Rencana-Rencana/Articles

Bibliographic Sources to Malaysian Parliamentary Papers

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Abstrak: *Satu huraian mengenai beberapa jenis kertas Parliamen Malaysia diutarakan. Beberapa jenis indeks kepada Hansard dijelaskan. Kelemahan indeks-indeks tersebut seperti tidak kemaskini, kekerapan penerbitan yang tidak tetap, ketiadaan indeks berkumulatif dan kekurangan pendekatan kepada indeks tersebut diberikan perhatian. Buat masa ini tiada penyusunan indeks yang lengkap dijalankan untuk lain-lain jenis kertas Parliamen. Cadangan-cadangan untuk memperbaiki keadaan dikemukakan seperti menyusun indeks mengikut sidang untuk meliputi semua kertas Parliamen, menyusun indeks sementara kepada Hansard dan membina satu sistem berautomasi yang berkeupayaan memberikan teks penuh dan kemudahan CD-ROM.*

Abstract: *A description of the various types of Malaysian Parliamentary papers is first given. The various indexes to the Hansard are then described. Shortcomings of these indexes such as lack of currency, infrequency of issue, lack of cumulations and inadequate access points are noted. There is currently no comprehensive index compiled for other Parliamentary papers . Recommendations for improvement are the compilation of a sessional index to cover all papers, compilation of interim index for the Hansard and an automated system with full-text and CD-ROM facilities.*

TYPES OF PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS

As Parliament is the forum where national issues are discussed and legislation made, papers presented and the records of its proceedings are invaluable primary sources of information to researchers. Using Ford's classification of British Parliamentary paper, Malaysian parliamentary papers can similarly be grouped as follows [1] :

I. Papers relating to the agenda, proceedings and debates of the House.

(a) *Aturan Urusan Mesyuarat* or the *Order Paper.* Being the agenda for each sitting, its contents reflect the order of the business as set out in the Standing Orders.

(b) *Undi-Undi dan Perjalanan Mesyuarat* or the *Votes and Proceedings.* These are the minutes of the previous day which outline records of business transacted. Like the British *Votes and Proceedings*, 'it is a record of what was done ... as opposed as to what was spoken by individual members which is recounted in the papers of the Hansard'. [2]

(c) *Penyata Rasmi Parlimen* or *Official Report of Parliamentary Debates (Hansard).* This official report is a verbatim record of the proceedings of the Houses and the Committees of the whole House including all speeches made, questions and answers thereto, motions and bills considered by the Houses. Earlier debates were reported in Bahasa Malaysia or English according to the language in which the speeches were delivered. However, because of the increasing use of the Malay language which has been designated as the official language of the Houses[3], the text of present day Hansard is predominantly in Bahasa Malaysia. The text of the Debates is usually printed in two columns which are numbered in a continuous sequence for each session.

II. Papers giving Parliament information and other materials relating to policy and administration

Arising out of the deliberations or needed for the work of the House, these are papers submitted to both Houses for the information of members. [4] They are of the following:

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(a) *Rang Undang-undang* or *Bills*. Four type of bills may be introduced : public or government bills; private member bills; private bills and hybrid bills. Each bill is numbered chronologically according to the year it is introduced as follows: 'DR...of 19.. or DN... of 19..', depending on whether it is introduced in the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) or the Dewan Negara (Senate).

(b) House Papers. These are usually reports of the various committees of the Houses such as the Committee of Selection, Standing Orders Committee, Committee of Privileges, Public Accounts Committee and Special Select Committees. Reports of these Committees usually have to be submitted before the end of the session in which they are appointed. Usually accompanied by minutes of proceedings together with evidence given, these reports are presented to the House either by the Chairman or by a member nominated by the Chairman.

(c) *Kertas Statut* or *Statute Paper*. Tabled pursuant to some statutory requirements, they include statutory instruments, annual reports and accounts of statutory bodies, and loan agreements. Each paper tabled bears a paper number in the following format : 'ST... of 19..' and is normally tabled for information only. These papers are usually not subject to discussion in the Houses but the Minister may move that the papers be confirmed.

(d) *Kertas Perintah* or *Command Paper*. Though theoretically tabled by command of the King, they are in practice presented by the Minister in charge. Usually they are papers which are considered to be of interest to Parliament but the presentation of which is not required by statute. They include the Auditor-General's reports; estimates of expenditure, revenue and development; Treasury reports like the annual *Economic Reports*; annual reports of service commissions; treaties and agreements; Commissions of Enquiry reports; Royal Commission reports and White Papers. Tabled by a Minister to either or both Houses, they are usually numbered as 'Cmd.. of 19..', with a new sequence of numbers every year.

EXISTING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

To facilitate access to the contents of these papers, indexes and guides are necessary. The currently available tools and their adequacy will now be examined.

(a) *Index to Parliamentary Debates = Fahrasat kepada Perbahathan Parlimen*

These indexes have varied in format and quality over the years. The first index issued covers the Debates for the First Session of the First Parliament, i. e. the 1959-60 session, 11 September 1959 to 24 February 1960. The items indexed are as follows: Announcement by the Speaker or President (A); adjournment speech (A/S); Committee stage of Bills (C); Committee of the Whole House (C/H); Committee of Supply (C/S); motions (M); oral answers to questions (O/A); First reading of Bills (1R); Second reading of Bills (2R); Third reading of Bills (3R); statement by minister (S); special appendix to the King's speech (S/A); and written answers to questions (W/A). Title headings assigned to reflect the subject matter are listed in alphabetical order. For each entry, abbreviation to show the type of item and the column number are given. Subjects pertaining to the various Ministries are also indexed under the name of the Ministry concerned in an inverted form, e. g. 'JUSTICE - MINISTRY OF', to collocate all subject matter pertaining to that Ministry. Some of these subjects are repeated under their title headings. In the case of Bills, they are indexed under the Ministry concerned and the title of the Bill. For example, the Advocates and Solicitors (Amendment) Bill is to be found under the 'JUSTICE - MINISTRY OF' as well as under its title.

The index to the Debates of the Second Parliament 18 May 1965 to 13 February 1969, saw a mix of English and Bahasa Malaysia headings used according to the medium of the speech indexed. This is a shortcoming because the same subject could be debated in either language and there is no collocation of entries on the same subject matter. For example, in the Fifth sessional index (6 June 1968 to 13 February 1969) both these terms bearing similar meaning, 'Buroh' (p.8) and 'Labour' (p.42) are employed and the items listed under each of these headings are not cross-referenced or repeated.

The Third Parliamentary Debates index (20 February 1971 to 26 July 1974) encompasses a few changes. All subject headings and abbreviations used to denote type of items are in Bahasa Malaysia. There is also an attempt to use headings to reflect subject matter rather than title headings as in earlier indexes. Collocation of subjects indexed is provided to some extent by the use of cross-references. For example, in the First Sessional Index (20 February 1971 - 11 February 1972), under 'Angkatan Tentera' one is referred to 'Tentera'.

There is also a new feature of indexing under the names of members who spoke with subdivisions according to the subject matter touched upon. These name entries are interfiled with the subject entries in an alphabetical sequence. With effect from the second session (10 May 1972 to 31 January 1973), the index is issued in two sections, i.e. the subject index and the name index. Entries listed under motions, ministerial statements, announcements by the Speaker / President and adjournment speeches are also listed under the appropriate subject headings. However, entries listed under Bills (*Rang Undang-Undang*) are not entered again under the appropriate subjects or title of the Bills. The practice of having entries under Ministries was discontinued.

The index to the Debates of the Fourth Parliament (4 November 1974 to 7 April 1978) follows the same format as that for the Third Parliament. However, in the index for the 1977 -78 session written answers to questions are no longer indexed. The practice of indexing members' contribution was discontinued in the index for the Fifth Parliament for reason of economy. This is a retrogressive step as it detracts from the usefulness of the index as a bibliographic tool. This absence of the name index is also evident in the last index issued to date, that for the Fourth Session of the Sixth Parliament (11 March 1986 to 8 April 1989).

(b) Index to Oral and Written Answers to Questions = *Fahrasat Kepada Jawapan-jawapan Mulut dan Jawapan-jawapan Bertulis kepada Pertanyaan-pertanyaan*

In this index, headings assigned by Hansard reporters to reflect the subject matter of questions are listed in an alphabetical order in a columnar format. Each entry carries details of whether it is written answers(W/A) or oral answers (O/A), date it is reported, volume number of the Hansard, the Parliament during which the question is posed, and the column number of the Hansard. Headings assigned are in Bahasa Malaysia or English according to the language of the text. A shortcoming of this index is that it does not index the name of the member who poses the questions and the Minister who replies. Moreover, the index is not produced on a regular basis and to date only two have been produced, the first covering the First Parliament from 11 September 1959 to 11 January 1964 and the second for the Second Parliament from 18 May 1964 till 13 February 1969.

Summary

The two indexes described above are useful bibliographic tools. A very significant problem however is the lack of currency. The sessional index for the debates of the First Parliament (1959-64) was only published in 1974 and to date the latest issued (in 1989) is that for the Sixth Parliament (14 June 1982 - 8 April 1986) although currently the country is into the Eighth Parliament. The delay in issuing the index could be linked to delays in getting the official and edited version of the Debates printed, as details of column numbers will not be available for inclusion in the relevant index.

The second shortcoming is its lack of frequency. The Indexes are sessional compilations without cumulations. Hence the inconvenience of having to look through several sequences.

The quality of its subject indexing is questionable. In the earlier indexes a hodge-podge of Bahasa Malaysia and English terms are used without cross-references to collocate subjects. The discontinuance of indexing under names of contributing members also adversely affects the usefulness of the index .

OTHER BIBLIOGRAPHIC GUIDES

As for the other types of Parliamentary papers, i.e. Bills, Reports of the House Committee, Command Papers and Statute Papers, there is no comprehensive index like the British House of Commons Sessional Index which covers all these papers. The only comprehensive listing of papers presented to Parliament is the *Risalat-Risalat Yang Berikut Telah diBentang Sebagai Kertas Statut; Kertas Perintah; Kertas Dewan Rakyat / Kertas Dewan Rakyat ke Dalam Persidangan Dewan Rakyat/Dewan Negara*. This listing appears in the Federal Government Gazette at the end of each meeting, appearing five to six months after their presentation without any cumulations. Morever, the Risalat-risalat is a cumbersome list to use because papers are arranged by the date of presentation to the Houses. The list provides only details of paper number, title and date of presentation, without any subject access.

Bibliographies such as the *Malaysian National Bibliography*, catalogues and accession lists of libraries may be used to track down parliamentary papers. However, these have limitations as bibliographic sources for such papers. These sources are

not specifically for parliamentary papers and one has to look through a long sequence fo pick out the relevant papers. Moreover, the comprehensiveness of their coverage is dependent on how successful the libraries are in acquiring these papers.

There is a dearth of bibliographic sources to aid the researcher to search for Parliamentary papers. The few available are not without deficiencies. Improvements in bibliographic sources are suggested along the following lines.

Compilation of an index to cover all papers

There is a need for a comprehensive index to Bills, House papers, Command papers and Statute papers. The arrangement of the sessional index should conform to the categorisation of the papers and the way they are numbered. In Malaysia, Bills are given a number preceded by the abbreviations 'DR' for Dewan Rakyat or 'DN' for Dewan Negara, with reference to the year rather than the session. House papers are numbered in a similar manner. Command and Statute papers are also given numbers with reference to the year. In the Malaysian Parliament Library, each of these types of papers is arranged and bound in seperate numerical sequences. The suggested index will have to conform to this pattern of numerical arrangement and one may take as an example, that of the House of Commons Sessional index in its post 1979/80 format. This Sessional index first lists the volume arrangement for the three categories of papers : Bills, House of Commons papers and Command papers. Thereafter is the index proper which is an alphabetical arrangement of titles of bills and subject headings taken from the POLIS thesaurus. Under each heading items are listed according to the type of materials. For each entry, details of title, paper number and date on which the paper is formally laid before the House are given. Cross references are given to faciliate reference to specific items particularly to specific title of Bills. Appended is a list of public Bills giving the title of a Bill, the Bill number, name of the Member sponsoring it and the abbreviation for the type of Bill. Following this are the dates of the various stages of the Bill in both Houses. The sessional index for Malaysian parliamentary papers may well follow the format described but with the addition of a chairman index and an appendix listing Command and Statute papers in numerical order.

Frequent and prompt publication of guides

The delay of five to ten years in the issue of the index to the Hansard has been attributed to the delay in the publication of the official version. This factor should not be a stumbling block to the compilation of an interim index at the end of each meeting with a cumulated sessional index . There may be changes between the text of the unedited daily version and that of the edited version but the cumulated sessional index can be easily revised as is done in the House of Commons' Hansard by the addition of a second column number reference.

As for the index to the other House papers, a sessional issue may suffice. For current search, before the appearance of the sessional index it may be necessary to have a checklist of papers presented at the end of each meeting. Alternatively a weekly supplement like the *House of Commons Weekly Information Bulletin* may be produced to provide information on the transactions of the House every week as well as listing the agenda of forthcoming business.

Cumulation of current issues at regular intervals

To facilitate retrospective searches, sessional indexes to the Hansards should be consolidated for the full Parliament. Similarly a consolidation of sessional indexes to the other House papers will reduce the inconvenience of looking through several issues.

Computer-based systems

With the growth in the volume and complexity of Parliamentary papers and the need for quick retrieval of information, it may mean that the conventional sources described so far will have to be supported by a computer-based system. The installation of such an automated information retrieval systems will be faciliated by the recording of proceedings on computer tape. Such an automated system has been successfully employed at the House of Commons Library which has installed an online system POLIS (Parliamentary Online Information System) since 1980. The POLIS database consists of indexes to Parliamentary questions, Ministerial statements, House papers, Bills, Command papers, debates and non-parliamentary publications acquired by the Library. The advantages such an automated system provides are obvious. Search techniques employing Boolean operators retrieve more efficiently than printed indexes, making avai-

lable the most current information. Moreover, by-products such as the printed Hansard and sessional indexes can be generated from the system. The Malaysian Parliament may reap benefits from the installation of an automated system for its proceedings and papers. With better software and hardware facilities now available, a database management system for its papers and a full text system for its proceedings linked to the computerised typesetting production of the Hansards with subsequent storage in compact disc medium is an achievable goal.[5] Provision of proceedings in CD-ROM medium with full text, multiple indexing and keyword searching facilities will fulfill the dual needs for effective search and document delivery.[6]

NOTES

[1] Percy Ford and G. Ford. *A Guide to Parliamentary Papers ; What They Are, How to Find Them, How to Use Them*. 3rd ed. Shannon : Irish University press, 1971, p.2.

[2] Eric Taylor. *The House of Common At Work*. 8th ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex ; Penguin, 1971, p.123.

[3] Malaysia. Dewan Rakyat. *Standing Orders of the Dewan Rakyat*. 9th ed. Kuala Lumpur : Jabatan Percetakan Negara, 1986, S.O.8. However, the Speaker or President may permit the use of English during Debates.

[4] Ford, p.5.

[5] For example, Meridian Data Inc, has introduced Personal Publisher, a software package that converts data and images to the CD-ROM publishing standard ISO 9660, thus enabling one with a 386 or 486 PC to format text or image and transfer the formatted information to CD-ROM. *Access*, September 1992, p.2.

[6] The British Hansard is now available on CD-ROM. Published by Chadwyck-Healey and HMSO, the database has full-text coverage, multiple indexing and keyword search facilities. Access is available by date, MP, debate, title, subject or 'chronologically, with a table of contents to show the headings for each day's activities'. One complete session is contained in one disc and cumulations are issued three times a year. *LA record*; v.94(12) December 1992, p.773.

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6. Taylor, Eric. *The House of Commons at Work*. 8th ed. Harmondsworth, Middlesex : Penguin, 1971.