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Hadrah, melodious sound of happiness

Music has always played a vital part in one's culture where it reflects a particular community or ethnic such as the famous *Sitar*, a famous traditional musical instrument of North India; *Gu-zheng* – a traditional Chinese musical instrument with 21 strings; or *Angklung*, a renowned musical instrument from West Java.

While in the Brunei Malay culture - *gulingtangan*; *gambus*; *biola*; *guritik*; *gandang sadaman*; and *guriding* are just a few traditional musical instruments that play a vital part in Brunei's rich and colourful tradition and culture.

Rampana is one of Brunei Malay's traditional musical instruments where it is made from hard wood such as *teras tibadak* where its surface is covered using stingray leather. *Rampana* comes in three types which are the *rampana naindung*, *rampana radat* and *rampana hadrah*. The techniques used to make these *rampana* are similar to one another but they

vary in sizes.

In the olden days, *rampana* was owned and widely used by the Brunei Malay ethnic residing at the famous water village or known as *Kampung Ayer*. These three *rampana* would be used during wedding ceremonies but played separately such as the *rampana naindung* would be played during *malam berjaga-jaga* and *malam berambil-ambilan* while *rampana radat* and *rampana hadrah* would be played during *Majlis Istiadat Bersanding*. However, moving along with time, the *rampana* now could also be seen played and made by those residing on dry land and played not only during wedding occasions, but also other auspicious occasions.

What makes it unique is not only the sound of drum-beating from these *rampana*, but it is usually accompanied with songs praising Allah The Almighty as well as modern songs bringing in mixture of tradition and modernity.

Process of making Hadrah



Hadrah, melodious sound of happiness

Rampana Hadrah

For this particular edition of Brunei Today, let's focus on *Rampana Hadrah* where the sound produced from this small drum-like musical instrument is hardly unnoticed especially when it comes to wedding ceremonies. You will hear melodious rhythm accompanied with songs of happiness with an upbeat sound. It is usually considered as incomplete without the sounds of *Rampana Hadrah* during wedding ceremonies as it adds to the lively affair.

It should be noted that playing *Rampana Hadrah* is not a solo effort, it should be played by a group of men where the age range from the young to the elderly. You will be able to see a group of men clad in colourful Brunei Malay traditional cloth known as *Baju Melayu*, looking smart wearing *songkok* and *sinjang* playing the *Rampana Hadrah* singing joyfully along with the drum-beats produced by the *Rampana Hadrah*.

Interestingly, *Rampana Hadrah* was formerly known as *Rampana Dikir*. Hence today, it is now familiar among Bruneians as *hadrah*.

Awang Haji Bakar bin Haji Bini is one of the several producers of *hadrah* who hails from Kampung Junjongan where he started making *hadrah* in the 1980's and became full-time producer by 1990's. According to Awang Haji Bakar, the skills he learned to make this traditional musical instrument are inherited from his parents.

To make a *hadrah*, hard wood is required where Awang Haji Bakar often gets his supply of hard wood such as *kulimpapa*, *rangun* and *merbau* from the rural part of Lamunin in Tutong District.





To ensure that good quality sounds are produced, a goat skin is often used where the skin would first be submerged into water and later dried for three days. The numbers of *hadrah* produced from this dried goat skin varies as a bigger size could sometimes produce six *hadrah*.

Making a *hadrah* involves a number of stages such as carving the wood into a round shape ornament, varnishing the wood, installing the skin and cymbals.

Producing *hadrah* can be beneficial as it can be an alternative source of income. For Awang Haji Bakar, he produces about 1000 *hadrah* every year where prices range from \$30.00 to \$50.00 for each *hadrah* depending on the size and quality. Thus it undoubtedly proves that the manufacturing of this traditional musical instrument not only ensures its sustainability but it also serves as economic foundation albeit it being a small-and-medium-size enterprise.





Hadrah's presence remains strong in the hearts of Bruneians. More efforts are seen to ensure that this musical instrument is well preserved such as the annual *hadrah* competition among academic institutions where it is not only held for primary school students but has also been extended to higher academic learning institutions. The *hadrah* are now also played by women, a positive progress showing that *hadrah* is here to remain producing memorable rhythm.



The *Hadrah* is derived from an Arabic word 'hadir' or 'hadara' which means 'present'.

What is more interesting is that there is a strong bond between *hadrah* and Islam as the growth of *hadrah* followed hand in hand with the spread of Islam across the Southeast Asian archipelago.

The *hadrah* is originated from Middle East during the 13th century in which merchants used to beat the hand-drum to attract customers to view their goods.

Hadrah needs a group of people as it cannot be performed by a solo player. During the performance, the *hadrah* is hold in one hand and uses the other hand to strike it.



Songkok



Songkok, a traditional headgear

Wearing a headgear has always been part of the Bruneian male's dress since time immemorial. This was especially so in the old days when different headgears were worn, which more often than not reflected the individual's stations in life, both for formal and informal occasions.

Generally the man's headgear in Brunei Darussalam can be categorised into three kinds: *dastar*, which is a piece of cloth tied around the head; *songkok* or *kopiah*, a type of cap made from velvet; and *tengkolok* or *serban*, which resembles a *turban* and is a typical headdress in the Middle East.

It is believed that the *songkok* was introduced to Bruneians by Arab traders more than six or seven hundreds years ago. In fact it is considered *sunat* (voluntary good deed) for the Muslim males to don a headgear provided that it is done in good taste.

After a period of time, the wearing of *songkok* becomes a tradition and synonym with being a Malay. Thus a symbol was born. It gradually replaced the *dastar* as part of the Malay's national dress on most formal occasions such as during *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* or a wedding ceremony.





Born

Malay craftsmen of that period started to improve on the original *kopiah*, which was somewhat round, and came out slightly oblong with horizontal top. Their creation served as the model for *songkok*-makers that followed and survived to this day, albeit with some modifications along the way such as sewing pieces of paper between the linings, which are always satin, to make it sturdier.

Black is the *songkok*'s original colour, but we can find it made in various colours such as red, dark blue and dark green and with patterns or decorations.

The price however depends on its size, materials, patterns and decorations.

The main ingredients of a *songkok* are cardboard, velvet and satin. The cardboard has replaced the old method of using pieces of paper as stiffener. When all the parts are sewn, they are then assembled and knitted according to the shape, height and head size required before the velvet is stitched on.

Today, like other headgears, the *songkok* comes in many colourful variations to suit individual tastes and styles. It is not therefore unusual for a man to have at least two of different shades to go with his equally colourful national dress and other attire. Some men like to have their *songkok* made to measure - even if it means that they have to pay a little bit more - so that they can incorporate their own innovations as well as select the type and colour of the velvet to mirror their individuality. While some prefer to choose from the wide variety of ready-made *songkok* available in shops in town.

Process of making Songkok



Values

Songkok is highly demanded especially with the approaching *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, which is the festival celebrated to mark the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, as parents upgrade not only their own wardrobes but also those of their children. Because of the religious significance of *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, the *songkok* is worn practically by every man, young and old.

The values of *songkok*-wearing are also emphasised to the young both at home and at school. An adult may not want to put the *songkok* on all the time but he will most certainly wear it on various important occasions including religious and state functions. Naturally there are people who wear *songkok* as part of their daily attire.





Preservation

In 1975, the government set up the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Training Centre (BAHTC), where *songkok*-making joined the other courses three years later. After completing the three-year *songkok*-making course, some of the students have been using their skills to set up their own business. Today with its popularity, demands for *songkok* are increasing. The budding *songkok* industry is one enterprise that will bloom to its potential without hinderance.



Male graduates wearing *songkok* as part of their convocation attire



Members of Royal Brunei Police Force wearing songkok as part of their ceremonial attire



School children donning the songkok as part of their school uniform

