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A typical road-side stall.



Bruneian kites.



International Kites Exhibition.



Maturing bananas.

Front cover

A bunch of ripe 'pisang emas' or golden bananas.

Inside of front cover

The erect flowers of a wild banana.

Inside of back cover

A kite representing a human figure.

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The fruit that people

By Ishak Haji Othman

LIKE any country in the world, Brunei Darussalam has a wide variety of fruits but none is more familiar or popular as the banana.

This is hardly surprising given the fact that it is considered to be the most important tropical fruit and ranks second only to grapes in world production of fruits.

It is not known when the banana, which is referred to both the plant and its fruit, was first cultivated in the country except that it thrives naturally even in the wild. What is certain is that it is endemic to Southeast Asia and has been grown in the region for millenia. Global-wise it is believed to be one of the world's earliest tropical fruits because available records have shown that it has been in cultivation for thousands of years.

Crown

The banana, which belongs to the family Musaceae, is a large herbaceous plant with perennial root or rhizome. It is from this root that the plant is perpetuated by sprouts or suckers.

Planting the sucker or corm as it is also called biologically is not merely burying it in the ground for some Bruneians who follow age-old beliefs that say the planter should not look up lest the banana-palm grows abnormally tall; should be bare-chested if a thin peel of the fruit is desired; and should choose the time to coincide with low tide



love to eat

*A banana plantation in one of
the villages in the country.*



when many pebbles are exposed on the beach as this would ensure abundant harvest.

When fully grown, the plant stem reaches a height of three metres or more. It is topped by a crown of six to eight broad leaves of up to three metres long, and each leaf has a thick stalk and midrib.

The plant produces flowers and perfects its fruits within ten months after cultivation before the stem dies. The inflorescence comes out in big spike with maroon bracts and develop into a bunch of fruits that weighs an

average of 11 kilograms, although it is not unusual for individual bunches to tip the scale at more than 18 kilograms. The length of the fruits varies from 10 to 30 centimetres or from 4 to 12 inches. In comparison, the wild species, which grows well particularly in open jungles, bears fewer and smaller fruits with seeds.

Dew

Incidentally, the banana-palm's system of bearing fruit once only before the stem dies has become the topic of a Malay proverb. For example, when



The flowers come out in large spike, which is known locally as tungkul or jantung pisang or the heart of the banana, and gradually turn into fruits.



A bunch of maturing bananas.



*The biggest known variety in existence in Brunei Darussalam, namely **pisang tanduk** or the horn banana.*



someone has made a serious mistake or has been subjected to an unpleasant experience, he would vow saying '*pisang tidakkan berbuah dua kali*' (the banana never bears fruit twice), which means that he would rather die than letting the same mistake or unpleasant experience repeat itself.

The fruit is green and turns yellowish when ripe. The flesh, which range in hues light pink to cream, is sugary and easily digestible so that it is perhaps among the very few fruits that

Pisang otel is perhaps the most common and popular, being widely grown and sold in the country.



Cucur

even toothless people can take without difficulty. Although becoming yellow seems to be the rule among ripe bananas, there is one species called *pisang embun* or dew banana that remains green throughout. One can tell it is ripe by the size of the fruit and tenderness of its skin.

The banana is usually eaten raw after meals or at anytime once it is ripe. Like any fruit, it is nutritious and is quite often served in hotels and restaurants as desserts in one form or other.

The banana, which is *pisang* in Malay, comes in many species and are distinguished only in Brunei Darussalam and the rest of the Malay-speaking world by adjectives because *pisang* is the generic names for all kinds. Thus *pisang emas* is golden banana in English and is so called probably in account of the colour of the flesh or the superiority of the flavour it possesses. Another example is *pisang tanduk* or horn banana, which is maybe the largest banana in existence. The

Malay call it *pisang tanduk* no doubt because of its size, shape and resemblance to the horn of a buffalo or a bull.

There is also another variety, which is normally grouped under plantain, whose fruit has to be cooked to eat and sometimes used as a vegetable. However, it is not as widely cultivated in Brunei Darussalam as the sweet banana.

As with other fruits, the banana has become a common ingredient in a variety of Bruneian cuisine.



Pisang kelling is another favourite among the people. The fruit is ripe when the skin turns dark yellow as in the picture.

A typical road-side stall, which sells several kinds of bananas and other fruits.



Pisang saba is best eaten as fritters because of its firm flesh.



*Bananas can also be made into delicious cake. The bananas in the picture are **pisang raja** or the king's bananas.*



*Frying banana fritters in
a wok.*

The best known of this is *cucur pisang* or banana fritters. Its popularity is mirrored in the fact that Bruneians say *laku macam cucur pisang panas* or popular as warm banana fritters when anything on sale or offer has been sold out or snapped up in record time.

Vegetables

Any type of banana can be made into fritters but the most palatable is *pisang saba*, which is slightly flat and has thick skin. In fact people seldom take *pisang saba*, though sweet, on its own. They either boil it and eat it with coconut scrapings or consume it in the form of fritters.

Two more local favourites are *leeking* and *kerepek*, which are made by drying slices of ripe and unripe banana respectively. Because of the tender nature of the flesh, bananas are also easily blended with flour and other ingredients to make sundry cakes and cookies.

In addition to its fruit, the banana-palm has a number of parts that are edible or can be utilised. This includes the stem and *tungkol* or the spike-shaped inflorescence, both of which can be turned into delicious vegetables; and the leaves, which can be used as food wrappers and plates.

Internationally, the banana is not only known as a dessert fruit but also appears in other forms such as banana ice-cream, banana split, banana flavoured drink and banana milk shake.

Thus it is not too much to say that the banana is one fruit that people everywhere love to eat.



The banana stem, after peeling off the outer layers, is used as vegetable and is just as tasty as its flowers.



*The inflorescence or **tungkul**, minus the maroon bracts, cooked with coconut milk and condiments can become a delicious vegetable.*



***Kerepek pisang** or banana chips are made of slices of half-ripe bananas.*



A clump of wild banana-palms, which grow well in open space of a jungle.



A wild banana plant bears smaller and fewer fruits.

KITE :

MORE THAN JUST A GAME

By Bolhassan bin Haji Abu Bakar

MAN has always had a great fascination for flying so much so that many stories have been told through the ages about his futile attempts to imitate the natural ability of birds to soar or cruise in the air. In his failure he restored to the next best thing : invented something that flew or he could send airborne. This was probably what led him to make the kite more than two thousand years ago.

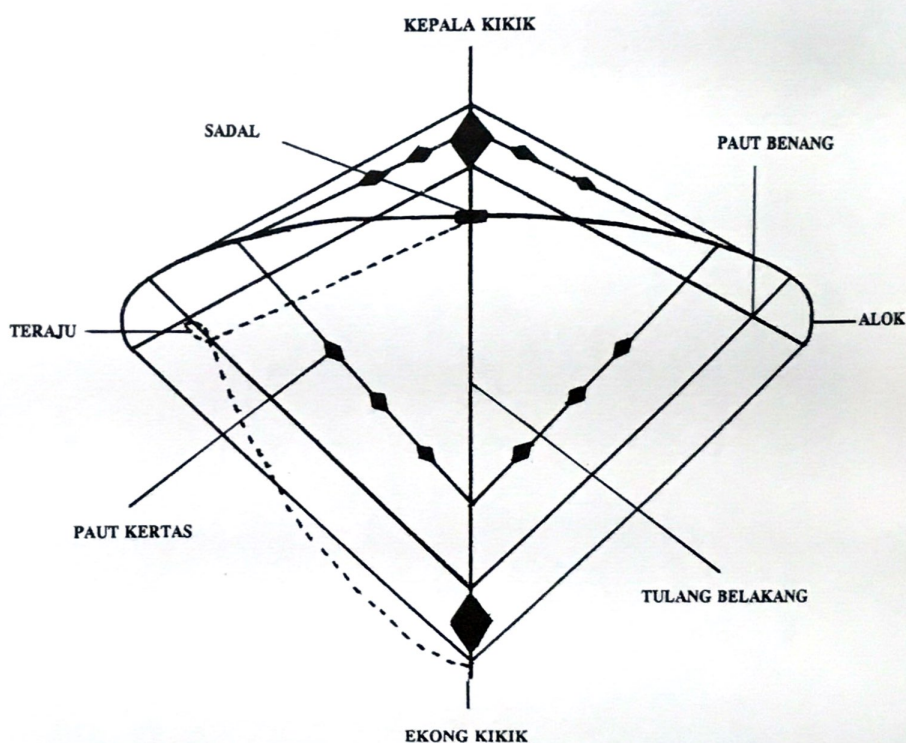
Records show that historians differed on who was the first creator of the kite. Some claimed it was a Greek called Archytas, who lived nearly 2,400 years ago, while others credited it to a Chinese named Han-Sin, who existed about 200 years after Archytas.

Experiment

Whatever the annals say about this, one thing was certain that it was made for pleasure to satisfy man's longing to take to the air.

Over the centuries the kite progressed from an object of pastime to a vehicle for purposes of study. Famous persons like Benjamin Franklin, Graham Bell,

RANGKA [PANAHI-PANAHI] KIKIK



The kite framework.

The bamboo, some of which are seen on the floor, is split, pared and smoothened until the desired size is obtained. One of the country's kitemakers, Awang Haji Besar is seen in the picture doing just that.



Once all the required bamboo parts are ready, making the framework follows.



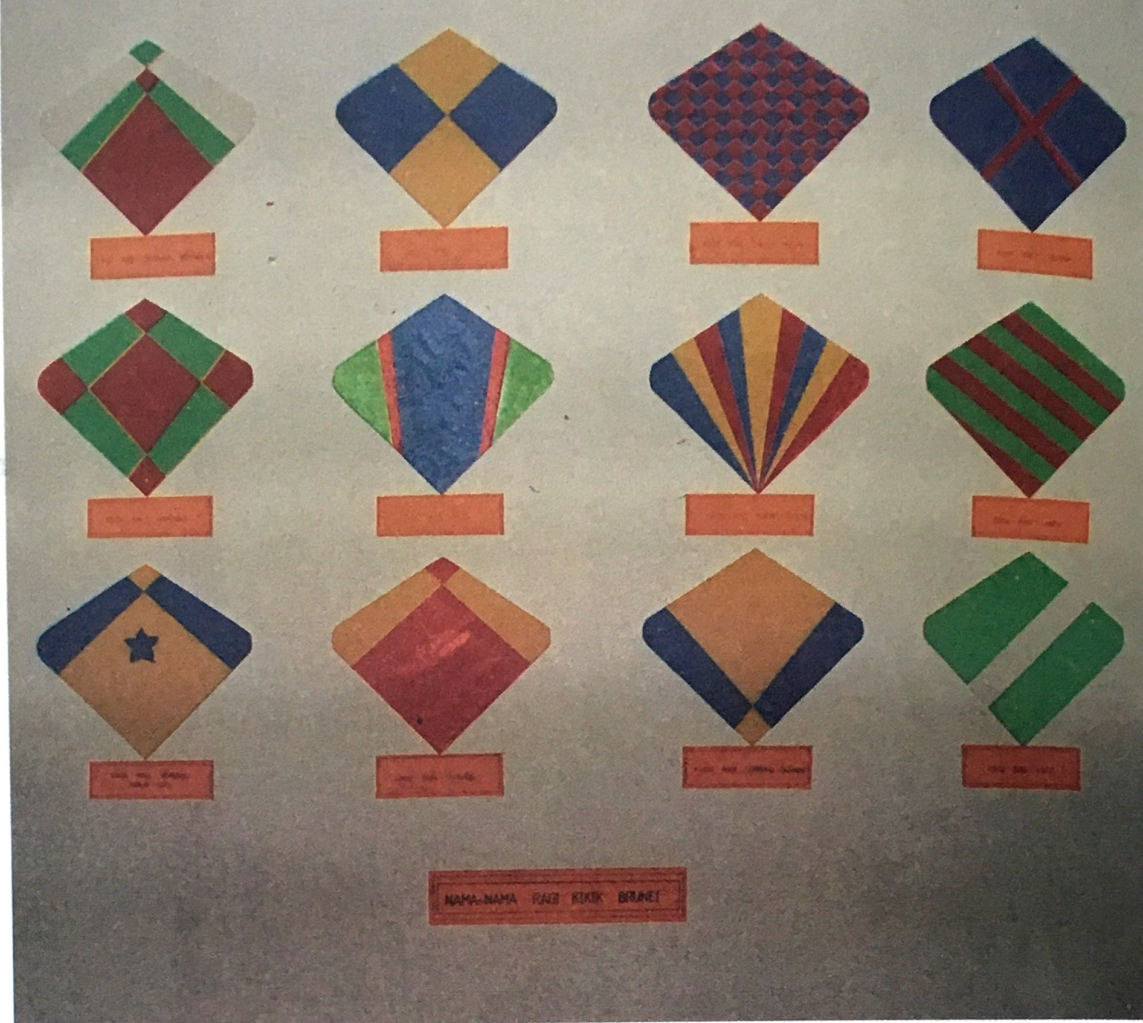
Using the forefinger the gum is evenly spread on the paper to make it stick to the framework.



Pieces of coloured paper are measured and cut against the framework.



The variety of Bruneian kites, each with a name of its own.



Although kites look basically the same, some kitemakers partly break with the traditional shape by adding something else like human figures.





A few more of the vital ingredients of a kite, namely (clockwise) glass; tapioca flour, which has to be cooked first and then mixed with ground glass to make the top part of the kite string stiff and sharp; and cooked sago or ambuyat to gum down the paper as above.

and the Wright Brothers successfully employed kites to conduct their respective experiments on atmospheric electricity and aeronautics.

Today the kite may no longer be used to carry out experiments but it is still flown as a hobby as well as a sport in competitions, especially in southeast and eastern Asia.

During competitions the kites, which vary in size, are colourfully decorated in the forms of birds, dragons or fishes.

Kikik

In Brunei Darussalam, kite-

flying has for centuries been a popular traditional game, both with adults and children.

The kite, which is called *kikik* in the Bruneian dialect, consists of a wooden or bamboo framework covered with paper, clothing or synthetic material. Bruneian kite enthusiasts prefer using bamboo, particularly one species known locally as *buluh* (bamboo) *temiang* because of its greater flexibility. The other components of a kite are paper, string and gum. Before commercial gum came into the scene, kite producers used cooked rice or sago, known locally as *ambuyat*, to make the paper or clothing stick to the

framework. However, most kite-makers still prefer the traditional sago to the modern-day gum. The various parts of the framework are tied with string in accordance with the kind of shape and size of the kite.

Once it is completed, a long string is attached to the kite, which is sent aloft by the action of wind on its surfaces. The height or distance can be determined by manipulating the string from the ground.

Duel

In the old days kite-flying was more than just a game. It was

more often than not a duel among friends. It was for this reason that each kite player was always on the alert by having several feet of the top part of the string coated with ground glass and cooked tapioca flour, making it quite sharp and stiff. The idea was to entangle and sever an opponent's kite string. One could recall that sometimes about a dozen or more kites were seen flying in the sky, attacking and trying to cut one another out of circulation. The one that survived the ordeal was declared winner of the eagerly-fought battle. The vanquished were never disheartened by the experience. Each was even more determined to become the victor in the next encounter.

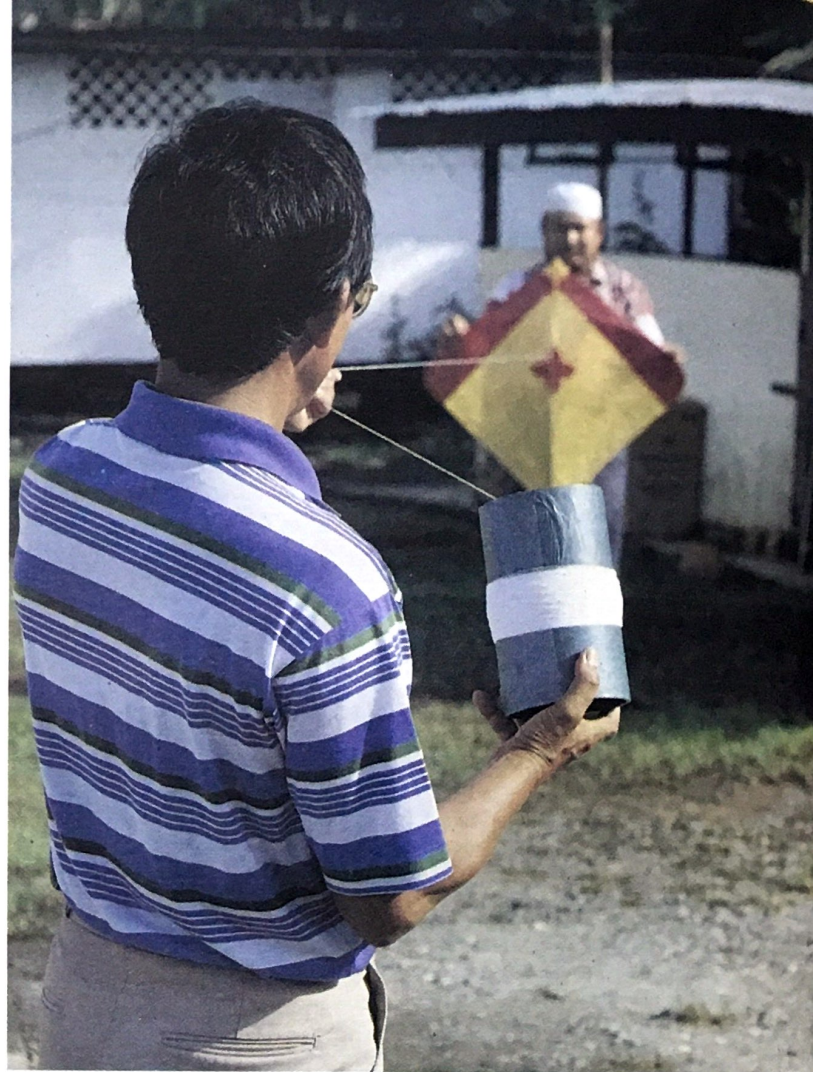
Festival

Various names are given to kites, which included bilis, siar manjar, sijulak, lasik, jangkang and lipat. Why a different title is assigned to each kite, only the kitemaker can fully comprehend but the design, shape and size of the kite have a lot to do with it.

Although kite enthusiasts have not yet come close to forming a club or a society, there is some sort of a national committee in existence, which organises a kite festival at least once a year during the birthday celebrations of His Majesty the Sultan and selects participants to kite events overseas.

There is no reason to think that kite-playing will ever disappear from the scene in the foreseeable future, given the zeal people are devoting to this ancient sport in Brunei Darussalam and many parts of Asia.

Once completed the kite is tested to make sure that it can fly.



A giant kite such as this requires a few people to make it airborne.

A creative competitor whose design can be described as revolutionary as far as kite-making is concerned.





*Another competition at a
different part of the
country.*



The annual kite-flying competition, which is normally held in conjunction with His Majesty the Sultan's birthday celebrations, is a big affair in which participants can number several hundreds. It is usually launched by a senior government official who is seen here being introduced to the competitors.

More of the participants with colourful kites before the start of the competition.





Prizes are presented to the winners at the end of the competition.

The Brunei Darussalam pavilion at the 1994 International Kites Exhibition in Malaysia.



