

# MEDIA & MUSLIM SOCIETY

MOHD. YUSOF HUSSAIN



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# Media & Muslim Society

*Editor*  
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## Chapter Six

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# Issues in the Print Media in a Colonized Muslim Society: The Case of the Malay World

Che Mahzan Ahmad

### Introduction

This chapter attempts to narrate some issues of the print media, especially newspapers and magazines, on activities in the Malay world (*Dunia Melayu*) during the period of Western colonialisation (circa 1600-1957). *Dunia Melayu* is a concept, which has long been used by scholars in the studies of Malay culture and civilisation. In a broader sense, *Dunia Melayu* refers to the Malay-speaking inhabitants of the larger area of Malay Archipelago, embracing the Malay Peninsula, thousands of islands of Indonesia, Borneo, Indo-China and Philippines. Some scholars even include Madagascar, Easter Islands, Hawaii and New Zealand (Collins, 1996). Here, *Dunia Melayu* is specifically confined to a geographical area of the Malay Peninsula of Malaysia, including Singapore, and the 'active' centres in Indonesia, namely Java Island and Sumatera. During the colonial era, the Malay Peninsula was known as Malaya, while the two Indonesian territories were part of the larger Dutch East Indies. For simplicity of discussion, an acknowledged localised term known as "Nusantara" that refers to both areas of *Dunia Melayu* will be used throughout this chapter. As Western colonialisation of Nusantara lasted for more than 350 years, beginning with the occupation of Ambon in 1605 and ending with the independence of Malaya in 1957, this chapter is thus divided into three main chronological time periods: 1615-1889, 1900-1941, and 1942-1945.

## 1615-1889

Western symbols of ...modernity include the use of such 'Western' imports as cars or newspapers. (Laffan, 2003: 8)

### Reading News as a Tradition

In Nusantara, the tradition of 'reading' news is claimed to be pioneered by Coen, the first Governor General of East Indies. He was said to direct the publication of the hand written bulletin, *Memorie de Nouvelles*, in 1615. It was published in Batavia (the present day Jakarta) under the auspices of *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), the enterprise that 'colonized the East Indies,' for the consumption of Dutch officials in the colony. Batavia was the centre of operation for VOC. To other Europeans, 'reading news' practices were made available largely through the publication of *Kort Bericht Eropa* (A Brief News from Europe) in 1676. The *Kort* was printed in Batavia under the leadership of Abraham Van Den Eede. Most news was about events in Poland, France, Germany, Spain, England, Denmark and Netherlands. At that time a large number of Europeans were known to work in many 'factories' in the East Indies (Guillot, 1993). Besides the two notable publications, the weekly *Bataviase Nouvelles en Politique Raisonnementen* (1774) was also popular in Batavia (Krisnawan, 1997). The main content of the weekly consisted of advertisements about trade activities especially notice of auctions, government orders, tour-diaries, notices of deaths, burials and receptions.

In the Malay Peninsula, the tradition of reading newspapers remained wide until the publication of *The Prince of Wales Island Gazette* (1806) in Penang. The island then was the centre of activity for the *East India Company* (EIC), the British enterprise that managed the colonialisation in Malaya. The weekly was published by Andrew Burchet Bone, a person with experiences as a printer and a publisher of two newspapers in India. He was said to be the founder of the first printing house in Penang. A large part of the spaces, in the weekly was allocated to information on trade activities. Local happenings, stories from India, Dutch activities in Indonesia, Malay court issues, and political developments in Europe were also included. Not to be missed in the weekly was news on the weather, a clear illustration of the

## About the Contributors

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# MEDIA & MUSLIM SOCIETY

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The book contains twelve essays on topics related to the subject “Media and Muslim Society.” It is compiled as a textbook for students taking the course of the same title at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Thus, the topics selected are those covered in the course. The topics include media at various stages in the development of a Muslim society, the role of communication in a Muslim society, media control, media effects on Muslim society and the roles of *ulamas* in influencing the media. A special topic on Muslim society is also included at the beginning of the book. The contributors of these essays are experts in their field. They have also helped developed and taught the course. In this first edition, most of the examples and discussions are based on two Muslim societies, i.e., Peninsular Malaysia and Indonesia. This is understandable because most of the writers in this first edition are from the Malay world. We hope to include examples from other Muslim societies in the next edition when we get contribution from writers from other parts of the Muslim world. Finally we welcome criticisms and suggestions to improve this book from our readers. We shall certainly consider these criticisms and suggestions in the next edition.

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