

THE MALAYSIAN PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY

- 1:1 The Malaysian Parliamentary Library began as a small collection of books and Federated Malay States Council Proceedings that belonged to the Federal Legislative Council Library
- 1:2 The Federal Legislative Council sat from 1909 to 1957. With the attaining of Independence in 1957, the Federal Legislative Council came to be called the Parliament of Malaysia, and the Minutes and Proceedings became known as the Hansards or Parliamentary Debates.
- 1:3 Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy and is ruled by a Constitutional Monarch with the King (known as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong) as the Head of the country. The King is elected to the throne for a five-year term from one of the hereditary rulers of the nine states in the Federation which are ruled by the Sultans.

Legislative Authority

At federal level, legislative power is vested in a bicameral Parliament headed by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and comprises the Dewan Negara (Senate) and Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives). The Dewan Negara has 69 members of whom 40 are nominated by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, 26 are elected by the State Legislative

Assemblies and 3 members represent the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan. The tenure of office for each Senator is 3 years and is not affected by a dissolution of Parliament. Senators can hold office for a maximum of two terms. 12% of these senators are women. The Dewan Rakyat is fully elective and has 177 members, 5% of whom are women. The Members of the Dewan Rakyat are elected every 5 years unless the Yang di-Pertuan Agong dissolves the Parliament before the end of its normal term. The period of 5 years or less constitutes one Parliament. The first Parliament was convened in 1959. The current Parliament is the Seventh.

Each Parliament consists of 4 or 5 Sessions. A session covers approximately a period of a little less than one year, usually beginning in March or April. The first meeting is ceremonially opened by His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who delivers the Royal Address. At the end of each Session Parliament is prorogued by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong by means of a Proclamation.

1:4 Organisation of Parliament

The Library is one of the 11 separate departments/divisions of the Parliament. The Secretary of the

Dewan Rakyat and the Secretary of the Dewan Negara are appointed by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. The Secretary of the Dewan Rakyat is responsible for the administration of Parliament, and in this capacity he is known as the Secretary of Parliament. One of the two Assistant Secretaries oversees the Library along with some other divisions and is directly responsible to the Secretary of Parliament.

1:5 The Collection

From the beginning the emphasis was on building up the collection, and parliamentary publications were exchanged for those from Great Britain, U.S.A., India, New Zealand, Australia and Singapore. A small number of relevant publications and serials were purchased. Parliament was originally housed in a wing of the then Public Works Department situated in an old building in Maxwell Road, and the Library occupied a corner of the entrance hall adjacent to the Speaker's Office. When Parliament moved to its present permanent building in 1963, the area allocated to the Library was the ground floor, with the main entrance on to the rear of the building, and access to the 2 Houses on the first floor was via a spiral staircase.

Early in 1964 the Library received a generous gift of about 1000 books from the Asia Foundation. Further donations came from the British Council (especially the basic library 'tools' like the British National Bibliography) and the Indian Government. These, together with the books and other materials purchased with funds from the Federal Government swelled the collection to a sizeable one.

The main areas covered by the collection include general reference books, economics, law, social sciences and politics. Books are acquired both in English and in the Malay language.

The collection now stands at about 24,000 volumes. The Library subscribes to about 9 local newspapers, and 20 serial titles, and fortunately about 130 titles are received gratis. Government publications number about 130, and in addition we also purchase the Government gazettes. The official reports of the State Legislative Assemblies are also received.

#### Special Collections

Our Hansard collection, together with Papers presented in Parliament form our unique collection, dating back

to 1909. From 1909 to 1958 they were known as the Federal Legislative Council Proceedings, and from 1959 they were called Parliamentary Debates (or Hansards) of Dewan Rakyat and Parliamentary Debates of Dewan Negara. An Index has been prepared by broad subject headings by the Editorial Section of Parliament for each Session of Parliament. There is no cumulative Index. The most recent index prepared is for 1982, the Sixth Parliament.

The Hansards are printed in the language of the floor, and the greater part of it is in the National Language, Malay which is the official language of the House. With permission of Mr. Speaker Members may use the English Language. There is a Simultaneous Interpretation service for Members who wish to avail themselves of it. The daily Hansards are prepared by the Editorial Section and are ready for distribution to Members of Parliament the next sitting day. These offset copies will later be printed and published in booklets by the Government Printer, and finally bound according to the Sessions of Parliament. It takes about 5 years for the final bound volumes to reach the shelves.

Likewise, all Parliamentary Papers and Committee Reports, viz. Command Papers, Statute Papers, Votes and

Proceedings, Bills, Reports of the Standing Orders Committee, House Committee, Public Accounts Committee etc. are printed by the Government Printer. The Library gathers and collates these and sends them to be bound.

We also receive the Parliamentary Reports of Great Britain, Australia, United States Congress, Lok Sabha India, Singapore.

With the exception of India and Singapore, there has not been any continued exchange of Parliamentary publications with any of the other South East Asian countries. During an official visit to Kuala Lumpur by the Speaker of the Philippines Congress in 1965, a set of the Philippines Congress Debates were given to the Malaysian Parliament. But this was not continued, and now stands isolated on our shelves. Similarly with a few of the South East Asian countries. We would like to see an exchange of our Debates with those of our neighbouring countries. An immediate problem which comes to mind here however is one language. The greater part of the Malaysian Parliamentary Debates are in the Malay language.

Law Books

This section which is mainly composed of the Laws of Malaysia and the Government Gazettes is frequently referred to by staff and by Members of Parliament, and has to be updated daily.

A small collection of text books on law by leading authors is also available.

1:6 Staffing

The early collection of the material was handled by a staff of 1 : an Assistant Librarian with no formal library training.

The situation was slowly rectified till the number of staff grew to its present size of 5.

The staff consists of

- 1 Librarian
- 1 Assistant Librarian
- 1 Library Assistant
- 1 Clerk
- 1 Attendant.

Library staff are sent from time to time for short training courses eg. the Attendant was sent to the National Archives for a two-week course on basic library binding, and the clerk was sent to observe the indexing done in the National Library.

1:7      Funding

The funds allocated to the library for books, journals and newspapers is very small, about M\$12000 (US\$4500) for the current year, and therefore selection of books for purchase has to be done carefully. For the year 1990 expenditure for Parliament is M\$15 million (US\$4.5m). This includes remuneration of Members and staff, building maintenance etc.

Services

The Library serves both Houses with a total membership of 246. It is meant primarily for Members of Parliament and Officers of the Parliament, and as such maintains a loans service, and answers queries verbally or by phone. A photostat machine is available to Members. Bibliographies are prepared for Members who might need them, and occasionally research is done for

them, though not in great detail. We have found that most references are made to our Hansards and our legal books.

New Members of Parliament are shown round the library and our holdings and services are explained to them. Members have free access to all library material and should they require reference works like the Acts of Parliament a photostat copy is made for them. If material requested is not available within the Library we try to obtain it from foreign countries.

Though the Parliamentary Library is meant for Members of Parliament, our collection has been useful to people in other sectors and frequently officers from other Government Ministries, research workers and students from the local Universities, lawyers from legal firms, and even foreign researchers have made use of our collection of Hansards and have found them useful. There have been requests from overseas. The Library of Congress based in Jakarta has asked for our Hansards and their representative has been to our Library.

There is yet another angle to the use of our library. Students following a course in library science at the local colleges (e.g. MARA Technical College) have had attachments in our library since 1983 as part of their curriculum.

We also take part in the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme for South East Asia conducted by the National Library and have had librarians from most South East Asian and South Pacific Countries visit us.

### Future

With the rapid growth of our collection of Hansards over the last 30 years, our shelving space has become acutely inadequate and serious thought is now being put to computerising the collection of Hansards.

Several problems arise, including the one on language.

A serious look has also to be made regarding the preservation of the old set of Hansards and law books which in some cases are in an advanced state of deterioration. The main obstacle here is one of cost.