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From colonial service to journalism

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Aziz kept bucking his British bosses

ABDUL Aziz Ishak was born in Perak in 1922, the descendant of prominent Sumatran Malay Datuk Jannatun who migrated to Penang in 1759 or 15 years before Francis Light arrived on the island.

Uneasy with the rapid changes taking place in Penang, which he saw as making the Malays more materialistic, Datuk Jannatun moved to Terong in Perak in the mid-19th Century. Aziz and his father were born there.

His father joined the colonial Fisheries Department and rose to a senior position. Aziz followed a similar career path before joining the world of journalism.

Denied entry into the Malay College Kuala Kangsar because of his non-aristocratic background, Aziz went to school in Singapore; first at the Victoria Bridge English School and later the more prestigious Raffles Institution.

His time at Raffles was an important learning experience. He mixed well with students of various ethnic backgrounds and was the school captain for two years, perhaps the only Malay to have held this distinction.

At Raffles, he formed a Malay literary associ-

ation with friends including Hamid Jumaat, Sardon Jubir and Ahmad Ibrahim and contributed articles on the Malays and their plight to *Warta Malaya*, a leading Malay newspaper in Singapore. This was done through his brother Yusof who was already working as a journalist.

Upon completing his Senior Cambridge, Aziz joined the colonial service in the Fisheries Department based initially in Port Dickson in 1936, followed by Kuantan and then Batu Kurau where he was responsible for the northern region.

In Kuantan, his sympathy for the Malay fishermen did not go down well with officials, notably the English district officer, while in Kuala Kurau his immediate boss wanted him to read books on fisheries only and not literary works.

Frustrated with British officialdom and after being unfairly accused of collaborating with the Japanese by his European boss (who was humiliated by the Japanese during 1942-45 and imprisoned in Changi), Aziz left the colonial service to join his brother Yusof at *Utusan Melayu*.