

The Times of Raja Bongsu of Johor (±1579–1623)

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Abstract. Raja Bongsu's significance in one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the sultanate Johor is the subject of this article. Seventeenth-century accounts play a major role in shaping the subsequent knowledge of him. These depict a man who—in a certain context—made decisions which to his own logic were right, but often led to serious problems. In the literature, he is an object of commentary rather than of study. Representations of Bongsu (youngest brother) establish the contours of his position, first as the closest associate of his brother, Sultan Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah III (r. 1579–1615), and as Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah (r. 1615–1623). He was the Raja Ilir (from the downstream area), in the sources also referred to as Raja Seberang (the other side of the river where he had his fort and his constituency), actively engaging in Johor's external relations, taking part in discussions and negotiations with foreigners on trade and military missions. His tenure coincided with the arrival and establishment of the Verenigde Nederlandse Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC), as an important factor in the Straits region.

Keywords and phrases: combat, entanglements, intrusion, treaties, disaster

Introduction

It would be a mistake to treat Johor's history as an isolated one because Johor was part of the fabric of the Malacca Straits region. The analytical framework is placed in this context.

It is perhaps unnecessary to recall that Portuguese conquest of Malacca (Melaka) in 1511 made possible the rise of the Johor sultanate, which asserted its influence and authority over the peninsular port states such as Kedah, Perak, Pahang, Patani and on the east coast of Sumatra the port states of Kampar and Siak, as well as islands in the Riau archipelago such as Bintan and Carimun. The sultanate's

peculiar political structure left room for factions, rivalry and infiltration in the port states, yet an underlying fundamental unity transcended the wish for political sovereignty, evident when in the face of foreign threats and invasions, they came to each other's assistance.

Bongsu was the irreconcilable enemy of the Portuguese who wrestled Malacca from his grandfather, Mahmud Shah, and a staunch upholder of Johor as the successor to the fallen Malacca sultanate. He was, besides, a determined opponent of the sultanate Aceh Dar-as-Salam—the nemesis of the Portuguese—which imposed its rules of engagement on the region. His efforts to retrieve Malacca and affirm Johor's grip over the port states, while at the same time keeping a vindictive Aceh at bay, shaped his political purpose and resolve

How did he rise to the challenges of the time from his position next to the throne and as sultan of Johor? What were his achievements and his legacies? It is the main current in this article.

Written texts of the *Verenigde Nederlandse Oost Indische Compagnie* (VOC) and from early Dutch trading companies enable us to a surprising extent to revisit and even reconstruct this period in which Johor's strategic importance was significant for all actors in the playing field of geopolitics and trade. The corpus of documents exists of letters from overseas merchants, officials and local rulers, (secret) instructions and treaties. It is however true that textual record often lacks transparency and is incomplete.

Sadly missing are local documents that describe Johor's experiences with outsiders. The *Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals)* gives some tantalising information, but no elucidation of events interesting to modern historians and readers. While it is presumed to date back to the 16th century, the rewriting by Tun Sri Lanang, *bendahara* (equivalent of prime minister) of Johor, was most probably commissioned by Raja Bongsu around the year 1612.

Scholarship on the Malacca Straits, whether colonial or more recent, has not given insight in the roots of ongoing conflicts, complex relationships and geopolitics. My treatment of the material available will be found to present a certain amount of novelty. I investigate Bongsu's exploits triggered by circumstances and explore the opportunities and problems created by Johor's peculiar position and the often unplanned developments.

To what extent were his concerns formed or informed by the past in order to strengthen his sense of identity and his political affiliations? A curiosity for what

lies behind the facts is essential to unravelling the realities, questioning what has not been questioned to fill in the unavoidable voids. It is not about a dominant conviction but about an idea. The actual course of events was not the only possible or even probable outcome of the interplay of historical forces and personalities.

I follow—so far as limitations permit—the chronology of developments. Deviations are necessary to try to establish the causes of incessant hostilities. Limitations are in determining (precise) dates of events which can only be obtained by reasoning back from the known to the unknown.

The Scene: Standoff between Aceh, Malacca and Johor (16th Century)

It is imperative to go back to the confused scene when the Portuguese conquered the famous emporium Malacca in 1511; much of what passed afterwards in the region, was related to this watershed moment. The Sumatran sultanate, Aceh Dar as-Salam, was the nemesis of the Portuguese for as long as they held on to Malacca (1641).

The origin of the problems between Aceh and Johor was Johor's inability to follow a consistent policy of defying the Portuguese. It sparked Aceh's fury and flagrant violation of the territorial integrity of ports loyal to Johor, such as Aru, Pedir and Pasai on Sumatra's east coast where the Portuguese traded and gained a firm foothold in the first decades of their presence, constructing a fort in Pasai. Johor fired back at Aceh, often assisted by Malacca and Patani.¹ The Portuguese either supported or challenged Johor, to manipulate the power equilibrium, securing an advanced position. Realising that violence and conquests reduced their revenues and trade incomes, they changed their conduct towards the ports, calling the struggle between the two sultanates an imperialist struggle with Aceh out on economic gains and Johor the protector of the ports (Lobato 2000, 34). This is ironic when viewed against their own doings in the region. To unravel and explain the gamut of hostilities between Aceh and Johor, two cases in particular attract attention.

The first case transports us back to the year 1565 when Aceh invaded the tin rich port of Perak, where it constructed a fort to defend the Malabar traders against the Portuguese (Lobato 2000, 34). Perak's rulers were descendants of the Malacca dynasty and thus closely related to the royal house of Johor. Aceh trespassed in Johor's sphere of influence. Malacca colluded with Johor in striking Aceh.

The enmity between the two sultanates which initially rose from the Aceh-Malacca stand-off, steadfastly developed into an incessant antagonistic struggle that

engulfed the ports. This is crucial for contemporary understanding of the political configuration of the Johor sultanate. Developments show that a captured Perak prince was installed around 1579 by the *orangkaya* (influential elite) as sultan of Aceh, when their own Mahkota Alam dynasty was exhausted by bloodshed. This is mentioned in the *Bustan as-Salatin* composed by Sheikh Nur'ud-din al Raniri, the leading Islamic scholar and ideologue at the court of Aceh from 1637–1645 (Teuku Iskandar 1966, 23).² The question why they deliberately installed a Perak prince as ruler and not someone from their own circle or from Aceh's second dynasty of the Dar al Kamal area of south Aceh, is food for thought. The unambiguous political purport was to humiliate Johor and break its authority.

This respected ruler was executed after about 10 years on the throne (1585). The *Bustan as-Salatin* omits an explanation, but circumstantial evidence may explain the reason. He had earlier married off his daughter to a prince of Johor who was also in captivity in Aceh and sent back to Johor by the previous sultan to act as his vassal. The reality was that the young son born from the marriage of this Johor ruler and the princess of Aceh was destined to succeed his grandfather on Aceh's throne. This prince whom the *Bustan as-Salatin* names Mahkota Buyong (Raja Ashem) was liquidated in Aceh in 1587, his throne usurped by a member of the Dar al Kamal dynasty, who would be known as Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah Syyed al Mukamil (r. 1589–1604).

Whatever the real reason for his liquidation, it can be proposed that it prevented that Aceh became Johor's vassal state. It would mean a shift of the balance of power in favour of the Johor-Portuguese axis, eventually unlocking Sumatra for Portuguese craving for gold, which was one of their aims.³ The murder of the prince led to a series of attacks and counterattacks by the two foes.

Scrutinising Gibson-Hill's proposed royal tree of Johor, we notice that the liquidated prince was a half-brother of Raja Bongsu and Sultan Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah by the same father, Sultan Muzaffar (Gibson-Hills 1955, 145). Skepticism is in place, for the dates he gives of Muzaffar's reign from 1564 until 1569/1570, when he died of poisoning; seem incompatible with the presumed dates of birth of both Bongsu and Mahkota Buyong. Or was the father, Ali Jalla Abdul Jalil Ri'ayat Shah (r. 1570/71–1597), as is suggested in primary Portuguese sources like d'Éredia's travelogue? There are no other known genealogies that refer to this remarkable blood bond. The murder of the prince gave another dimension to the Aceh-Johor enmity, heightening Bongsu's sense of identity. He became a determined enemy of Aceh and of the usurper Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah al Mukamil and his grandson (born from his daughter), Iskandar Muda (r. 1607–1636).

Seizing up on significant events and evaluating these farther provides some surprising insight, uncovering layers of information. It is evident that forging ties through royal marriages, was no antidote to the enmity/rivalry, no guarantee for peaceful co-existence between the old foes.

For the second case, we jump to the year 1637 when the *orangkaya* unanimously appointed a captured prince of the peninsular state of Pahang as the successor of the deceased ruler Iskandar Muda (1636). He was known as Sultan Iskandar Thani (r. 1637–1641). It is instructive to note that the *orangkaya* followed the resolution of Iskandar Muda in which he declared this prince—whom he gave the title “Raja Mughal”—his successor, many years before he passed away in 1636 (Teuku Iskandar 1966, 13). It was most likely a premeditated plan. The prince was also married off to his eldest daughter.

Royal power in Aceh was supported by the *orangkaya*, but it crumbled when they rose in opposition against their ruler. In the scholarly literature, the *orangkaya* are rather disparagingly called kingmakers and king breakers, but we search in vain for a validation. Their involvement in processes of strategic politics and in international trade is simply not regarded. The result is the lack of a digested account.

This prince was among the royals taken captive when Aceh invaded Pahang in 1617. An explanation is in place. His father, Sultan Ahmad, had been forcefully removed from his throne in 1614 by his own brother, Abdul Ghafar, the vassal of Johor, who in turn was murdered by his own son, who opposed Johor’s authority over Pahang.

Bongsu played an essential part in Sultan Ahmad’s fall, which is clear from his efforts to restore Johor’s authority. Pahang was in the middle of a deep crisis exacerbated by foreign intrusion. A third faction favoured a candidate from Borneo on the throne and asked the Portuguese in 1614 to convoy him to Pahang which at the last moment failed to materialise. A year later, in 1615, the Portuguese convoyed the Johor crown prince, Raja Bujang, to Pahang to take the throne. The issue shall be treated further in this article.

Iskandar Muda’s war expedition to Pahang in 1617 was to wipe out Johor’s authority and Portuguese incursions. A second Acehnese invasion of Pahang followed in 1618. These invasions happened when Bongsu was sultan of Johor.

Iskandar Thani regarded Johor his blood enemy, which he made very clear in his letter of 1638 to Dutch governor-general, Van Diemen in Batavia, who asked

him to participate in a siege of Malacca in a coalition which to his astonishment and anger included Johor (see VOC: 1.04.02: 1131; Van der Chijs 1887, 10–11). Aceh's cooperation was discussed with Sultan Iskandar Muda in 1632 when the VOC offered him military assistance for a final attack on Malacca in return for a trade license.

Van Diemen was convinced that Iskandar Thani's real concern was the rising power of the VOC in the Straits (Coolhaas 1960, vol. 7, 57). It was a serious oversight to take his most fundamental grievance against Johor for granted. He felt betrayed by the governor-general who insisted to "take Johor under our wings to prevent it siding with the Portuguese" (Van der Chijs 1887, 10–11).

One of his major concerns was his prestige: "What will all the kings in the area say when they see me in the company of Johor, whose rebel king invaded my homeland Pahang?" (Van der Chijs 1887, 10–11). At that moment, his fleet was on its way to Pahang to dislodge Johor from there. Immediately after his accession in 1637, he sent a diplomatic mission to the governor-general in Batavia, requesting his assistance to attack Johor. Van Diemen preferred non-interference in local feuds, "not allowing the Indian princes to become big by supplying them with Dutch artillery, keeping them in balance against each other" (Coolhaas 1960, vol. 1, 605).

Pahang's prominence in the peninsula, predating the Malacca sultanate, was well known. Nur'ud-din al Raniri described Aceh's invasion of Pahang as divine intervention (Teuku Iskandar 1966, 43–44). It was an ideology to aggrandise Aceh, glorifying Iskandar Thani's accession as ordained, alluding to the "prophets" David and his successor, Solomon.⁴ He ascribed to him worldly and religious power. Iskandar Thani exalted in his role of *Khalifah Allah* (Allah's representative on earth or caliph) as is evident in his letter to Van Diemen. Nur'uddin's writings had a lasting effect on Aceh's perceptions of the past. The communication between the sultan and the governor-general lays bare the complex realities of connectivity and conflicts and of Dutch concern that Johor would side with the Portuguese as it had done in the past. We cannot fail to note that Pahang was a significant factor in the Aceh-Johor struggle.

Another interesting fact observed from Gibson-Hills proposed royal tree of Johor is that the mother of Raja Bongsu was from Pahang. This *tour de horizon* demonstrates that it is precarious to look at events in isolation and base an opinion on these without acquainting oneself with the region's geopolitics and its concomitant.

A New Era: Change and Continuity

There was perhaps no country in Asia welcoming a European country as friend and ally than Johor on the arrival of the Dutch (citizens of the Netherlands), even knowing that Cornelis de Houtman, commander of the *Zeeland* fleet visiting the Sumatran sultanate Aceh Dar as-Salam in June 1599 to buy pepper, signed an agreement with its sultan to help him carry ammunition on his war expedition to Johor, in exchange for a shipload of pepper. It was a precondition to get his load of pepper (Unger 1948, 73). The sultan was Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah al Mukamil, the usurper and declared enemy of Johor. The murder of Mahkota Buyong (Raja Ashem) caused the internecine hostilities to re-emerge.

To put the events in perspective, a brief account is warranted. The Portuguese were able to prevent the war expedition to Johor at the last minute, by stirring the sultan against Cornelis de Houtman, calling him a pirate who bombarded the Javanese port of Bantam (Banten) in 1596 on his first voyage to the East Indies.

From the travelogues of this voyage, it is undeniable that the Portuguese, who traded in Bantam, incited its authorities against the newcomers in their trading grounds. It led to the capture and almost execution of Cornelis and 11 men of the delegation who were ashore. When the bombardment from the ships started, they were set free (Rouffaer and Ijzerman 1915–1929, n.p.). Anxiety to lose their monopoly position in the Asian commerce, held during the century, was the driving force to frustrate the region's trade with other Europeans.

Since 1593, they were allowed to trade in the ports of Aceh. Their intervention led to violence and the killing of Cornelis and 28 of his men. They triumphed in their success when Captain Frederick de Houtman, younger brother of Cornelis, was chained and imprisoned by the sultan, calling it a day to celebrate.⁵ He was a prisoner in Aceh for circa 24 months. Manuel Lobato in his informed article speaks of Portuguese instigation of the rulers of Bantam, Sunda and Aceh against the Dutch.⁶ They faced a dogged enemy in the East, a reality curiously ignored in past and present scholarship, when extant documents support the facts. Historians ought to restore, as far as possible, the balance of truth disturbed by propaganda and controversy.

For the Portuguese, it was unacceptable that Johor would be subjugated by their enemy Aceh in cooperation with the Dutch. The Aceh-Malacca struggle was the deep essence of a whole era. When they finally came to an agreement in 1593 to station merchants in each other's ports, it was simply a matter of *realpolitik*

(Mitrasing 2011, 102). They were, as the saying accurately typifies, feigned friends and declared enemies. Again, the Portuguese were able to incite the sultan against another Dutch fleet that arrived in Aceh in 1600 with a letter from Prince Maurice of Nassau, chief commander of the Netherlands republican troops who was involved in the Asian voyages, saying that it was written on pig skin.

The breaking point in their relations was imminent when they harassed local vessels on their way to Aceh. When they took sides in 1602 with the Sumatran port of Aru which rebelled against Aceh's intrusion, it was the end of what can be considered the *interbellum* period. This *intermezzo* necessarily provides the backdrop to follow the brisk developments that ensued.

Johor: Fate and Future

Not the least of the factors on which Johor's fate depended was the kind of Europeans arriving in its port. The Dutch understood this as no other newcomer to the region would. They contested the claim of the Portuguese to the monopoly of Asian commerce, by opening doors to alliances and trade contracts, arriving with letters to that purpose from Prince Maurice of Nassau who was deeply involved with the Asian voyages. There is a correlation between foreign visits and the importance of the country visited. Questions such as who are one's friends and one's enemies, who is strong and who is weak, are major considerations. Especially meaningful was their view that "Aceh is the enemy of our enemy (Malacca) and therefore our friend". They threw their anchors in the ports of Aceh and Patani where they opened their first offices in the region respectively in 1600 and 1601, before the VOC was established in 1602 out of several provincial companies.

One of Johor's major attractions was its strategic location with its long seaboard. Although its trade was of less significance, it commanded a domineering position over the Malay ports on both sides of the Straits, rich in pepper, silk, gold and tin.⁷ Most importantly, Johor was a stepping stone to conquer Malacca.

Jacob van Heemskerck was in command of the first VOC fleet to Johor in 1603; more fleets arrived in quick succession. He showed his prowess by seizing the Santa Catarina, a large Portuguese carrack coming from Macao, loaded to the brim with silk, lacquer and porcelain, in the close vicinity of Johor on 23rd February the same year. It is widely considered an act of piracy of the Dutch. Military instructions of Prince Maurice however, to ships going to Asia, promulgated that seizing of foreign ships was forbidden and only permitted in cases of self-defence.⁸

According to Richard Winstedt, “the Portuguese, fearful for their galleons coming from Macao, sent a fleet to lie off Johor. Irked by this the Johor ruler informed Van Heemskerck, coming from Patani, of the approaching advent of the galleons. The Portuguese had warned him not to trust the Dutch thieves” (Winstedt 1932, 26).

Dutch fleets would no longer suffer Portuguese molest and interventions after the horrific events in 1596 in Bantam and Sunda and in 1599 in Aceh. From the pillaged goods worth a fortune which were auctioned in Amsterdam, Johor received a share for its cooperation (de Jonge 1964, 3). Van Heemskerck’s audacity established Raja Bongsu’s confidence in the Dutch as a potential ally to retrieve Malacca. The admiral in turn esteemed his aptitude and stature. Some laudatory references are found in the descriptions of Bongsu as dignified, tall, fair and graceful. He was hailed by Dutch visitors to Johor as the most pleasant of the royal brothers.

Sultan Ala’ud-din Ri’ayat Shah and Raja Bongsu certainly knew of the successful Aceh mission of 1601 to the Netherlands Republic where the envoys met Prince Maurice, whose letter of friendship and alliance to the sultan paved the way for re-establishing the violently disrupted relations and the release of Frederick de Houtman. These effusive letters were diplomatic tools in communicating and dealing with Asian rulers.

Following their enemy Aceh in its diplomatic move to endorse a military alliance, they sent a delegation of envoys with the returning fleet of Van Heemskerck to meet Prince Maurice and the States General, the highest political institute of the United Republic of the Netherlands. The chief envoy, Megat Mansur, passed away on the onward voyage, the others under whom Encik Kamar, who acted as head of the mission, returned home with the large military fleet of 11 ships under Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge, who discussed with the sultan and Raja Bongsu a combined attack of Malacca. The lower crew of the fleet was only informed of the military mission when they reached the Nicobar Islands. It was practically impossible to attract such a huge number of untrained young men (around 1,350) for a dangerous military operation. It would be the VOC’s first massive attempt to seize Malacca (Tiele and Heeres 1886, 60–61). An imminent deal was completed on the admiral’s ship *Oranje* on 16th May 1606. On Johor’s side, the sultan and Raja Bongsu signed the treaty (de Jonge 1964, 214; Heeres 1907, 44).

Utopian missions of the Dutch

Examining the provisions gives clarity why it was necessary for the VOC to have a treaty. The brief summary and discussion of important provisions were as follows:

Article 1

Firstly the said Admiral in the name above at the request of the said king Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah promises him to help him to conquer the town of Malacca and take it out of the hands of the Portuguese, their common enemy, and each shall use his powers to the utmost to drive these same out and this being with God's help accomplished, the same walled town, as it now is within its walls and ramparts, shall be and remain forever, without payment of any charges or acknowledgement of overlordship, in the free ownership of the States aforesaid, which the king aforesaid grants the walled town of Malacca as payment for the war. (English translation cited from Winstedt 1932, 27–28)

Johor received the outer territories and the islands in the seascape. The VOC was entitled a place to erect a fort within Johor's territory, where its ships could assemble, take in provisions and be repaired, a place to *rendezvous*. The availability of wood in the vicinity was a major condition.

Article 4 (trade conditions)

The VOC was clearly out to create its own sphere of influence, not even allowing private Dutch traders to trade in Johor without a written permit of the Governor of Malacca "and if they have not the same, they shall be held to be enemies and treated as much".

Here speaks conviction that Malacca would come into their hands. They plainly followed the Portuguese by applying the same restrictive norms. The *cartaz* (written permit) gave the Portuguese full control over the trade.

Article 10 (peace with the Iberians)

Peace with the Iberians was allowed only by mutual consent.

I propose that this provision was brought in to minimise the chances that Johor sided with the Portuguese in Malacca. Johor could be manipulated and in conflict situations with Aceh, Johor and Malacca often colluded. Its close location to Malacca made it easy for the Portuguese to penetrate by land from where they could strike at their enemy's ships.

The concessions by Johor were substantial. Bongsu, obviously astounded, conceded Malacca to the Dutch (VOC). From the very start of their engagements, he and the sultan had asked assistance to deliver them the town their grandfather Mahmud Shah lost to the Portuguese in 1511. Matelieff unscrupulously pushed his case, not caring for deception: the town of Malacca was payment for Dutch assistance.

Winstedt's assertion "at first Raja Bongsu demurred to letting Holland keep even the town of Malacca, although it was built not by the Malays but by the Portuguese" seems to be Winstedt's own logic. Malacca before Portuguese conquest was the famous trade centre in Asia. An inaptitude to identify existential issues that occupied the minds of the rulers in this exposed region, often led historians to draw easy assumptions. Even a pro-Dutch stance on Bongsu's part is not sufficient to account for the decision to concede Malacca to them. He wanted Malacca to come back into the hands of the Malays who lost her to the Portuguese. It was a legitimate wish. He eventually yielded to the strong Dutch military presence.

What was the sultan's role in this? Matelieff described him as:

A person of little energy, who ate and slept the whole afternoon, after which he washed and drank until he was incoherent, not being able to govern nor talk business. He left everything to his nobles and Raja Bongsu. A weak man who did not listen, nor cared for his people, only for wine and women. (Hartgers 1648, 12)

An impressive Portuguese armada under the command of Dom Martim Alfonso de Castro, which arrived in the Straits in June 1606, with the special aim to conquer Aceh, interrupted the siege of Malacca by Matelieff and Johor which participated with around 3,000 men. They fought each other in a sea battle, relieving Aceh from the invaders who had landed on its soil, while Malacca was saved from a possible defeat.

The treaty lost its value and became redundant for the reason that Malacca was not conquered. Forced by the unforeseen circumstances, Bongsu and his aides drafted a new one which was signed 23rd September the same year (de Jonge 1964, 217). What stands out is that neither the conquest of Malacca nor the spoils of war were mentioned; neither do we see a provision regarding the right to a fortified place within Johor's territory, as agreed in the first treaty.

Was it a matter of having lost confidence in the capabilities of the VOC to retrieve Malacca from the Portuguese? One cannot fail to hear a sigh of relief in the corridors that the May treaty which conferred the port of Malacca to the Dutch, went overboard. Yet, Johor wanted to maintain close relations with them. One can imagine Matelieff's disgruntlement with the revised treaty. Bongsu evidently stood firm.

Before Matelieff left the Straits, a second sea battle with the Portuguese took place; it was a tragedy with large numbers of casualties and the loss of many ships on both sides.

Not giving up on the idea to have a fortified place for the VOC in the Straits, Matelieff sent his second in command, Vice-Admiral Olivier de Vivere, to Aceh to negotiate a deal of trade and alliance with the incumbent ruler Ali Ri'ayat Shah (r. 1604–1607). It resulted in the Treaty of 17 January 1607 with very favourable conditions for the VOC (de Jonge 1964, 223; Heeres 1907, 48). The company was entitled to have a fortified place where its ships could *rendezvous* and a colony of families settle under Dutch jurisdiction and unique trade privileges. Was the treaty a corollary to the "brotherly agreement" established when Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah al Mukamil, wary of the Portuguese, sent his envoys, together with the released Frederick de Houtman to the Republic in 1601, to meet Prince Maurice to discuss alliance and trade? It looks more like a cleverly negotiated deal by De Vivere.

Iskandar Muda, nephew of the sultan (his sister's son), astutely rejected the treaty when he usurped the throne several months later, not giving away an inch of Aceh's sovereignty. A stunned VOC stood with empty hands: not only had it lost the right to a fortified place in Johor, but alternatively one in Aceh.

The Portuguese quickly regained their strength after the battles with the Dutch and started to patrol the Johor waters in 1607 with a large fleet. It frightened the locals who fled to the mountains. There was great disillusionment in Johor that the VOC had not delivered on the promise made by Matelieff to send ships for its protection. Its ships went to trade in neighbouring Patani and did not visit Johor for over a year.

In his letter to the officials in Bantam (1608), the outspoken resident merchant Sprinckel in Patani accused the company of being guilty for the misery in Johor; first it had drawn the sultan in the war with Malacca merely to forsake him afterwards. Johor wanted peace with Malacca (de Jonge 1964, 77–78). The news landed like a bombshell on their desks. There existed no clear vision

on how to negotiate politics in the Straits; neither Matelieff nor De Vivere saw their conduct strategy for a fortified place concluded with an inviolable treaty.

Another large VOC fleet under Willem Verhoeff (Verhoeven) arrived in the Straits in the course of November 1608 to conquer Malacca. The fleet was forced by strong winds to shelter in the bay of Aceh, however, according to his instructions, the Admiral needed to consult the sultan of Aceh regarding all his plans for an attack of Malacca,⁹ which he did not. He went secretly on land for a reconnaissance of the area, delegating minor officers to the sultan with presents. Iskandar Muda demanded to know why his confederate did not come to pay his respects. The following day, a delegation of captains explained to him that the Admiral was in a hurry to go to Johor to plan with its ruler an attack of Malacca (Van Opstall 1972, 239–241). Quite incongruously, Iskandar Muda referred to his “confederate”, while he rejected the treaty which made it concrete. It remained the great obstacle in Dutch-Aceh relations for decades to come.

Anxiety rose at the Johor court when Verhoeff proposed a combined strike of Malacca by sea and land which the royal brothers dismissed as impractical (*ibid.*, 243). Discussions at the court included assessments of Johor’s chances of success for an expensive and chancy venture to assist the Dutch, who had hitherto been unsuccessful. The influential *orangkaya* were against continuing the alliance, for it had brought Johor only loss, trade had come to a standstill because of Portuguese blockades and people were starving. The sultan’s half-brother, the ruler of the East Sumatran port of Siak, took the lead in advocating a truce with Malacca to normalise the trade. Bongsu still counted on Dutch assistance to retrieve Malacca; he also requested Verhoeff to help him take Patani, which he claimed in the name of his elder brother, the murdered ruler (de Jonge 1964, 68). It was to no avail, the VOC maintained good relations with the female ruler and Patani was crucial for its trade with China. Verhoeff was not coaxed to intervene in the local feud.

Aware that the mood was changing in favour of peace with Malacca, Verhoeff harangued the royal brothers that this was against the treaty and it was their duty to assist him. It implies that he was out to take Malacca for the VOC. This could not have escaped Bongsu’s attention. The faction for a truce with Malacca was indifferent to Verhoeff’s proposal to construct a fort to shield Johor against its enemies, fearing that this would amount to a clear provocation of the Portuguese.

In the meantime in Europe, an armistice was pending between Spain and the Netherlands Republic. Verhoeff was informed while on his way, but kept it to himself. It went down in history as the 12 Years Truce (1609–1621), a break in

what would be the 80 years' war between them (1568–1648). It implicitly applied to their operations in Asia, however the memory and instruction of the State's General—acknowledged by the Gentlemen XVII (Board of Directors of the VOC) and Prince Maurice—to the admirals, vice admirals, head merchants and merchants in East India, instructs them to be vigilant and reticent in their conversations with the local authorities (Tiele 1877, 73). It was a covered way to say that the struggle in Asia was not over. Verhoeff was on a military mission and ready to conquer Malacca. His efforts failed, but he inflicted heavy damage on the enemy's ships. Acting in vengeance, the Portuguese blockaded the Johor River for a whole year in 1609. It was the second time in two years that they resorted to punitive actions. The cumulative impact on Johor was disastrous.

From Batu Sawar, the chief town of Johor, resident merchant Jacques Obelaer, informed the officials in Bantam that the king asked him several times why there came no ships to Johor, but went to Patani. It is proof of Sultan Ala'ud-din's serious concern with the situation in Johor, which sketches a different picture of him than Matelieff did. The fact that the VOC directed its trade to the rebel port Patani was not well received. Obelaer assured him that ships would come to Johor.

He imparted the information of the arrival in October 1610 of a Malaccan ambassador, Joan Lopes de Morero Tombongan (identified as Joao Lopez d'Amoira), to talk the sultan into signing a peace treaty and hardly needed to convince him, because Portuguese blockade of the river with their frigates had completely ruined Johor's trade. The ambassador returned in the company of a Johor delegation to Malacca on 22nd October, to sign the treaty. It backed up Sprinckel's disquieting message of the alarming situation in Johor. "The peace with Malacca was announced in Johor by the beating of drums. People were confused" (de Jonge 1964, 304–305, Letter from Obelaer).

Raja Bongsu came to the Dutch residence the following evening to talk secretly about the fact that he had consented to the truce, out of loyalty to his brother, declaring wholeheartedly that he would never forsake Prince Maurice and the Gentlemen XVII for as long as he lived. He claimed that because of the absence of VOC ships the Portuguese had ample occasion to throw up their blockade (de Jonge 1964, 304–305, Letter from Obelaer). Bongsu was unprepared for what he learned that same instance from a letter from the prince, Obelaer handed him, in which he informed the royals that a truce was pending between the Netherlands Republic and Spain (the letter is missing in the VOC archive). Bongsu was overwhelmed. Obelaer apparently withheld the letter of Prince Maurice from Bongsu until his nocturnal visit, following the instructions from the high authorities in the Republic.

Maurice was a great military strategist who relentlessly battled the Spanish occupiers and was against the truce called for by the States General of the Republic. Both men complied with the resolutions of a higher authority.

The letter of reply to Prince Maurice speaks of the king of Johor and his brother, Raja Ilir, etcetera, yet closer examination reveals that it is stamped with the seal of Raja Ilir only (ibid., 305–307, Translation of the Letter with the Stamp of Raja Ilir). Did it signify that the sultan had distanced himself from the Dutch for the obvious reasons? Or had Bongsu kept the letter from the prince in which he announced the truce with Spain from him? It would play favourably into the hands of the pro-Malacca faction.

Unable to abandon his most fervent wish to retrieve Malacca from the Portuguese, he beseeched Maurice to first deliver them Malacca “to whom can we turn if the truce with Spain comes into effect? This will glorify our brother’s name throughout the world”. He requested Maurice to send somebody with full authority to Johor to make an unbreakable, permanent agreement which could not be changed like in the past years, “not by another 20 or 30 admirals”. Bongsu did not mention Johor’s truce with Malacca. Was this an oversight? He may intentionally have kept the prince uninformed, wishing to continue the struggle against the Portuguese with his assistance. It was in blatant defiance of the peace accord between Malacca and Johor.

After a close reading of the available records of the sequence of events and facts, I cannot but disagree with Peter Borschberg’s contention that:

“the news of a truce between Spain and the Republic exacerbated factionalism at the court. The Johor ruler, Ala’udin Ri’ayat Shah III and especially his younger sibling Raja Bongsu, were incensed and evidently felt they had been left to carry on the struggle against Portuguese Melaka on their own. Unable to continue the war effort without Dutch funds, subsidies and ammunition, the pro-Portuguese faction at the Johor court brokered a peace with the Estado da Índia in October 1610. This deal led to the fall of Raja Bongsu and his pro-Dutch faction at the court”.¹⁰

Borschberg’s hasty conclusion seems based on a combination of facts and fiction. We know that Verhoeven’s plea in 1608 for a cooperated attack of Malacca by sea and land was denied by the royal brothers after they considered Johor’s contribution and the risks. He wanted to construct a fort “to protect Johor” which was seen as a provocation of the Portuguese.

Nonetheless, Portuguese retribution for Verhoeven's attack of their ships led to punitive measures against Johor by blockading the Johor River for a whole year. Importantly, Bongsu's stupefied reaction after reading the letter of Prince Maurice, proves that the truce between the Republic and Spain was not the reason for Johor to make peace with Malacca (1610). The Johor delegation had left for Malacca to sign the accord the day before Bongsu came to the lodge. He testified that he consented to the truce with Malacca out of loyalty to his brother the sovereign. There is no proof of the fall of Raja Bongsu and his pro-Dutch faction at the court.

There is striking difference between the responses of Raja Ilir (Bongsu) and Sultan Iskandar Muda, who too was informed by the prince of the pending armistice with Spain. The latter replied that he understood the decision for the armistice with Spain because the two countries were located in close vicinity of each other. He regretted that he was too far away to assist the prince in driving out the enemy from his country, reiterating that the Iberians were his enemies and he would battle them until the end of his life, like his forefathers did, because of religion and tyranny.¹¹

An unstoppable process

Iskandar Muda sacked Johor in 1613 for its peace accord with Malacca. Conditions prevailing at that time are important indicators of Aceh's reasons for the invasion. There is a clear pattern in its actions since the 16th century, having to do with Johor-Malacca associations. Its intense military campaigns did not lead to permanent control over Johor. The armada first attacked Aru and Deli on Sumatra's east coast which were loyal to Johor, respectively in 1611 and 1612, probably to minimise the chances for attacks from these ports against the passing armada to Johor. Thousands of captives were brought from Johor to Aceh, among them were members of the royal family, including Raja Bongsu and twenty two Dutch merchants who had just arrived in Batu Sawar and took up arms against the invaders. They were the only ones coming to the support of Johor. Where were the Portuguese? Not inconsequential is the fact that the *laksamana* (admiral) of the Acehnese armada sent a message to the crew of the Dutch vessel *De Hoop* anchored in the river, not to interfere and no harm would be done to them (Colenbrander 1919, 26).

The appalling situation of the war captives who were dumped at the outskirts of the port of Bandar Aceh, where many were starving or dying in the streets, is mentioned by French admiral, Augustin de Beaulieu, who was in Aceh in 1619 and spoke with witnesses of their humiliation and inhuman treatment (Lombard

1967, 77). The superficial claims by William Marsden, Denys Lombard, Anthony Reid and others following in their footsteps that Iskandar Muda's rapacious conquests were geared to repopulate Aceh, is in stark contrast with his abhorrent neglect of the war captives in his realm. It ignores the odds that capturing people, arms and ships has a devastating effect on the resources and trade of the castigated port. It was aimed at shattering Portuguese trade and intrusion in the ports. In a following section, his conquests are discussed.

Iskandar Muda appointed Raja Bongsu as his vassal, married him off to his sister and sent him back to Johor in 1614 in great state, accompanied by an armada of large and small vessels, giving clout to the new alliance. Bongsu, who took the name of Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah, was a suitable candidate because of his stance against the Portuguese, yet he was a determined enemy of Aceh. He was a victim of the circumstances. The released Dutch merchants accompanied the armada to Johor.

The Acehnesse sultans followed in the footsteps of their predecessors who sacked Johor every time it sided with Malacca. As mentioned earlier, a son of the captured and executed sultan was sent back to Johor after having married an Acehnesse princess, to act as vassal ruler. He was the father of Mahkota Buyang (Raja Ashem) and probably also of Raja Bongsu and Sultan Ala'ud-din.

It cannot have escaped our attention that Aceh was a "nursery" where captured Malay princes were prepared to function as vassal rulers and as rulers of Aceh such as the Perak prince and the Pahang prince and where marriages were arranged between royal houses. A captured Johor prince was married to a daughter of Iskandar Muda. He was with the armada at the east coast of Sumatra in 1626 and escaped with a small boat to Malacca. It is reported by Roque Carreiro in his dispatch from Goa to Lisbon. This is mentioned by C.R. Boxer (1964) in his account of the Acehnesse attack on Malacca in 1629.

A point on which there is a good deal of speculation is the fate of Sultan Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah. The captured Dutchmen, Theunemans en Boekholt, mention that they were brought to Aceh together with Raja Seberang, many *orangkaya* and a large number of the common people.¹² They do not mention the capture of the sultan. Englishman Ralph Croft who was in Aceh in 1613 recorded that Iskandar Muda was furious at his admiral "for not bringing the old king of Joar who was an ould decreped man" to Aceh and therefore forced him to eat a "platter of turdes" (faeces) in the presence of a large crowd (Foster 1934, 172). Peter Floris on board the English ship *Globe* which was in the Straits records:

The King of Atchin had sent the younger brother of the King of Johor, Raja Boungsoe, back agayne with great honour in companye of 30 prawes and 2,000 Atchiners for to build upp agayne the forte and cittie of Johor, with good store of ordinance and other necessaries, having married him to his sister and was gone for Bintan some 14 days ago, saying that the old King should be disposed and hee settle upp in his place. (Foster 1934, 81)

This suggests that the sultan had escaped to Bintan. Or was he perhaps in Pahang where he went to assert his authority in 1612 as reported by the merchants in Johor? There is only passing mention of the death of the sultan in captivity and not a proper proportion of the whole story in the *Sejarah Melayu*, “marhoem yang mangkat di Atjeh” (Djajadiningrat 1911, 180). It makes it uncertain to come to a conclusion.

With so much military power to back him on his return, Abdullah Ma’ayat Shah, accompanied by three Acehnese galleys and a fleet of smaller boats went to Pahang, where Johor’s vassal Abdul Ghaffur was murdered by his own son, who rebelled against Johor’s control. It spelled havoc. As explained earlier, this ruler had forcefully removed his brother, Sultan Ahmad, from the throne. A Pahang faction which favoured a candidate for the throne from the island of Borneo, requested the Portuguese to convoy him to Johor. While it did not materialise, the Portuguese prevented the Johor-Aceh fleet from entering Pahang. Humiliated, it retreated. Pahang was in a deep crisis in which Johor played its part in the scuffle. We may put forward the proposition that by assisting Johor to put its candidate on Pahang’s throne, Aceh would dominate over both Johor and Pahang. The Portuguese were resolute to repulse Aceh from the ports. The prolonged chaos ensued out of the interest of several parties.

Dangerous liaisons

The VOC office and storehouse in Batu Sawar had gone up in flames when the Acehnese ransacked the town. Rumours spread that the Dutch themselves put fire to these, when the Acehnese arrived, after burying their cash and valuables in the ground beneath the storeroom. The goods consisting of two golden swords and cash amounting to 16,000 Dutch guilders, 10,000 *reales* (Spanish coin of eight), 44 *tael* (Chinese currency with varying value) gold and the contract for the storehouse had disappeared. It was reported that the sultan himself took the goods which he divided among his courtiers (Colenbrander 1919, 35). If true, it confirms the earlier information that he was not captured by the Acehnese in 1613.

As a result of Bongsu's appeal to Prince Maurice to send a person with authority to talk permanent arrangements, envoy Adriaan van der Dussen arrived in Batu Sawar in the course of 1614. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, just appointed director of the VOC business in Bantam, took immediate actions. In his function first as director of the business and later as governor-general of the East Indies (1619–1624; 1627–1629), he conducted relations with the ports in the Straits with the company's interest as his compass, anxiously trying to keep both Aceh and Johor on the company's side.

Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah was in Pahang and hurriedly returned overland on the back of an elephant to meet the important visitor. With equal vigour, he dealt with matters at home and in the vassal state. His incessant inclination to the Dutch is evident.

The envoy offered him the condolences of the governor-general with the loss of his city (to Aceh), curiously disregarding the presence of an Acehnese governor and a large contingent of workers in town.¹³ It was an opening to demand payment for the losses the VOC had suffered as a result of Aceh's invasion. The envoy magnified the merchants' actions against the invading Acehnese saying that it was in defence of Johor "according to our treaty", thumping-up the story to get his permission for the construction of a fort.

Bongsu, stupefied, responded that they had betrayed him while it was their duty to defend him and his country. How could he be held responsible for the losses of the VOC, while he had lost his country, his people and his home? He stressed that if the VOC had come to his assistance, he would never consented to a truce with Malacca.

He asked the envoy to send ships for a period of three months for a siege of Malacca. The question comes to mind why he asked the VOC for assistance, when Aceh could have provided this. In return, the company would be allowed the construction of a fort at a chosen site. This was agreed. Winstedt's claim that the request excited distrust and was refused is incorrect (Winstedt 1932, 44). The envoy was offered a reconnaissance trip of the area and chooses a site in the Carimon islands. Abdullah asked his overlord Iskandar Muda to grant his permission. Raja Lela Wangsa, Aceh's governor in Batu Sawar, offered his assistance with the project.¹⁴ It may show that Iskandar Muda had no grudge against the Dutch. Although this is not the place to discuss their evolving relationship, it was strategically advantageous to have the VOC on Aceh's side, recognising its military strength. For the VOC, the same applied and trade in the subjugated ports of Aceh was important for the company to barter Chinese wares and Moluccan spices for pepper and Indian textiles.

The developments were watched with the gravest concern by Malacca. The Portuguese were aware of an impending attack on their town and set out to induce Abdullah in his fort in Ilir, to consent to a peace treaty before VOC ships arrived; their intelligence worked well. Was it thanks to the faction that wanted peace with Malacca that they could infiltrate in Johor? It certainly arose from the confused state of Johor politics. They pursued Abdullah who had fled to Bintan. He signed the truce under pressure in 1615.

Another explanation is that Sultan Ala'ud-din signed the truce, to assume government of state and to bring his son Raja Bujang to Pahang to take the throne (Gibson-Hill 1955, 158). The unfolding of the developments may hold a clue.

Mindful of Iskandar Muda's reprisals, Bongsu sheltered among the *orang laut* (sea nomads), who formed a protective shield around him. He went on board the English *Solomon* which arrived at the entrance of the Straits from Patani, to learn about the insurrection against Johor's authority (Danvers and Foster 1896–1902, vol. 1, 127).

Bongsu, on his own, was left to pursue the various strands of internal and external policy inherited from his brother, joint rule and from the past. Could he rise to the challenges? The examples of the rebellions in Pahang and Patani show that a unified Malay constellation under Johor's authority was not an accepted given.

Van den Broeck who visited him in 1615 in his hiding place, found him utterly distressed. He was angry that the governor-general did not send ships for a three months siege of Malacca as promised by Van der Dussen, claiming that it was unavoidable to sign the truce with Malacca (1615).

The indecision of the VOC to come to his help, left him in an exposed position. The Portuguese openly confessed to him that they feared an Acehnese attack on their town and proposed that they combine their fleets to withstand the Acehnese armada which—if we credit the information given by Van den Broeck—came to Johor with 100 galleys and circa 20,000 men (Colenbrander 1919, 70, Letter of Van den Broeck).

They offered him and his family sanctuary in Malacca and promised to protect him to their last person, “but Abdullah always distrustful of them, rejected the offer” (Colenbrander 1919, 70, Letter of Van den Broeck). It is credible evidence that he was not powerless and could still assemble a fleet and men with the help from ports like Jambi, Palembang and Kampar who were fearful of Aceh's threats. Bongsu

had to cope with a situation in the Straits which was created by all parties (Johor included), not willing to give up their own ambitions or fearing for their security.

The prorogued Johor court followed to Bintan. The fact that the Portuguese could easily infiltrate in Johor, is evidence of Aceh's weak control. It was an embarrassment for Iskandar Muda and a setback in his efforts to dispel them from the region. The writing was on the wall! Ruination of Johor was in sight: his troops burnt down the already vacated town of Batu Sawar in 1615, epitomising his failed strategy.

On its return his armada, drained of ammunition and four Portuguese galleons from Goa coming to Johor's defence, confronted each other. One of the galleons exploded from its own fire; the Acehnese pillaged the ship, seizing its artillery, capturing around 60 men whom Iskandar Muda released afterwards. The galleons were on their way to convoy Johor's Raja Bujang to Pahang to be installed as ruler. It underpins the fact that Sultan Ala'ud-din had been negotiating with the Portuguese, that by signing the truce they recognise him as the legitimate ruler of Johor. It was in rejection of Aceh as Johor's overlord c.q. his brother Abdullah as Aceh's vassal ruler. The situation is described by Admiral Steven Verhagen (Van der Hagen), one of the company's seasoned admirals, who came to the Straits from the Moluccan islands, to defend Johor against a Spanish fleet coming from the Philippines and to seize a carrack from Macao. Bantam sent two yachts in support.

Verhagen was perplexed by Aceh's ruthless destruction of Batu Sawar, for which he found no other reason than Iskandar Muda's tyranny and angrily went after the armada, but ran into the three galleons from Goa, tied to each other in the bay of *Isla das Naos*, right under Malacca. Two of his yachts almost ran aground in the shallow waters. An intense fight followed whereby the crew of the galleons panicked and jumped overboard, swimming towards land, setting fire to one of their ships, while a second caught fire. Verhagen took the *Nossa Senhora*, pillaged its artillery and gunpowder and recovered the artillery of the two wrecks. Before he left the Straits, he visited Sultan Abdullah and presented him a handsome amount of the artillery "to defend himself against the Acehnese".¹⁵

Verhagen's overtly pro-Johor stance and angry pursuit of the Acehnese was not taken well by Coen, who earlier rebuked the merchants for their actions in 1613 in Batu Sawar against the invading Acehnese. War with Aceh was the last thing the authorities hoped for. Prioritising the company's interest was Coen's main focus; he was adamant to trade in the ports of Tiku and Priaman on Sumatra's west coast, for which he needed a license from Iskandar Muda. The development of relations with both Aceh and Johor is a striking aspect of the balancing politics of the VOC.

Interesting to know is that Verhagen's fleet brought back to Aceh in 1604 the envoys who visited the Netherlands Republic.

The Spanish fleet from the Philippines with Governor Don Juan de Silva, arrived in front of Johor after Verhagen had left the Straits. The troops cut down all the fruit trees in Johor Lama and Batu Sawar, to revenge Johor's agreements with the VOC. This was the frenzied situation in 1615/1616. Growing anxieties and shifting alliances caused the hostilities to intensify. Verhagen's elaborate reporting provides valuable information of the circumstances at a precise moment.

Writing from his ship to the sultan of Johor, Don Juan de Silva in no uncertain terms accused him of betrayal by making agreements with the VOC. He demanded that Abdullah gave back all the artillery and gunpowder Verhagen pillaged from the galleons, sending Captain-Major Fernando de Acosta to discuss matters of defence against their enemies (*ibid.*, 130–131).

What was Bongsu's reaction? What was the situation in Johor after the destructive actions by Aceh and the Castilleans, had it become a no-man's land? Unfortunately, there is a break in the record. Portuguese primary sources, if extant, may shed light on the situation. An interesting fact which we draw from the *Bustan as-Salatin* is, that Tun Sri Lanang spent the rest of his life in Aceh in high government positions, having scholarly discussions with Nur'ud-din al Raniri while the latter was in Aceh (1637–1645).

Iskandar Muda was resolute to drive the Portuguese from the region, carrying on with the traditional policy of his predecessors. After more than a century of wars and hostilities, Malacca was still in Portuguese hands. His anger was directed towards Abdullah who furtively moved to Lingga in the Carimon islands in 1618 to escape the Acehnese who came looking for him. He had sent his wife back to her brother and married the daughter of the king of Jambi. This king said to Dutchman De Haze that the sultan of Johor had to flee his country, because he lived under constant threat of the Iberians and Aceh because of his friendship with the Dutch. This is partly true. There is conclusive evidence that Iskandar Muda pursued Abdullah for the armistice with Malacca and certainly not because of his friendship with the Dutch.

In 1615, the Portuguese convoyed Raja Bujang, the son of Sultan Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah, to Pahang to claim the throne, giving evidence of an agreement between Ala'ud-din and the Portuguese. This was certainly not against Bongsu's wishes, because it had long been decided that Bujang would access Pahang's throne. In 1614, the Portuguese stood ready to convoy a contender from Borneo

to Pahang. It is an example of their ability to exploit affection and disaffection to their advantage. It is fair to say that they had to cope with unfaltering enmity from the strong ports even after a century of their presence in the Straits. They were completely dependent on commerce and provisions from the neighbourhood.

Gibson-Hill places Raja Bujang as ruler of Pahang from 1615 to 1617 in his Johor royal tree. In 1617, the invading Acehnese took members of the royal family of Pahang captive. Was Raja Bujang among them? Or did he flee to Bintan to escape Iskandar Muda's troops as is suggested in the historiography? Or was he captured during Aceh's second invasion of Pahang in 1618? According to Coen's letter to the Gentlemen XVII in Amsterdam (Board of the VOC) of 24th June 1618, Sultan Abdullah grieved over the fact that the Acehnese invaders had taken his son (his nephew, Raja Bujang?) to Aceh and he requested the Dutch to bring him back in return for his favours to trade in Kampar and Andragiri where Johor remained influential (*ibid.*, 329).

The Dutch were loyal to Abdullah whom they considered their truest friend, even if the Gentlemen XVII saw no profit in maintaining an office and storehouse in Johor because the sultan was on the run for the king of Aceh. They ordered the closure of offices and storehouses which were unprofitable. The ones in Aceh and Patani continued.

Abdullah was eager to maintain his friendship with the Dutch. They did not respond to Iskandar Muda's request to hand him over for he traded with the Portuguese for textiles of which he was bereft. They told him to stop these activities (Colenbrander 1919, 176).

Expecting the arrival of a large number of VOC ships to attack Malacca, the desperate Portuguese asked him to sell them 10 pieces of artillery for which they were prepared to pay him four *bahar* (unit of weight) of gold, but Abdullah responded indignantly that his artillery was not for sale, even if paid in gold (*ibid.*, vol. 7 [pt. 2], 686). Again, we note that even after its discomfiture and destruction, Johor remained a factor of importance for Malacca.

Raja Bongsu/Sultan Abdullah, the man who saw it his purpose to keep the Malay ports under Johor's umbrella, was not spared the anguish to see how several ports fell to a callous Iskandar Muda. Pahang was invaded in 1617 and 1618, extirpation of Kedah followed in 1619 and Perak was invaded in 1620. The Portuguese traded in these ports. He prepared for an attack of Patani because the queen had assisted Kedah by sending overland 2,000 men and provisions and because the Portuguese were trading in her port. Obviously fearing that she

would be attacked from different sides, she sent a letter to the governor-general in Batavia, begging him not to interfere in her trade with the Portuguese, at which Coen (since 1619 governor-general) replied that he preferred her to stop trading with them, but his ships would not molest vessels from the Moluccan islands and Malacca coming to or leaving her port (*ibid.*, vol. 2, 574).

A number of about 20,000 thousand people from these invaded ports were brought to Aceh. Added to this number are the thousands of Johor captives brought there in 1613 and 1615. Insurrection was punished severely by torture and execution.

In 1623, the Acehnese drove away Sultan Abdullah from Lingga, burnt down his residence and town. He fled to the Tambelan islands, his last refuge, where he passed away shortly afterwards. The Dutch were deeply saddened by his death. Governor-General Carpentier wrote to the Gentlemen XVII that Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah of Johor had died of a broken heart. He feared that this was the end of the famous empire of Johor (Coolhaas 1960, vol. 1, 144, Letter to the Gentlemen XVII).

Abdullah's widow furtively left with their young son to her father, the king of Jambi, to escape Iskandar Muda's pursuit. The little prince was predestined to succeed his cousin, Raja Bujang, as sultan of Johor and Pahang.

Final Remarks

Conflicts, fusion and fission were the norm in the Straits region. The arrival of European powers impacted with force on the evolution of interstate relations. Johor was at the same time a victim of the circumstances and an active player in geopolitics in which the ports were enveloped and offended.

The arrival of the Dutch was a mixed blessing. Because of Bongsu's strong inclination to them, they regarded him as their truest friend, yet they were intent to have Malacca and abused his confidence. Even though they did not deliver Malacca and save Johor from its misfortunes, Bongsu stubbornly counted on their support.

There is a saying that choices and actions are the rolling stones of history; whichever choices Johor made by way of an alliance with the VOC, peace accords with Malacca or inevitably an association with Aceh, there was always an avenging party ready to attack. Peace was the prelude to war.

The year 1615 was a breaking point; the second truce with Malacca was signed. Johor was victimised by Aceh and the Castilians. Sultan Ala'ud-din Riayat Shah was taken captive to Aceh where he was executed.

Bongsu managed to stay out of the hands of Iskandar Muda who pursued him relentlessly. He was able to shake off his pursuer and his degrading status of vassal. He was the sovereign of the sultanate Johor from 1615 until his death in 1623.

The “empire” of Johor was not lost forever as Governor-General Carpentier feared; it survived the onslaught of its enemies.

Bongsu's legacy was that he continued the dynasty throughout the tribulations. He was succeeded by his nephew Raja Bujang (Abdul Jalil Shah r. 1623–1677) who was sultan of Johor and Pahang. Bujang was envoyed by the Portuguese to Pahang in 1615 where he claimed the throne. It is the irony of history that thanks to Portuguese meddling, Johor remained influential in Pahang to the point that it came under the crown of the Johor dynasty. Bongsu's own son, Raja Bajau, by his wife from Jambi, was predestined to succeed Abdul Jalil Shah, yet Gibson-Hill's Johor royal tree shows that it was Raja Bajau's son, Ibrahim Shah who was sultan of Johor and Pahang (r. 1677–1685).

Afterthought:

We leap forward to the year 1641 when the VOC at last seized the unconquerable town of Malacca with help from Johor (Abdul Jalil Shah) in the month of February. The 16th May treaty seemed to come to life. It was certainly embarrassing for Johor that another European power became the new occupier of Malacca for which it had fought so long and hard.

Aceh's Sultan Iskandar Thani, the prince of Pahang, died in January 1641 before the fall of Malacca. He died childless. The Aceh-Pahang connection ended with his death. There came an end to the Aceh-Johor hostilities.

Thanks to Bongsu's friendship with the Dutch the ongoing relations between the VOC and Johor were solid and friendly. Johor steadfastly strengthened its position in the region.

Notes

1. Mitrasing (2011, 175) onwards, description and profound analysis of the Aceh-Johor struggle.
2. In Bab II, Fasal 13.
3. De Santos Alves (2000, 93–94) referring to Manuel Codinho and Gaspar Barreiros.
4. “Shahdan maka ada-lah di-ilhamkan Allah ta’ala dalam hati Raja Iskandar Muda memileh Sultan Mughal akan ganti-nya itu saperti Nabiu’-lah Daud memileh dalam antara anaknya Nabiu’-lah Sulaiman akan gantinya” (Teuku Iskandar 1966, 43–44).
5. “Agorasta gran fiesta!” (Unger 1948, 78).
6. “Os Holandeses experimentaram grandes difficultades nos primeiros anos da sua frequencia da Insulinda. Em 1595–1596 os irmaos Houtman tiveram serios problemas em Banten, parece que por instigacao dos Portugueses de Malaca. En 1599 foram atacaos em Sunda e no ano seguinte no Acehm, aqui por instigacao da diplomacia Portuguesa, facta que marca a apogeu do relacionamento entre Achem e o Estado da India” (Lobato 2000, 55–56).
7. The English, who arrived at the heels of the Dutch in the Straits in 1602 under Admiral Lancaster, were no frequent visitors of Johor of that time; they traded in Patany, Aceh, Bantam and on Sumatra’s west coast.
8. See Unger’s (1948, 30) *Concept-instruxtie ende memorie voor Cornelis de Houtman* for example.
9. *Geheime instruxtie voor Admiraal Verhoeff* (Secret instruction for Admiral Verhoeff) (ibid., 68).
10. See “The Johor-VOC Alliance c. 1606–1613”, National University of Singapore Working Paper, 2009.
11. In VOC: 1.04.02: 11263, Translation of the letter; Mitrasing (2011) (the copy is included in the “Annex”).
12. In VOC: 1.04.02: 1056, 51 a 52.
13. Since 1610, an appointed governor-general functioned as chief political affairs in the Indies. The first was Pieter Both.
14. “Cort verhael vant wedervaren van Adryaen vander Dussen, Opperkoopman, etc.” in Tiele (1877, 70–79).
15. In Tiele and Heeres (1886, 118–130), Letter of Steven van der Haghen (10th March 1616) to the Gentlemen XVII.

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