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**THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF MALAYSIA -
ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

by

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Organisée avec le soutien de l'ACCT (Agence de Coopération culturelle et technique), l'ACDI (Agence canadienne de Développement international), la BIEF (Banque internationale d'Information sur les Etats francophones), le CRDI (Centre de Recherches pour le Développement international), le Conseil canadien des Archives avec les Archives nationales du Canada et les Archives nationales du Québec, l'UNESCO (Organisation des Nations unies pour l'Education la Science et la Culture) et le CIA (Conseil international des Archives).

Organised with the support of ACCT (Agence de Coopération culturelle et technique), ACDI (Canadian International Development Agency), BIEF (Banque internationale d'Information sur les Etats francophones), IDRC (International Development Research Centre), the Canadian Council on Archives with the National Archives of Canada and National Archives of Quebec, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and ICA (International Council on Archives).

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**ZAKIAH HANUM NOR
DIRECTOR GENERAL, NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF MALAYSIA**

"The staff members of the Public Records Office (the old name of the Malaysian National Archives) have maintained a high standard of efficiency and will provide a stallwert framework for the expanding service." These were the words of the late Haji A. Mubin Sheppard (Tan Sri), Keeper of Public Records, and the first Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia. These words, expressed on the first day of October 1962 continues to have relevance to this very day. The National Archives has been and continues to be an expanding service from the day it was established on 1st. December 1957. It started off with just three staff members. Today, the number has increased to 429, after 37 years of its existence. This number will continue to increase every year as more programmes and projects are entrusted to the National Archives, and as the service becomes increasingly recognized by the nation.

The conservation of the nation's public records was under consideration by the government well before the Second World War (1941-45) but no action was taken until 1957 when Mr. H.N. Blakiston of the Public Record Office, London was assigned to undertake a survey to determine the state of the nation's archives. He

completed his mission in two months. The Public Records Office was born six months later on the first day of December, 1957.

From the beginning of its existence the National Archives was not an organization that was passive in its style of work, merely waiting for the flow of archival materials to arrive for custody. It has always been an agency ready to undertake assignments including surveys of record accumulation, record categories, machine readable records, storage conditions etc. to determine the record creation and record keeping status at all levels of government administration.

The National Archives until to-day is somewhat handicapped by the fact that training facilities in archives and records management are not available in the country. For archivists to become professionally qualified they need to be sent abroad to places like United Kingdom, India, Australia, United States, Italy and Canada. Currently there are 66 qualified archivists with Diploma in Archives Administration and 15 with a Master's Degree in Archives Management. Staff members at other levels have also been sent abroad for short courses in records management, conservation, bookbinding etc.

The National Archives building which was built with expert advice from Michael Duchein of the National Archives of France is on a 5 acre site occupying a built-up area of more than 120,000 sq. ft. It has all the facilities of an archives building with a search room capable of handling some 300 researchers, a

repository which could store more than 20 km. of records, a conservation laboratory, exhibition areas, an auditorium etc. It also has a sculptured garden and plaza for use of visitors and staff. The building which is almost 12 years old now is undergoing its second phase of development which focuses on the repository area. An additional land of 15 acres adjacent to the present site was recently given to the National Archives.

A purpose-built records centre building for the National Archives was built in 1963 to process more than 16,800 linear feet of records from government departments and agencies. In addition there are also rented space areas in Kuala Lumpur providing the much-needed storage space to house the large number of records received from departments. At the state-level where there are 8 branch offices serving as the National Archives in miniature, space always becomes a problem after 4-5 years of existence. Work on the first purpose-built Archives branch is underway in Kedah, a state in the north, occupying a built-up area of about 50,000 sq. ft. Plans are also being executed for the construction of an intermediate repository, or limbo, of about 40,000 sq. ft. just outside Kuala Lumpur to house semi-current records of the federal government.

Two years after its existence the National Archives started planning records management programmes focusing largely on the orderly disposal of non-current records. Circulars prohibiting the destruction of records and on proper management of records were issued from 1961, well before the existence of the Archives Act which was

passed in 1966. More and more circulars were issued over the years besides the provision of other manuals on proper record-keeping in public service. File covers of all government departments contain specific directives on the proper management of records based on the Archives Act, circulars, regulations etc.

Government departments are required to appoint departmental record officers and clerks to be responsible for records management in the respective agencies. And these are trained by the National Archives which has a regular training programme on records management, conservation, archives administration, reprography and bookbinding. To date 2,200 courses were held benefitting government staff members. Courses are also held to benefit foreign trainees from countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Several newly established archives in those regions have been assisted under the Malaysian Technical Assistance Programme enabling trainees to be brought over for several weeks of training, attachment and practical programmes.

The link existing between the Archives and government agencies has enabled the transfer of records to be systematically done, particularly of those over 20 years as required under the law. A number of agencies have established disposal schedules giving them a systematic method of handling records. A programme started in 1990 called URUS (manage records for safekeeping) has enabled the Archives to establish a close rapport with several agencies in the country. The aim of URUS is to enable the Archives and the agency to

work together through providing an equal number of workers to undertake a programme of selection, disposal and transfer of records within a period of 3-4 weeks. Millions of records have been handled under the programme giving the agencies help in space-saving.

The Conservation and Reprography Branch which began operations in 1965 has the main objective of preserving and restoring archival and historical materials through various processes of conservation, binding and reprography. The current conservation techniques in use include leaf-casting, traditional repair, tissue repair and lamination. Reprography techniques include microfilming and photography. The Branch is also given the responsibility to undertake research and analysis on the durability of archival materials and control of quality over work done in conservation and microform reproduction. A research laboratory headed by a chemist undertakes various tests on modern techniques used and search for better methods of conservation as a whole. The Conservation and Reprography Branch has been providing training for locals as well as foreigners for almost 30 years now. There are 18 conservators and 17 bookbinders, many of whom have been trained overseas either in New Delhi, London, Tokyo or Rome. Since the last 29 years they have bound more than 200,000 books and repaired more than a million documents. There are 9 photographers working full-time on microfilming and photography of archives valuable to the nation.

One of the regular functions of the National Archives is producing publications containing finding aids, catalogues, guides and special monographs on

popular subjects of history. To date the National Archives has published 190 titles of books including periodicals and non-periodicals some distributed for free and others for sale to the general public. Finding aids such as accessions lists, thematic guides and descriptive lists have been produced for many years and distributed free. Popular publications such as speeches of Prime Ministers, TV series 'Today in History', indexes to records, special publications on Portuguese documents are available for sale. Annual publications issued under the law is the annual report which contains summaries of accessions for the year reported on. The series on the Guide to the Sources of Malaysian History containing information on sources in archives, libraries, museums and other documentary centres is produced in 7 volumes and forms part of the Unesco/ICA project on Guide to Sources of Asian History.

In many developing countries archival set-ups are not a favourite with the general public. They often do not know the role and function of the Archives. Sometimes it is also difficult to get civil servants including key-planners to understand and accept the significant role of the Archives. As a result the Archives are not given proper consideration in their annual budget bids. At the same time, staff strength too does not get upgraded in number on a regular basis.

Looking at such situations prompted the National Archives of Malaysia to initiate action by getting the Archives to reach out to the general public. In a country like Malaysia any activity will not be recognized or remembered if it is not done continuously

and upgraded constantly. There is a tendency for people to forget what is seen, heard or read within just a few days. There is no other way an agency can progress or be understood by the public except undertaking programmes to reach out to everyone including the old and the young.

Programmes that have become core items under archives outreach activities include exhibitions, permanent or temporary, memorial projects, talks, discussion etc. publication programme, TV programmes and others. Programmes with media both electronic and print are important as they serve as reminders of events and happenings within the country.

Memorials are symbol of a society's reverence for ideals and noble aspirations, which may be remembered through an event of great historical and national significance, or personified by a great leader or hero who is greatly loved and admired by the people. Memorials that are raised in their name emphasise the direction that society intends to take, and the values that it intends to preserve, protect and propagate as the distinctive and unique inheritance of a people. For this reason, Memorials may even be raised in commemoration of anything that may be of enduring aesthetic or cultural value. In Malaysia, the establishment and administration of Memorials has been given to the National Archives since the past two decades, which began with the Tun Abdul Razak Memorial for Malaysia's second Prime Minister. Since then there have been various other Memorials including the Proclamation of Independence Memorial that is located by

the seaside of the ancient city of Malacca and the Memorial of the first Prime Minister which was officiated in November 1994. There are two separate Memorials to the name of P. Ramlee, an artiste of versatile talents. These Memorials have originally been the homes and birth place of P. Ramlee. The house in Kedah where Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (current Prime Minister) was born has also been elevated to the status of a Memorial.

History Narrating Sessions which involve documentation activities are popular in bringing audience to the National Archives. These sessions which are actually oral history sessions involve interviewees and the interviewers which include live audience. The programme which was started in 1984 has been of much help in bringing together people involved in a particular event of history to complement information already available but somewhat sketchy in content. History narration involving more than one narrator helps to confirm facts and data brought up to highlight an event in the nation's history.

These extension programmes have the net result of imbuing our young citizens with a great sense of pride in their nation. The programmes are also well received by the larger public. They have resulted in greater publicity for the National Archives, attracting an increased number of both local and foreign visitors. In 1993 alone, there were almost one million visitors to the National Archives (including the various Memorials). This is indeed an eloquent demonstration of the inherent potentiality of the Archives and its Memorials as a tourist attraction of profound importance.

In many Archives of the world fresh approaches are being adopted in disseminating archival materials to society. Information technology is being used in many places to enable the public to have speedier access to information. In Malaysia the trend now is to upgrade ways to acquire, compile, preserve and disseminate records for use. A close rapport has to be established with the Archives' clients to enable the role of the National Archives to have the impact desired. It should be the role of the National Archives to acquaint itself with government policies and interpret them suitably for the benefit of the agency. Being innovative in approaches towards policies and taking proactive action in style of work is what is expected of the public service in Malaysia. In line with the paradigm shift that is being repeatedly reminded of the Malaysian public service, the National Archives indeed has a tremendous role to play to meet the challenges marking the end of this millennium and enhancing the next.

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