

BRUNEI TODAY

JUNE 1991





BRUNEI TODAY

VOL. 4 NO. 2

JUNE 1991

PERPUSTAKAAN
JAKAAN PERKULANGAN
BRUNEI



Giving the top its final smoothness and symmetry.



Plaiting the barks of a tree into ropes is an integral part of the top-spinning tradition.



Each competitor hopes that his top will be the last to rotate.



A ripe Tibadak fruit showing the flesh, which is eaten raw.

Front Cover

Traditionally garbed, one of the country's leading experts in the ancient game of top-spinning is seen here in action.

Inside of front cover

Tops rotating on pieces of glass during a competition.

Inside of back cover

Young Tibadak fruits.

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Brunei Today is published quarterly by the Information Department, Prime Minister's Office and printed by the Government Printing Department, Ministry of Law, Brunei Darussalam.

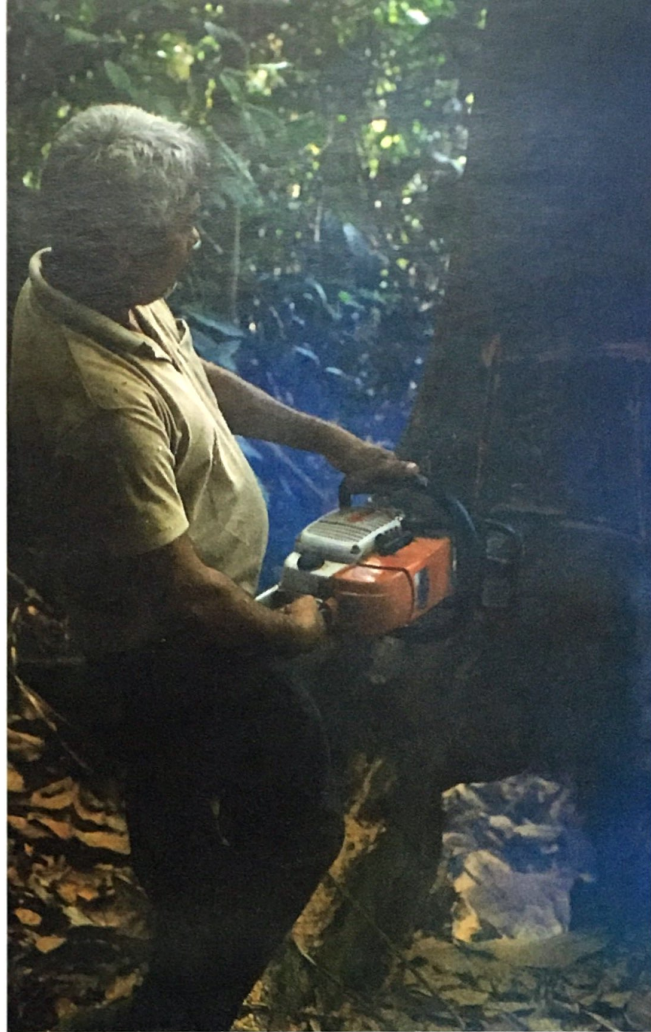
SPIN LIKE A TOP

A batch of newly finished tops, which are made from two of Brunei Darussalam's well-known hardwoods, namely the Impas and Pitaling trees. Each top ranges in circumference between 66 cm and 81 cm, and is called Gasing Pedada (Pedada Top) because it resembles a native fruit of the country, the Pedada (Sonneratia Caseolaris).





One of the country's top experts, Abdul Ahad Limbang, aged 45, who has been involved in playing and making tops since he was ten years old, is seen here using a powered saw to cut a chunk from the lower trunk of the Impas tree.





Working the lathe, the maker skillfully gives the top its final smooth and symmetrical shape.

*The wood is shaped roughly resembling a top, with the help of a long knife known as parang. In the background can be seen the **lirikan**, which is manually operated lathe (left).*

TOP spinning has been practised by Bruneians for many centuries and even though many popular imported sports have arrived, top spinning has still managed to flourish.

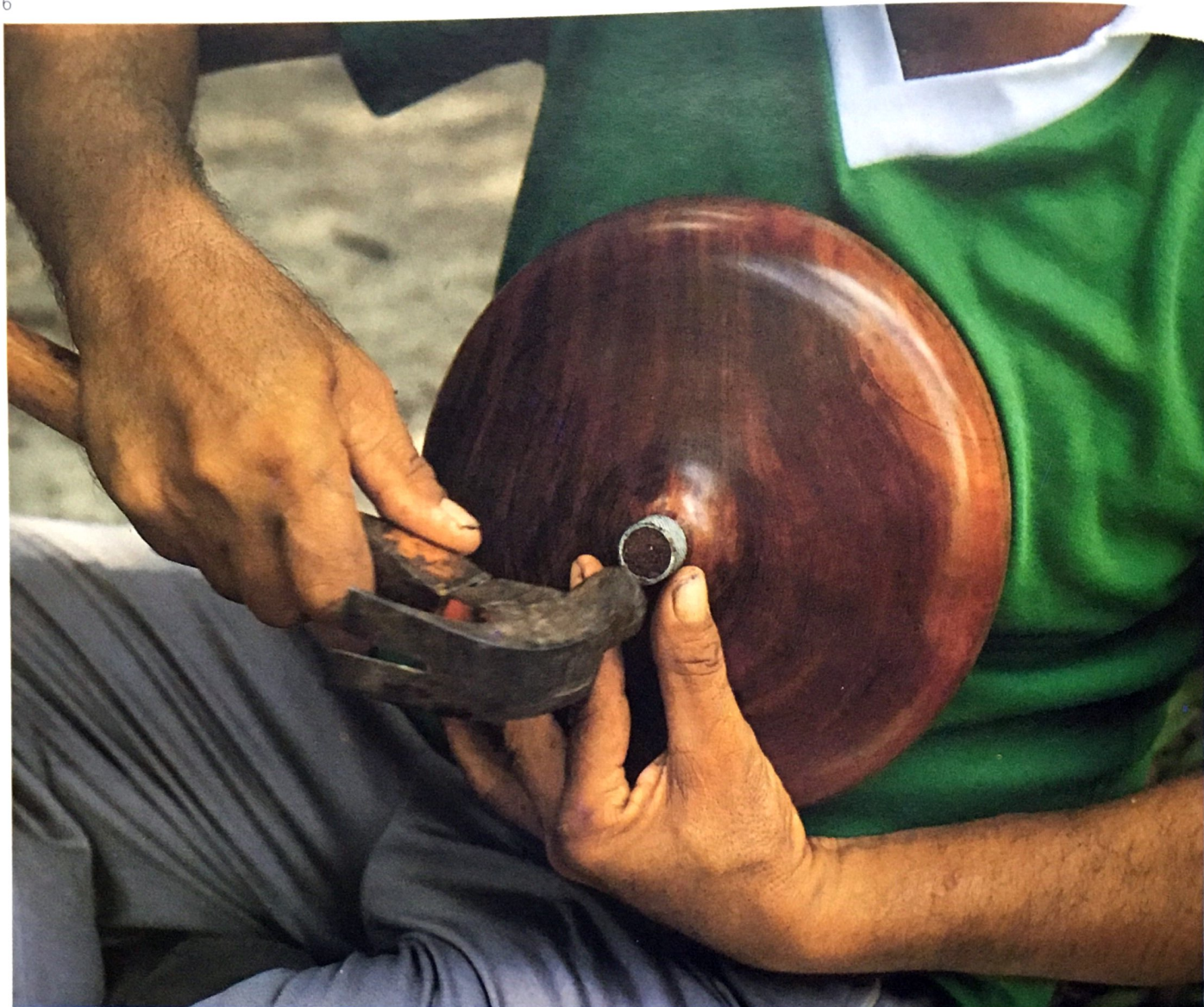
Top spinning can be traced back as far as the 14th century during the reign of the first Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Mohammad Shah (Awang Alak Betatar). This was mentioned in the writings known as "Syair Awang Semaun".

Historians and researchers have had great difficulty in pinpointing where the game of top spinning originated from. What is certain is that it is played throughout South-east Asia though the shapes of the tops and the styles of play differ quite a lot.

A popular belief is that top spinning started when a group of people saw long-tailed monkeys spinning fruits with their tails. It is conceivable that this very simple and innocent act sparked the interest in man too, and of course it wasn't long before man invented not only better and more durable tops but also some simple "ground rules" for competition.

Hardwoods

Over the years the quality and durability of the tops have improved dramatically. Technology too has played an important part, as the rotation of it depends to a large extent on the symmetry of the top itself. Machines have enabled the top to be shaped into an almost perfect symmetrical form so



After polishing and varnishing to preserve the wood, the top is fitted with a metal ring at the **kepala** (head) and a small nail at the bottom. Sometimes a thin steel plate is added all the way round the top's mid-section to make it rotate longer, according to some popular belief. But this is no longer allowed in top-spinning competitions.

An integral part of top-spinning in the best tradition is the rope that is woven by hand from the bark of another local tree called Timbaran. The freshly cut stem is first beaten to loosen up the bark.



important for balance and length of rotation.

Initially though, much of the early stages of manufacture was a purely hand-skilled matter. Top-makers in Brunei Darussalam normally choose 'Mengarlis' or 'Impas' hardwoods because of their toughness and weight. The best section of the tree is usually just above the

After slitting with a knife, the bark comes off easily by just a slight downward pull.



trunk where the veins are compact. Here a piece, rectangular in shape, is cut and then roughly fashioned by hand into a shape roughly resembling a top.

Steel

The smoothness and eventual symmetrical shape is performed with the use of a rudimentary lathe. The roughly fashioned top is rotated, often by the use of a foot pedal, while the artisan uses a sharp wood tool to smooth and shape the top. Once this has been completed all that needs to be done is to insert a small nail in the base and a few coats of varnish to preserve the wood.

The nail is positioned at the base because it is on the sharpened end that the top rotates. Obviously the metal point offers little resistance, which is necessary, if the top is to spin for any length of time. The final stage in the manufacture of the top is the fitting of thin steel plate called 'sampak' and the insertion of a narrow round metal top called the 'kepala'.

Gyrate

The means by which the top is spinned is by a rope and once again this is made from locally produced materials. Usually it is taken from the 'Kayu Timbaran' or 'Kayu Ara' both trees being indigenous to Brunei Darussalam. The length of the rope measures two armspans and it is wound round the top from left to right.

In order to have the top reached its maximum spinning time, it is placed on a small 5 cm by 10 cm piece of glass. This coupled with



The barks are skinned and hung to dry in the sun.

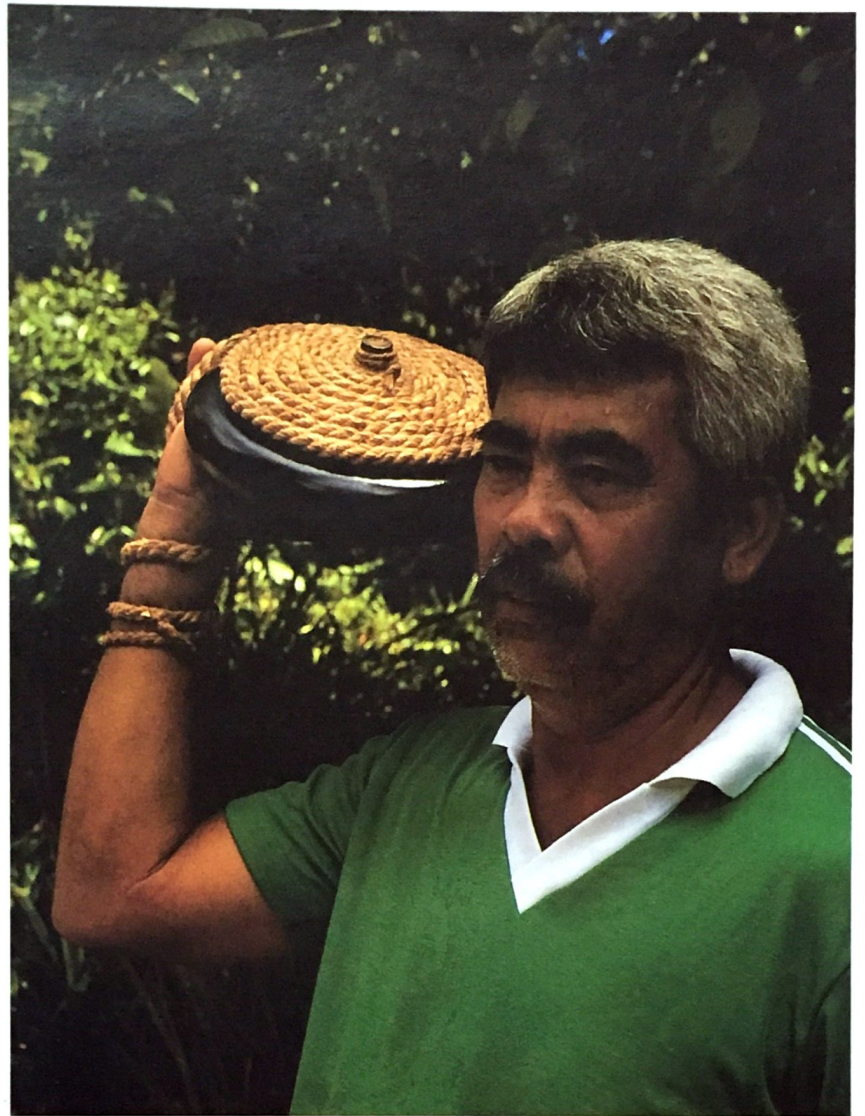


Once the barks are quite dry, they are cut into sizeable strips before plaiting them into ropes.

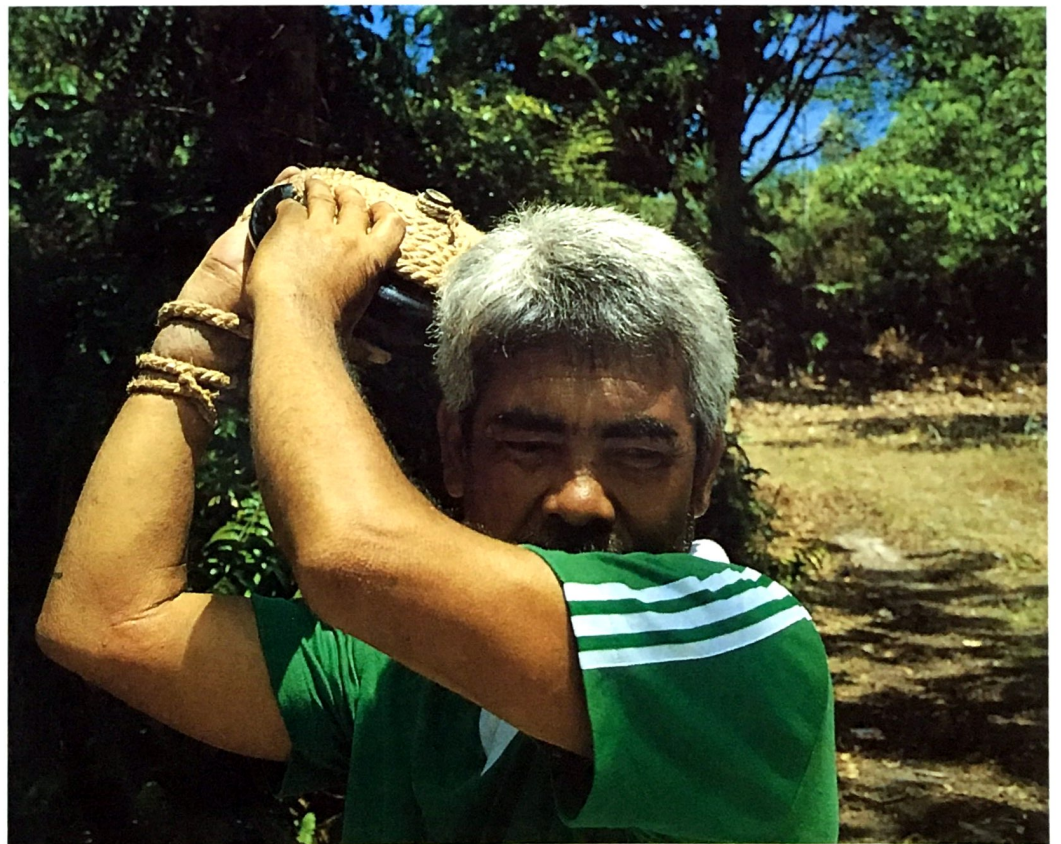
The completed ropes, whose length is two and a half armspans each, are ready for use.



To spin the top, the rope is tightly wound from left to right. The metal ring fitted earlier onto the head holds the rope in place, looking tidy and compact.



One end of the rope is tied to the wrist; and to get an optimum throwing power, concentration and both hands are needed to hurl the top to the ground.







*The moment the top hits the ground it is scooped up with the **Penyiut**, a spoon-like piece of wood, and transferred immediately onto a piece of glass to obtain a maximum rotation time.*

the nail of the top offer two surfaces that reduce friction to a minimum thus allowing the top to gyrate for long periods. Under certain conditions — because of modifications and better designs — tops can now rotate for as long as two hours though the average would likely be 40 to 60 minutes.

Contests

Initially the top is thrown to the floor using a “whip like” motion to maximise rotation. It is then scooped up with a flat spoon-like piece of wood called the ‘penyiut’ before it is transferred to a piece of glass.

There are three main types of top spinning contests. Tops spin on the ground only (gasing di tanah); tops picked up from the ground with the ‘penyiut’ (gasing bersiut) and tops weighted with lead (gasing berisi timah).

Unfortunately the game of top spinning has been on the wane recently. Years ago top spinning contests used to be organised during the gathering of villagers for the makan tahun or annual feast, held by each family household after the rice harvesting season. It was a type of thanksgiving as well as a remembrance of the dead.

Celebrations

The competitions would sometimes last the whole day, each team comprising between 15 and 20 people. Today, however, there are only a handful of top spinning enthusiasts who are keen to compete in contests. The modern world has placed restrictions on available leisure time and only a few can spare the time. It takes long hours of practice to become a proficient exponent, and unfortunately there are not that many who are willing to devote that amount of time to this ancient art.



Some enthusiasts give their tops a different look by covering them with grooves, like this one in the picture.

The decline in popularity has naturally caused great concern as it is one of the traditional 'permainan rakyat' or people's games of Brunei Darussalam. The art of top spinning needs to be preserved, and thankfully steps are now under way to achieve this. For example, top spinning competitions are now part of the celebrations to mark His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan's birthday. Also, effort is being made towards the formation of a national association in order to revive, promote and preserve the art of top spinning.

Revival

To revive interest in top spinning emphasis must be placed on the youths developing an interest in it. To this end the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports has arranged the setting up of Persatuan Gasing Kebangsaan Brunei Darussalam or Brunei Darussalam National Association of Top Spinning. Discussions have also taken place between the governing

bodies of top spinning associations of ASEAN countries.

The outcome should be a revival in the art of top spinning, and a standardisation of the rules and regulations is important if international contests are to be held in the future.

In conclusion top spinning is an important element in Brunei Darussalam's cultural heritage. It would indeed be a catastrophe if the game were to discontinue.

It is imperative that top spinning should survive this present difficult time and flourish in the future because an important part of Brunei Darussalam's history and heritage is at stake.





A typical scene in a competition during which the participants, after scooping up their tops, sit down; and each hopes that his top will be the last to stop rotating.

TIBADAK

a favourite among Bruneians



The Tibadak tree with its fruits, some of which nearing maturity, hanging from its trunk and branches.

A ripe Tibadak showing the flesh, which is eaten raw or can also be made into fritters.



The Tibadak, especially the young fruits, can also be made into a delicious vegetable with the right condiments.

Although related
to the Tibadak,
the Tarap is
rounder in form
and its flesh is
smaller.

FRUITS in Southeast Asia come in a variety of colours and shapes, whose very appearance sometimes belie their edibility and nutritional values. One such fruit is the *Tibadak*, or Cempedak as it is called in standard Malay. It is quite a common and popular fruit, especially in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore.

The *Tibadak* usually appears in the market in Brunei Darussalam at least once a year and is easily recognizable by its oblong shape and rind that is covered throughout by short sharp fleshy spines, which become blunter as the fruit matures. In some cases the spines vanish completely as the fruit attains dimension, leaving only smooth marks on the rind of the ripe fruit.

The integument of the young fruit is bright green and firm. It gradually turns greenish yellow and tender when the fruit starts to ripen, which can also be detected by the strong rich smell it gives off.

The best way to get at the flesh inside is by cutting the rind all round from top to bottom and then pulling backwards the top half of the slitted rind.

Rich

The flesh is golden yellow — pinkish is not unusual but rare — and sweet, with slimy texture. Every *Tibadak* contains several of these almost rounded-flesh each with a seed the size of a marble. The seeds comes off easily and is

covered by light brown membrane.

The flesh is taken raw or made into fritters together with the seed. A good way of eating the seeds is by boiling until cooked and, after removing their coverings, mashing them with grated coconut and sugar. The seed has a rich flavour and is obviously loaded with carbohydrates.

The young fruit can be turned into a tasty vegetable when cooked with coconut cream, dried prawns, *belacan* (shrimp paste) and condiments. Another edible part is the inner flesh of the ripe *Tibadak*'s rind. Preserved in salt and a bit of rice, it becomes *Budu Tibadak* and is used as a pickle.

Latex

A growing *Tibadak* tree can reach a height of up to 20 metres and start fruiting about five years after germination. The fruits are borne on the main trunk and branches, and each mature fruit ranges in measurement from 20 cm by 10 cm to 35 cm by 15 cm.

The *Tibadak* is scientifically known as *Artocarpus integer*. Its contiguous companion is the Nangka or Jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), and both are related to the Sukun or Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) and the Tarap (*Artocarpus elasticus*).

The artocarpus trees, which are native to this part of the world, are characterized by the possession of latex and woolly leaves, among other things.



The Sukun or Breadfruits, though not as abundant as its relatives such as the Tibadak and Tarap, are usually sold in the open air market in the country's main towns.



*The Tarap is
another popular
fruit in Brunei
Darussalam (right).*





There are two kinds of the Sukun fruit, namely the seedless and seeded varieties. The seedless variety is the more popular as it can be sliced and made into fritters or ground and baked into biscuits etc. The seeded variety is mostly used as a vegetable.



The barrel-shaped Nangka or Jackfruit is the largest of all the artocarpus fruits, reaching a length of 90 cm and a girth of 50 cm. Like the Tibadak, its flesh is golden yellow but firm and slightly longer rather than soft and round.

