

Malaysia's National Language Mass Media : History and Present Status

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Compared to its English and Chinese language newspapers and periodicals, Malaysia's national language press is relatively young. The first recognized newspaper in the Malay (also called Bahasa Malaysia) language appeared in 1876, seven decades after the *Governement Gazette* was published in English, and 61 years later than the *Chinese Monthly Magazine*. However, once developed, the Malay press became extremely important in the peninsula, especially in its efforts to unify the Malays in a spirit of national consciousness.

Between 1876 and 1941, at least 162 Malay language newspapers, magazines and journals were published, plus eight others in English designed by or for Malays and three in Malay and English.¹⁾ At least another 27 were published since 1941, bringing the total to 200.²⁾

Of the 173 pre-World War II periodicals, 104 were established in the Straits Settlements of Singapore and Penang (68 and 36, respectively): this is understandable in that these cities had large concentrations of Malay population. In fact, during the first four decades of Malay journalism, only four of the 26 newspapers or periodicals were published in the peninsular states, all four in Perak. The most prolific period in the century of Malay press is the 35 years between 1906-1941, when 147 periodicals were issued: however, in this instance, 68, or nearly one half, were published in the peninsular states. Very few of the publications lasted long, to the extent that today, in Malaysia, despite the emphasis on Malay as the national language, there are only three Malay dailies. The oldest, *Utusan Melayu*, dates only to 1939.

Historical Perspective

Most historians³⁾ agree that Malay journalism owes its beginnings to the locally-born

- 1) Additionally, 15 periodicals were published in Arabic and nine in Malay by Christian missionaries for their self-serving purposes. William R. Roff. *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 1-2.
- 2) See P. Lim Pui Huen. *Newspapers Published in the Malaysia Area*. Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, April 1970, various pagings.
- 3) For example: William R. Roff. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967, p. 48; E. W. Birch. "The Vernacular Press in the Straits," *Journal of Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, Dec. 1879, p. 51; Zainal Abidin b. Ahmad. "Malay Journalism in Malaya," *Journal Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 19, Part II (1941), p. 244; Nik Ahmad bin Haji Nik Hassan. "The Malay Press," *Journal Malayan Branch Asiatic Society*, Vol. 36, Part I (1963), p. 37.

Indian Muslims of Singapore, called the Jawi Peranakan. As Roff explained, the Jawi Peranakan were primarily locally-born offspring of unions between indigenous Malay women and South Indian Muslim traders. In late 1876, this group formed an association in Singapore, called Jawi Peranakan, which initiated a printing office to publish a weekly newspaper, again named *Jawi Peranakan*. A writer of the time described *Jawi Peranakan* as having a circulation of 250 by 1880, "ably and punctually edited, having with only one exception, been issued consistently on the day on which it professes to come out."⁴⁾ The paper during its first year used manuscript writing and lithograph and followed the example of the English press in emphasizing war news. Birch said of its policy,

Towards Government its tone is not hostile, nor even critical: indeed in only one instance was anything like a burst of feeling given bent to.⁵⁾

He foresaw the main advantage of *Jawi Peranakan* as "settling the language" and giving a "uniformity to the various dialects of Malay."⁶⁾

The first managing editor of *Jawi Peranakan* was Munshi Mohd. Said bin Dada Mohiddin. When he died in 1888, his widow retained the paper with the aid of others until 1895, when it ceased publication. Nik said that during Said's editorship, the weekly ran editorials dealing with social events and the weather, an example of the former being an appeal to kampung (village) folk to avail themselves of medical facilities.⁷⁾

Besides being first and the longest lived pre-World War II Malay periodical, *Jawi Peranakan* is also remembered for its spawning of other newspapers. Roff claimed that most of the 17 periodicals between 1876 and 1905 were sponsored or edited by *Jawi Peranakan* personnel.⁸⁾ For example, all five of the nineteenth century Malay language papers of Penang had *Jawi Peranakan* staffs.

Most of the first periodicals were hand lithographed weeklies, modelled initially after English language newspapers, and later using Egyptian and Arabic news content. The result was that most of the content did not relate to the Malay community. In fact, they seemed to have as their chief function the serving of reading materials in the schools.⁹⁾ For example, *Sekola Melayu* (The Malay School), edited by Munshi Mohd. Ali Al-Hindi, appeared solely for teaching grammar and language in the schools. It was *Jawi Peranakan's*

4) Birch, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

5) *ibid.*

6) *ibid.* Zainal, who had a copy of number 38 issue of *Jawi Peranakan*, dated Oct. 15, 1877, verified Birch's conclusions on content. Zainal, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

7) Nik, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

8) Roff, *Bibliography of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Before proceeding any further, it should be mentioned that Birch recalled three other Malay periodicals publishing in the country before 1880: a sister of *Jawi Peranakan*, called *Jawi Standard*, which lasted a brief time in Penang; *Peredaran Shamsu Walkamer* (The Revolution of the Sun and the Moon) and *Bintang Barat* (Western Star). Birch, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

9) Roff, *The Origins of...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-52.

main competitor from its birth on August 1, 1888, until 1893, when it ceased publishing.¹⁰⁾

Other periodicals of this initial era (1876–1905) which deserve mention were: *Nujumul Fajar* (Morning Stars): the following from Perak, *Seri Perak* (Light of Perak), a briefly-lived 1893 paper which was the first published in any of the peninsular states, *Jajahan Melayu* (Malay Territories), a weekly in 1896–97, *Jambangan Warta*, weekly of 1901 and *Khizanah al-Ilmu*, a monthly in 1904; *Tanjong Penegeri*, the first Malay paper of Penang,¹¹⁾ started October 4, 1894, and the following also from Penang, *Pemimpin Warta* (1895–97), *Lengkongan Bulan* (The Crescent, 1900–01), *Bintang Timor*,¹²⁾ weekly of 1900 which lasted 30 issues, and *Chahaya Pulau Pinang* (Light of Penang, 1900–08).

In July 1906, the mood of Malay journalism began to change with the appearance of *Al Imam* (The Leader), a religious journal published in Singapore by Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi¹³⁾ and edited by Mohd. Tahir bin Jalaluddin. Previously, Malay media dealt with literary and social interest contributions, but *Al Imam* had a drastic effect on the trends in content and outlook of periodicals. During its three-and-a-half year existence, *Al Imam*, pushing for social and religious reforms in Malaya, tried to live up to the tenor of its introductory editorial, which said in part: “to remind those who are forgetful, arouse those who sleep, guide those who stray, and give a voice to those who speak with wisdom.” As Roff stated,

In an orgy of self-vilification and self-condemnation, *Al-Imam* points to the backwardness of the Malays, their domination by alien races, their laziness, their complacency, their bickering among themselves, and their inability to cooperate for the common good.¹⁴⁾

The first Islamic reform journal to be published in Muslim Southeast Asia, *Al Imam* set an example for successors such as *Neracha* (The Scales), a thrice monthly journal in Singapore from 1911–15; *Tunas Melayu*, monthly brought out in association with *Neracha* in 1913; *Majallah al-Islam* (1914–), edited by K. Anang, assistant editor of the former two periodicals; *Saudara* (The Brethren), published in Penang from 1928–41; and *Al Ikhwan* (The Brotherhood), Penang monthly during 1926–31. The latter two were started by the

10) Nik, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

11) Birch's mention of a Penang *Jawi Standard* has never been substantiated. Muhammad bin Dato' Muda. *Tarikh Surat Khabar*. Malaya, 1940, p. 102.

12) Another paper by that name was started in Singapore, July 1894, by Song Ong Siang, president of the Chinese Christian Association. It is identified by Nik as being the first Romanized Malay paper in the nation. The first *Bintang Timor* was a daily for nine months, then a tri-weekly for three months, before it died. Nik, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Roff, however, reported that *Straits Chinese Herald*, published by the Baba Chinese and Malays in 1891, was the first Malay paper in Romanized script. Roff is a more reliable source, being a later reporter and having examined more of these papers than Nik. Roff, *Bibliography of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

13) See S. H. Tan. “The Life and Times of Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi,” BA Honours Exercise, History Department, University of Singapore, 1961.

14) Roff, *Origins of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

earlier mentioned Sayyid Shaykh.

Another development of the period commencing in 1906 was the birth of major national Malay dailies. Operated as a Malay edition of the *Singapore Free Press*, *Utusan Melayu*, started in 1907 publishing thrice weekly, was the closest thing to a daily in the national language. For seven years, it had no Malay language competition in the newspaper field; in 1915, *Utusan Melayu* became a daily and continued as an excellent commentator upon its times until its death in 1921. A second daily, *Lembaga Melayu*, appeared in 1914 as a somewhat Malay edition of the *Malaya Tribune*. Its editor was Mohd. Eunus bin Abdullah, formerly editor of *Utusan Melayu* and considered by some as the father of Malay journalism. Mohd. Eunus stayed with *Lembaga Melayu* until its demise in 1931. After *Utusan Melayu's* closure in 1921, *Lembaga Melayu* participated more fully in Malay activities and promotions and was the only Malay paper until *Idaran Zaman* (The March of Time) was printed in Penang from 1925-30.¹⁵⁾

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Malay press gradually moved out of Singapore, increased its numbers considerably and offered a diversified field of daily and weekly newspapers, religious periodicals, publications of teacher's associations, literary magazines, periodicals of progress societies and journals of entertainment.¹⁶⁾ Malay media more and more portrayed the growing Malay consciousness on the peninsula, part of which could be gleaned in the correspondence columns of newspapers which filled up with controversies over language, idiom, custom and religion.¹⁷⁾ As Roff indicated, "newspaper journalism . . . came to play a leading role in shaping the Malay intelligentsia, training their leaders, and disseminating their influence."¹⁸⁾

Between 1930 and 1941, at least eight daily Malay newspapers appeared, five of which were particularly significant. *Warta Malaya* (Malaya Times) was created in 1930 by the wealthy Alsagoff family in Singapore. It typified the Arab influence upon Malay journalism of the thirties—in relation to ownership pattern and newspaper content, a large proportion of the latter being translations of Egyptian papers.¹⁹⁾ *Warta Malaya* was the strongest Malay newspaper until a new *Utusan Melayu* was formed in 1939; it took critical stands on political matters, especially under the editorial direction of Onn bin Jaafar and Syed Hussain, and was among the first Malay papers not to depend on other presses for information, subscribing to the world news agencies instead.²⁰⁾ *Warta Malaya* also established a weekly, *Warta Ahad* (Sunday Times), in 1935 and *Warta Jenaka* (The Comedian), a very popular periodical, in 1936.

15) Nik, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

16) Roff, *Bibliography of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

17) Zainal, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

18) Roff, *Origins of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

19) Mohd. Taib bin Osman. "Trends in Modern Malay Literature," In Wang Gungwu, ed. *Malayaia: A Survey*. New York : Praeger, 1965, p. 215.

20) Nik, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 58.

A second major newspaper using daily journalism techniques was *Majlis* (The Council), at first a twice weekly paper, started in Kuala Lumpur in December 1931. Like *Warta Malaya*, it too was partial to many Malay causes, and, according to Roff, played an important role in the rise of the Malay state associations movement of the late 1930s.²¹⁾ Although the paper died under this name in November 1941 when its editor was detained for suspected collaboration with the Japanese, actually, however, it lived on as the occupation forces' *Perubahan Bahru*. *Saudara* of Penang, mentioned previously, was a third key newspaper of the 1930s, retaining its Islamic reformism and adding more discussion of political events.

Lembaga (The Tribune) was also an Arab financed daily of Singapore, founded in October 1935 by Onn bin Jaafar. It was a follow-up of the earlier weekly, *Lembaga Malaya*, and published until the occupation. The fifth main daily of the decade was *Utusan Melayu*, different from the earlier newspaper of this name. *Utusan Melayu* came into existence in mid-1939 after a long fund-raising campaign among Malays to finance the daily. For years, Malay papers had been owned by Arabs, Jawi Peranakan and Malay Arabs, but *Utusan Melayu* was the first owned and staffed solely by native Malays. The paper survived its initial financial stresses with close cooperation of the Information Department which granted *Utusan Melayu* a contract for printing government circulars.²²⁾ By November 1939, a weekly edition, *Utusan Zaman*, was initiated, followed by a monthly pictorial, *Mastika*. All three survive today.

Obviously, the thirties was a rich period for Malay journalism ; Roff claims at least 81 new periodicals appeared in at least 14 cities of the archipelago.²³⁾ Why this burgeoning development of the Malay press in such a short period of time ? Part of the reason was the commercialization of journalistic activity in response to growing audiences for inexpensive reading material. The birth of illustrated weeklies, use of more light reading fare and professionalization of the media were also appealing,²⁴⁾ as was the fact that by 1931, an estimated one-third of Malaya's adult population was literate in Malay. Entertaining reading material appeared in newspapers in the form of serialized literary works. This was not, as Osman has stated, "a conscious effort at creating a new literary genre, but rather... a journalistic endeavor to provide entertaining reading in the newspapers."²⁵⁾ It was almost natural that Malay literature would appear first in newspaper format since the great literary figures themselves, Abdul Rahim Kajai, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Muhammad Yasin bin Ma'mur, were essentially journalists.

Although the publications of the thirties emanated from different organizations, they

21) Roff, *Bibliography of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

22) Nik, *op. cit.*, p. 62 ; Roff, *Bibliography of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

23) Roff, *Origins of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

24) *ibid.*, p. 167.

25) Mohd. Taib, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

were, nevertheless, quite similar in format and content ; they also had something else in common in that most of them did not prosper long. Zainal characterized the Malay journalistic activity of the decade as crusading. He said :

They warn, exhort and call to action, at the same time denouncing idleness, extravagance, ignorance, superstitions, fatalism and un-Islamic practices. Sometimes the lesson is driven home by means of stories translated or specially written for the purpose, sometimes by humorous and biting satires, and of late even by means of crude cartoon drawings and caricatures. But more often it is done by direct and outspoken condemnation.²⁶⁾

After the Japanese occupied Malaya in early 1942, most of the Malay language press (as were all presses) was suspended. The Japanese confiscated *Utusan Melayu* on February 15, 1942, and eventually merged it with *Warta Malaya* to form *Berita Malai* (Malaya News).²⁷⁾ *Berita* originally was published in Jawi script but switched to the romanized version later. It was a two page daily circulating about 10,000 copies, mainly in Singapore, as distribution elsewhere was difficult. Additional Malay papers appeared from time to time,²⁸⁾ and other language papers either had separate daily editions²⁹⁾ or a section published in Malay.³⁰⁾

The Japanese also published the monthly magazines, *Semangat Asia* (Asian Spirit) and *Fajar Asia* (Asian Morn), merged in 1944 and called *Fajar Asia*. The objectives of *Semangat Asia*, as outlined in its first issue in January 1942, were to introduce Nippon to Malaysians, inject Asian spirit, popularize Nipponese and Malay languages, revive the culture and tradition of Malays and provide reading matter for them.³¹⁾ All Malay periodicals during this period were allowed to be somewhat nationalistic, as long as they seemed to be "anti-white." Contents of the periodicals were devoted to social and cultural fare, short stories and poetry. Most literary content was nationalistic and sarcastic (against Great Britain) and carried a strong Japanese propaganda flavor.³²⁾ Othman said that, although

26) Zainal, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

27) Nik, *op. cit.*, p. 69 ; Othman b. Haji A. Rashid. "Mass Media in Malaysia During the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1945." Presented to John A. Lent's "Journalism II" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, January 1974. Othman interviewed a number of editors who practiced journalism during the occupation of Malaya.

28) Among these : *Mahasuri Shimbun*, probably a Jawi paper in Kedah ; *Chahaya Timor*, Jawi weekly (May 1942) ; *Matahari Memanchar*, Japanese weekly for Malays (June 1942) ; *Department of Rising Sun*, Jawi paper in Muar ; *Pancharan Matahari*, Jawi paper in Penang (1942) ; *Perubahan Bahru*, Kuala Lumpur daily in Jawi (1942-43), and *Berita Perak*, Jawi-Romanized Ipoh paper of 1944-45. Ainon Haji Kuntom. "A Historical Survey of Malay Newspapers." Presented to John A. Lent's "Comparative Media Systems" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, January 1974.

29) For example, *Penang Shimbun* had a Jawi edition.

30) For example, *Malacca Tushin* had four pages in English, two in Malay and one each in Chinese and Tamil.

31) Othman, *op. cit.*

32) Mohd. Taib, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

on the surface they appeared to be pro-Japanese, in reality, they were calling on the Malay masses to be alert, conscious and willing to take the responsibility to retain the sovereignty of Malaya.³³⁾

The Japanese controlled the electronic media just as systematically. Theaters were allowed to show only Chinese, Indian, Indonesian and Malay films. Radio programming was divided to accommodate each ethnic group of the nation: for example, Monday and Thursday were called Malai Days when the preponderance of shows were in the Malay language.

Besides the official occupation press, a number of underground papers blossomed during World War II, the tradition surviving to this day. Even though most underground newspapers were in Chinese, there were Malay language radical papers such as *Seruan Raayat* (Call of the People) and *Suara Pemberentak* (Voice of the Revolution), both in North Johore; *Suara Melayu*, a Malay version of *Emancipation News*, published every two months, and *Suara Raayat*, probably started in 1941 and published as a mimeographed four page weekly throughout the war. *Suara Raayat* was said to be well produced and precise. It was printed in a cave in Pahang and used a mixture of Jawi, English, Chinese and Tamil. Its slogan was "China, Melayu, India-Abang, Adek (Brothers)."³⁴⁾

The underground press survived during Malaya's 12-year emergency period (1948-60), at varying times, promoting Marxist theory, Malay nationalism or the Muslim religion, and invariably, attacking Malay rulers and officials. Among these publications were *Berita Tani*, a weekly mimeographed on rice paper, aimed at villagers from 1948-54; *Seruan Merdeka*, published by the Kedah-Penang Joint States Committee and distributed at the Malaya-Thailand border, and *Warta Raayat*, a Jawi monthly of North Malaya.

From the end of the war in 1945 until independence in 1957, at least 20 Malay language newspapers were published,³⁵⁾ besides those underground. Whereas pre-war papers strove for the rights of Malays against Chinese and Indian encroachments, those appearing in the immediate post-war period fought against British colonialism.³⁶⁾ Seeking independence, Malay editors resisted the British designs for a Malayan Union in 1946, promoted unity among Malays for better social, political and economic roles. Newspapers aligned themselves with Malay literary groups such as Angkatan 50, Lembaga Melayu or Persatuan Wartawan and political parties such as United Malays National Organization, the latter

33) Othman, *op. cit.*

34) Cheah Kim Lean and Rodziah Ahmad Tajuddin. "Underground Press in Malaya During the Japanese Occupation and Emergency Period 1942-1960." Presented to John A. Lent's "Comparative Media Systems" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, January 1974. The authors interviewed numerous former underground journalists throughout Malaysia.

35) Ainon Haji Kuntom. "Leading the Path to Freedom." *Leader: Malaysian Journalism Review*, 3:1 (1974), p.39.

36) Nik, *op. cit.*, p.70.

formed in 1946. *Suara UMNO* and *Melayu Raya*³⁷⁾ (Malay Nation), both established in 1950, and *Malaya Merdeka* (Malayan Independence), in 1954, were powerful political party or trade union papers urging Malay participation in politics. Additionally, three key pre-war newspapers were revived in 1945-46: *Utusan Melayu*, five days after the British landed in Singapore in September; *Majlis*³⁸⁾ in Kuala Lumpur, and *Lembaga* in Johore, the latter only lasting a few issues. In 1947, *Utusan Zaman* resumed publication as an afternoon edition in Romanized Malay; shortly after, it reverted to its pre-war status of a Jawi weekly. By 1958, *Utusan Zaman* had a circulation of 35,000.³⁹⁾ In the north, *Warta Negara* (The Country Times) was the dominant Malay paper. Started in Penang on September 4, 1945 (a day after the Allies landed), the Jawi script *Warta Negara* lasted until 1969. There have been recent attempts to revive the paper in Penang. By 1958, *Utusan Melayu*, with a circulation of 30,000, was the leading Malay daily. *Utusan Melayu* was anti-British, sympathetic to UMNO and revolutionary to the extent it indoctrinated the people with socialist ideologies concerning community development.⁴⁰⁾ The paper moved its headquarters to Kuala Lumpur in 1958 after Malaya received its independence.

Since Malaya received its independence in 1957, about a dozen Malay newspapers have appeared on the scene. Two months before independence was declared, *Berita Harian* (The Daily News) was started as a Romanized Malay edition of the Singapore *Straits Times*. *Berita Harian* started a Kuala Lumpur edition shortly after and *Berita Minggu*, its Sunday edition, on July 10, 1960. Still other newspapers in the post-independence era have been *Suara Kesatuan*, a trade union organ that lasted from 1957-59; *Mingguan Bahru*, a Jawi weekly in Penang from June to December 1958; *Semenanjung*, daily started in early

37) *Melayu Raya* was suspended for ten months by the Singapore government when it reported on the Muslim riots of that city. Before suspension, the paper had 30,000 circulation, but dwindled to 5,000 just before its death in 1952.

38) Closed in 1955 because of financial problems.

39) Nik, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

40) Ainon, "Leading the...", *op. cit.*, p. 40.

For additional readings on the history of Malay journalism, see the following: Cecil K. Byrd. *Early Printing in the Straits Settlements 1806-1858*. Singapore: Singapore National Library, 1970; Marina Samad. "Early Malay Journalism," *Leader*, Jan. 1972, pp. 18-22, and "Enter the *Utusan*," *Leader*, July 1972, pp. 5-10; Marina Merican. "Syyid Shaykh Al-Hadi dan Pendapat Pendapat nya Mengenai Kemajuan Kaum Perempuan" (Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi and His Views on the Advancement of Women). BA Honours, University of Malaya, 1961; Mohd. Taib bin Othman. *The Language of the Editorials in Malay Vernacular Newspapers Up to 1941*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966; William R. Roff. *Guide to Malay Periodicals, 1876-1941*. Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1961; Muhammad b. Dato' Muda. "Tarikh Akhbar Akhbar dan Majallah Majallah Melayu Keluaran Semenanjung Tanah Melayu," *Majallah Guru*. 15: 10 (1938), pp. 361-408; Russel Betts. "The Mass Media of Malaya and Singapore As of 1965: A Survey of the Literature." Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for International Studies, Dec. 1969; Tan Peng Siew. "Malaysia and Singapore." In John A. Lent. *The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971, pp. 179-191.

1958 in Singapore, and its weekly sister, *Warta Ahad Semenanjung*, also of Singapore, established in 1959; the short-lived paper of UMNO, *Merdeka*, started in Kuala Lumpur in 1964; *Suara Dewan Perak* (Ipoh, 1966) and *Mingguan Kota Bahru* (1966). *Utusan Melayu*, noting that more people were learning Malay because of a constitutional clause of 1957 declaring it the national language, started its weekly *Mingguan Malaysia* in 1964 and a Romanized daily, *Utusan Malaysia*, on September 1, 1967.

Contemporary Malay Media

Newspapers

By the mid-1970s, only six of Malaysia's 51 newspapers were in Bahasa Malaysia, serving an estimated 2.3 million West Malaysian adults literate in the language.⁴¹⁾ Actually, they constitute three dailies and their editions. Total circulation of the Malay papers in late 1973 was 300,000, compared to 800,000 for Chinese newspapers, 500,000 for English and 100,000 for Tamil.⁴²⁾ But numbers of papers and circulations do not tell the complete story. Readership of Malay newspapers is high because of group reading habits of that ethnic group and the use of the papers by Chinese and Indians seeking to learn the national language. A 1973 survey by Survey Research Malaysia gave *Berita Harian* 13 readers per copy and *Utusan Malaysia* and *Utusan Melayu*, about nine each, among adults in West Malaysia.

The largest Malay newspaper organization is the Utusan Melayu Group, which brings out the dailies *Utusan Melayu* (circulation in 1973, 42,000) in Jawi script and *Utusan Malaysia* in the Romanized version, and their Sunday papers, *Utusan Zaman* (circulation 57,000) and *Mingguan Malaysia* (128,000),⁴³⁾ respectively. *Utusan Malaysia* has been the success story of recent Malay newspapers, increasing its initial circulation of 8,000 in 1967 to over 73,000 in 1974. The Utusan Melayu Group profits, including those realized from its magazine chain, were M\$ 1.8 million in 1973. The other two Malay language newspapers, both in Romanized script, are the daily *Berita Harian* (circulation, 32,800) and its Sunday edition, *Berita Minggu* (48,000), published by the New Straits Times Press.

In East Malaysia, the English language *Kinabalu Sabah Times* (circulation, 23,000) and *Daily Express* (circulation, 25,800) each have pages in Romanized Malay.⁴⁴⁾ Until recently, a small Malay daily, *Utusan Sarawak*,⁴⁵⁾ was published in Kuching, but it is no

41) D. E. Greenhalgh. "Circulation and Readership," *Leader*, July 1972, p. 28.

42) Frances Dyer. "The Print and Broadcasting Media in Malaysia," *Leader*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1974), p. 3. For comparison, see: Jack Glattbach and Mike Anderson. "The Print and Broadcasting Media in Malaysia." Kuala Lumpur: South East Asia Press Centre, Aug. 1971; Howard Coats and Frances Dyer. "The Print and Broadcasting Media in Malaysia." Kuala Lumpur: South East Asia Press Centre, Dec. 1972.

43) "Utusan Melayu Group." *Leader*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (1974), p. 7.

44) Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 22. For earlier data, see: "The State of the Press in East Malaysia." Kuala Lumpur: South East Asia Press Centre, Aug. 1970.

45) Glattbach and Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

longer listed in directories. Thus, the development of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language has not been mirrored in East Malaysian newspapers—possibly because the Malays do not make up the majority of the population and those who do reside in Sabah and Sarawak depend on Kuala Lumpur papers.

Not only are all Malay newspapers closely tied to the government; they are virtually owned by government agencies. The Utusan Melayu Group is owned by the United Malays National Organization, a political party of the ruling National Front, and since 1972, the New Straits Times Press, which besides *Berita Harian* and *Berita Minggu*, publishes *Straits Times*, *Malay Mail* and a number of periodicals and books, is reportedly 80 per cent owned by Pernas, a government agency. Links with Malay language newspapers in Singapore have been broken in recent years by government intervention.

The roles Malay editors see for their papers are similar to government aims as outlined in the national ideology (Rukunegara) and the Second Five-Year Plan. For example, the *Berita* editor feels his papers should encourage all Malaysians of all races to work peaceably together, “even if this means that our circulation drops.” He explained his papers, conservative in nature, do not want to “offend anyone.”⁴⁶⁾ Encik Mazlan Nordin, editor-in-chief of the Utusan Melayu Group, strives to give a distinctive image to each of his papers, wanting to make *Utusan Melayu* a quality paper and *Utusan Malaysia*, popular.⁴⁷⁾ *Utusan Melayu*, because it is in Jawi and concentrates on life in the kampungs, appeals to a narrower audience—older Malays who still know the script; while *Utusan Malaysia* purports to write for all Malaysians. All mass media of Malaysia, including those in Malay, are government supporters. As one Utusan Melayu Group official said, “it is not the newspapers’ role to check on government. The papers here are not pro- or anti- government, but supporters of government.”⁴⁸⁾

The strong sedition and printing presses acts of Malaysia have had a stifling effect on Malay newspapers, as they have on all media. Malay editors are particularly careful because it was one of them who suffered under the wrath of the Sedition Act. In April 1971, *Utusan Melayu* printed an editorial calling for the closure of all Chinese and Tamil schools in the nation. The editor, Melan Abdullah, was accused of seditious publication, found guilty and fined M\$ 500, while the author of the editorial received a M\$ 1,000 fine. Upon appeal, the conviction was squashed, but not before intimidating the entire Malaysian media operation.

Another vigilant watchdog on the Malay press is the Islamic community which it serves. Some critics point out contents, especially in *Utusan Malaysia*, are against the

46) Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

47) *ibid.*

48) Salleh, Utusan Melayu Group executive, to Universiti Sains Malaysia students, Kuala Lumpur, Aug. 25, 1972.

principles of Islamic faith and the nation's ideology.⁴⁹⁾ *Utusan Malaysia* material criticized as being undesirable has included stories on campus love and peeping toms and cheesecake photography. Ironically enough, in mid 1973, copies of the Malay language *Filem dan Feshen* were banned in Brunei because of excessive sex symbolism.

Until very recently, Malay newspapers carried large amounts of supernatural fare, sometimes treated as fact. For example, *Warta Negara* in 1965, featured a news story about giant footprints found in Johore;⁵⁰⁾ others have reported on ghosts. An official of the Utusan Melayu Group explained his papers carry ghost stories because people enjoy them but said that they are not portrayed as factual accounts any longer.⁵¹⁾ Ainon, in her criticisms of Malay journalism, has called for more stories designed for the *rahim kajai* readers (those who face facts and realities of life) rather than for the *raj Kapoor* readers (those who like fantasy news).⁵²⁾

Contemporary Malay newspapers have also been characterized as being lethargic, never taking stands on governmental issues. An editor of *Utusan Melayu* felt there was a reason for this, other than the tough legislative restrictions on the press: "There's nothing more for the press to fight. We are free now. We are led by our people. There's nothing for us to do except to build up our economic and political stability."⁵³⁾

Content analyses by Universiti Sains Malaysia students in 1972 and 1973 lend some support to the above criticisms, especially the one concerning the lack of critical stands taken by Malay newspapers. In a study comparing the editorials of *Utusan Malaysia* with *Straits Echo*, an English language daily, during a 30-day period in November-December 1972, it was found *Utusan Malaysia* highlighted government progress and ignored any national development failures. Government ministers were quoted frequently in *Utusan Malaysia* editorials. Whereas the *Straits Echo* used more foreign-oriented topics (19) than national (15), the Malay daily was definitely more nationalistic in its editorials, devoting 52 out of 54 editorials to national issues. In another study⁵⁵⁾ of editorials in *Utusan Melayu* and *Straits Times* for a constructed week in November 1972; Ismail showed that the Malay daily emphasized editorials featuring economic development of the Malay race, to the exclusion of other ethnic groups. Neither paper carried editorial matter critical of government policies; *Straits Times* devoted nearly half (43 per cent) of its editorials to politics, but usually other nations' politics. Again, the Malay daily dwelt more on national

49) Ainon, "A Historical...", *op. cit.*

50) *Warta Negara*, Jan. 3, 1965.

51) Salleh, *op. cit.*

52) Ainon, "A Historical...", *op. cit.*

53) *ibid.*

54) Tuan Kamaruzaman Tuan Mohammad. "A Comparative Study of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Straits Echo*," Presented to John A. Lent's "Journalism II" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jan. 1973.

55) Ismail bin Mamat. "Editorial Content of *Utusan Melayu* and *Straits Times*," Presented to John A. Lent's "Journalism II" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jan. 1973.

Table 1 Contents of *Utusan Malaysia*, *Utusan Melayu*
(Figures represent percentage of total newshole
in each newspaper.)

	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	<i>Utusan Melayu</i>
Sports	8.2	5.4
Sensation/Human Interest	6.7	4.4
Letters	2.3	2.1
Editorials	1.4	1.9
Crime	6.0	2.9
Foreign News	1.8	2.1
National Politics	2.1	2.1
Trade and Industry	4.2	5.3
Economic Development	7.1	7.0
Education	4.9	6.1
Youth and Women's News	3.4	4.2
Local News	5.2	9.8
Advertisements	19.5	31.3
Other	27.2	15.4

topics for editorials than did the English language *Straits Times*.

Abdullah,⁵⁶⁾ using a constructed week in November 1972, surveyed the contents of *Utusan Melayu* and *Utusan Malaysia*. He found that contrary to popular belief, the newspapers do not carry large portions of Islamic news and information; *Utusan Melayu* spent 1.3 per cent of its newshole on religious matter, *Utusan Malaysia*, 0.9 per cent. These figures are particularly low because the analysis was conducted during the religious month of Ramadan. As for cultural and ceremonial news and features, important to national policy in Malaysia, *Utusan Malaysia* had 2.8 per cent and *Utusan Melayu*, 1.7 per cent. See Table 1.

Abdullah also found that neither Malay language daily carried stories of opposition parties. Economic development received major treatment mainly because land development schemes, farmers associations and cooperatives reported on, affect Malays favorably more than any other ethnic group. Throughout stories in both papers, themes featuring government efforts to achieve equitable incomes and a just and harmonious society are prominent.

Magazines

Malaysian magazines have always faced stiff competition from imported periodicals.⁵⁷⁾ Lately, however, the Malay language periodical press has shown significant growth in Malaysia. The two organizations that have spurred the development of Malay magazines

56) Abdullah bin Mahmood. "Content Analysis of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Utusan Melayu*." Presented to John A. Lent's "Journalism II" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jan. 1973.

57) See Mohd. Taib, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-223, for discussion of literary role Malay magazines have played throughout the nation's history.

recently have been the Utusan Melayu Group and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Malaysia Language and Literary Agency).

Utusan Melayu Group publishes *Wanita*, *Mastika*, *Utusan Radio dan TV*, *Filem dan Feshen*, *Al Islam*, *Utusan Pelajar*, *Majallah Bulanan*, and *Utusan Kiblat*. *Wanita*, published since 1969, is a women's monthly which, with a circulation of 100,000, is the most widely circulated magazine in Malaysia. *Mastika* has been in existence since 1939. A monthly of 25,000 subscribers, *Mastika* has been converted from a literature and culture journal to a general interest magazine. *Utusan Radio dan TV* (35,000) and *Filem dan Feshen* (23,000) are devoted to radio, television and movie personalities and programs, and in the latter case, fashion. *Al Islam*, created in January 1974, is a religious monthly of 10,000 circulation. *Utusan Pelajar* is one of two successful children's magazines in the country. Started in 1970 as a weekly, it now has a circulation of 55,000.

To promote the national language, the government through Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, subsidizes monthlies such as *Dewan Masyarakat*, *Dewan Bahasa*, *Dewan Sastra* and *Dewan Pelajar*. The agency was formed as a government department in 1956, converted to corporation status in 1959 and published its first magazine, *Dewan Bahasa*, in 1957 as a semi-academic journal promoting Malay language and literature. Largest selling of DBDP's publications is *Dewan Masyarakat*, a general interest and current affairs magazine with over 40,000 circulation; the other three are education oriented. *Dewan Pelajar* (circulation, 21,000) gears its materials according to language standards while *Dewan Sastra* (circulation, 10,000) is more of an arts periodical, containing poetry, literary efforts, language instruction and pictorial coverage of important events.

In addition, the government prints about 30 magazines (with a combined circulation of about three million) to explain government policy, aid national unity and publicize radio and television shows. These periodicals are primarily in Malay with translated editions in English, Chinese and Tamil.⁵⁸⁾ New Straits Times Press started a Malay business bi-monthly in mid-1973, *Puspaniaga*, and Star Publications of Penang had plans for launching a Malay magazine.

Broadcasting

The multi-racial nature of the nation's broadcasting system has roots in 1934 when Station ZHJ of Penang began services in four main languages.⁵⁹⁾ But, until after independence, English was the chief broadcasting language. For example, during a typical broadcast day in 1947, the national system devoted 5.1 hours to English, 4.25 to Chinese, 3.1 to Malay and 2.75 to Tamil.⁶⁰⁾ In 1973, Radio Malaysia broadcast 475 hours and 25

58) Dyer, *op. cit.*, p.18.

59) Molly Mathews. "A History of Broadcasting in Malaysia." Presented to John A. Lent's "Journalism II" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jan. 1973.

60) See Betts, *op. cit.*, for figures of the 1960s.

minutes per week, of which 168 were in Bahasa Malaysia, 100.55 in Chinese, 100 in English, 92.30 in Tamil and 14 in aboriginal languages.⁶¹⁾

Radio Malaysia, the national broadcasting service, is divided into five networks: Ibu-kota, a special Malay language service for Kuala Lumpur; National in Bahasa Malaysia; Blue, English; Green, Chinese and Red, Tamil. On an average day, Survey Research Malaysia estimated recently, 1,719,000 adults listen to the National Network, 97.8 per cent of whom are Malays. The average numbers for the other language networks are 178,000 for the English, 778,000 for the Chinese and 288,000 for the Tamil.⁶²⁾

Radio Television Malaysia has as its main purpose, the presentation of government information in a favorable light. Bahasa Malaysia is the preferred language. For example, the main news show on Radio Malaysia is "Berita Perdana" (Prime News), broadcast in Malay and used on all networks.⁶³⁾

Television began in December 1963; a second network was opened in 1969. Network One, carrying Bahasa Malaysia programs, telecasts 57 hours weekly while the second channel, using English, Chinese and Tamil, is on for 27 hours per week. Initially, a very large proportion of the programming was foreign produced, but efforts are increasingly made to localize content. For example, in 1973, a 50 per cent surcharge was tacked onto foreign-produced TV commercials to encourage the development of local advertisements for the medium.⁶⁴⁾ Also in 1973, the Ministry of Information initiated "Dendang Rakyat," a series of competitions on radio and television to revive interest in traditional Malay music and to offset the invasion of pop music. The competitions are also used to transmit government messages to rural folk and to break down state identities within the nation. Each regional station of RTM handles competitions for a certain type of folk music: boria at Penang, ghazal at Johore Bahru, dondang sayang at Malacca, etc. All of the competitions are national development oriented but appeal chiefly to the Malay ethnic group.⁶⁵⁾ The national language is encouraged in all programming; for example, on Television Malaysia, all opening, closing and spot announcements are in that language and Malay subtitles and dubbing are used on TV shows in English, Chinese or Tamil. Of five newscasts on Television Malaysia, two are in Malay; the 9 p.m. one is the most important

61) In 1971, total hours broadcast was 419.20, of which 129½ were in Malay. Glattbach and Anderson, *op. cit.*, p.23. In December 1972, 463.50 were broadcast, of which 168 were in Malay. Coats and Dyer, *op. cit.*, p.25.

62) Dyer, *op. cit.*, p.20. See: Jack Glattbach and R. Balakrishnan. "Malaysia." In John A. Lent, ed. *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming, for additional information on Malaysian broadcasting.

63) Mohd. Naim Ismail. "Suara Malaysia (The Voice of Malaysia)." Presented to John A. Lent's "International Communication" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jan. 1974.

64) *Leader*. Vol.2, No.3 (1973).

65) Aziz Muhammed and Zainie Rahmat. "Folk Songs and Folk Tradition As an Agent of Change Employed by the Ministry of Information in Disseminating Government Policies." Presented to John A. Lent's "Comparative Media Systems" course, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jan. 1974.

newscast.

The other radio broadcaster in Malaysia is Rediffusion which maintains Gold (Chinese language) and Silver (Malay and English) Networks. The government requires Rediffusion to relay only Radio Malaysia news. Recently, the authorities have also asked Rediffusion to relay Radio Malaysia national development shows and one hour of Malay language music daily, even though very few subscribers to the service are Malay speaking.⁶⁶⁾

Summary

Historically, the Malay press has been identified with fostering various causes of the Malays and of the Islamic faith. It has been a fighting press. Today's mass media in Malaysia have assumed new roles: they no longer fight causes, oppose government policies or think critically; instead, they act as supporters—and even, apologists—for the officials. Malay language media are expected to be at the forefront of the campaigns to propagate governmental programs because the authorities are themselves Malay. Thus, through restrictive legislation, self censorship and ownership patterns, the Malay mass media have been made into nothing more than extensions of government.

66) Interview, Chang Kok Hwa, commercial manager, Rediffusion, Kuala Lumpur, Dec. 27, 1972.