Chairman) the meeting did take place, though he did not specify the number of members who attended the meeting. What was clear, however, after the meeting took place, if it took place at all, was the ensuing lack of interest to discuss any ‘matters arising’ which they, formerly, vehemently debated. This was clearly expressed at their Committee Meeting held on the 28th of August 1965 at Masjid Muhammadi, where the majority of the members suddenly realised that most of their demands and ideas ‘were too ambitious’. There is always the possibility of arguing otherwise: that they were made to realise that their actions were such!

The Annual General Meeting due to be held on 2nd of October 1965 was not reported. I looked for missing pages but found none. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Annual General Meeting above was not held.

15 From my interview with the Chairman which took place on 11.3.76.
as the members were probably dejected following their meeting with the *Menteri Besar*. It was during this time that Haji Mohammad Nor resigned from his position as Chairman. A kind of personal “coup d'état” had been implemented with the take over by Mohammad Fauzi who was then Vice-Chairman. Two possible explanations can be advanced for the resignation of Haji Mohammad Nor. The first was that he was consciously pressured by an ‘outside force’, whoever this may have been. The second explanation lies with the different personalities of the Chairman and his assistant. Haji Mohammad Nor, as we saw, was a *hanyut* leader as opposed to the robust, out-spoken, worldly-oriented Mohammad Fauzi. By his very nature Haji Mohammad Nor shied away from confronting problems. His resignation could be considered ‘temporary’ since he did not leave the *PEKEMAS* totally, for he was later (for the term 1965-1966) elected as Assistant-Secretary. It was proposer, he may have thought, that under the circumstances, a man of Mohammad Fauzi’s personality, a cunning (*liar*) personality, should lead the Association.\(^6\) Again for the term 1966-67, Haji Mohammad Nor was elected as Vice-Chairman indicating that the personality conflict between Haji Mohammad Nor and Mohammad Fauzi was of lesser importance as a factor in contributing to a temporary inactivity of the *PEKEMAS* for the 1965-1966 period. It seems then that the ‘outside force’ was the main factor reminding the members of the *PEKEMAS* that their actions were ‘too ambitious’.

**THE MAJLIS DECISION**
What finally spurred on the 1967 Incident was the decision made by the *Majlis* to review their Act in 1966,\(^7\) where in Clause (41), in relation to zakat-fitrah collection, it specifically states that:

> “Save and except in areas where the *Majlis* directly effects assessment, the *Pegawai Masjid* shall be entitled to receive as *habuan* one-fifth of all *zakat* and *fitrah* received by the *Majlis*, whether directly or through the *Imam*, in respect of their *mukim masjid*."

In sub-section (2), it goes on to say that:

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\(^6\) Imam Fauzi interview with the Chairman which took place on 11.3.76.

\(^7\) The Act in reference is the Kelantan Council of Religion and Malay Custom Enactment, 1966. For the purpose of our discussions it can be referred to as *Majlis Enactment, 1966*. 

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In any case, irrespective of whether all the appointments of Pegawai Masjid are filled, the habuan shall be divided as follows:

(a) Imam Tua shall be entitled to one-half of the habuan, and
(b) the reminder of the habuan shall be divided on the basis the Imam Muda (if any) receives four shares, Khatib (if any) receives three shares and Bilal (if any) received two shares.  

The above ruling clearly indicates that the Imams should only get 20 per cent out of their zakat-fitrah collection. This ran counter to their demands for 50 per cent. Upon hearing the introduction of this Act, a Special General Meeting was called by the PEKEMAS on 10th of December 1966. The Imams viewed the introduction of the above Act as a rebuff to their long struggle to achieve their ambition and hence a denigration of their honour. The seriousness of the situation, as the Imams took it, can be judged from the fact that the Special General Meeting was opened with sembahyang hajat (Prayer of Hope).

The meeting was held at Maahad Muhammadi and was attended by 120 Imams. After the prayer, a highly-spirited speech was given by the Secretary asking two inter-connected questions: “Who is Majlis Agama Islam” Where did the Majlis get their financial backing? He then answered the two questions thus:

“Majlis Agama Islam is a body or institution to look after Islamic religion and Malay Custom in Kelantan, and 80 per cent of her financial backing si from the collection of zakat and fitrah, collected from all the people in this country. But the Majlis that I know today is nothing more than a profit-making body and the accumulation of such wealth is for the purpose of looking after the welfare of the town people”.

Having spoken for 35 minutes, he concluded that:

“In conclusion, 80 per cent of the zakat-fitrah from the people as a whole is collected for the benefit of the town people”.

18 Ibid., p. 66.
19 Majlis Enactment, 1966 took effect on 7th of April 1966.
20 This kind of prayer is usually performed in times of crisis as an ultimate weapon against adversaries. The prayer can be performed individually or communally.
21 This is the writer’s own translation from the Malay text.
What is clear from the above speech is the identification of a cleavage between rural and urban Imams. To identify one’s colleague in the town as having a different style of life is soundly based. The Imams in the towns, in charge of the mosque are given a monthly salary. For example, for an Imam in charge of a district mosque, his salary (in 1976) was about RM180 per month. The Imams also complained that mosques in towns are adequately supplied with cleaners, paid monthly, to look after the mosques. In the rural areas, they pointed out, most of the suraus are built by the villagers themselves, and the cost of maintenance is sometimes personally borne by the respective Imams.

The complaint also focussed on the issue that most of the poor (miskin) in the town, during the fasting month of Ramadhan, were given free food by the Majlis, forgetting that there were also the rural poor who did not get from the Majlis, ‘sebiji buah khurma pun’! Their concern, and they were surely angered by the introduction of the Act, can be discerned from the fact that the meeting collected RM197 from the members. This collection is known as “Derma Kilat” (lit: ‘lightening donation’) and it is intended for warding off the present danger. Hence ‘sembahyang hajat’ (religiously) and ‘derma kilat’ (economically) go hand in hand as a pivotal expression of one’s

21 This is the writer’s own translation from the Malay text.
22 The three important mosques in Kelantan are Masjid Kota Bharu (Muhammad), Masjid Kampung Langgar and Masjid Kampung Laut. In 1916 the monthly salary for the respective Imams at the above mosques were RM35, RM15 and RM15 respectively. See, Kesyataan Majlis Ugama Islam dan Istimadat Melayu Tahun 1916, Kelantan, National Archives, Kuala Lumpur, file No. 8/17, p. 6. In 1976, the Imams at the above three mosques were certainly being paid more than RM180 per month.
23 Though the Majlis Enactment 1966, Section 45(1) made it clear that the building of any mosques or surau must have prior approval (written) from the Majlis, however, since most suraus in the rural areas are built by the villagers themselves, there is no reason for the Majlis to lodge any complaint! In 1974, the sum allocated for mosque (building and maintenance) was RM115,304.68. To be sure, most of the mosque (masjid) are in towns. See, Majlis Annual Report, 1974, p. 7.
24 In 1974, Majlis obtained 1 pikul and 55 katis of khurma (dates) to the prisoners at Pengkalan Cepa, and the Welfare Centre at Taman Kemumin. The Majlis also spent about RM754.60 for the provision of free food during the month of Ramadhan, usually centered at Masjid Muhammad. Usually it was the poor and those around Kota Bharu town who benefitted from the donation. Cf. Majlis Annual Report, 1974, p. 12.
25 It can be translated as “not even a date”. Dates (khurma) known to be eaten by prophet Mohammad for “breaking” the fast, hence the special place afforded to Khurma during the fasting month (Ramadhan).
ultimate efforts to battle any exigencies.

Simultaneously, the *Imams*’ dissatisfaction directed to the *Majlis* can be questioned. While delivering the above speech, for instance, the Secretary must have realised that there were present in their midst, *Imams* from the town areas. Again, the rural poor in the *kampungs*, during the fasting month, were not that badly treated after all. The real explanation for the ‘showdown’ lies in the fact that — as we noted before — it was an expression emanating from a deep-seated frustration held fast by the rural *Imams* against the continued and sustained attitudes of the *Majlis* towards their demands. The rural-urban dichotomy, again reflects the covert antagonistic feeling among the *Imams*, an internal cleavage with the *PEKEMAS* itself.

THE AL-RAHMAH PLEDGE

A further Special General Meeting was held at Al-Rahmah Arabic School, Kubang Kerian, on Saturday, 11th November 1967. This meeting served to crystallise the *Imams*’ fight against the *Majlis*. After the usual ‘sembahyang hajat’, the Secretary, in his speech, reiterated the fact that the *Imams* were nothing more than objects used unsympathetically by a certain interest group. Speakers, however, cautioned the members present that they should avoid being rash and should be *sabar* (patient). To be *sabar* and less emotional, they argued, gives one an added advantage in case of failures, in the sense that, to use their own expression, “kalau pun kita silap langkah dan kita tergelincir mudah-mudahan kita tidak tersungkur”. They fully realised that at this stage they were battling against two fronts: the Government (state) and the *Majlis*. They also specifically mentioned the nuisance caused by what they termed ‘Senarai B’ which is the ‘Assessment List’, a list prepared by the *Majlis* listing all the names of persons liable to pay zakat and *fitrah* respectively and the amount they have to pay for each ‘mukim masjid’. The preparation of the list is the responsibility of the *Majlis*, and the *Imams* only functioned as ‘agent for an on behalf of the *Majlis*’. If the zakat is on padi,

26 Kubang Krian is a place 3 miles South-East of Kota Bharu on the way to Pasir Puteh. The well-known village of Kenali is also in this area.

27 Cf. the Malay version: “Sudah menjadi suratan takdir telah menghendakkan kita supaya jadi jambatan yang tempat ditiiti oleh orang-orang yang tidak bertimbang rasa.

28 This can be simply translated as “even though we were to make a wrong step and slip we will not we hope fall flat on the ground.
it is the responsibility of each and every Imam to enter into the list the amount produced and the amount payable at each harvesting season.\textsuperscript{29} [Cf. Majlis Enactment, 1966, Section (35), (38) and (40)]. The Imams considered the ‘assessment list’ as nothing more than an unnecessary burden thrust upon them. Cumbersome, doubtless, the main explanation can be seen in the terms of the Imam’s rejection — consciously and/or unconsciously — of things formalized and bureaucratized. The nature of the work — filling in of the ‘Assessment List’ — to a secular school educated person is easy but to the Imams, mostly pondok educated, the job is something ‘alien’ to them and hence cumbersome. From this vantage point they were being fair to themselves when concluding that “the burden increases but the habuan decreases”. In order to make this point explicit, let us discuss some of the subtleties inherent in what can be termed as the ‘percentage syndrome’.

As noted before, of the 20 per cent given to the ‘pegawai masjid’, the Imam Tua should have received 10 per cent of the total and the other 10 per cent was divided among the other mosque officials, namely the Imam Muda, the Khatib and the Bilal each receiving 4, 3 and 2 per cent respectively. According to the Imams, the ‘subtle plot’ lies in this ‘act of cunningness’ (tipu muslihat). As we realized the remaining 10 per cent allocated to the Imam Muda, Khatib and Bilal, and that only utilized 9 per cent which means, they argued, that the Majlis automatically retains the remaining 1 per cent.\textsuperscript{30} On the other hand, from the Majlis’ point of view it could be argued that in line with the Enactment of 1966, the allocations are ‘irrespective of whether all the appointments ofpegawai masjid are filled’, meaning that in places, especially in rural areas, in which all the positions are rarely filled, the Imam Tua by this very token can have all the habuan to himself or the major portion of it. This is precisely the reason, as we shall see later on, why the Majlis criticized the Imam Tua for being not too eager to appoint other pegawai masjid such as the Bilal to assist him.

The allegation made by Majlis that the majority of the Imams were rather unconcerned to appoint other officials in order to collect the remaining

\textsuperscript{29} The “entering” into the Assessment List can still be “corrupted” by the Imams since they are the ones who known best about their respective anak mukims. The collection could sometimes be biased against the Majlis. It solely depends on the trustworthiness of the Imam concerned since the Majlis does not have any effective way of checking this as yet. To be sure the Assessment List was the first comprehensive and formal way of assessing zakat (mainly padi grains) introduced by the Majlis.

\textsuperscript{30} I was made aware of this "subtle plot" by the then chairman of the PEKEMAS.
10 per cent, angered them. They argued that this false allegation was made for the purpose of antagonizing the Imams unnecessarily. After all, they argued — and rightly so — it is the Majlis duty, according to the Enactment, to appoint other mosque officials as well.31 This 'percentage issue' left the Imams with an experience little short of traumatic, imprinted on their hearts "satu luka yang sangat parah yang parutnya tidak mudah hilang".32 Again, comparisons were frequently made with the Religious Officers (Pegawai Agama) at Army Headquarters in Pengkalan Cepa where they received 12 instead of 10 per cent from their collection of zakat and fitrah,33 while at the same time lamenting their important roles, idealistically and broadly conceived, as 'kepala agama' (the Head of Religion) in the respective mukims. The rural Imams considered themselves as nothing more than 'hantu jembalang' (a ghost) or 'hamba rampasan' ('captured slaves') which were capabale of performing any task for the mere payment of 'sirih sepiak, rokok sebatang'.34

Having reviewed all their unfavoured situations, as far as their relationship particularly with the Majlis was concerned, in the end they made a pledge that if their demands were not adhered to, they were willing to take the issues to the street. The number of Imams present at this 'historic' moment were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branches</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kota Bharu</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasir Mas</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachok</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasir Puteh</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulu Kelantan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanah Merah</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macang</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumpat</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>550</strong></td>
<td><strong>206</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31 Majlis Enactment 1966 Section (50) and (51) clearly state that it is the responsibility of the Majlis to appoint all the mosque officials.

32 It can be simply translated as "a cut which leaves an indelible scar".

33 These pegawai agama are obviously appointed by the State Government having a fixed monthly salary. They are in a sense "government servant".

34 The phrase can be translated as "a betel leaf and a cigarette". This is an idiom describing the "cheapness" of payment of having the lowest appreciation for human labiout.
At this crucial meeting, the Pasir Puteh delegation was particularly vocal in supporting the taking of the issues to the street; Bachok, however, cautioned the members that because of the rather poor turn-up, the action could be fruitless, making the analogy of mice trying to hang bees on a sleeping cat. In the end, as an alternative, the Pasir Mas delegation suggested that the Imams relinquish their positions and the idea was seconded by Kota Bharu. Pasir Puteh, after the first proposal being defeated, suggested that this year’s (1967) fitrah must not be collected. The idea was seconded by Tumpat. The votes were taken. Pasir Puteh’s suggestion — not to collect the fitrah for 1967 — won with 82 votes as opposed to Pasir Mas’s idea for the Imams to step down from the office which won 20 votes. They also agreed that they would have to take vows (sumpah), and for this special purpose they would have to have another meeting.

At another Representative General Meeting (Mesyuarat Agung Perwakilan) which was held on 25th of November 1967, they once again renewed their pledge taken at Al-Rahmah, i.e. not to collect fitrah for 1967. At this very meeting they also drafted a letter to the Majlis regarding the action they were going to take. In addition, it is important for us, at this critical stage, to be made aware of who the Executive Committee Members were. The composition of the Executive Committee Members reflects, to a certain degree, the kind of leadership qualities preferred by the majority of the Imams, for the purpose of championing their interests in a time as crucial as this. The Committee Members for 1967/1968 were as below:

President : Mohammad Fauzi haji Ahmad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fitrah</th>
<th>Total Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>RM292,333.65</td>
<td>RM 779,216.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>RM299,776.10</td>
<td>RM 679,554.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>RM324,409.57</td>
<td>RM 770,105.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>RM361,200.29</td>
<td>RM 740,215.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>RM712,789.18</td>
<td>RM1,175,156.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figures are compiled from Penyata Tahunan Majis Ugama Islam (Majlis Annual Report) for the year 1964, 1967 and 1974. It will be noted that the above collection is only from the fitrah not the zakat as a whole. The collection from fitrah is usually higher than the collection from other forms of zakat since virtually all Muslims, young and old, have to pay fitrah.
From the above composition of the Executive Committee Members, we can see that they had recourse to the old traditional leaders, such as Haji Mohammad Nor. This is important in a society where traditional beliefs are still prospering and hence the need for such persons said to possess rare traditional qualities — usually expressed in the notion of *bertuah* — to be in their midst in a time of crisis providing them with some kind of moral if not psychological backing.

It should also be noted that there was no change in the composition of the Executive Committee Members for the term 1966 and 1967/1968. The permanency of membership composition is largely attributable to the need for group solidarity in the face of an external threat.

**THE SUMMIT: THE TAKING OF SUMPAH**

The pinnacle of the pledge, initially taken at Al-Rahmah, took place on Sunday, 10th of December 1967, at a meeting held at Langgar Primary School, attended by 233 *Imams*. The attendance was by far the largest in comparison with former meetings initiated by *PEKEMAS*. The idea of the gathering was precisely, in the words of the Chairman, ‘to finish the house that we have constructed’. At this decisive meeting the Secretary criticized some of the ‘clever *Imams*’ who were absent, afraid to face the challenge. These *Imams*, he said, only know how to talk ‘in the office shops’. Criticisms aside, the debate over the main issue — of not collecting the *fitrah* for 1967...
— continued. The Imam of Kota was definitely for the notion. The Imam of Binjai, however, voiced the fear that the Majlis might appoint somebody else to collect the fitrah. In the end, all present adhered to their old Al-Rahmah pledge, not to collect fitrah for this particular year, 1967. Haji Wan Ismail, the Assistant Secretary, however, sensed the danger that the members might change their opinion as soon as they went back to their respective villages. He suggested that everybody must take an oath (sumpah) before the Chairman. After everybody took this oath, the Chairman was still unsatisfied and suggested that a secret ballot was necessary. After the ballot, the result was still very encouraging, 39 for the collection and 193 against it. Only one member abstained from voting. Even at this stage, it was already clear that some of the Imams were shaken to their very roots and undecided. The fact that the secret ballot showed 39 members already against the idea, proved something. 'Derma Kilat' was again launched, and this time they managed to collect only about RM39.90 as compared to the first 'Derma Kilat' which gathered the sum of RM197.

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE
As it turned out the pledge and the promise were broken only three days before the Hari Raya prayer, what happened was that the Majlis undoubtedly applied pressure to the Imams in general by using the practical technique of — in the word of one Imam — ‘persuading the strong and pressuring the weak’. I was told that it was a house to house persuasion. In the final stage of the ‘showdown’, only 10 ‘hard-core’ Imams were left to fight the Majlis. The 10 ‘hard-core’ Imams, in due course, surrendered, finding it impossible to go on fighting. All in all, the Majlis, was said to have spent about RM17,000 for the purpose of trying to counteract and persuade the Imams. From the Majlis side, its success in winning over the Imams to collect the fitrah for 1967 was largely due to the efforts of one man. He is Haji Yaakob bin haji

38 Under the Majlis Enactment 1966, anybody at all can do the collecting with prior approval from the Majlis.
39 According to Islamic teachings, when the prayer for Hari Raya Puasa starts, the fitrah can no longer be collected. Much of the story to follow is largely derived from my interview with the Chairman of PEKEMAS which took place on 11.3.76.
40 The Malay version of the saying is, “orang kuat gaya: orang lemah tekan”. From an interview with the Chairman of the PEKEMAS’s Machang Branch, Haji Abdul Halim Yaakob, the Imam of Kampung Kemuning, Machang on 10.2.76.
41 Even the Chairman of PEKEMAS was alleged to have received a bribe.
Hassan, the then and the present Religious Officer (Pegawai Agama) at the Majlis. The Imams are all directly under him. He and the Secretary of the Majlis are the longest surviving members of the Majlis. He has held his present post since 1949. Incidentally, he is also Pegawai Zakat and Fitrah (Zakat and Fitrah Officer).

Having failed in their confrontation with the Majlis in 1967, the year 1968 saw the PEKEMAS reverting to its pre-1967 strategy in which much of its activities once again hinged on the so-called ‘dualistic demands’. However, understandably, their efforts were to no avail. In one of PEKEMAS’ Representative General Meetings which took place on 12th of October 1968, it looked as if the administrative authorities realized the potential of the Imams. The State Government — through Mahkamah — increased the commission (habuan) of nikah-cerai from 35 per cent to 40 per cent (Imam’s original demand was 50 per cent). As far as the Majlis was concerned they still stuck to the 20 per cent for the zakat-fitrah collection (the Imam’s original demand was 35 per cent).

As from 1968 the efforts of the PEKEMAS were more diversified, sometimes transcending arochial sentiments and demands. At one meeting a motion was put forward by the Pasir Puteh delegation condemning President Marcos’s claims over Sabah. At their final meeting which was held on 5th December 1968, just before the Association was ‘frozen’ (dibeku) — primarily a reaction on the part of the Majlis following the 1967 Incident which saw the Imams when grouped together as potentially dangerous — the memebrs lamented their ‘abortive defiance’ of 10th December 1967. A decision was reached that for the year 1968 they would collect the fitrah, since they had no choice (though they did not accept the Majlis’ offer - a 5 per cent raise from the original 35 per cent) for the commission for being Registrars of Muslim Marriages and Divorces; and the original 20 per cent for the zakat-fitrah collection. The Imams, however, had asked for a rise up to 50 per cent in performing the first function and 35 per cent to the second. They realized also that their effort failed precisely because they lacked legal backing. As one of them succinctly puts it: “it is no point in arguing and protesting against the Majlis, since we have to change the law first”. The ‘law’ he referred to is the Majlis Enactment, 1966.

Surprisingly, in August 1971, a further conession was offered to the

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42 This was the meeting attended by Professor Clive Kessler, formerly at Barnard College, Columbia University, who did his research in Kelantan from August 1967 to October 1968 and again from January to July 1969.
Imams: that as far as the zakat-collection is concerned, the 20 per cent offered will be the prerogative of the Imams. This is to say that in suraus which do not have other mosque officials (to them the allocation is 10 per cent of the total) the Imam Tua can keep the entire 20 per cent for himself. Though far from their original demand for 35 per cent they considered the ‘concession’ as a compromised move on the part of the Majlis.43

CONCLUDING REMARKS
In general, what has emerged from the above discussion regarding the activities of the PEKEMAS are the following two inter-related themes.

First, the covert resistance shown by the Imams toward the Majlis was a natural, albeit awkward, response of the Imams as a collectivity to processes of increased bureaucratization which has challenged their traditional threshold. A way of maintaining their traditional status quo was to be persistent with their dual demands (tuntutan), of the need to increase the percentage of the commission (habuan) for the collection of zakat-fitrah and for administering marriages and divorces. It may be correct to assume that the nature of the demands was essentially economic in orientation, representing Imams’ struggle for an increase in their material well-being.

The second important theme was the internal cleavage within the PEKEMAS itself and in extension the merging polarization of Imams into two apparently opposing groups, the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’. This rural-urban contrast, as we have already seen in the case of the 1967 Incident, weakened rather than strengthened the PEKEMAS.

In reiteration, it may be noted that the changes within the leadership of the PEKEMAS changed nothing as far as demands go. The PEKEMAS demands were the same, whether in 1962 when it was under the other - worldly, hanyut leadership of Haji Mohammad Nor of Kenali or after 1966 under the chairmanship of the more worldly and liar Mohammad Fauzi Haji Ahmad. Even though the demands, especially the “dualistic demands”, were basically the same, however, under the liar leadership of Imam Fauzi, PEKEMAS managed to push their policies more vigorously, culminating in the 1967 Incident. Furthermore, it may be correct to conclude that the most important single factor which led to the 1967 Incident was the passage of the Majlis Enactment 1966, particularly the newly introduced “Assessment List”.

43 It also mean that prior to 1971, in areas where there is no Khatib or Bilal, the 10 per cent allocated for them went to the Majlis Endowment Fund.