

**MAJLIS PUSAT:  
CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS  
AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

**ZULKIFLI BIN MOHAMMED**

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**Department of Malay Studies  
National University of Singapore**

## FOREWORD

I am pleased to write this short foreword to introduce the Department's Seminar and Occasional Papers Series. The series provides the opportunity for staff members of the Department as well as scholars of Malay Studies in general to have their research findings on Malay subjects made known to a wider audience. It is also hoped that this initiative will provide the avenue for a beneficial exchange of ideas and viewpoints on Malay issues between town and gown.

The Department would like to thank Hotel Properties Pte Ltd for sponsoring the publication of the series.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the views expressed in the seminar and occasional papers series are those of the respective authors.

23 November 1992

Professor Tham Seong Chee  
Head  
Department of Malay Studies

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**A. Background on Formation of Majlis Pusat**

- On 12 April 1965 after approximately two years of deliberations and brainstorming by the Malay intelligentsia, 31 Malay organisations came together to set up an umbrella body called Majlis Pusat (MP).
  
- Its formation marked another collective self-help effort on the part of the Malays with the aim of streamlining and co-ordinating the activities of its affiliated members so that resources could be better utilised to improve the Malays in the fields of education, language, culture and economy.
  
- MP came into existence just 4 years after Singapore gained independence, ie at the time when the Malay community was in a state of uncertainty and felt that their culture and identity were being threatened.

- Majlis Pusat's main objectives are:-

- (a) To co-ordinate Malay educational, religious, cultural, welfare, social, economic and sports activities not only between its member-organisations but also with other organisations with similar objectives.
- (b) To establish a Research & Planning Section to study the educational, economic, social and cultural aspects of the Malays and to plan projects to enable Malays to make further progress in these fields.
- (c) To identify and to consider the problems of the Malays and to recommend solutions and give advice, if required or necessary, to the authorities concerned.

- As it evolved, Majlis Pusat gradually assume the role as an unofficial voice representing Malay interests by providing feedback on various issues and policies to the relevant authorities/agencies. This was how Majlis Pusat, as the spokesman for its many affiliated groups, kept open channels of communication between the community and the Government.

B. Activities/Programmes of Majlis Pusat in the First Decade (1969-80)

(a) Community Service

- Conducting tuition classes for upper Secondary and Pre-U students (1973-80) in collaboration with Singapore Malay Teachers' Union and other organisations.
  
- "Projek Maju Padu" ie visiting kampungs and conducting dialogue sessions with its residents to explain/clarify on developments taking place then e.g. high-rise living, industrialisation, national service.
  
- Setting up an employment agency to assist unemployed Malay youths to find jobs in the industrial sector.

(b) Seminars/Forums

Several seminars and forums were organised to intimately involve the community to get as many views as possible on the causes of Malay under-achievement and to propose recommendations and solutions. Appended below is the list of seminars/forums organised in the '70s:

- 1971: Seminar on "Malay Participation in Nation-Building" (in collaboration with Singapore Council of Social Service).
  
- 1974: Seminar on "Malay Women in National Development".
  
- 1977: Seminar on "Tuition Classes".
  
- 1978: Seminar on "Malay Culture".

**C. Majlis Pusat Today**

- MP has 38 affiliates under its wings. They are involved in the Culture/Arts, Literary Development, Community Service/Welfare, Youth and Sports.
  
- MP's administered by a 20-member Executive Committee and 1 permanent staff. Its has 5 Secretariats (namely, Publicity & Information, Youth, Women & Community Service, Current Affairs, Culture & Arts and Finance) which are run by volunteers from all walks of life.
  
- MP's role is guided by the need to ensure that each ethnic group has the freedom to pursue, retain and perpetuate its distinct social customs and traditions, religious beliefs and language within the context of the overall national interests.
  
- At the national level, MP is affiliated to the People's Association (PA), the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and Yayasan MENDAKI.
  
- Also, at the national level, MP works hand-in-hand with several ministries and government agencies such as MCD, MITA, MOH, MINDEF, National Arts Council, STPB, Sentosa Development Corporation, SBC, National Museum and Oral History & Archives

Department.

- **Guiding Principles**

- (a) Co-operation, not confrontation, with Government and government agencies if progress is to be achieved for the community.
- (b) Open-door policy ie willingness to work with other organisations including non-Malay ones.
- (c) Sincere, effective, dedicated and committed leadership placing the interests of the community and the nation above everything else.
- (d) giving sincere views and feedback in a rational and responsible manner in the hope that this will be received in good faith by concerned parties.

- The above principles will help to strengthen Majlis Pusat's role as the channel upon which the Government can place its trust and confidence.

- In exercising its responsibilities, Majlis Pusat will endeavour its utmost to remain neutral and not allow itself to be used as a tool by others. Uppermost in the minds of Majlis Pusat's leadership is that it must

remain to be a credible organisation.

**D. Future Challenges**

(a) Leadership

- MP's main area of concern is self-renewal among its ranks, in particular its leadership. This task is a daunting one because the majority of its leaders must come from the ranks of its affiliated organisations. Without its affiliates, Majlis Pusat cannot exist. Its affiliates must make conscious and concerted efforts to identify new blood and groom future leaders.
  
- Another challenge is the need for the better endowed in our society to immerse themselves in Malay grassroots organisations. This is an essential ingredient if one is to grasp problems at source and formulate the desired solutions. A leader is no leader if he does not understand the ground.
  
- Leadership is not something to be taken for granted. A leader must lead and not be led and also a leader must not pander to the majority. Leadership requires adherence to certain fundamental moral and ethical principles, such as upholding right from wrong and being objective by debating issues rather than being deflected by personal or sectoral interests.



- A leader must not succumb to populist appeal. It is easy to be perceived as a champion or a hero by making vocal comments and criticisms. But to be credible, we must offer counterproposals or alternative solutions to overcome problems and issues as proof of our sincerity, responsibility and commitment.

(b) Majlis Pusat/Affiliates Linkage

- There is an ongoing need to promote and strengthen co-operation between Majlis Pusat and its affiliates.
- Some ways to establish closer rapport with affiliates include newsletters, news briefs, dialogue sessions, informal gatherings and involvement in activities co-ordinated by Majlis Pusat.

(c) Role in Nation-Building

- Fully conscious that no ethnic group can exist by itself in the Singapore milieu, MP will continue to work closely with non-Malay organisations and Government agencies through involvement and participation in activities/programmes that promote and encourage inter-ethnic understanding and goodwill.
- For the future, MP will explore the possibility of promoting more joint multi-ethnic events eg in the arts and culture.

- In this way, the Malay community will not only get adequate exposure to national activities and aspirations, but at the same time fulfil their needs and help to narrow the perception gap between the different ethnic groups.
  
- In tandem with our nation's pursuit of excellence, Majlis Pusat will endeavour in its utmost to lift Singapore's culture to a higher plane of development. For the Malay community, Majlis Pusat will work towards establishing an Academy of Fine Arts in the long run.

(d) **Field of Activity**

- The promotion of culture and the arts will still be an anchor activity for MP. MP will explore ways and means to upgrade existing standards.
  
- Another anchor activity of MP is the SANA-Muslim Counselling Service to provide aftercare services to ex-drug addicts and inmates of Drug Rehabilitation Centres.
  
- Organising forums and seminars on current affairs and issues affecting the Malay community as and when necessary.

- An area that Majlis Pusat hopes to give greater emphasis to is community service. MP regards this as crucial, in view of the social ills that are afflicting the Malays, eg drug abuse, broken homes, juvenile delinquency, high divorce rates, the underclass and the under-achievers. There is a pressing need for resources to be gathered to set up social support agencies for Malays.

**E. CONCLUSION**

- Majlis Pusat as a parent body tasked with the responsibility of serving the needs of the Malay community, will continue to adopt a pro-active approach. It will play its part in nation-building whilst endeavouring to preserve, promote and enhance Malay culture and identity and assist the Malays to surge towards achieving excellence.

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