



## **Propaganda of the Bintang Timur Newspaper during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, 1963-1965**

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### **Abstract**

*This research aims to review the propaganda activities of the newspaper Bintang Timur, published by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation between 1963 and 1965. The study seeks to examine the extent to which the PKI utilized Bintang Timur as a tool to disseminate propaganda in order to gain public support for the "Crush Malaysia" movement. Through articles and cartoons, the propaganda successfully instilled hatred among the Indonesian people towards Malaysian leaders and citizens. This study explores the PKI's role in the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963-1965), employing historical methodology with a focus on the PKI's political, social, and military involvement. Data were collected through library research, with a primary emphasis on newspapers published by the PKI. In addition to references obtained from the National Library of Indonesia, this research was supplemented by field studies, including interviews and observations conducted by the author. The findings indicate that the propaganda disseminated by the Indonesian Communist Party, through both written content and the use of cartoons, effectively influenced the Indonesian public to support President Sukarno's confrontation policy against Malaysia. This public support subsequently translated into backing for the "Crush Malaysia" campaign led by President Sukarno.*

*Keywords: Propaganda, Newspaper, Indonesian Communist Party, Malaysia-Indonesia Confrontation*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau kegiatan propaganda surat kabar Bintang Timur, yang diterbitkan oleh Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI), selama Konfrontasi Indonesia-Malaysia antara tahun 1963 hingga 1965. Tujuan dari studi ini adalah untuk mengkaji sejauh mana PKI memanfaatkan Bintang Timur sebagai alat untuk menyebarkan propaganda guna mendapatkan dukungan publik terhadap gerakan Ganyang Malaysia. Propaganda tersebut, melalui artikel dan karikatur, berhasil menanamkan kebencian di kalangan rakyat Indonesia terhadap pemimpin dan warga negara Malaysia. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran PKI dalam Konfrontasi Indonesia-Malaysia (1963-1965), menggunakan metodologi sejarah yang fokus pada

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keterlibatan politik, sosial, dan militer PKI. Data dikumpulkan melalui penelitian pustaka, dengan fokus utama pada surat kabar yang diterbitkan oleh PKI. Selain referensi yang diperoleh dari Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia, penelitian ini juga dilengkapi dengan studi lapangan seperti wawancara dan observasi yang dilakukan oleh penulis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa propaganda yang disebarkan oleh Partai Komunis Indonesia, baik melalui konten tulisan maupun penggunaan karikatur, berhasil mempengaruhi publik Indonesia untuk mendukung kebijakan konfrontasi Presiden Sukarno terhadap Malaysia. Dukungan publik ini kemudian diterjemahkan menjadi dukungan untuk kampanye Ganyang Malaysia yang digerakkan oleh Presiden Sukarno

Kata kunci: Propaganda, Surat Kabar, Partai Komunis Indonesia, Konfrontasi Indonesia-Malaysia

### الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الأنشطة الدعائية لجريدة بينتانج تيمور التي كان ينشرها الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي خلال المواجهة بين إندونيسيا وماليزيا بين عامي 1963 و1965. والغرض من هذا البحث هو دراسة مدى استخدام الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي لصحيفة بينتانج تيمور كأداة لنشر الدعاية لكسب التأييد الشعبي لحركة غانيانج ماليزيا. ونجحت الدعاية، من خلال المقالات والرسوم الكاريكاتورية، في غرس الكراهية بين الإندونيسيين تجاه القادة والمواطنين الماليزيين. يستكشف هذا البحث دور الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي في المواجهة بين إندونيسيا وماليزيا (1963-1965)، باستخدام منهجية تاريخية تركز على مشاركة دور الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي السياسية والاجتماعية والعسكرية. وقد جُمعت البيانات من خلال البحث المكتبي، مع التركيز بشكل أساسي على الصحف التي نشرها دور الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي. وبالإضافة إلى المراجع التي تم الحصول عليها من المكتبة الوطنية لجمهورية إندونيسيا، استُكمل هذا البحث أيضًا بدراسات ميدانية مثل المقابلة والملاحظة التي أجراها الباحث. وتظهر النتائج أن الدعاية التي نشرها الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي، سواء من خلال المحتوى المكتوب أو استخدام الرسوم الكاريكاتورية، نجحت في التأثير على الجمهور الإندونيسي لدعم سياسة المواجهة التي اتبعتها الرئيس سوكارنو تجاه ماليزيا. ثم تُرجم هذا التأييد الشعبي إلى دعم لحملة الرئيس سوكارنو ضد ماليزيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدعاية، الصحف، الحزب الشيوعي الإندونيسي، المواجهة بين إندونيسيا وماليزيا

### Introduction

President Sukarno implemented major changes as soon as he took over the administration of the country around 1959. The most significant change was that the President held absolute power in determining both domestic and foreign political policies. To strengthen his authority, President Sukarno issued a decree known as the 5 July 1959 Presidential Decree. The decree was an immediate action to restore the political turmoil faced previously.

Interestingly, when offering the implementation of Guided Democracy, Sukarno proposed a concept to strengthen the unity of the people through the NASAKOM (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism) spirit. Sukarno utilized the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) to gain popular support, especially to back the Indonesian revolution. This new phase of the Indonesian revolution was a grand mission for Sukarno to rebuild Indonesia's political, economic, and social strength without foreign interference, particularly from Western powers. Sukarno believed that Indonesia needed a comprehensive revolution to rebuild the nation that had long been oppressed by Western colonial powers.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Guided Democracy period, Sukarno was seen as leaning more towards the PKI compared to the Indonesian National Party (PNI), whose members were nationalists, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Masyumi, which represented religious groups. Sukarno was more attracted to the PKI because it embodied a revolutionary spirit compared to the others. He needed support from radical groups to implement

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin B Weinstein, *Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Dilemma of Dependence: From Sukarno to Soeharto* (Equinox Publishing, 2007), 56.

his confrontation policy in the political conflict over reclaiming West Irian from the Dutch, followed by the confrontation with Malaysia. The politics of reclaiming West Irian and the confrontation with Malaysia put Indonesia in a very desperate situation, so Sukarno leveraged the PKI to secure arms support,<sup>2</sup> both from the Soviet Union in dealing with the Dutch and from the People's Republic of China to confront Malaysia.

Sukarno showed a deep interest in the *Bintang Timur* newspaper as a propaganda tool during the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation. Through *Bintang Timur*, he was able to spread a narrative that supported the confrontation policy and opposed the formation of Malaysia. The newspaper became a primary channel for influencing public opinion in Indonesia, spreading hatred towards Malaysia, and strengthening nationalist sentiments. Sukarno utilized the media as an instrument to reinforce his political struggle, with the aim of rallying public support for his aggressive foreign policy and solidifying his government's position.<sup>3</sup>

Sukarno placed high expectations on newspapers to publish his speeches as main articles, providing essential information to the public. According to Roslan Abdulgani, newspapers could serve as revolutionary tools and also convince the people. Newspapers were responsible for rallying and convincing the people to continue the unfinished revolution.<sup>4</sup> Sukarno set a condition that all media practitioners, particularly newspapers, must act as effective revolutionary tools for the people. To quote Sukarno: "I want objective news coverage, but it must clearly side with our revolution and attack the enemies of the revolution".<sup>5</sup>

Given Sukarno's leadership style, which sought to place himself and his ideas at the forefront of public admiration, newspapers published by the PKI held a special place in Sukarno's heart. As a result, *Harian Rakyat*, *Bintang Timur*, and *Warta Bhakti*, all owned by the PKI, became highly active in disseminating the government's political policies.<sup>6</sup> Over time, the PKI leveraged newspapers, whether published or pro-communist ones, to express their support for Sukarno. At the same time, they took the opportunity to criticize their political opponents. On the other hand, Sukarno increasingly favored the PKI due to the party's vast influence and political orientation, which could guarantee his dominance over other political groups.

In May 1965, Sukarno's administration issued a new regulation on newspaper distribution. In line with the implementation of NASAKOM politics, newspapers were required to align with the prevailing socio-political forces. As such, their activities and actions had to conform to state policies. Any newspaper that did not align with the state ideology or failed to demonstrate revolutionary spirit was ordered to cease operations and had its publication banned. This order greatly benefited PKI newspapers. The PKI dominated nearly the entire publishing and distribution of newspapers at that time.<sup>7</sup> Newspapers became highly effective propaganda tools to garner public support. Moreover, it cannot be denied that newspapers also served as propaganda tools to cover up the government's weaknesses and shortcomings.

The Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963-1966) has been studied from multiple perspectives, with key works shedding light on its political, military, and ideological dimensions. O. R. Nitisastro's<sup>8</sup> delves into Indonesia's foreign policy under Sukarno, focusing on his use of the PKI and military resources against Malaysia. R. E. Elson's (1991)<sup>9</sup> provides a detailed account of the military and diplomatic aspects, highlighting Cold War dynamics. Liddle and Mujani's<sup>10</sup> explores Sukarno's nationalist rhetoric and media strategies, while Milne and Smith's<sup>11</sup> offers a Malaysian perspective on the conflict. Together, these works provide a

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<sup>2</sup> Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 80-82.

<sup>3</sup> R. Karl, *The Indonesian Army: A Political History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 41-43.

<sup>4</sup> Andi Suwarta, "Dinamika Kehidupan Pers Di Indonesia Pada Tahun 1950-1965: Antara Kebebasan Dan Tanggung Jawab Nasional," *Sosiohumanika* 1, no. 2 (2008): 63-64.

<sup>5</sup> Edward C Smith, *Pembredelan Pers Di Indonesia, 1949-1965* (Jakarta: Pustaka Grafiti Press, 1986), 201-202.

<sup>6</sup> Triubana Said, *Sejarah Pers Nasional Dan Pembangunan Pers Pancasila*, ed. Jakarta: Haji Masagung, 1988, 135-137.

<sup>7</sup> T Sjahril, *Garis Besar Perkembangan Pers Indonesia* (Jakarta: Syarikat Penerbitan Suratkhbar, 1971), 130.

<sup>8</sup> O. R. Nitisastro, *The Indonesian Confrontation: A Political and Economic Analysis* (Stanford University Press, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> R. E. Elson, *Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation: A Political and Military History* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> R. W. Liddle and S. Mujani, *Sukarno and the Indonesian Revolution* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> R. W. Milne and D. C. R. S. Smith, *The Making of Malaysia* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).

comprehensive understanding of the confrontation's complexities and its lasting impact on Southeast Asian geopolitics.

The role of newspapers in Indonesia during the revolution and the confrontation period (1963-1966) has not been widely studied. However, several key works offer valuable insights for research. The first is *Kesaksian Perdjoengan Pena*<sup>12</sup> which explores how the idealism of writers influenced newspaper content, with authors using their idealism to support the government and serve as tools of social control. Another important work is *Sejarah dan Perkembangan Pers di Indonesia (1997)*,<sup>13</sup> which traces the history and development of the Indonesian press, emphasizing its role in advocating for national rights and improving people's welfare. *The Press and Government Relations (2001)*<sup>14</sup> discusses the relationship between newspapers and government, comparing the press's role in various political systems, although it does not focus specifically on a particular era. Lastly, *The Role of Newspapers in Social Change*<sup>15</sup> examines the press's role in societal transformation, particularly during the Indonesian independence revolution, and provides a foundation for researching the role of newspapers during the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation. Together, these books lay the groundwork for understanding the press's influence during this critical period in Indonesian history.

The relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia has unique characteristics. Both countries share many similarities that could serve as a bond to strengthen the relationship between their peoples. As sovereign nations, both will prioritize the interests of their own people when building relationships, even if it sometimes requires sacrificing the brotherhood between them. This competition can sometimes result in conflicts, which have frequently strained relations between the two nations until today. The tension is often met with emotional reactions from some segments of Indonesian society, reviving slogans from the Old Order era, such as *Crush Malaysia* or *"Ganyang Malaysia."*<sup>16</sup>

Thus, it is fascinating to study in more depth why the confrontation between 1963 and 1965 arose, especially through the role of mass media. One compelling aspect is the Indonesian Communist Party's (PKI) determination to spread propaganda that fueled Indonesian anger against Malaysians. The mass media, especially newspapers, became the primary tool used by Indonesia to attack Malaysia in the lead-up to and during the confrontation.

The PKI seized this opportunity to gain the public's support and sympathy for their political agenda. *Harian Rakjat* and *Bintang Timur* became the PKI's main tools and weapons to garner public backing. The PKI grew very close to Sukarno and became a strong supporter of the revolutionary policy to "Crush Malaysia." The Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation became crucial to Indonesia's independence, and the PKI used *Harian Rakjat* and *Bintang Timur* to continue their propaganda campaign, ensuring that the public remained sympathetic and supportive of their struggle.

The questions that need to be answered based on these issues are as follows: a. What were the propagandas of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, 1963-1965? b. How did the PKI use the newspaper *Bintang Timur* as a tool of propaganda during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, 1963-1965? c. How effective was *Bintang Timur* as a propaganda tool during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, 1963-1965?

## Method

This study is a historical investigation examining the propaganda of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation from 1963 to 1965. Data collection, such as newspapers and government documents related to the confrontation, was conducted at the National Library of the Republic

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<sup>12</sup> P Samuel, *Kesaksian Perdjoengan Pers* (Jakarta: Yayasan Sumber Agung, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Ismail Taufik, *Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Pers Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Triyinc, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> F. Rachmadi, *Perbandingan Sistem Pers, Analisis Deskriptif Sistem Pers Di Berbagai Negara* (Jakarta: Yayasan Sumber Agung, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Andi Suwirta, *Pers, Revolusi Dan Demokratisasi: Kehidupan Pers Di Jawa Masa Awal Revolusi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Linda Sunarti, "Politik Luar Negeri Malaysia Terhadap Indonesia, 1957-1976: Dari Konfrontasi Menuju Kerjasama," *SUSURGALUR* 2, no. 1 (2014): 65-80.

of Indonesia in Jakarta. The author examined newspapers published in Jakarta from 1963 to 1965, with a primary focus on publications by the Indonesian Communist Party, such as *Harian Rakjat* and *Bintang Timur*. In addition, important books published by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1963 were also studied. These books contain materials related to "The Malaysia Issue," volumes I, II, and III, published in 1964. The author also conducted research at the Library of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta to review official Indonesian government documents concerning the Confrontation. In addition to library research, interviews will be conducted to complement the study. This method is used to gain further explanation regarding specific reports or events. The author will interview key figures who were either directly or indirectly involved in the events.

## Discussion

### 1. Bintang Timur Newspaper and PKI's Propaganda Against Malaysia

The newspaper of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), such as *Bintang Timur*, played a key role in spreading propaganda during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963–1965). This propaganda aimed to mobilize support for the anti-Malaysia and anti-Western agenda while strengthening communist ideology in Indonesia. Several main themes shaped the pattern of this propaganda.

First, PKI portrayed the establishment of Malaysia as a "neocolonial project" orchestrated by Western powers, especially the British. Malaysia was accused of being a "puppet" of the West, used to weaken the nationalism movement in Southeast Asia and hinder the spread of communism. This propaganda focused on the narrative that Malaysia was a threat to Indonesia's sovereignty and regional revolutionary goals.

Second, the Malaysian leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman, became the target of propaganda attacks, labeled a traitor to the Malay people and a tool of Western imperialism. Cartoons and articles in PKI newspapers depicted Tunku as a leader who depended on foreign protection to maintain his political position. He was portrayed as an "imperialist puppet" or "weak leader."

Third, PKI also incited hatred against Western powers, particularly the British and the United States, who were seen as protectors of Malaysia. The British were depicted as colonizers unwilling to relinquish their influence in Southeast Asia, while the United States was accused of supporting Malaysia as part of its Cold War strategy to block the spread of communism.

Furthermore, PKI propaganda emphasized the narrative of revolution and patriotism, urging the Indonesian people to fully support President Soekarno's confrontation policies. PKI used this narrative to stir nationalistic spirit and called on Indonesians to support the struggle against Malaysia, which was portrayed as a Western puppet state.

PKI's propaganda also used strong visuals, such as cartoons and posters, depicting Malaysian and Western leaders as cruel colonizers. The rhetoric used was emotionally charged, with terms like "enemies of the people," "traitors of Asia," and "imperialist puppets."

Analysis of these attack patterns shows that the attacks on Tunku Abdul Rahman aimed to create a negative image of the Malaysian leader, while the attacks on the British and the United States portrayed them as threats to the independence of Southeast Asian nations and the main instigators of the conflict. This aligned with PKI's anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideology.

In conclusion, the propaganda patterns employed by PKI during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation reflect a systematic approach to building ideological and political support. Through the use of visual elements, strong rhetoric, and anti-Western narratives, PKI succeeded in portraying Malaysia as Indonesia's primary enemy. This study of PKI propaganda can be further analyzed using communication theories, such as the agenda-setting theory or the spiral of silence theory, to understand its effectiveness in the historical context.

The Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation became more heated as newspapers played a significant role in spreading provocative news. The PKI took on a substantial role in fully controlling newspaper publication and distribution in Indonesia.<sup>17</sup> As discussed earlier, the PKI successfully influenced Sukarno to revoke all

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<sup>17</sup> S. Soergiarso, *Siapa Menabur Angin Akan Menuai Badai: G30S-PKI Dan Peran Sukarno* (Jakarta: Sri Murni, 1988), 171–177.

publishing rights for newspapers that exhibited anti-revolutionary sentiments and did not support Sukarno. Due to the difficulty in obtaining publishing rights, only PKI-owned newspapers and those supporting the PKI were permitted to be published. Sukarno placed great trust in the PKI to report and disseminate news that could garner as much public support as possible. Support from various layers of society was crucial to ensuring the continuity of Sukarno's political policies.

The Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation was a major mission for Sukarno. In addition to garnering significant public support, this conflict was instrumental for Sukarno in attracting attention both domestically and internationally. The PKI saw this opportunity as a chance to demonstrate loyalty to Sukarno and eliminate their political opponents. The PKI capitalized on this substantial opportunity, having the advantage of a broad network of followers from various social strata. This advantage of having a network of newspaper publications became a strength for the PKI. They made the most of the space and opportunities to spread propaganda. The monopoly on news dissemination, coupled with their expertise in utilizing caricatures, was highly effective in gaining public support.

Newspapers became a crucial platform for the PKI to convey information in the form of news reports and to broadcast special speeches by President Sukarno and other senior leaders, such as Dr. Subandrio and high-ranking PKI leaders. The Bintang Timur newspaper played a significant role in executing the propaganda of "crushing Malaysia." In fact, the propaganda carried out by this newspaper heightened tensions between Indonesia and Malaysia from the very beginning of the conflict announced by Sukarno.<sup>18</sup>

In the early stages, Bintang Timur focused on news that clarified the ongoing situation. The news published reflected Indonesia's attitude and stance towards the plan for the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia. In line with the role of newspapers as information conduits for the public, Bintang Timur sought to present an objective stance in delivering government information to explain the true situation to the people. As the 1960s progressed, the political situation in Indonesia was not smooth. Indonesia was facing a challenging situation in restoring its troubled domestic economy. In addition, Indonesia was also grappling with problems, especially in reshaping its foreign relations policy. Bintang Timur became a propaganda tool to draw public attention and support for President Sukarno's new policies led by him. Furthermore, Bintang Timur was utilized to divert the public's attention from domestic uncertainties to international issues.

When the issue of forming the Federation of Malaysia surfaced, public attention could be diverted from domestic issues. Bintang Timur featured news related to Malaysian issues as the main highlight on the front pages of their newspapers. Every news item about Malaysia was placed on the front page and displayed as a major headline to attract public attention. The PKI used Bintang Timur effectively to create an atmosphere that heated the ongoing conflict. Speeches from top national leaders condemning Malaysia were broadcast to incite hatred and anger among the people towards the efforts to establish Malaysia.

To strengthen public support, Bintang Timur continued to publish news about the need for Indonesian leaders and the people to be vigilant against the threats facing the Republic of Indonesia. Concerns based on the dangers that Indonesia would face were also raised for the Philippines, given that both countries shared borders with Malaysia. News reports cited that Malaysia would bring in foreign troops to help secure the national borders against threats and protests from Indonesia and the Philippines. To prevent complications in Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei, the British had submitted requests to bring in troops from India and SEATO countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada to send aid forces to secure the borders in Kalimantan.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to publishing reports in the form of articles and writings, Bintang Timur also utilized propaganda through caricatures. Caricatures served as an effective discourse to instill hatred among the people, particularly directed at Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.<sup>20</sup> The caricatures published portrayed

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<sup>18</sup> BT, "Kesabaran Indonesia Ada Batasnja: Politik Konfrontasi Terpaksa Terhadap Malaysia," *Bintang Timur*, January 19, 1963.

<sup>19</sup> BT, "Pemerintah Inggeris Tak Mau Mengerti," *Bintang Timur*, February 1, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> R. S. Anuar, *Sukarno, Tentera, PKI: Segitiga Kekuasaan Sebelum Prahara Politik 1961-1965* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2007), 213-260.

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj in various negative dimensions, including labeling him as "the British Dog".<sup>21</sup>



Figure 1: Tunku Abdul Rahman, a British puppet.<sup>22</sup>

As April progressed into May 1963, news spread about meetings between the highest leaders of Indonesia, Malaya, and the Philippines. Reports mentioned a meeting of Foreign Ministers in Manila to seek solutions to issues related to Malaysia. Despite efforts to find common ground, *Bintang Timur* continued to publish reports condemning Malaya. Criticism and condemnation were particularly directed at Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj was criticized for deliberately showing a hostile attitude toward Indonesia.<sup>23</sup> *Bintang Timur* consistently published reports that tarnished Malaya's image, including accusations that Malayan leaders deliberately delayed the meeting in Manila to avoid discussing the Malaysia issue.<sup>24</sup>

The newspaper's focus increasingly shifted towards the issue of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. Additionally, the newspaper frequently quoted President Sukarno's speeches, which included warnings to groups opposing the Indonesian revolution.<sup>25</sup> Sukarno's message through his speech received prominent placement in the newspaper. The essence of the speech called for all citizens to take responsibility to defend the country, which was about to face a significant enemy. Sukarno urged the people to fully support the ongoing revolution.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 2: Warning to the anti-revolutionaries.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> BT, "Tengku Menjadi Anjing British," *Bintang Timur*, March 23, 1963.

<sup>22</sup> BT, "Tengku Boneka British," *Bintang Timur*, March 23, 1964.

<sup>23</sup> BT, "Tengku Mulai Lagi Dengan Fitnah Dan Tuduhan," *Bintang Timur*, April 1, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> BT, "Malaya Tidak Suka Ada Pembicaraan Malaysia," *Bintang Timur*, April 17, 1963.

<sup>25</sup> BT, "Amanat Presiden Pada Hari Kepolisian," *Bintang Timur*, July 3, 1963.

<sup>26</sup> According to Sukarno, a revolution will not progress on its own without the people participating and fully taking part. The people and the nation of Indonesia must have the courage to take responsibility for becoming a strong nation. See *Bintang Timur*, July 5-6, 1963.

<sup>27</sup> BT, "Teror Rasialis Robek2 Bendera Merah Putih!," *Bintang Timur*, June 7, 1963.

The turmoil in the Borneo archipelago, particularly in North Kalimantan, also received special coverage in the newspaper. This coverage highlighted Brunei's refusal to join Malaysia.<sup>28</sup> The PKI certainly spread propaganda to create a heated atmosphere that could influence the populace. Bintang Timur employed strategies such as publishing a message from President Sukarno, commanding the entire nation to unite in defending the fate of their brothers in Kalimantan. Sukarno's message became a headline in the newspaper with the phrase "Our Honorable Duty to Oppose Malaysia".<sup>29</sup> The following day, the newspaper featured a full report on President Sukarno's warning regarding preparations to confront Malaysia.<sup>30</sup>

President Sukarno called upon the Indonesian people to be ready to carry out a confrontation against Malaysia. Bintang Timur served as a platform to report on the directives given to the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia to prepare for confrontation. The news published by Bintang Timur indicated that the Indonesian people were ready to take on the responsibility to heed President Sukarno's call to crush Malaysia. The readiness of the Indonesian people was reinforced by reports stating that nearly 10 million Indonesian youths were prepared to respond to Sukarno's call for confrontation against Malaysia. Furthermore, to create a greater impact in garnering the sympathy of the people, news about the people's resistance in North Kalimantan against Malaysia and Tunku Abdul Rahman continued to be the main focus.



Figure 3: "Caricature of the Long-Tongued One"<sup>31</sup>

The PKI, through Bintang Timur, continued to escalate the conflict by publishing news that affected the public. The news about Indonesia's readiness to take decisive action by severing diplomatic relations with Malaya received a significant reaction. This action was a response to Tunku Abdul Rahman's stubbornness, which incited the anger of both Indonesian leaders and the people.



Figure 4: The Arrogance of Tunku Abdul Rahman.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> BT, "Hasil Kasak-Kusuk London," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>29</sup> BT, "Presiden Komandokan Seluruh Rakyat Bersatupadu," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>30</sup> BT, "Presiden Perintahkan Angkatan Bersenjata Laksanakan Konfrontasi," *Bintang Timur*, July 12, 1963.

<sup>31</sup> BT, "Sipanjang Lidah," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>32</sup> BT, "Tengku Harimau," *Bintang Timur*, July 13, 1963.

A caricature of a tiger with the face of Tunku Abdul Rahman was published to depict Tunku's arrogance, aiming to stir hatred among the public. According to *Bintang Timur*, Tunku's attitude led to nearly 60% of Malay youth expressing their willingness to take up arms in support of anti-Malaysia fighters.<sup>33</sup> This show of support from the youth was immediately responded to by President Sukarno, and a large headline appeared in *Bintang Timur* on July 15, 1963, titled "President's Message to the People's Command".<sup>34</sup>



Figure 5: Trikora Crushing Malaysia.<sup>35</sup>

*Bintang Timur* published a caricature of Trikora (Tri Komando Rakyat) "crushing Malaysia" to illustrate Indonesia's determination in facing the threat from Malaysia. Additionally, the Indonesian Navy (ALRI) and the Indonesian Air Force (AURI) were also reported to be ready for a joint operation to launch an attack on Malaya if necessary. President Sukarno, as reported by *Bintang Timur* on July 29, 1963, reaffirmed that 100 million Indonesians and the people of the New Emerging Forces fully supported the confrontation against Malaysia.<sup>36</sup>

The call and campaign to crush Malaysia were increasingly spread through newspapers. The PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) fully supported President Sukarno in launching a political confrontation against Malaysia. Propaganda, both in the form of writings and caricatures, especially through *Bintang Timur*, had a profound impact on the public. The formation of the Federation of Malaysia was promoted as a significant threat to the nation and people of Indonesia.<sup>37</sup> In addition, to strengthen the public's confidence, newspapers also reported on the support President Sukarno received from the People's Representative Council of Mutual Cooperation (DPRGR). The mandate given by DPRGR was full support for President Sukarno to launch a multi-sector confrontation policy against Malaysia.

The PKI continued to ramp up efforts to divert public attention to support the confrontation policy against Malaysia. Additionally, the PKI sought to prove British involvement in the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. Britain was also accused of being behind the crippling of the people's liberation movement in North Kalimantan.<sup>38</sup> *Bintang Timur* also reported on British military preparations, allegedly establishing a military base on the Kalimantan border in preparation for the official declaration of Malaysia. The official declaration was expected on 31 August 1963. This news continued to fuel newspaper criticisms. The decision was deemed to violate the agreement reached at the Maphilindo leaders' meeting in Manila.

The attacks utilizing newspapers to tarnish Malaysia's image were increasingly rampant. Reports spread that the Federation of Malaya's cabinet had decided to proceed with the declaration of Malaysia on 31

<sup>33</sup> BT, "60% Pemuda Melayu Sanggup Panggul Senjata Untuk Bantu Pejuang Anti-Malaysia," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>34</sup> BT, "Amanat Presiden Kepada Komando Rakyat," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> BT, "Semangat Trikora Mengganyang Malaysia," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>36</sup> BT, "Di Mana-Mana Kita Berjuang," *Bintang Timur*, July 29, 1963.

<sup>37</sup> S. Said, *GESTAPU 65: PKI, Aidit, Sukarno Dan Soehato* (Jakarta: Pustaka Mizan, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> BT, "Eksperimen AS Di Vietnam Selatan Mau Dipraktekkan Di KU," *Bintang Timur*, August 3, 1963.

August 1963.<sup>39</sup> News reports also criticized the Federation of Malaya for allegedly conspiring to protect smuggling groups aiming to cripple Indonesia's economy. Furthermore, Tunku Abdul Rahman was repeatedly criticized for betraying the agreements made in Manila and disregarding the voices of protest from the people of North Kalimantan.<sup>40</sup> The public's anger was also expressed through caricatures, reflecting Indonesia's disdain for Malaysian leaders and people. Caricatures mocking Tunku Abdul Rahman were consistently published in newspapers to show the growing hatred of Indonesians toward the country's leader.



Figure 6: Pangeran Patung.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, Sukarno needed full support from all groups to ensure that his policy of confrontation succeeded in achieving its goals. He placed great trust in the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) to act as the backbone, especially for revolutionary-minded individuals. The PKI responded to this trust by using newspapers as a propaganda medium to convince the people to support Sukarno's confrontation policy. The *Bintang Timur* newspaper was effectively utilized by the PKI to carry out this mission. *Bintang Timur* became a driving force in reporting the developments throughout the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation campaign. Daily reports were aimed at denigrating Malaysia. Furthermore, the PKI aimed to instill hatred among the Indonesian people towards Malaysia.

It became a significant responsibility for President Sukarno to raise awareness that the Indonesian nation was facing a major external enemy. Approaching the celebration of Indonesia's 18th Independence Day on August 17, 1963, Sukarno delivered a speech that aimed to ignite the spirit of struggle among the people. He called on the entire Indonesian population to unite in defense of the Indonesian revolution.<sup>42</sup> Using the theme "Genta Suara Revolusi Indonesia" ("The Chime of the Indonesian Revolution"), Sukarno sought to awaken the people to support the revolutionary political policies he was championing.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the revolutionary politics promoted by Sukarno provided ample space for the PKI to join him in the struggle. Furthermore, Sukarno's speech was widely disseminated by the PKI to influence the public to support a cause aligned with the PKI's ideological goals.

Sukarno's speeches often received special coverage in newspapers. These speeches attracted the attention of the public, particularly the youth, who responded to his revolutionary calls. Sukarno frequently reminded the people through his speeches that the Indonesian revolution must continue. One crucial step for the survival of the Indonesian revolution was the successful implementation of a confrontation policy against Malaysia. Sukarno's call was well received by radical groups such as Pemuda Rakyat and labor and peasant organizations. Support was demonstrated through anti-Malaysia demonstrations led by Pemuda Rakyat. The

<sup>39</sup> BT, "Kabinet Malaya Putuskan 31/8 Bentuk Malaysia," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>40</sup> BT, "Ada Tanda-Tanda Tungku Ingkari Hasil-Hasil KTT," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>41</sup> BT, "Menjelang Pangeran Patung 31 Agustus," *Bintang Timur*, August 9, 1963.

<sup>42</sup> BT, "Pidato Presiden/PTR Bung Karno - Proklamasi RI Ke-18," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>43</sup> Sukarno, *Dibawah Bendera Revolusi, Jilid 2* (Jakarta: Media Pressindo, 2019).

influence and support for Sukarno became widespread, especially with the backing of the mass media, particularly newspapers that were fully controlled by the PKI.

The PKI continued to focus on anti-Malaysia rhetoric in newspapers to gain public support for their campaign against Malaysia. Reports of demonstrations in Sarawak, Sabah, and North Kalimantan became the main headlines, especially with the presence of U.N. observer teams in those areas.<sup>44</sup> To further provoke public anger, the PKI continued to exaggerate the issue of British military intervention in North Kalimantan. The British military was also accused of trying to eliminate anti-Malaysia movements, frequently trespassing into the sovereign territory of Indonesia. British soldiers were reported to be chasing rebels seeking refuge in the Kalimantan North-Republic of Indonesia border region.<sup>45</sup> These actions by the British were seen as an attempt to sabotage the peace efforts planned by Southeast Asian leaders through the Maphilindo Pact.<sup>46</sup> Caricatures were also published to further stoke public anger and intensify the people's hatred toward both the British and Malaysia.

The editorial team of the *Bintang Timur* newspaper continuously utilized caricatures as a propaganda tool of the PKI to express hatred and incite the public to support the political confrontation against Malaysia. To further emphasize the fact that the British and Malaysia were attempting to destroy their enemies, a caricature depicting a missile attack was published to instill fear among the people. This caricature was shared to prepare the public to rise up against their foes with the spirit of the Indonesian revolution. Additionally, the people were reminded that the enemy was always ready to destroy Indonesia.



Figure 7: Threat of Missile Attacks.<sup>47</sup>

The use of caricatures in newspapers as an attack is increasingly intensified by the PKI, alongside the publication of news that disparages Malaysia and Britain in the lead-up to the announcement of the Federation of Malaysia. The propaganda to tarnish Malaysia was amplified after September 16, 1963, was announced as the official date for the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia. The *Bintang Timur* newspaper ramped up its propaganda to ignite anger and instill feelings of hatred among the Indonesian people towards Malaysia.

The Federation of Malaysia was interpreted by the PKI as a cunning idea of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj to become a great leader. Tunku employed various tricks and methods, including leveraging British and American support, to realize the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia. The Indonesian people were reminded not to allow leaders like Tunku Abdul Rahman to continue threatening Indonesia's independence and sovereignty. The published caricatures successfully instilled a sense of hatred among the Indonesian people to support Sukarno in implementing a confrontational policy against Malaysia.

<sup>44</sup> BT, "Inggeris Terbangkan Lagi Pasukan Gurka Ke KU," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>45</sup> BT, "Fakta2 Anti-Malaysia Mau Ditiadakan Secara Paksa," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>46</sup> BT, "Inggeris 19 Kali Langgar Wilayah RI," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>47</sup> BT, "Serangan Peluru Atom," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

The newspapers continued to present shocking headlines as rumors circulated that the proclamation of the Federation of Malaysia would take place as soon as the research body appointed by the UN published their findings. President Sukarno criticized the decision announced by U-Thant, the head of the committee appointed by the UN. U-Thant was criticized for being biased during his survey to gain approval from the people of Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. Sukarno was also disappointed with the UN observer team for disregarding the agreement previously reached at the Heads of Government Conference in Manila. This anger led President Sukarno to issue orders for all Indonesian Armed Forces commanders to prepare their troops. All branches of the Indonesian military were directed to be ready to launch a confrontation against Malaysia.<sup>48</sup>

As expected, the Federation of Malaysia was officially proclaimed on September 16, 1963. Indonesia reacted by issuing a strong protest that was widely published in newspapers. Demands were made for the Indonesian government not to recognize Malaysia's sovereignty.<sup>49</sup> To show the seriousness of Indonesia's protest, it was firmly declared that Indonesia would continue its confrontation against Malaysia. Additionally, full support would be given to the movement to expel British and Malayan troops from the land of Kalimantan, led by the North Kalimantan National Army (TNKU).

The wave of anger among the Indonesian people towards the formation of Malaysia continued to be stoked through *Bintang Timur* as part of the PKI propaganda. Various forms of news were published, interspersed with caricatures depicting developments in Malaysia. The role played by the newspaper successfully fueled mass protests not only in the capital Jakarta but also spread widely to other major cities throughout Indonesia. The propaganda, meticulously planned by the PKI, was very effective in garnering support from people across different strata of society. The PKI also incited labor groups in the capital to strike and boycott British-owned companies.<sup>50</sup> Youth and students continued to be utilized by the PKI to launch demonstrations, chanting "Ganyang Malaysia" while parading through the main streets of Jakarta.

Caricatures continued to be a highly effective medium for the PKI, aiming to remind the people about Indonesia's enemies. The public was urged to assist the government in successfully implementing the Ganyang Malaysia policy to ensure that Indonesia's sovereignty could be maintained.

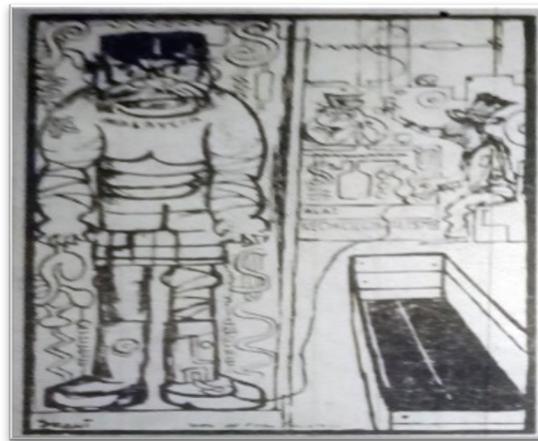


Figure 8: Tunku's Coffin.<sup>51</sup>

The propaganda disseminated by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) newspaper, such as *Bintang Timur*, effectively influenced the people of Indonesia to participate in the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963–1965). Through aggressive propaganda, PKI stirred nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments, encouraging the public to take part in the struggle against Malaysia and the Western powers.

A clear example of this propaganda's influence was the formation of the Dwikora Volunteer Corps in 1964. This corps was established in response to President Soekarno's call to involve the people in the

<sup>48</sup> BT, "Presiden Pemerintahkan Petinggi Siapsiaga Sejauh Mungkin," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>49</sup> BT, "Indonesia Tidak Sahkan Pembentukan Malaysia," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

<sup>50</sup> BT, "Pemuda-Pemuda Ibukota - Putuskan Hubungan Diplomatik Dengan Pemerintah Inggris Dan PTM," *Bintang Timur*, September 16, 1963.

<sup>51</sup> BT, "Keranda Tengku," *Bintang Timur*, 1963.

confrontation. PKI's propaganda played a crucial role by portraying this struggle as a fight for independence and against Western colonialism, particularly British and American imperialism.

More than 100,000 Indonesians are reported to have joined the Dwikora Volunteer Corps, demonstrating the success of the propaganda in garnering public support. This participation was further supported by street demonstrations and public rallies that fueled hatred against Malaysia and the Western powers, with cartoons and articles attacking Malaysian leader Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Overall, PKI's propaganda was effective in mobilizing the Indonesian people to engage directly in the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation, proving the influence of the media in shaping political and military actions of the public.

## Conclusion

This study examines the role of the Indonesian Communist Party's (PKI) newspaper *Bintang Timur* during the Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1963-1965). PKI used newspapers as a key tool for spreading propaganda to ignite revolutionary spirit and rally the Indonesian people behind President Sukarno's policies. Newspapers, especially *Bintang Timur*, became crucial in conveying government messages and fostering nationalism, serving as a powerful propaganda medium for the PKI. The confrontation with Malaysia provided the PKI an opportunity to expand its political influence. By fully supporting Sukarno's approach, the PKI strengthened its relationship with the government, aiding the "Ganyang Malaysia" campaign. This was backed by PKI's wide network of organizations across Indonesia, including workers, youth, and students, alongside its extensive newspaper network. *Bintang Timur* played a significant role in garnering public support through news reports, caricatures, and speeches that urged people to support Sukarno's policies. One of the key successes of this propaganda was the formation of the Dwikora Volunteer Corps, with nearly 24 million people registering by June 1964 to support the "Crush Malaysia" mission. This overwhelming response was a testament to the effectiveness of *Bintang Timur* and PKI's campaign in mobilizing the people. The success of the campaign boosted Sukarno's confidence in Indonesia's ability to pursue the confrontation with Malaysia, demonstrating the impact of PKI's media-driven efforts in advancing national policy and securing popular backing for the revolution.

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