

CRITERIA FOR LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE BASED ON SELECTED MALAY STATECRAFT MANUSCRIPTS

*(Kriteria Kepemimpinan dan Tadbir Urus Berdasarkan Naskah
Ketatanegaraan Melayu Terpilih)*

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To cite this article (*Rujukan makalah ini*): Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad
(2026). Criteria for leadership and governance based on selected Malay
statecraft manuscripts. *Malay Literature*, 39(1), 1–36 [https://doi.
org/10.37052/ml39\(1\)no1](https://doi.org/10.37052/ml39(1)no1)

Received: Peroleh:	22/2/2026	Revised: Semakan:	30/5/2026	Accepted: Terima:	26/6/2026	Published online: Terbit dalam talian:	30/6/2026
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This article has undergone a double blind peer-review process (Makalah ini telah melalui proses penilaian sulit berganda)

Abstract

This study examines the governance and leadership criteria within the Malay governmental tradition by analysing selected statecraft manuscripts: *Taj al-Salatin*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*. The central issue is the need to reassess mechanisms of legitimacy and national stability through the lens of local political philosophy and value traditions. The objective is to identify and describe the leadership criteria and governance systems contained in these manuscripts. This study employs a qualitative method using library research techniques and textual analysis to achieve the stated objectives. The findings were obtained through a thematic analysis guided by a three-dimensional conceptual framework, namely personal, functional and governance system criteria. The appointment criteria were determined based on a synthesis of textual evidence from the study manuscripts, aligned with the parameters of the conceptual framework. Findings indicate that ruler appointment criteria emphasise religiousness, justice, trustworthiness and intellectual capacity. Selection mechanisms through *syura* (consultation), *bai'ah* (pledge of allegiance), and *wasiat* (testament) function as sources of legitimacy and as safeguards against abuse of power.

Practical governance practices identified include consultation with *ulama* (religious scholars), careful evaluation of information, field visits to hear public grievances, and the appointment of authoritative officials such as *wazir* (vizier) and envoys to strengthen legitimacy and sovereign stability. Overall, this study contributes to the field of governance by outlining governance guidelines based on the principles of integrity, justice, and consultative practices. The research findings further reinforce the need for leaders to prioritise the welfare of the people and the rule of law to ensure national stability. In addition, this study proposes a dynamic and visionary leadership model as a foundation for a more transparent and sustainable governance transformation.

Keywords: Governance, leadership criteria, statecraft manuscripts, government leader, *wazir* (vizier), envoy

Abstrak

Kajian ini meneliti kriteria kepemimpinan dan tadbir urus dalam tradisi pemerintahan Melayu melalui analisis naskhah ketatanegaraan terpilih, iaitu Taj al-Salatin, Bustan al-Salatin, Safinat al-Hukkam, Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik, dan Thamarat al-Muhimmah. Isu utama dalam penulisan ini ialah keperluan untuk memahami semula mekanisme legitimasi dan kestabilan negara dengan merujuk falsafah politik serta tradisi nilai tempatan. Objektif kajian adalah untuk mengenal pasti dan menghuraikan kriteria kepemimpinan serta tadbir urus yang terkandung dalam naskhah-naskhah tersebut. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif yang mengaplikasikan teknik kepastakaan dan analisis teks untuk mencapai objektif yang ditetapkan. Hasil kajian diperoleh melalui proses analisis tematik yang dipandu oleh kerangka konsep tiga dimensi, iaitu kriteria peribadi, fungsional dan sistem tadbir urus. Penentuan kriteria pelantikan dilakukan berasaskan sintesis bukti tekstual daripada naskhah kajian yang dipadankan dengan parameter kerangka konsep tersebut. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa mekanisme pemilihan menerusi syura, baiah dan wasiat berfungsi sebagai sumber legitimasi dan menjadi medium pencegahan penyalahgunaan kuasa. Amalan praktikal seperti bermusyawarah dengan ulama, ketelitian menilai maklumat, budaya turun padang, serta pelantikan pembesar berwibawa seperti wazir dan utusan merupakan elemen penting bagi pengukuhan legitimasi dan kestabilan kedaulatan. Secara keseluruhannya, penulisan ini menyumbang kepada bidang ketatanegaraan dengan menggariskan panduan tadbir urus berasaskan prinsip integriti, keadilan dan amalan syura. Dapatan kajian memperkukuh lagi keperluan pemimpin untuk

mengutamakan kebajikan rakyat serta kedaulatan undang-undang demi menjamin kestabilan negara. Selain itu, kajian ini mencadangkan model kepemimpinan yang dinamik dan berwawasan sebagai asas kepada transformasi tadbir urus yang lebih telus dan mampan.

Kata kunci: Tadbir urus, kriteria kepemimpinan, naskhah ketatanegaraan, pemerintah, wazir, utusan

INTRODUCTION

The historical Malay Sultanate inherited a feudal government system that possessed its own unique characteristics. The Sultan served as the supreme leader and exercised absolute authority over his subjects. This stemmed from a deeply-rooted understanding among the subjects, which accorded absolute confidence in the ruler's sovereignty in all aspects of life. The influence of Hinduism rendered the ruler sacred, bestowing upon him a status nearly equivalent to that of a deity, consequently receiving veneration and worship from his subjects. The complexity of royal sacredness is further reinforced by hereditary myths of royal lineage passed down through generations, which rendered the ruler's power sacred in nature and encouraged the devotion of the subjects.

The arrival of Islam in the Malay Peninsula transformed government administration, encompassing not only religious affairs but also exerting a profound impact on the social and political structures of Malay society. This transformation not only reflects a shift in beliefs from the mythologised glorification of rulers rooted in deity worship, but also affirms the role of the ruler within an Islamic context as a revered spiritual leader and moral exemplar, whose authority and commands are respected and obeyed by the subjects. The allegiance of the subjects to the ruler similarly mirrored their devotion to Islamic law, giving rise to the epithet "the shadow of God upon the earth." According to Jelani Harun (2003), Malay authors employed the Arabic term *zillullāh fil- 'ālam* to denote the position of Malay rulers. Nevertheless, Islam as a way of life imposes certain conditions upon the privileges and prerogatives of royal authority. Notwithstanding the conception of the ruler as "the shadow of God upon the earth," such sovereigns are nonetheless obligated to uphold justice in their governance.

This circumstance has established a distinctive relationship between the government and the people. The *Sulalat al-Salatin* records that prior to the death of Sultan Mansur Syah, he bequeathed to Sultan Alau'd Din Riayat Shah several significant matters pertaining to the administration of

the Malacca sultanate. Among the fundamental tenets of his testament was and the emphasis placed on the relationship between the ruling authority and the governed subjects. The substance of the said testament reads as follows: “The subjects are metaphorically the roots, and the ruler the tree; for without the roots, the tree shall not be able to stand” (*Sulalat al-Salatin*, MS 86: 219). Through this testament, a balanced understanding is discerned regarding the reciprocal relationship between the governing authority and the governed populace. Sultan Mansur Syah illustrates the subjects as the roots, constituting the foundational bedrock of a tree, upon which the survival and continuity of the tree symbolise the ruling government. This testament further reflects the values of governance wisdom that prioritise a harmonious relationship between the ruler, the authoritative officials, and the subjects, as well as the necessity of recognising that the welfare of the subjects constitutes the basis in establishing a foundation of stability and prosperity for the ruling government.

Based on traditional Malay literature, statecraft literature constitutes a literary genre that focuses on the integration and cohesion between the ruler and the subjects. Statecraft literature, also known as *adab* literature or “mirrors for rulers” in the Western scholarly tradition, is closely associated with the life of the sultan and functions as a guide, counsel, and source of moral direction for rulers in shaping leadership characteristics and determining the direction of government. The content of statecraft literary manuscripts emphasises moral and ethical values, while also addressing issues of justice, methods of adjudication, the social responsibilities of rulers, and safeguarding the welfare of the populace. Therefore, these manuscripts serve as a comprehensive reference encompassing spiritual knowledge, administrative management, customs, and culture within the context of traditional governance values.

There are several statecraft manuscripts from various governments that are each rich in protocols and conventions of governance. Notable examples include the *Taj al-Salatin* by Bukhari al-Jauhari (1604) and *Bustan al-Salatin* by Nuruddin al-Raniri (1638), both originating from Aceh. Both manuscripts offer valuable insights into the practices of governance and religious values within the context of Acehnese society during that period. *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik and Thamarat al-Muhimmah* by Raja Ali Haji (1857) are significant manuscripts that examine the principles of governance and administrative management within the Riau kingdom. *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* by Raja Haji Ali Kelana (1901), originating from Riau, is also an important scholarly manuscript that

portrays traditional values and localised governance practices. Furthermore, manuscripts such as *Adab Raja-Raja* from Sri Lanka, *Kitab Undang-Undang Raja Nati* by Syarif Sukma Wira ibn Syarif Jaafar Baqabah (1876) from Kutai, and *Kitab Nasihat Raja-Raja* by Syeikh Duyong from Terengganu, collectively contribute to an intellectual heritage that documents the wisdom and normative principles of governance within their respective historical kingdoms.

This study focuses on five central manuscripts of statecraft produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, namely *Taj al-Salatin*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, that collectively serve as the primary corpus of textual analysis for this study. The selection of these manuscripts is based on the chronological development of Malay authorship. *Taj al-Salatin* and *Bustan al-Salatin* serve as the foundational reference texts that established the principles of justice and royal legitimacy in Aceh. *Safinat al-Hukkam* is selected on account of its concentrated focus on Islamic legal and judicial dimensions, while *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* represent the mature phase of political thought in Riau-Lingga, with particular emphasis on ethical, intellectual, and administrative structural dimensions. Hence, through this discussion, the objective of the study is to identify and elaborate upon the criteria of leadership and governance as exercised by the ruling government, based on selected manuscripts of statecraft. The criteria of leadership and governance in this study are determined exclusively through textual content analysis of the selected statecraft manuscripts. This approach is adopted to ensure that each criterion is anchored to the original narrative and political thought embedded in the manuscripts, unmediated by an external conceptual framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the Malay-Islamic leadership in the Malay archipelago are often referred to through works of statecraft that position Islam as the foundational basis of administrative affairs. Shah Rul Anuar Nordin (2017), in his examination of the texts *Taj al-Salatin* and *Bustan al-Salatin*, asserted that justice constitutes the primary core of governing legitimacy. He stated that the integration of *Shari'ah* principles and Malay customary practices within these texts is not merely normative in character but also functions practically in the nation's administration, religious reform, and

the holistic formation of Malay-Islamic political identity. Meanwhile, Annuar Ramadhon Kasa and Akmaliza Abdullah (2022) emphasised the aspects of human development and leadership ethics as articulated by Raja Ali Haji in *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*. The findings indicate that good leadership originates from a soul free from internal crises, particularly the trait of envy. Raja Ali Haji outlines eight perils of envy as barriers to true knowledge, thereby positioning him as a thinker who provides solutions based on Islamic principles to address the social predicaments of the Malay World.

Subsequently, the intellectual dimension of leadership is examined by Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad (2022) through the Seventh Chapter of *Bustan al-Salatin*. She concluded that Nuruddin al-Raniri emphasises the concept of the intellect (*'aql*) as an essential element encompassing the aspects of knowledge, reason, and self-reflection. The emphasis on the distinction between the rational and irrational functions is an ethical guide for leaders in attaining personal excellence and a prosperous life. Complementing the dimension of well-being, Masdinizam Shamsudin Shukor and Wan Ali Wan Mamat (2025) examined the aspect of holistic health within *Bustan al-Salatin*. Their study finds that the Seventh Chapter of al-Raniri's work integrates elements of Islamic medicine based on *Tibb Nabawi*. The manuscript, which incorporates the physical dimension through the application of Sunnah-based remedies and the spiritual dimension through soul-based treatment, demonstrates that classical Malay leadership placed considerable emphasis on the comprehensive well-being of both the subjects and the government.

This tradition of statecraft writing experienced a unique evolution in specific contexts. Annuar Ramadhon Kasa and Mohd Anuar Ramli (2024) identified that *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* incorporates elements of the Bugis royal genealogy into its statecraft narrative. This is seen as a divergence from the Islamic didactic tradition and the historiographical writing tradition of Pulau Penyengat, pioneered by Raja Ali Haji. This shift reflects the dynamic nature of political writing in Riau-Lingga. Meanwhile, Azman Yusof et al. (2025) positioned *Kitab Kumpulan Ringkas Berbetulan Lekas* as the final political work within the corpus of traditional Malay literature. Based on a qualitative textual analysis approach, this study outlines three core concepts in Raja Haji Ali Kelana's governance thought, namely the nation as an analogy of the human body, the emphasis on the leader's responsibility in fostering justice, stability, and prosperity, and the importance of religion and historical consciousness as the primary guiding framework in determining the direction of the nation's leadership.

Although studies on statecraft literature exist, a significant gap nonetheless remains. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by focusing on the criteria of leadership and governance in Malay-Islamic statecraft literature. Although previous studies have emphasised the aspect of justice in general terms, there remains a need to elaborate on the multidimensional criteria of leadership encompassing intellectual, moral, and physical dimensions. Therefore, this study examines how these criteria are integrated within a governance framework that contributes to the stability of the government. The results of the analysis show that this study is able to highlight the continuity of Malay political thought, which has shifted from a focus on legitimacy towards a more practical and competency-based leadership. The distinctiveness of this study lies in its synthesis of leadership criteria drawn from various manuscripts of statecraft, thereby forming a comprehensive set of governance guidelines. This is of considerable importance in ensuring that the intellectual heritage of Malay political thought remains a dynamic moral and intellectual force in addressing leadership crises within the contemporary context.

The distinctiveness of this study lies in its synthesis of leadership criteria drawn from multiple manuscripts of statecraft, thereby forming a comprehensive set of governance guidelines. The synthesis of prior studies yields a conceptual framework that consolidates the elements of leadership into three central dimensions. First, personal criteria focusing on ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Annuar Ramadhon Kasa, 2022). Second, functional criteria involving the intellectual role, the exercise of reason, and the responsibilities of the ruling authority (Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad, 2022). Third, a system of governance that encompasses the holistic well-being of the subjects and a stable governmental structure (Masdinizam Shamsudin Shukor & Wan Ali Wan Mamat, 2025; Azman Yusof et al., 2025). The integration of these three dimensions, derived from the review of prior studies, serves as the foundational parameters for the data analysis of the study manuscripts, to formulate a practical model of governance leadership.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, with a particular focus on textual content analysis. The research design was selected to facilitate an in-depth reading of the Malay manuscripts of statecraft in order to obtain substantive data for discussion. The methodology is divided into two main phases:

a) Phase 1: Data collection procedure

Data were collected through library research concentrating on primary sources, namely selected manuscripts of statecraft, which are *Taj al-Salatin*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*. Secondary sources comprised a literature review drawn from relevant journal articles, theses, and scholarly books.

b) Phase 2: Data analysis

The manuscripts were analysed by employing thematic and descriptive-analytical analysis. The analysis is guided by a conceptual framework formulated through a synthesis of the literature, which consolidates the elements of leadership into three central dimensions, namely personal criteria (ethical, moral and spiritual), functional criteria (intellectual role, the exercise of reason and governmental responsibilities), and governance system (well-being of the populace and the stability of the state structure). The integration of these dimensions enables the systematic categorisation of data to formulate a conceptual framework of the study based on manuscript evidence.

Research Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was constructed as a systemic guide for analysing leadership criteria and governance models in selected Malay statecraft manuscripts. It represents a synthesis of the literature review, integrating scholarly perspectives on classical administrative philosophy with the criteria of governance. In principle, this framework is applied through the integration of three interrelated dimensions, namely the personal dimension, the functional dimension, and the governance system dimension. Table 1 summarises the three central dimensions that serve as the parameters in analysing the study manuscripts:

Furthermore, to provide a clearer understanding, this conceptual framework is elaborated through three central dimensions that are mutually integrative. Each dimension functions as a fundamental parameter in evaluating the quality of leadership and the effectiveness of governance based on the perspective of selected Malay statecraft manuscripts. The elaboration of each dimension is as follows:

1. The central dimension of personal criteria as a foundation

This dimension focuses on the intrinsic qualities of the leader. The effectiveness of governance originated from moral integrity and purification

Table 1 Central dimensions of leadership and governmental governance.

Central Dimension	Component Focus	Central References
Personal Criteria	Ethics, morals, spirituality, creed (<i>aqidah</i>), devotion (<i>taqwā</i>), and purification of the soul.	Annuar Ramadhon Kasa (2022)
Functional Criteria	The role of intellectuals, the use of reason (knowledge, thought, reflection), the maturity of <i>ijtihad</i> , and administrative responsibility.	Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad (2022)
Governance System	Holistic well-being of the subjects (physical and spiritual), stability of the state structure, and social justice.	Masdinizam Shamsudin Shukor and Wan Ali Wan Mamat (2025), Azman Yusof <i>et al.</i> (2025)

of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). Without a firm creed (*aqidah*), a leader is susceptible to personal crises that undermine the stability of the government. Therefore, this dimension serves as the foremost ethical and moral fortress.

2. The central dimension of functional criteria as a mechanism

This dimension translates personal values into action. It emphasises reason as an intellectual instrument for deliberating any decision. A leader is required to have the maturity of *ijtihad* and strategic wisdom so that the role of vizier as the government's mind and the envoy as the tongue of the government's sovereignty may function efficiently.

3. The central dimension of governance system as a purpose

This dimension evaluates the impact of leadership on the governmental ecosystem. The combination of integrity of character and judicious action produces a stable governance system by focusing on the well-being of the subjects and the sustainability of a fair and harmonious state structure.

In this regard, to provide a visual representation of the aforementioned relationships, Figure 1 presents a concise grouping of the central dimensions in the Leadership and Governance Criteria Model as follows:

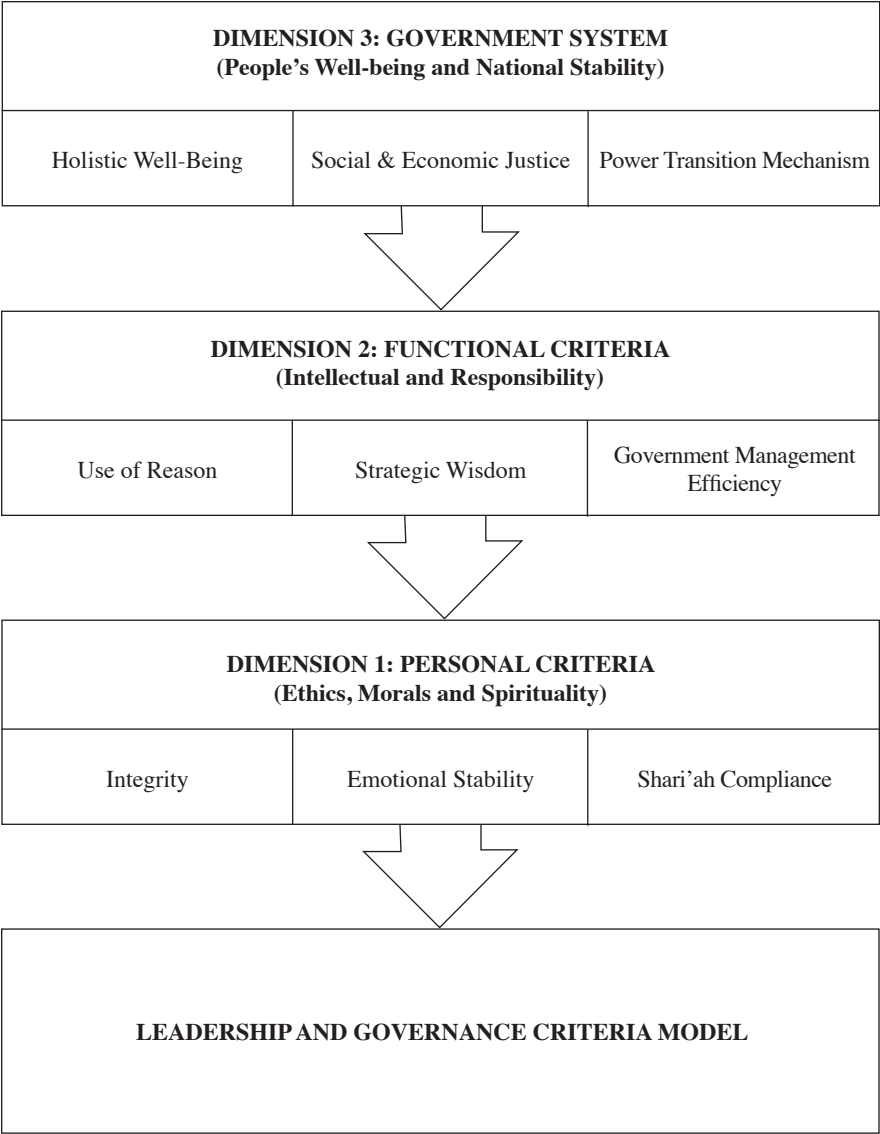


Figure 1 Leadership and governance criteria Model.

The integration of these three dimensions provides a model for examining Malay statecraft manuscripts. Thus, by linking personal criteria as the root, functional criteria as the mechanism, and the governance system

as the purpose, this study translates the traditional values into practical administration. This framework not only functions as a systematic data categorisation instrument but may also serve as a dynamic moral and intellectual reference in addressing contemporary leadership crises.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The ruler of the kingdom is likened to a helmsman navigating a vessel towards its intended destination. Just as a helmsman bears the responsibility for navigating the tumult of the sea and charting a safe passage amid the storm, the ruler is obliged to lead with wisdom, justice, and foresight, while confronting emerging challenges and conflicts so as to ensure the safety, stability, and well-being of the subjects. Based on this analogy, the concept of rulership within the Malay-Islamic tradition is understood as an unwavering leadership journey based on *Shari'ah* (Islamic law).

In this regard, the selection of a ruler who fulfils the requisite criteria according to *Shari'ah* constitutes a fundamental matter for the survival and continuity of governance of a nation. The success or failure of a system of governance is highly dependent on the credibility of the electoral method. Thus, the statecraft manuscripts function as sources of wisdom and authoritative guidance for the government, particularly in the appointment of qualified authoritative officials. The role of the officials is significant as they serve as the driving force of administration and the pulse of governmental development. The implementation of this understanding is capable of producing effective leadership and elevating the government to prominence.

Next, this section elaborates on the research findings pertaining to the selected statecraft manuscripts. The focus of discussion centres on four central dimensions that constitute the pillars of Malay-Islamic state stability, namely:

- a) Personal criteria of the ruler
- b) Mechanism of appointment of the ruler
- c) The application of wisdom in governing the kingdom
- d) Criteria for the selection of the authoritative officials

The four dimensions were identified through inductive content analysis of the statecraft manuscripts under study. The determination of these dimensions is not arbitrary; rather, it is guided by the parameters established

in the conceptual framework constructed through the synthesis of scholarly literature as stipulated in the literature review section. Dimensions (a) and (c) reflect the central parameters of personal criteria and governance system, whereas dimensions (b) and (d) are categorised under the functional criteria and governance system. This approach ensures that the research findings are anchored to the statecraft manuscripts.

The determination of these four dimensions is deliberate, ensuring that the analysis remains relevant to the textual register of each manuscript under study. This is owing to the fact that not all manuscripts, such as *Taj al-Salatin*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, address all four dimensions comprehensively or with equal depth. Thus, these selected dimensions serve a descriptive framework that enables the research findings to highlight the specific strengths of each manuscript, whether in relation to personal ethics, functional structure, or governance system, in accordance with the historical context of their composition.

Personal Criteria of the Ruler

The personal criteria of the ruler refer to the personal qualities, character, and moral credibility that a government leader must possess in order to safeguard the sovereignty of the government. In the statecraft corpus, these criteria are not purely normative in character but constitute the core of legitimacy that distinguishes just rulers from tyrannical rulers. Shah Rul Anuar Nordin (2017) asserted that the integration of the values of justice within statecraft manuscripts functions practically in the formation of Malay-Islamic political identity. Annuar Ramadhon Kasa and Akmaliza Abdullah (2022) further emphasised that effective leadership originates from the strength of character and moral integrity, whereas Syed Muhammad Naquib al Attas (1972) positioned *adab* (manners) and wisdom as the central requisites for preventing the deterioration of the value of knowledge in leadership. Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad (2022) highlighted the role of reason and knowledge as critical ethical guidance in shaping the personal excellence of the ruler. From a sociopolitical perspective, Milner (1982) regarded the personal qualities of the ruler as the source of legitimacy and sovereignty. Collectively, the scholarly perspectives demonstrate that personal criteria encompassing moral, intellectual, and physical aspects constitute the foundational framework that determines the direction and sustainability of governance.

Based on Chapter Three of *Bustan al-Salatin* (MS UM 41: 299), and Clause 13 (*fasal ke-13*) of *Taj al-Salatin* (Or. 13295: 251), the authors outline the criteria and responsibilities of a ruler qualified to govern a kingdom. Among the foundational criteria are adherence to the Islamic faith, being a freeman, male, having attained puberty, and being of Quraysh lineage, as well as possessing qualities of bravery, justice in delivering judgement, and strict compliance with religious commandments. A ruler is obligated to protect the rights of the oppressed, safeguard the subjects, and strengthen the state by equipping the military force. This includes collecting the obligatory *zakat* (tithe) and distributing it to eligible recipients, exercising firmness in dealing with offenders, and upholding the performance of congregational prayers, including Friday and Eid prayers. In addition, the ruler is required to adjudicate disputes, uphold the integrity of witness testimony, administer the marriage of minors without a legal guardian (*wali*), ensure the equitable distribution of war spoils (*ghanimah*) acquired from the infidels, and possess comprehensive knowledge of religious affairs. An example of the excerpt is as follows:

As for the conditions of the ruler, as stated by all the ulama (scholars): First, he must be a muslim. Second, a freeman. Third, a male. Fourth, having attained puberty. Fifth, of the Qurasy lineage. Sixth, possessing utmost bravery in his heart. Seventh, fair in executing the laws of Allah. Eighth, compliance with all the commandments of Islam. Ninth, rendering justice to the oppressed, and tenth, safeguarding his subjects. Eleventh, strengthening the state. Twelfth, equipping the military force. Thirteenth, collecting the zakat (tithe) mandated by Allah Ta'ala and distributing it to its rightful recipients. Fourteenth, acting firmly and severely against wrongdoers, such as thieves and robbers. Fifteenth, performing congregational prayers. Sixteenth, performing Friday prayers. Seventeenth, performing Eid prayers. Eighteenth, resolving disputes and claims among all the servants of Allah. Nineteenth, accepting witnesses based on truth. Twentieth, solemnising the marriages of young boys and girls without a legal guardian (wali). Twenty-first, distributing the spoils of war (ghanimah) acquired from the infidels. Twenty-second, must be pious in all religious orders, but if he is not pious ... (Bustan al-Salatin MS UM 41: 299).

Meanwhile, *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* similarly outlines the criteria for the ruler of a kingdom. These criteria dictate that the ruler must be a Muslim who adheres firmly to religious principles, a *mukallaf* (accountable adult) male, a freeman, fair, possessing sound capacity for *ijtihad* (independent

legal reasoning), exhibiting refined and courteous speech, having good hearing and vision, demonstrating courage, being diligent rather than idle, and consistently demonstrating justice and benevolence. The focal point of the condition of being a ruler lies in the practical application of religious knowledge in daily life. A ruler who practises the fundamental religious knowledge, adopts Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as *uswah hasanah* (an excellent role model), and aligns closely with the ulama (religious scholars) for administrative guidance capable of executing governance fairly and equitably. The evidence is as follows:

Concerning the establishment of a ruler: Verily, establishing ruler is a collective obligation (fard kifayah) in the Islamic religion...the ruler must be a Muslim, a mukallaf (accountable male), a freeman, fair, possessing sound capacity for ijtihad (independent legal reasoning), refined speech, good hearing, and good sight, possess steadfast bravery and diligence, never wearing or indolent in administering the kingdom, and swift to act in every undertaking that promotes benevolence (Thamarat al-Muhimmah, :8)

The essence of the appointment requirements derived from both manuscripts reflects the philosophy of Islamic governance, which integrates social and political elements within a harmonious framework. These conditions encompass two central dimensions, namely governance and justice. When observed from the perspective of governance, emphasis is placed on the ruler's obligation to adhere to religious commandments and implement *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) fairly and without prejudice. This is to ensure that every decision and judgement rendered is anchored in the Quran and Hadith, thereby establishing justice as the primary fortress for protecting the rights of the subjects and the sovereignty of the nation. In addition, from the perspective of social responsibility, the ruler is expected to ensure that the welfare and well-being of the subjects are safeguarded. According to Siti Hawa Salleh (2006), the formation of nationhood is closely related to the character and attributes of the individual appointed as the ruler or Sultan. The ruler is portrayed as possessing exemplary qualities, including wisdom, responsibility, justice, refraining from oppressing his subjects, and maintaining an honourable reputation in the public eye. These positive attributes serve as the foundation for the prosperity of the kingdom and are capable of attracting inhabitants from other kingdoms to seek refuge and protection under its auspices.

The demand for such holistic leadership conditions demonstrates that, within the Malay-Islamic statecraft tradition, the position of a ruler is

neither absolute nor unconditional but is bound by responsibilities. This is because the position constitutes a sacred trust (*amanah*) that is inextricably linked to personal discipline and devoutness (*taqwā*) towards the Almighty. The conditions outlined within these statecraft manuscripts function as a mechanism of checks and balances, ensuring that power is exercised to uphold justice, preserve the sanctity of religious teachings (*syiar agama*), and protect the welfare of both the subjects and the kingdom. When these conditions are translated into governing practices, they not only establish a legitimate and authoritative nation but also cultivate a state that earns divine grace and benediction. This is consistent with the statement in Clause Seventh (*fasal ke-7*) of *Taj al-Salatin* (*Or.13295, 1824:64*), which states that: *When a ruler is pious (wara') and adheres strictly to the path of righteousness, the kingdom shall be protected by Allah; the gates of virtues shall be opened unto him, and the kingdom shall be protected from all manner of evil, insyaAllah (God willing).*

In summary, the personal conditions for assuming the role of a ruler may be elucidated as presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2 The classification of dimensions of conditions of rulership based on *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Taj al-Salatin*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*.

No.	Dimension	Condition
1.	Creed and Character (<i>Akidah and Akhlak</i>)	A Muslim, embodying piety and devoutness (<i>warak dan bertakwa</i>); emulating Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the exemplary model (<i>uswah hasanah</i>); upholding noble moral character; demonstrating responsibility.
2.	Knowledge and Independent Reasoning (<i>Keilmuan dan Ijtihad</i>)	Practising foundational religious knowledge; being learnt in religious affairs; possessing the capacity for independent juridical reasoning (<i>ijtihad</i>); maintaining close association with religious scholars (<i>ulama</i>).
3.	Status and Eligibility (<i>Status dan Kelayakan</i>)	Being a free individual, a legally accountable adult male (<i>mukallaf</i>), of Quraysh lineage (as stipulated in <i>Bustan al-Salatin</i>).
4.	Physical Capacity (<i>Keupayaan Fizikal</i>)	Possessing sound sight and hearing; demonstrating courage; exhibiting diligence and industriousness.

Table 2 (continued).

No.	Dimension	Condition
5.	Justice and Enforcement (<i>Keadilan dan Penguatkuasaan</i>)	Fair in administration; firm in sentencing/judgements; accepting honest witnesses; resolving disputes.
6.	Social Responsibility (<i>Tanggungjawab sosial</i>)	Safeguarding the welfare of the subjects; upholding the rights of the oppressed; ensuring social well-being.
7.	Resilience and Defence (<i>Ketahanan dan Pertahanan</i>)	Fortifying the states; equipping the military force; maintaining national security.
8.	Economy and Wealth Management (<i>Ekonomi dan Pengurusan Harta</i>)	Collecting <i>zakat</i> (tithe) and distributing it to rightful recipients; managing and distributing <i>ghanimah</i> (spoils of war) according to <i>Shari'ah</i> (Islamic law).
9.	Legal Affairs and Family Matters (<i>Perundangan dan Urusan Keluarga</i>)	Overseeing matrimonial arrangements (including those of minors without a guardian) in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence; upholding the <i>Shari'ah</i> as the foundational basis of all rulings.

The personal conditions of a ruler outlined in these manuscripts are synthesised through two central dimensions that mutually complement each other. First, the central dimension of personal criteria serves as the foundation of establishing internal qualities such as being a Muslim, fair, and possessing moral integrity, as elaborated in *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Taj al-Salatin*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, which serve as the pillars of ethical values that guarantee the credibility of the ruler. The efficacy of this moral foundation is subsequently translated into the central dimension of the governance system as its ultimate objective, emphasising personal integrity as the core factor of the stability of the state's ecosystem and the well-being of the subjects. Although the personal aspect is not addressed as prominently in *Safinat al-Hukkam* and *Muqaddimah fi Intizam*, which are predominantly a more functional approach, its presence is nonetheless acknowledged as an implicit prerequisite. This association proves that personal conditions are not only ideological aspirations, but rather a fundamental precondition within the statecraft tradition for the establishment of an authoritative government blessed by Allah Ta'ala.

The Mechanism of Ruler Appointment

The mechanism of ruler appointment constitutes a formal procedure that determines the legitimacy of a leader. The *Thamarat al Muhimmah*, particularly in Clause One: '*Menyatakan Mendirikan Raja*' (Declaring the Establishment of the King), provides an in-depth discourse on the methodology of monarchial selection and succession, which is anchored in *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) and *muafakat* (mutual consensus). Based on Clause One: *Pada menyatakan 'Mendirikan Raja'* (In stating the Establishment of the King) in '*Thamarat al Muhimmah*' (1857:7), a detailed exposition is provided concerning the selection of a ruler for the kingdom. In the context of the selection of a ruler or royal succession, the manuscript explains several methods, namely:

1. Selection through the pledge of allegiance (*bai'ah*)

This method involves the consent and acceptance of the community or specific designated groups towards the prospective ruler or royal successor. The selection is carried out through the consensus (*muafakat*) of fair and virtuous men, community leaders, and religious scholars (*ulama*), who prioritise candidates based on criteria of intellectual merit and exemplary personal character. The evidence is stated as follows: *We, all the members of the Ahl al-Hal wa al-'Aqd, following a concluded consensus (muwafaqat) and consultation (mushawarat), have appointed the respective individual (fulan) to be our ruler over this kingdom and all its subject territories; and the relationship between our ruler and us shall be conducted within the most Exalted verse of Allah Taala ... (Thamarat al-Muhimmah: 7)*

2. The nomination of a successor through consultation (*musyawarah*) or testament (*wasiat*)

This method involves mutual discussion with stakeholders or members of the community to determine a suitable candidate to succeed the ruler. The decision is reached either through collective consultation or based on the testament (*wasiat*) left by the preceding ruler, mirroring the practices established by the Companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): *Khalifah al-'Adl, Sayyidina Umar radiyaLlahu anhu, during his lifetime engaged in consensus (muwafaqat) and consultation (mushawarat) with several companions to establish a successor after his death, specifically by convening consultation (mushawarat) among six of the most eminent companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)... (Thamarat al-Muhimmah: 8). The*

nomination through consultation (*musyawarah*) or testament (*wasiat*) is not merely normative; instead, it serves as the ethical foundation of leadership, enabling the ruler to discharge the trust (*amanah*) with full integrity and in accordance with the principles of *Shari'ah*, thereby mitigating the prospect of succession disputes.

3. The use of coercion or regime deposition

This method is based on coercion and the exercise of power, including military action, to depose an existing ruler. For example: *The third part occurs by virtue of taghallab, that is, through the forcible dominance of a man possessed of power (quwwat) who vanquishes a territory and thereby installs himself as its ruler by his own decree (Thamarat al-Muhimmah: 8).* Although this approach brings about administrative changes, it is generally regarded as less acceptable, owing to the inherent risks of engendering social instability and conflict.

The mechanism of appointing rulers outlined in *Thamarat al Muhimmah* reflects the intellectual maturity of Malay-Islamic political thought, anchored in the tradition of earlier manuscripts. Although *Thamarat al Muhimmah* categorises the methods of appointment more systematically, namely pledge of allegiance (*bai'ah*), consultation (*musyawarah*), and coercion, the foundational principles had long been emphasised in *Taj al Salatin* and *Bustan al Salatin*, which situated the legitimacy of the ruler upon compliance with the conditions of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) and the mandate granted to the people of intellect (*golongan berakal*). The technical nature of this appointment is reinforced in *Safinat al Hukkam*, which focuses on procedures in accordance with *fardu kifayah* (collective religious obligation). At the same time, *Muqaddimah fi Intizam* emphasises bureaucratic orderliness to prevent anarchy during transitions of power. These findings indicate that all five manuscripts support sociopolitical consensus in guaranteeing the stability of the Malay kingdom.

The mechanism of ruler selection in the *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* constitutes a vital medium in ensuring the legitimacy and stability of a nation. Through the mechanism of pledge of allegiance (*bai'ah*), consultation (*musyawarah*), and testament (*wasiat*), the power transition process can be executed systematically, thereby minimising the risk of succession contestation and the abuse of power. Raja Ali Haji's emphasis on the criteria of knowledge (*'ilm*), character (*akhlak*), and adherence to

Table 3 Methods, mechanisms, and implications of ruler appointment in Thamarat al Muhimmah.

Methods	Central Mechanism	Implication
Selection through the pledge of allegiance (<i>bai'ah</i>).	Consensus of <i>Ahl al-Hall wa al-'Aqd</i> (Religious Scholars & Authoritative Officials)	Guarantees the legitimacy of the ruler and acceptance by the subjects
The nomination of a successor through mutual consultation (<i>musyawarah</i>) or testament (<i>wasiat</i>).	Collective consultation based on the testament (<i>wasiat</i>) of the preceding ruler	Ensures an ethical and orderly transition of power
The use of coercion or regime deposition	Physical coercion and military action (<i>taghallab</i>)	Results in anarchy and chronic social conflict

Shari'ah is not merely a formality; rather, it constitutes a guarantee that the appointed leader possesses the integrity to safeguard the welfare (*kemaslahatan*) of the subjects. Consequently, this method functions as an effective conflict prevention medium to ensure that the transition of power occurs harmoniously, untainted by political violence.

In the context of historical literature, the second mechanism of selection, namely consultation (*musyawarah*) or testament (*wasiat*), emerges as the most dominant. The transfer of ruling power through this method can be observed in *Sulalat al-Salatin*, *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Based on *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, before the commencement of a new reign, the transition is preceded by a royal testament (*wasiat*) delivered by the reigning ruler to his successor. For example, the testament (*wasiat*) of Sultan Malikul Mahmud to Sultan Ahmad.

O my son, the light of my eyes and the fruit of my heart, take great care in governing your kingdom to uphold the commandments of Allah and the commandments of His Messenger, and to prohibit all that both have forbidden; and do not transgress the word of Allah Ta'ala nor the traditions of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wassalam). O my son, do not fail to heed my counsel. In all matters, you must consult with your senior ministers, and do not act hastily in any affairs until you have deliberated thoroughly with your ministers and commanders, and only thereafter proceed. Cultivate patience in all matters that are contrary to the *Shari'ah*, and do not oppress or bring ruin upon the servants of Allah Ta'ala without the

truth. Do not neglect the commanding of good and forbidding of evil [al-Jamr bi'l ma'ruf wa [l]-nahy 'an il-munkar]. O my son, for this world is a transient abode that shall not endure, and it is the hereafter alone that is the eternal dwelling. O my son, Hubaya, by all means, do not fail to follow this testament (*wasiat*) of mine.” (Russel Jones, 1987: 35)

This testament (*wasiat*) serves as a guide and a manifestation of moral values for the ruler's successor. The testament also calls upon the ruler to remain steadfast in adhering to religious teachings and to engage in consultation (*musyawarah*) with wise and experienced ministers so that consequential decisions made for the nation are always guided soundly. According to Rogayah A. Hamid and Mariyam Salim (2006), a testament (*wasiat*) is not merely a legal document; rather, it is a counsel or reminder that provides an individual with foresight of what will transpire in the future. In addition, a bestowed testament reflects the importance of patience (*sabr*) in executing the duties of governance and strictly forbids committing tyranny (*kezaliman*) against the people. In its entirety, this testament is not simply formal in nature; rather, it serves as a solid ethical foundation for leaders to execute their duties with complete integrity (*amanah*) and under the guidance of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law).

The appointment methods found within these manuscripts may be associated with the central dimension of functional criteria as a mechanism. This dimension gives expression to the principles of sovereignty through official governance mechanisms, such as the systems of pledge of allegiance (*bai'ah*), consultation (*musyawarah*), and testament (*wasiat*), which are systematically detailed in *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*. This functional mechanism operates as a technical instrument that guarantees the legitimacy of the ruler and ensures that the transition of power occurs in an orderly manner to prevent anarchy. Although the procedural details of these mechanisms are not comprehensively expounded in the *Taj al-Salatin*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, and *Muqaddimah fi Intizam*, which are predominantly oriented towards ethical aspects or general jurisprudence, the existence of these mechanisms nevertheless proves the maturity of the bureaucratic system within Malay-Islamic socio-political thought.

Drawing Wisdom for the Governance of a Kingdom

In maintaining stability and peace, a kingdom inherently requires an administration that is efficient, authoritative, and anchored in wisdom (*hikmah*), as recorded within the statecraft manuscripts. Manuscripts such as the *Taj al-Salatin* and *Bustan al-Salatin* provide a wealth of practical counsel

to the ruler, including an emphasis on the importance of close collaboration between the ruler and religious scholars (*ulama*), the exercise of caution in the evaluation of information, and the prioritisation of appointing authoritative officials who are both competent and possessed of integrity. The comprehension and application of these values not only consolidate the legitimacy of the kingdom but also establish an administrative foundation that is proactive in addressing both internal and external challenges, thereby guiding the ruler to practise more effective governance.

Constantly Maintaining Close Ties with Religious Scholars (Ulama)

Based on the Malay-Islamic tradition of statecraft, the close relationship between rulers and religious scholars (*ulama*) is considered the pivotal axis of stability and justice in governance. This is affirmed in *Sifat as-Salatin*, which admonishes rulers of their obligation to maintain constant association with and consult with the learnt class. This encompasses the endeavour to seek guidance on matters pertaining to *Shari'ah* and to accord due attention to every reminder as well as viewpoints put forward by the said group. The evidence of this is as follows:

As for what is written in the book of *Sifat as-Salatin*, it is incumbent upon the ruler to always yearn for the companionship of the knowledgeable and those who stood firm in the matters of religion, and to constantly question them for guidance on religious affairs and the conduct of the pious, and to take heed of their counsel and discourse (*Taj al-Salatin* MKM 1638: 63).

The role of religious scholars (*ulama*) in governance functions as an ethical and legal advisory body that ensures every policy and action of the ruler aligns with religious values and societal aspirations. Expressions such as “always yearn for” and “constantly question” in the excerpt above emphasise that consultation (*musyawarah*) should be consistent and proactive, rather than sought only during times of crisis. This is in line with the view of Jelani Harun (2003), who asserted that the presence of religious scholars (*ulama*) in the palace is not merely a matter of protocol, but rather functions to “purify the soul” of the ruler and ensure the survival and continuity of refined conduct (*adab*) and justice. This cooperation does not solely entail a formal relationship, but also requires a mutual understanding of issues and challenges that exist within the kingdom. The ruler must realise that religious scholars fulfil a vital role as the spiritual leaders of the community. The ruler must remain receptive to the counsel and perspectives of religious scholars, particularly in the resolution of administrative matters.

Viewed from another perspective, the prosperity and security of a nation are attained when harmonious collaboration exists between the rulers (*umara'*) and religious scholars (*ulama*), representing an idealism forged through a shared and unified worldview. Any disagreement or disruption of relations with the religious scholars may undermine societal harmony and bring about the wrath of Allah Ta'ala. Therefore, wisdom in navigating sensitive matters is accorded the highest priority, in order to ensure the stability and well-being of the community. This matter is also illustrated in the excerpt below:

Advice: It is befitting for all rulers to cultivate close affinity with the religious scholars (*ulama*) who illuminate the path to the hereafter. As the Prophet sallallahu alaihi wasalam said... Meaning: Allah Ta'ala has promised His love to all rulers when they maintain close association with *ulama*, but the wrath of Allah Ta'ala is upon all *ulama* when they intermingle (*mukhalitah*) with rulers [for worldly gain] ... (*Bustan al-Salatin UM MS 41:369*)

This approach not only functions as a mechanism to prevent errors but also ensures the formulation of more holistic policies. This close relationship further strengthens the principles of accountability and transparency, as religious scholars (*ulama*) serve as a counterbalancing force capable of offering correction whenever the ruler deviates from the proper course of governance. In contrast, the ruler gains guidance to preserve social and religious harmony. According to Siti Hawa Haji Salleh (2010) and Abu Hassan Sham (1995), the close relationship between the ruler and religious scholars (*ulama*) functions as a traditional system of checks and balances. The role of the *ulama* as ethical counterbalances is to ensure that every action of the ruler does not deviate from the precepts of the *Shari'ah*, thereby guaranteeing the justice and harmony of the kingdom. Nonetheless, this synergy must be balanced by clear guidelines to prevent excessive interference that may compromise the professional functioning of the administration.

Exercising Caution in Evaluating Information

The scrutiny on the validity of information received by the ruler constitutes a matter of paramount importance in ensuring the survival and continuity of sound governance. Typically, rulers face significant challenges in ensuring that the information they receive is accurate and reliable. The passage cited

below provides guidance and a reminder to rulers regarding the methods to be employed in examining and verifying the information they obtain.

- a) It is behoven upon all rulers that they should not be hasty in listening to anything submitted by their viziers (*wazir*), even if that vizier is the prime minister, until they have thoroughly investigated everything that has been presented. For who knows, there may be hidden within it the secrets of a treacherous plot (*Bustan al-Salatin*, *Klinkert MS 14:49*).
- b) Among the just and faithful rulers, there are those who do not place undue reliance upon the reports of their envoys, but instead venture forth themselves by night, so as to directly observe and hear both the good and the ill, and to deliberate upon all such matters accordingly (*Taj al-Salatin*, *Or.13295: 123*).

Based on the passages cited above, several counsels may be synthesised as guidance for the ruler.

- a) A ruler who is faithful and just ought not to place unconditional reliance upon the reports conveyed by the viziers of the kingdom. Accordingly, the ruler must adopt a measured approach and exercise restraint in extending trust to any particular party with undue haste.
- b) The ruler must engage in field visits (*turun padang*) and actively participate in hearing the grievances of the subjects firsthand, whether favourable or otherwise. A ruler who is attentive to the concerns of the subjects is better positioned to adopt more effective measures in addressing the issues faced by the community.
- c) Conducting a thorough investigation prior to arriving at decisions that may affect the lives of the subjects is equally imperative. In this regard, the ruler must uphold the principle of justice and refrain from rendering decisions predicated upon unsubstantiated allegations, as such conduct would constitute an act of oppression against the accused. Consequently, such action will create an adverse perception of the ruler's leadership authority and credibility.

The primary importance of implementing this counsel is to safeguard the ruler against the misappropriation of information. By refraining from placing exclusive reliance upon viziers or ministers, the ruler is able to minimise the risk of treachery and ensure that every decision is grounded in information drawn from a multiplicity of sources. The field visits (*turun padang*) to listen to the people's grievances, paired with thorough

investigations, provide a much more accurate picture of reality and foster deep trust among the subjects. Indirectly, such an approach serves to curb the propagation of slander (*fitnah*) and safeguards against injustice when passing judgement. Consequently, the sovereignty of the government remains protected through a harmonious relationship between a just ruler and loyal subjects. In *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik* (p. 4), Raja Ali Haji emphasises that a kingdom blessed by Allah Ta'ala is one that protects all its subjects, practises absolute justice in its administration, and evaluates judgements and truth using sound reason guided by Shari'ah. A fair ruler may be compared to the metaphor of placing a tiger and a sheep within the same enclosure, yet they coexist in peace and harmony. He counsels officials to remain perpetually vigilant against those among the subjects who are inclined to instigate discord and resort to deceitful ploys. This is because such actions can invite catastrophe, to the extent of fracturing societal cohesion and tearing families apart through bitter disputes. The continuous spread of slander and backbiting will complicate governance, ruin individual reputations, and undermine the stability of the administration. Therefore, the ruler must act early, address the root causes of conflict, and take decisive action against the perpetrators. This is illustrated in the following passage:

... when the inhabitants of a state fall into mutual enmity, the state shall inevitably be filled with backbiting, slandering, and the bringing down of one faction upon another, rendering it the most squalid and most defiled of places. Ultimately, a multitude of complaints and litigations shall be brought before the ruler, placing him under a tremendous burden in adjudicating between the contending parties (*Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*:7).

A ruler should rightfully reject the testimony of those who are inclined to instigate discord, as elements of falsehood and slander taint the credibility of their words. Such individuals are prone to exploiting the failings of others and are habitually engaged in fabricating non-existent transgressions for the purpose of discrediting their adversaries. This statement aligns with the views of Imam al-Ghazali in *Nasihah al Muluk*, who asserts that a ruler who lends an ear to talebearers essentially undermines his own authority (*Nasihah al-Muluk*, MS 4639). In accordance with the counsel of Raja Ali Haji, a leader must possess the decisiveness to close off such avenues, preventing feuding factions from influencing the decisions of the kingdom. This is important to ensure that the integrity of justice is not compromised

by personal vendettas, which could ultimately undermine the institution of leadership.

When enmity is proven between two individuals, it becomes impermissible to accept reports from either party concerning the vices of the other; their reports can no longer be accepted. For this reason, Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) rules that an enemy cannot serve as a witness (*Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*: 9).

In addition, the leader must exercise circumspection with regard to every complaint received, as some are lodged with the intent of slander (*fitnah*). In this regard, Raja Ali Haji divides complaints into three categories: first, complaints from the *malakiyy* or *malakiyyah* group, which means possessing angelic qualities and prioritising the well-being of both this world and the hereafter; second, complaints from those who follow worldly desires; and third, complaints from the *shaytaniyyah* group, which are likened to the whisperings of the devil. This classification enables the ruler to discern the intentions of the complainant and assess the validity of the information before taking action.

Verily, the complaints of the people are divided into three parts. First, complaints of a malakiyy nature, which is to say, complaints akin to the nature of angels. Second, complaints driven by worldly desires. Third, those of a shaytaniyyah nature, which is to say, complaints akin to the nature of the devil. (Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik: 12).

The second and third categories clearly demonstrate attitudes that are detrimental to leadership. Such individuals are willing to sacrifice moral values and integrity in pursuit of their objectives, to the extent of occasionally reducing others to victims. This is attributable to the fact that individuals within these groups invariably harbour the conviction that they occupy a position of righteousness and are supported by like-minded allies, thereby giving rise to factions that discredit or slander others without regard for the consequences. The decree of Allah states: “And do not (deviate from your right stance, and do not) obey every worthless habitual swearer, who is despicable (in their opinions and actions). A scorner, going about with malicious gossip (to sow discord among the people)” (*Surah al-Qalam*:10–11).

Raja Ali Haji cautions leaders to always investigate every complaint thoroughly before making any decision. He emphasises that a ruler should not accept information unquestioningly; instead, they must remain vigilant

and impartial. A thorough investigation serves to uphold the truth and constitutes a mechanism for ensuring that both the complainant and the accused receive due justice. An example of the excerpt is as follows:

Furthermore, once we have thoroughly understood all the behaviours of those three types of complaints, we must remain vigilant whenever a complaint is brought forward; we must not accept it unless it has been examined between both parties, the claimant (*mudda 'i*) and the defendant (*mudda 'a 'alayh*) (*Muqaddimah fi Intizam Wazaif al-Malik*:14).

The aspect of drawing wisdom (*hikmah*) in governance, as advocated in these statecraft manuscripts, is associated with the central dimension of functional criteria as a mechanism. This central dimension highlights intellectual wisdom into practical actions, including the practice of keeping close company with religious scholars (*ulama*) and exercising caution when evaluating information, which serves as a medium of checks and balances in decision-making. The use of reason as a functional mechanism (*'aql*), as stated in *Bustan al-Salatin* and *Muqaddimah fi Intizam*, enables the ruler to filter out negative influences and ensure that the policies adopted are just and aligned with Islamic law (*Shari'ah*). Although the emphasis on this intellectual mechanism is less elaborated in *Taj al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, which focus more on etiquette (*adab*) or bureaucratic procedures, the principle of wisdom (*hikmah*) remains the foundation for the stability of the kingdom's ecosystem.

The Appointment of the Kingdom's Officials

In the tradition of Malay statecraft literature, counsel to the ruler is frequently interwoven with warnings concerning the causes of the fall of a kingdom. The authors of these manuscripts emphasise that the survival and continuity of a kingdom depend greatly on the ruler's meticulousness in selecting his lineup of authoritative officials, as well as his ability to uphold the integrity of government affairs. The most critical threat is not merely that which originates from external aggression, but is far more perilous when it is rooted within the internal structure of the administration itself. This refers to the presence of authoritative officials who are morally corrupt or harbour malicious intent contrary to the welfare and common good (*maslahah*) of the people. The following passage elaborates upon two sources of ruination that the ruler is obligated to avoid in order to preserve the sovereignty of the nation:

The foremost causes of ruination of the ruler and the subjects are but two matters: first, a treacherous minister. Second, malicious intent, such as the desire to destroy the lands of Islam, to administer the wealth of Islam with treachery, and to regard the wives and children of Muslims with treacherous intent. It is from these two matters that the ruination of rulers arises (*Taj al-Salatin Or.13295:214*).

In response to these sources of ruination, the statecraft manuscripts prescribe exceedingly stringent criteria for the selection of authoritative officials as a preventive measure. This is because the survival and continuity of the kingdom depend heavily on candidates for the position of vizier (*wazir*), judge (*kadi*), or envoy (*utusan*) who possess specialised competence and expertise to guarantee smooth administration, as they are individuals who earn the ruler's trust and function as the "eyes and ears" of the kingdom. This corps of officials bears the weighty responsibility of bridging the divide between the ruler and the subjects through the exercise of effective communication skills. A capable and authoritative official is able not only to execute directives but also to function as a strategic spokesperson, capable of articulating the vision and direction of the kingdom with clarity such that it is received and accepted across all strata of society. According to Zainal Abidin Borhan (2013), although it is the ruler who establishes rules and customs, it is the authoritative officials who are responsible for bringing those rules to life within society. Without officials who are adept in communication and well-versed in customary conventions, the ruler's vision would be difficult to be harmoniously internalised by the subjects. Therefore, it is imperative that the selection of high-quality officials be regarded as an indispensable requirement of sound administration and as the foremost shield in upholding the sovereignty of the kingdom against internal threats that engender ruination. This section examines two principal offices within the kingdom, namely the vizier (*wazir*) and the envoy (*utusan*).

The Office of the Vizier (Wazir): The Intellect of the Kingdom

The vizier (*wazir*) is the most influential individual within the administrative hierarchy, occupying the highest position after the ruler. Their presence is not merely complementary to the palace; rather, they serve as senior advisors who are the primary reference for the ruler in every consequential decision. In the history of the Malay Sultanate of Malacca, this office is synonymous with that of the *Bendahara*, for instance, Tun Perak, as portrayed in the *Sulalat al-Salatin* and *Sejarah Kesultanan Melayu Melaka*, who serves as a symbol of unparalleled wisdom. The enduring prominence

of his name among scholars to this date attests to the fact that the greatness of a vizier lies not solely in the power he wields, but in the impact of his leadership upon the civilisation of the nation. Given the magnitude of the responsibilities borne by the vizier, the statecraft manuscripts prescribe exceedingly detailed criteria to ensure that only those who are genuinely qualified may hold this office. The *Bustan al-Salatin* outlines twenty-two specific conditions to ensure the competence and authority of an official. Among the conditions stipulated for the appointment of an authoritative official are as follows:

Thus, the first condition: the vizier must be God-fearing towards Allah... The second condition: when the vizier observes any matter that is not conducted in accordance with the rulings of Islamic law (syara'), or that brings reproach between the rulers, he must not contest it openly, but rather ought to present his counsel in a secluded setting, with decorum and in a gentle manner... The third condition: the vizier must at all times safeguard the conduct of his own affairs and the affairs of his ruler... The fourth condition: the vizier must express gratitude towards his ruler... The fifth condition: when the vizier observes any individual transgressing the command of his ruler that is consonant with the rulings of Islamic law, he must forbid it, even should the transgressor be the ruler himself... (Bustan al-Salatin, UM MS 41:513-519)

Similarly, the *Sahibul Kitab Sultan Zainal Abidin* prescribes twenty-two conditions encompassing aspects of moral character and intellectual capacity, while the *Safinat al-Hukkam* outlines ten principal criteria that constitute the foundation for the selection of a just and competent leader.

Thus, ten qualities are prescribed for all viziers. First, they must be knowledgeable (*berilmu*). Second, mature in age (*tuha umurnya*). Third, trustworthy (*amanah*). Fourth, steadfast in loyalty (*teguh setianya*). Fifth, minimal in greed (*sedikit tamaknya*). Sixth, free from contention and envy among all creatures (*jangan perbantahan dan perdengkian*). Seventh, firm in recollection of all that he is entrusted to remember. Eighth, wise and astute in all matters (*budiman lagi cerdik*). Ninth, not succumbing to his worldly desire (*hawa nafsu*). Tenth, contented with his sustenance and spending, and knowledgeable in the proper rules for managing and distributing wealth and provisions. (*Safinat al-Hukkam*: 23)

Based on *Safinat al-Hukkam*, the appointment of a vizier or official is not undertaken arbitrarily; rather, it must fulfil ten principal criteria that guarantee the stability of a kingdom:

1. Knowledgeable (First Quality):
A vizier must possess extensive knowledge, particularly in matters of administration and governance, to ensure that every decision is consonant with *Shari'ah* and the common good (*maslahah*).
2. Seniority (Second Quality):
Maturity of age reflects experience and emotional stability. An elder vizier is regarded as more rational in dispensing counsel and more measured in his actions.
3. Trustworthy (*Amanah*) (Third Quality):
This quality constitutes the pillar of integrity. A vizier must steadfastly uphold the trust vested in him by the ruler without abusing his power for personal gain.
4. Firm Loyalty (Fourth Quality):
A vizier must maintain unwavering loyalty to the ruler and the kingdom, so as to preclude treachery that may undermine the sovereignty of the nation.
5. Benevolent (*Qana'ah*) (Fifth Quality):
The quality of not being greedy is of paramount importance, so that a vizier does not become susceptible to corruption or misappropriation that would damage the economic integrity of the kingdom.
6. Avoidance of Discord (Sixth Quality):
A vizier is prohibited from harbouring envy or engaging in constant disputes with others. This trait guarantees harmony among officials and the general public.
7. Strong Memory (Seventh Quality):
An acute and strong memory is indispensable for retaining all matters of the nation, commitments, and administrative records, so that all decisions are grounded in accurate and reliable information.
8. Wisdom and Astuteness (Eighth Quality):
A vizier must possess wisdom (*budiman*) and astuteness in resolving complex problems across all responsibilities entrusted to him.
9. Detached from Worldly Desire (Ninth Quality):
A vizier must be capable of controlling his personal desires and must not allow emotion or carnal impulse (*hawaal-nafs*) to influence the discharge of his official duties.

10. Competence in Resource Management (Tenth Quality):

A vizier must not only be content with his own provision and attire, but is also obligated to possess the skills to administer governmental expenditure and financial resources in a systematic and orderly manner.

The stringent criteria governing the selection of a vizier attest to the fact that the duties and responsibilities of this office are highly demanding, to the extent that the role is metaphorically equated to the intellect: “And some wise men have said, verily, the heart is like a ruler, knowledge is like a judge (*qadi*), and the intellect is like a vizier” (*Safinat al-Hukkam*: 22). The stringency of these conditions is intended to enhance administrative efficiency, eradicate the practice of cronyism, and consolidate the legitimacy of the government. In this regard, the author of *Nasihah al-Muluk* affirms that the wisdom of a vizier is the key to exemplary governance, whilst the inadequacy of a vizier leads invariably to the ruination of the kingdom. This is corroborated by Darke (1978:23), who asserted that the rise and fall of a kingdom is contingent entirely upon the quality of its vizier:

The good or ill of the king and kingdom depends on the viziers. When the vizier is of good character and sound judgement, the kingdom is prosperous, the army and peasantry are contented, peaceful and well supplied, and the king is free from anxiety. But when the vizier is bad, irreparable harm is done to the kingdom, the king is constantly perplexed and distressed, and the provinces are in a state of disorder.

Darke’s (1978) exposition further consolidated the argument that the quality of a vizier is the determining factor in the survival and continuity of a nation. When Darke asserted that “the good or ill of the king and kingdom depends on the viziers”, he was referring to the function of the vizier as the stabilising force of the kingdom’s ecosystem. A vizier possessed of sound judgement functions as a balancing agent, ensuring that the welfare of the subjects and the strength of national defence advance in tandem. Conversely, the failure of the vizier to discharge his functions effectively will precipitate a cascading state of disorder, commencing from administrative dysfunction and culminating in the moral collapse of the kingdom. Therefore, the stringent criteria outlined in the *Safinat al-Hukkam* are not mere formalities; rather, they constitute a functional necessity to ensure that the “intellect” of the government remains sound in order to guarantee the survival and continuity of the ruler’s authority.

The Office of the Envoy (Utusan): The Tongue of Diplomacy

In addition to their role at the domestic level, the authoritative officials also shoulder critical responsibilities in managing foreign affairs and international relations. Officials serving as envoys constitute the official representatives of the government in all negotiations and interactions with foreign powers. The diplomatic acumen possessed by an envoy is a determining factor in the harmony of international relations and the effectiveness with which the national interests are advanced and promoted. The *Taj al-Salatin* outlines specific criteria that an envoy is obligated to possess, encompassing aspects of integrity, wisdom, and negotiating competence. These qualities are very important in ensuring that every official mandate is conveyed accurately without causing any misunderstanding that may jeopardise the sovereignty of the kingdom.

An envoy or a messenger ought to be of pleasing appearance, sweet in speech, eloquent of tongue, precise in expression, and clear in the meaning of his words. He ought furthermore to be learnt (*alim*), wise (*budiman*), discerning (*arif*), and astute in discourse, and well-comprehending of all manner of speech. He ought moreover to be upright in his deeds, truthful in his word, highly strategic in his counsel, free from greed, firm in his faith, and pure in his character, for the envoy is the substitute for the eyes, ears, and tongue of his ruler. (*Taj al-Salatin*, Or.13295:244)

Meanwhile, in the third chapter, the fifth clause of *Bustan al-Salatin*, ten qualities of an envoy are recorded as follows:

The judges have stated that the conditions of an envoy are ten in number. The first condition is that he should fear Allah Ta'ala and be strong in faith. The second condition is that he should be knowledgeable. The third condition is that he must be pleasant in appearance. The fourth condition, that he be trustworthy and never betray his King in pursuit of his own desires... The fifth condition is that the envoy be fluent in speech, and that his voice be pleasant, the sixth condition, that he be wise ... The seventh condition is that, as an aide, he be courageous in carrying out the charge of his King. The eighth condition, that he be good in act and intelligent ... The ninth condition is that he be kind and noble. The tenth condition, that he not be greedy, for such greed will sully his King's good name. (*Bustan al-Salatin*, UM MS 41:564)

An analysis of *Taj al-Salatin* and *Bustan al-Salatin* reveals that the criteria for the selection of an envoy are not confined solely to technical

competence, but rather incorporate a holistic perfection of character. Both manuscripts emphasise that an envoy constitutes a representative of sovereignty, functioning as the substitute for the “eyes, ears, and tongue of the ruler”. Therefore, each attribute listed is directed towards the preservation of the ruler’s dignity and honour on the international stage. In principle, the central condition is the possession of devotion (*taqwā*) and a firm religious foundation as a moral fortress in the execution of his duties. This quality is complemented by the attributes of trustworthiness and honesty, whereby the envoy is obligated to place his loyalty to the ruler above any personal worldly desire of self-interest. From an intellectual perspective, the individual must be knowledgeable and well-versed in religion, law, and diplomatic protocol, complemented further by wisdom and foresight in formulating precise diplomatic strategies. This aligns seamlessly with the views of Siti Hawa Salleh (2009), who asserted that within the Malay literary tradition, the envoy is regarded as the very personification of the ruler’s character. Any flaw in the conduct or speech of the envoy will reflect adversely upon the dignity of the ruler whom he represents. The effectiveness of a diplomatic mission is further contingent upon the envoy’s eloquence and communication skills. The envoy must have a pleasant voice and be capable of conveying the ruler’s intent with accuracy and clarity.

Furthermore, they are required to possess acute memory and meticulous precision in recording the details of discourse, so that no information is overlooked. Courage and efficiency in executing high-risk tasks are also essential prerequisites, alongside high emotional maturity and high degree of patience when confronted with the pressures of negotiation. Consequently, to reflect the nobility of the kingdom they represent, an envoy must furthermore be of a pleasant physical appearance and charisma that leaves a positive impression during formal meetings, while consistently remaining courteous and morally upright in every interaction. A generous and authoritative nature will cultivate the trust of the opposing party, whilst a non-greedy and moderate attitude will distance the envoy from the risk of bribery that may bring disgrace upon the ruler. Every single action of the envoy must mirror the highest sense of responsibility, considering that their every step is a direct manifestation of the ruler’s position as the eyes, ears, and tongue of the kingdom.

The stringency of the criteria in both of these manuscripts extends far beyond merely delivering messages. This is because an envoy serves as a fortress of sovereignty in the international arena. The fusion of external attributes, such as appearance and eloquence, with internal virtues, such

as devotion and trustworthiness, is directed towards ensuring that the image of the kingdom is held in high esteem by foreign powers. Failure to appoint an envoy who meets these standards would undermine diplomatic negotiations and invite disrespect for the institution of the monarchy. This is in line with the view of Jelani Harun (2003), who affirmed that the holistic criteria prescribed in the statecraft manuscripts were intended to ensure that envoys possess a high degree of mental and spiritual resilience. He further contended that the entirety of the envoy's character is indispensable in preventing undue influence from foreign parties during diplomatic missions.

It is therefore pertinent to note that, as Raja Ali Haji states in the *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, "*Bermula kebinasaan itu ada kalanya zahir ada kalanya batin*" (Destruction manifests at times externally, and at times internally) (1857:49). Raja Ali Haji's warning regarding this dual nature of ruin further reinforces the argument that appointing authoritative officials who fail to meet the criteria established in statecraft manuscripts will yield severe negative implications. The internal ruin (*kebinasaan batin*), triggered by the greed and treachery of these officials, will ultimately manifest as external destruction (*kebinasaan zahir*) in the form of diplomatic crises and domestic instability. In this regard, manuscripts such as the *Safinat al-Hukkam* dan *Taj al-Salatin* serve as preventative manuals to ensure that rulers do not plunge into that abyss of ruin. Failing to preserve the quality of the "intellect" (the vizier) and the "tongue" (the envoy) means the ruler is deliberately leaving the gates of destruction wide open, which will ultimately dismantle the entire structure of the nation's civilisation. Therefore, the efficacy of officials conveying the ruler's mandate with accuracy and clarity thus constitutes the key to the enduring cultivation of harmonious and strategic diplomatic relations for a kingdom.

The selection of these authoritative state officials is further consolidated through the central dimension of functional criteria as a mechanism. This central dimension manifests the kingdom's technical requirement for highly stringent selection criteria regarding strategic positions such as the vizier (the intellect of the government) and the envoy (the tongue of the government). *Bustan al-Salatin* and *Safinat al-Hukkam* detail conditions such as knowledge, trustworthiness, and wisdom not only as personal qualities, but as functional mechanisms to ensure the administrative machinery operates efficiently. The failure of these functions is regarded as the primary cause of ruin for both ruler and subjects. In contrast, their effectiveness, as emphasised in *Taj al-Salatin*, forms the pillar of the central dimension of the governance system as an ultimate objective. Even

though the specific details of the vizier's position are not the central focus of *Muqaddimah fi Intizam* and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, which are more inclined towards the principle of thoroughness in the selection of officials, it remains the fundamental basis for ensuring the sustainability of sovereignty and the well-being of the people.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the leadership and governance criteria within selected Malay statecraft manuscripts, namely, *Taj al-Salatin*, *Bustan al-Salatin*, *Safinat al-Hukkam*, *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Malik*, and *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, emphasise the integration of values through three central dimensions that form the backbone of Malay-Islamic governmental stability. Furthermore, through the dimension of personal criteria as a foundation, leadership quality is determined by the holistic personal prerequisites of the ruler, such as creed (*akidah*), character (*akhlak*), and the maturity of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), which guide moral integrity and sovereignty grounded in Islamic law (*Shari'ah*). The efficacy of this foundation is further consolidated through the dimension of functional criteria acting as a mechanism, which translates these values into practical action. This is achieved through systematic ruler appointment mechanisms, such as *syura* (consultation), *bai'ah* (pledge of allegiance), and *wasiat* (testament), alongside the leadership's wisdom in drawing upon profound insight (*hikmah*) to govern the realm prudently through the medium of checks and balances.

This stability is further complemented by the meticulousness involved in establishing selection criteria for high-integrity authoritative officials, specifically the vizier (the intellect of the government) and the envoy (the tongue of diplomacy), to ensure that the administrative machinery operates with optimal efficiency. Meanwhile, the dimension of the governance system as an ultimate objective manifests the impact of this integration on the well-being of the kingdom's ecosystem through the practice of dynamic social justice.

In conclusion, this study contributes significantly to documenting the Malay-Islamic philosophy that has been marginalised within current modern thought. By foregrounding the holistic criteria required for the ruler, vizier, and envoy, this study demonstrates that the principles of good governance, such as accountability and transparency, are not values foreign to the tradition, but have long constituted the core of the sovereignty within the traditional Malay kingdom. The emphasis on the roles of the

“intellect” and the “tongue” of diplomacy also offers a novel framework for understanding how individual integrity functions as an effective mechanism of checks and balances within a monarchical system of governance. It is therefore recommended that future research pursue comparative analyses between manuscripts representing distinct phases in the development of administrative thought, with a view to tracing the evolution of Malay administrative philosophy and ensuring the continuity and enrichment of scholarly discourse in this field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Author would like to deeply thank the management of Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, Yayasan Karyawan for the necessary support to carry out this research.

PUBLICATION FUNDING

The publishing of this article is funded by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of interests: The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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