

**Umno realigns media units with eye towards polls**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Jahabar Sadiq**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 13 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak's media strategist, Abdul Jalil Hamid, is expected to head newspaper publisher New Straits Times Press (M) Berhad (NSTP) from Monday as Umno realigns its media units ahead of the next general election expected by early 2012.

The Malaysian Insider also understands that apart from changes in NSTP, another Umno-linked newspaper, The Malay Mail, is in talks to take news from the Malaysiakini web portal in exchange for shares in the tabloid. Malaysiakini, which began in 1999, has been interested in the print media for some time and is suing the Home Affairs Ministry for a publishing permit.

Malaysiakini chief executive Premesh Chandran has since responded to this report, saying that "Mkini is not selling out, neither are we buying a stake in Malay Mail", via microblogging service Twitter.

Both media companies have planned for a relaunch on November 11 with The Malay Mail returning as a paid morning tabloid while the NSTP's flagship New Straits Times will sport a new design. It is learnt that NSTP's current group managing director, Datuk Zainul Ariffin Mohammed Isa, will return to lead the company's e-Media unit that focuses on putting more content online.

It is also understood that the publisher's Umno-linked parent, Media Prima Berhad (MPB), have agreed to a "mutual separation" with NSTP chief executive officer Datuk Anthony @ Firdaus Bujang. His post has been re-designated as chief operating officer and is expected to be filled by Mohammad Azlan Abdullah, the current chief executive officer of MPB's Big Tree Outdoor Sdn Bhd.

"The decision was made at a board meeting yesterday. Both MPB and Anthony have agreed that he can leave but the real surprise is moving Zainul Arifin out effective this Saturday," a source told The Malaysian Insider.

Several other sources confirmed the new appointments, with one saying that NSTP was abuzz with news that Jalil would take over the newspaper company, which is now a subsidiary of MPB.

"What we hear in Balai Berita is Jalil Hamid, ex-Reuters and ex Securities Commission, will be the new group managing editor," one newspaper editor told The Malaysian Insider, referring to the NSTP headquarters in Jalan Riong here.

Another source confirmed that only two changes were made in the board meeting yesterday and MPB group managing director Datuk Amrin Awaluddin is expected to brief NSTP staff later today on the changes in the top posts. Anthony took up his post in November 2008 while Zainul Arifin has led the editorial team since July 2009.

Jalil is a widely-respected journalist who had only worked with national news agency

Bernama and international newswire Reuters Ltd before it became ThomsonReuters PLC. He was seconded to head Najib's National Communications Team in September 2010 from the Securities Commission (SC), which he joined as its senior general manager in the Corporate Affairs Department in 2009.

Apart from serving twice in the Reuters Kuala Lumpur bureau, Jalil has also worked in Reuters' offices in Singapore and London, specialising in commodities, equities and political news.

He was in the news in July when criticised over a leaked note to Umno information chief Datuk Ahmad Maslan advising local media on coverage of the July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally calling for free and fair elections. Several newspapers demonised the rally and its organisers while the government cracked down on the rally which is now subject of a public inquiry by the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam).

New COO Mohammad Azlan has been with Big Tree since 2001 and will continue to report to Amrin. He holds a Bachelor Business Degree (Accountancy) from University of Tasmania, Australia and is a full member of the Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) Australia and Chartered Accountant, Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA).

Media executives say the NSTP stable of newspapers remains profitable and will benefit from increased advertising expenditure in 2012 due to campaigns related to the London Olympics and Euro 2012 football competition. But it is understood the owners are unhappy with the English-language New Straits Times' editorial coverage and shrinking circulation.

"It is making money but readership is falling off for the NST. Only the Bahasa Malaysia papers are doing well," an executive told The Malaysian Insider on condition of anonymity. He added that Umno officials had expressed concern and had recommended personnel changes recently.

The Malay Mail, which first began in publishing in 1896, is now under the Redberry Media group that bought a 75 per cent stake of the tabloid from the NSTP group in 2009. It became a free afternoon newspaper in May 2008 but has recently announced plans to revert to being a paid daily.

Both media groups are supportive of Najib, who last month announced that newspapers will not be subject to annual licensing under the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 as part of a wider liberalisation package that his political foes say is linked to snap polls next year.

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