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Developments And Trends In The Rural Media In Asia:
Case Study Malaysia

By

Mohd Hamdan Haji Adnan
DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS IN THE RURAL MEDIA IN ASIA - CASE STUDY MALAYSIA
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by Mohd Hamdan Haji Adnan.

Developments of the rural media in Malaysia, especially in the Peninsular has not been encouraging. This is a sad state of affair considering that about 60 per cent or 10 million of Malaysia 17.1 million population still dwell in rural areas. Also, since independence the biggest allocation of the national budget have nearly always been for rural development. Yet after more than 30 years of independence, the rural media in Malaysia has yet to make an impact or gain its proper place in nation building and rural development.

Also, this is despite the fact that Malaysian leaders have long perceived the country's mass media in what might be termed the classical role for media in developing nations. Newell Grenfell observed this in his book Switch On, Switch Off (1979). He quoted an address to a seminar of newspaper editors and publishers in 1974 by Tun Haji Abdul Razak, then Prime Minister of Malaysia:

"The press and other mass media act as an intermediary between the Government and the people. Their functions and responsibilities are more important and complex in a multi-racial country like Malaysia. All those concerned should take heed to ensure that whatever is published for the general public should not cause misunderstanding or be detrimental to certain groups. In this way the press and the mass media could help the Government foster the spirit of understanding and strengthen the
friendship among the people ... The press should also avoid publishing materials which give rise to tension among ... various parties."

In its white paper entitled "Towards Preserving National Security in Kerajaan Persekutuan 14 Tekah 1988 presented to the Malaysian Parliament, the government acknowledged the power of the newspapers. It stated that "Newspapers play a very important role in society by among other things providing news and comments, and publishing readers' views on certain subjects. Newspapers also have a big influence in the formation of public opinion. Those who own Newspapers and their editorial management can play this role in various ways." However, despite this expectation of the government, the mass media in Malaysia have not really gone rural as expected if it is to play their role more effectively in nation building.

A major reason for this unhappy situation is that the modern mass media in Malaysia is basically urban centered and oriented. Also, the modern mass media tradition in Malaysia, as with most developing nations is a relatively recent phenomenon.

The Malaysian mass media, especially in the Peninsular being urban-centred, closely reflected the patterns of the British colonial interests and administration. The print media, for example, emerged primarily to serve the commercial interests as well as the urban elites.

Also, the print media came to being to serve communal interests. The year 1805 saw the publication of the first English language newspaper in Penang. Known as The Prince of Wales Island Gazette (1805-1827) it served British interests in
Malaya, particularly the communities in the Straits Settlements (Kho, 1988). The first Chinese newspaper, Chinese Monthly Magazine was published in Melaka by William Milne, a missionary who worked for the London Missionary Society. The Society published the Chinese newspaper to propagate its religious activity in mainland China (Tang, 1988). The Malay and Indian communities were relatively late in publishing their own vernacular newspapers. The first Malay bulletin, Jawi Peranakan first appeared in 1876. In the same year, the first Indian bulletin in Malaysia, Tungai Sinegan was also published. The ethnic clientele of such newspapers created a demand for, and consequently encouraged reportage of features and news items of ethnic interest. Thus the economics of publication itself propagated a structure of coverage which was heavily biased towards ethnic needs and concerns. This happened in spite of the fact that the three vernacular bulletins were published in Penang and Singapore, were relatively cosmopolitan and British in outlook (Arabi & Latiffah, 1988).

Also, it must be mentioned that before the Second World War newspapers existed in some larger towns of the Peninsular. For example, an English newspaper was established in Ipoh before the Second World War and during the war Japanese propaganda newspapers was also being published in Ipoh. Immediately after the war an English newspaper was still surviving in Ipoh. However, these newspapers serving the local community ceased to exist after the Federal system in British Malaya became more centralised and Kuala Lumpur became the capital.

However, before we go any further in discussing the
developments and trend of Malaysia's rural mass media, it is important to have some knowledge about the country.

**Malaysia in Brief**

As a nation, Malaysia is relatively new. It was formed in 1963 and consisted of 13 states, that is, nine states in the Peninsular and two states in Borneo, namely, Sabah and Sarawak. All thirteen states had been under British influence.

Malaysia adheres to a kind of federal system. However, in Malaysia the federal or the central government has more say in many issues than the state government. Nevertheless, in land and forest matters, the state governments have more rights than the federal government. Also, for the two new comers that formed Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah, they further have authority over immigration and other matters that are meant to safeguard the state interest.

Malaysia has a constitutional monarchical parliamentary form of government. The government, by law, has to seek a fresh mandate at the end of every five years. Malaysia is one of the few developing nations that has regularly conducted elections since the first one held in 1955.

Malaysia has been lucky to generally experience political stability since independence. This is despite persistent predictions that given the communal structure of the population there would be incessant racial strive and chaos.

Malaysia has a land size of 137,581 square miles. It is divided by the South China Sea into West or officially named as Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. In term of land mass,
East Malaysia is much bigger. However, in term of population, the number of people in Peninsular Malaysia is about six times more than in East Malaysia.

The total population of Malaysia is about 17.1 million. It comprised of three main racial groups, the indigenous people or known in Malaysia as the Bumiputras (children of the land), the Chinese and the Indians.

The Bumiputra groups consist of various ethnic groups such as the Malays, Senois, Semangs, Temiar, etc. in the Peninsular with Kadazans, Dusuns, Bajaus, Murut, etc, in Sabah and Ibanis, Bidayuhs, Penans, Kelabit, etc, in Sarawak. The Chinese also have their own subgroupings based on clans such as the Hokkiens, Cantonese and Teo Chew. Also, the Indians are heterogenous. They compose of sub categories such as Malayalamks, Punjabiis and with majority Tamils. Other national minority groups include Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Eurasians. Each of these groups have their own religion, culture, language and practice.

As stated, about two-thirds of Malaysians live in rural areas with more so in Sabah and Sarawak. Generally, a big majority of the indigenous people are located outside the urban centres where most of the Chinese dwell. A majority of the Indians are found in the estates.

Even though Malaysia is still a developing country, it is relatively rich. Malaysia's GNP per capita is about US$1,800. The economy is stable and well recovering a recession with GDP growth of about 7.4% (Asiaweek, Jan. 6. 1989).

Malaysians literacy level is currently about 95 per cent, with the high side in urban centres and lower in rural areas.
Literacy level is also slightly lower in East Malaysia, again with more so in the rural areas.

Malaysians are generally well exposed to the mass media. Radio coverage is almost 100 per cent. Television has extensively penetrated rural areas with electricity supply. As for the print media, a 1982 study revealed that only 42 per cent of the rural adults read newspapers as compared to 72 per cent of urban adults. It was also implied that the percentages for reading books and magazines would be much lower in the rural areas. For 1989, it is estimated that the number of adults reading newspapers and magazines would have increased by approximately 10 per cent. The estimation is based on the growth of newspapers and magazines circulations.

Mass Media in Malaysia

Malaysia's mass media systems is a mixture of government and private-enterprises. In order to be able to publish a newspaper or magazines one must get a permit to do so. The permit can be applied from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Publishers must seek for new permit at the end of every year. It is not an automatic renewal. As for operating a television station, so far only one company has been given licence to do so. Up to now there is no private radio station. Licence to operate the electronic media can be applied to the Ministry of Information.

As for the electronic media, radio is fully controlled by the government. In the Peninsular, Radio Malaysia provides service in four main languages: Bahasa Malaysia (the national language), English, Chinese (plus the dialects), and Tamils. Each of these
languages are broadcasted through its own channels.

Also, about two hours a day are allocated for the Orang Asli (the aborigines of Malaysia) in the Sepak and Tender dialects. The Orang Asli are usually located in rural settlements in the forest zone or its fringes. The broadcasts are made from Kuala Lumpur and usually with the assistance of the Department of Aborigines.

Radio Malaysia in Sabah and Sarawak also broadcast in the languages of the two states indigenous people.

To ensure that the rural people are serve effectively by radio, the Malaysian government has established a number of radio stations in the rural areas. Besides programmes on national airtime. Radio Malaysia also broadcasts local programmes from its regional stations in Penang, Ipoh, Kota Bahru, Kuala Terengganu, Kuantan, Johor Bahru, Melaka, Alor Setar, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching, Limbang, Sibu, Miri and Sri Aman.

RTM launched its regional station for the Federal Territory of Labuan on August 31, 1986.

The government local radio stations are encouraged to produce local programmes and sometimes using the dialects of the main population of the particular area to ensure it meet the needs of the intended listeners. Subjects of the local programmes usually relates to the agricultural activities or the type of occupations that involved the majority of local population. Television Malaysia though centred in Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital city does produce programmes meant for rural areas. These are seen in programmes like the locally produced agriculture segments. Islamic study and the like that are meant to attract
and educate the rural audiences. Also, the Television Malaysia stations in Sabah and Sarawak are encouraged to produce their own local programmes which include magazine type programmes, dramas and musicals.

As such the published objectives of Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) are as follows:

1. To explain in depth and with widest possible coverage, the policies and programmes of the Government in order to ensure maximum understanding by the public.
2. To stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve changes in line with the requirements of the Government.
3. To assist in promoting civic consciousness and fostering the development of Malaysian arts and culture.
4. To provide suitable elements of popular education, general information and entertainment.

As seen in the ordering of RTM's objectives, the priorities are to inform and educate before entertain. Since, the level of literacy is lower in the rural areas, the Malaysian government has deemed it fit to utilise its electronic media to reach the rural people. This is especially so with coverage of radio 100 per cent. Also, television will be 100 per cent when the dish receiver established in Kuala Lumpur becomes fully operational in 1990. Nevertheless, when receiving programmes from all over the world, RTM needs to be selective otherwise it can become counter-productive.

As such, the Malaysian government recognizes that radio and television constitute two major forms of mass media which are
important for communicating with the people, particularly those in the rural areas.

On the other hand, the government has allowed a television station popularly known as TV3 to operate as a private enterprise and strongly competing for audiences and advertisers with its own two television channels. Privatisation of television came about in 1984. It emerged as a result of the Malaysia incorporation move. By its very nature of being a commercial creature, TV3 is urban centred and oriented to where its lifeblood is, the city and town folks as well as the advertising industry.

As for the print media in Malaysia, there are currently thirty-five daily newspapers: 20 in Mandarin, 3 in Bahasa Malaysia, 8 in English and 3 in Tamil. Also, a number of daily newspapers in Sarawak and Sabah published in two or three languages. For example in Sabah, the Daily Express and Sabah Times are published in English, Bahasa Malaysia and Kadazan. In Sarawak, The Borneo Post appeared in two languages, Bahasa and English.

All the national newspapers are published in Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital. Only in the state of Sabah and Sarawak are newspapers published in its state capitals and other major towns. In Malaysia, it is these newspapers that are located outside the national capital that can be termed as the rural print media. In Sabah and Sarawak, these newspapers have seemed to survive satisfactorily.

On the other hand, in Peninsular Malaysia even regional newspapers never seem to prosper. This experiences have
discourage entrepreneurs to set up rural press or community newspapers. For example, national newspaper organisations that have established regional newspapers like Bintang Timor in Penang for Utusan Group and Warta Tebrau in Johor for the New Straits Times Group have found their venture unprofitable and were forced to terminate their publications. Both of the newspapers have been in Bahasa Malaysia to cater to the needs of the majority of the rural people. Conversely, The Star an English newspaper that began life as a provincial paper in Penang become a big success after turning national. Another, English newspaper, The Echo also originating in Penang, however, was not that lucky. It was surviving well enough as a provincial newspaper for the northern zone of Peninsular Malaysia until it became The National Echo moving its headquarters to Kuala Lumpur and quickly became insolvent.

Nevertheless, currently, the major national newspaper organisations like the New Straits Times Group, Utusan Melayu Group and The Star are publishing their newspapers to cater for regional and the rural people needs. For example, the New Straits Times Group published a northern edition, an eastern edition, a central edition as well as a Sabah and Sarawak edition. Each of these regional edition place special emphasize on the news of the particular region it is intended for. The slant or angle of the stories is also geared to the need of the region concerned.

Newspaper groups like Utusan Melayu and The New Straits Times have also established printing plants in certain regions of Peninsular Malaysia to facilitate publication of their regional
editions. For example, the Utusan Melayu Group is now operating a printing plant in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia while The New Straits Times Group is also doing so for the Northern Zone of the Peninsular.

This development and trend in Peninsular Malaysia is expected to discourage the birth and growth of rural print mass media which have its roots in the rural areas. The adequate communication infrastructure in the Peninsular would also provide the same effect.

As for Sabah and Sarawak, their inadequate communication infrastructure is believed to be one of the most important factors contributing to the birth and nurture of their rural print media. This is despite the fact that the literacy level in Sarawak and Sabah is much lower than the Peninsular. However, with the rapid increase of literacy in the two states the number of people reading newspapers is also expected to rise.

Also, what is expected is that the current development and trend of establishing printing plants away from Kuala Lumpur and the keen competition among the major national newspapers to offer regional editions would lead to the growth of rural journalism in the Peninsular. Further, it could provide journalists in rural areas the opportunities to give wider and comprehensive coverage of their regions.

Malaysians, besides having access to newspapers, radio and television, are also exposed to magazines which are either published locally or are imported. The local magazines are available in English, Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and in Tamil. Nearly all the local magazines are produced in Kuala Lumpur, with
the rest being published in the various state capitals.

The Rural Print Mass Media in Malaysia

As stated the rural print mass media in Malaysia are basically located in Sarawak and Sabah.

Sarawak has 12 newspapers, one in the local languages (Utusan Sarawak), one in Bahasa and English (The Borneo Post), two in English and the rest in Chinese (see table 1) published by the private sectors. Malaysia's Information Department in Sarawak also produce four bulletins, two in Bahasa Malaysia, a monthly and a bi weekly and two in Iban (the biggest ethnic group), a monthly and a weekly.

Sabah has nine newspapers. Three of the newspapers are published in three languages – Bahasa Malaysia, English and Kadazan (language of the largest ethnic group in Sabah) while the rest are in Chinese (See table 2).

It is observed that the Chinese language newspapers are more in terms of numbers as compared to the other languages newspapers are linked to the Chinese interest in commerce and their tradition of giving importance to education. Therefore, it is of no surprise that a number of the Chinese newspapers are located in the other major towns of Sarawak and Sabah where they are of the majority and where most of them are involved in businesses.

In term of contents, there is not much difference between the various newspapers. Generally, they give emphasis on local news, followed by national news, and ASEAN news and finally the world news. Also, the local newspapers do give importance to business news, especially if it has bearings on the local population. The
same goes for agricultural news, especially if it touches on the produce of the local inhabitants.

Somehow, some of the newspapers are seen as "taking sides". They can be seen as pro-government or the ruling party, pro-opposition and neutral. These allegations of the Sarawak and Sabah newspapers taking sides are seen from the slants of their coverages and their ownerships. However, these allegations of "taking sides" should not be directed to the East Malaysian newspapers only, the national newspapers based in Kuala Lumpur fair no better.

This state of affair occurs because even though newspaper industry is generally a business concern in Malaysia, political parties or individuals with strong political motivations or connections have been known to own newspaper companies or have a big share in the companies' assets. For example, the youngest daily in Sabah, Borneo Mail is reported to be owned by the current ruling party or someone very close to the party. As such, the news content are very much in favour of the current state government.

The birth of the Borneo Mail has also been strongly linked to one of the local daily taking a strong stance against the existing state government and giving coverage to serious allegations against it. As a result, the state government had directed all the state departments to stop subscribing to the concerned daily; its chief editor, a Malaysian but a non-Sabahan work permit terminated and the newspaper company sued in court. Further, another daily that had been seen as pro the ruling party is now seen as neutral and sometimes bordering on being too...
critical.

In Sarawak, one of the local newspapers that has been labelled as pro opposition has been reported to have been bought over by individuals who are pro the current state government.

However, irregardless of ownerships, newspapers in Malaysia, urban or rural have been judged as generally having a liberal policy. This means, that newspapers in the country have generally tried to be fair to all parties involved by giving coverage to all considered newsworthy. This is so even for giving coverage to the underdogs, the lower income groups, the under priviledge, rural people, etc.

a. Economic Viability of the Rural Media

In terms of circulation the rural newspapers in Sabah and Sarawak range from 3000 to nearly 39,000 copies sold daily (see table 1 & 2). Sarawak newspapers, however, have a higher circulation than the Sabah newspapers. The highest circulation in Sarawak is nearly 39,000 while in Sabah its only nearly 16,000 copies daily.

In Sarawak, the newspaper that has the most circulation is a Chinese daily based in Sibu an average size town, about five hours by boat from the state capital. The daily entitled See Hua Daily News has three editors published in three regional towns of Sarawak and has a total daily circulation of 38,700 copies. The second biggest selling newspapers in Sarawak is an English daily, the Borneo Post with a circulation of 28,000.

In Sabah also the largest selling publications is a Chinese paper called Asia Times. It has a circulation of about 16,000.
copies. The second most sold publication is a daily, *Daily Express*, a newspaper published in three languages (Bahasa Malaysia, English and Kadazan) and having a circulation of about 15 copies.

The prices of the rural print media range from 30 cents Malaysian to 70 cents Malaysian a copy. Somehow, the Chinese daily is more expensive per copy than for the other languages. For example, the *See Hua Daily News* in Chinese is selling for 70 cents a copy while the *People Mirror* in English sells for 30 cents a copy while the *Sarawak Tribune* also in English is selling for 40 cents a copy.

All the rural publications carry advertisements. The amount of advertisements vary from one newspaper to the next. However, it is observed that the newspapers located in the larger towns do carry more advertisements.

To ensure that their publishing business is in good financial position, the rural publishers do seek out printing jobs from other business people in terms of publishing their occasional publications, calendars, business cards, greeting cards and other miscellaneous.

b. Professionalism of the Rural Media/Management

In terms of ownerships, the rural media are owned by individuals, family, political party, etc. Many of the smaller publishing company, especially for the Chinese publications, are usually owned and managed by family businesses.

However, the trend seems that as a publishing company expanded there is a tendency for it going public and influential.
personalities or representatives of certain political parties trying to obtain a substantial share in it.

Much can still be done to improve the professionalism of the rural media/management. For now, most of the managers and proprietors are self-made people. Hiring are conducted based on the experience of the potential employees in relevant fields. In certain cases, children of the proprietors have managed to secure relevant qualifications and training and being asked to manage the family businesses.

In term of editorial staff, also, much can be done to improve their level of competency and professionalism. All the participants of a five day workshop in "Training for Rural Journalists" conducted by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre together with local or national press institute in Sabah and Sarawak admitted that they sorely needed training. Nearly all of them have no formal training in journalism. They also admitted that their management or chief editors were self-made people. The participants felt that their superiors themselves needed training, especially in the running of a newspaper company.

c. Adoption of New Technology

In term of adopting new technology the rural media is generally slow in doing so. This is more connected to its costs than actually being ignorant about it. Most of the rural media company are not that well off and many are barely surviving. However, being more expose to world because of their responsibilities as media people the publishers are generally
aware of the development in the communication world. Their regrets are that they cannot afford it. Also, a number said that they are waiting for the price to drop lower or more affordable to them.

Nevertheless, a few of the larger publishers in Sabah and Sarawak are beginning to buy personal computers and other newer computerised equipments. Those who have began to adopt the new technology are beginning to gain the upper hand over their competitors and finding it indispensable. However, they also have to work harder to justify the cost and maintainence. They are seeking to do other publications or other related businesses rather than just depending on the publications of their newspapers.

Public Access to and Participation in the Rural Media

In term of radio stationed in rural areas the public access and participation to it is rather good. Personnels in these radio stations are encouraged to involve the people in their various programmes, especially in voicing their problems. In fact in many of these radio stations there are talk back programmes where people can voice their problems over the telephones. However, this is limited only to people who have telephones or have public telephones installed in their villages.

Nevertheless, journalists in these radio stations are encouraged to go out and meet the people and gives relevant coverage to happenings in rural areas. The people access and participation in radio can be further much increased though.

As for the print media in the rural areas, the public access
to participation to it can also be very much improved. However, the rural media is not to be solely blamed for the situation. As participants for the workshops on "Training for Rural Journalists" lamented the communication infrastructure are not very adequate. They themselves find it very difficult to reach these people. In Sarawak for example, journalists are only able to reach some rural areas only with the assistance of the Department of Information personnels who are kind enough to accommodate them in their transports when the situation arises.

Stringers who stay in the rural areas also complained about the difficulty to send news fast when required and their news normally become "stale" by the time it reaches the relevant editors. Also, they complained about the attitudes of editors towards rural news. Editors, they said, do not give priorities to rural news and frequently used it only as fillers. On the other hand, editors complained about the quality of news sent to them by their stringers or rural journalists.

Further, it seems, the rural areas only get mass media coverage when something tragic or unusual occurs, and especially when ministers or other important dignitaries visited it.

Much can still be done to improve the public access and participation in the Malaysian rural media.

Reaching the Rural People

As said, a number of studies have shown that Malaysians including those in rural areas are reasonably exposed to mass media. A sample survey in 1972 among farmers in Peninsular Malaysia revealed that only 18 percent of them did not read
newspapers. It was also discovered that 82 percent of the farmers listened to rural broadcasts over radio.

Another survey conducted in 1982 among farmers in Sabah showed that they obtained their initial information about a National Unit Trust launched especially for the indigenous people through radio, television, newspapers, government information officers or mobile units of the Information Department, friends and their own children. Television was the commonest means of information. About 70 percent of them first heard about the Trust scheme from television.

Further, a 1987 survey of 1,000 respondents in two eastern states of Peninsular Malaysia (Terengganu and Kelantan) which are mainly rural revealed that television is the most credible mass media. This study by mass communication students of the Institut Teknologi MARA showed that about 70 percent of them felt so. Somehow they felt that it is easier to believe what can be heard and seen rather than just through reading or listening. It probably also reflect their level of education. Further, the rural people may be better able to associate with television because their traditional media are also verbal and visual in nature.

Hence, important though mass media as source of information and change agents in rural areas. Malaysia has also been using folk media or traditional communication as means of reaching people outside urban areas. Since early 1970s, Malaysia Information Department has been employing folk media to communicate development and other messages to rural audiences. It has sent out troupes to present the classic Ramayana figures of
"Wayang Kulit" (shadow play) to rural people with themes of anti-communism. Malaysia's Economic Policy, the Five-Year Plans, hazards of taking narcotics, family development and others. 'Boria' and 'Dikir Barat' two forms of Malaysia traditional music for example are also utilized to support government campaigns and spread desirable innovations. It was reported that a boria song urging the use of a new strain of rice was at one time among the most popular song in the country.

The Malaysian Information Ministry also occasionally hires Chinese drama troupes to perform skits which include government messages couched in humorous dialogues. With regard to this approach, senior information officers have attested to its effectiveness in livening up a dry topic like tenant registration. Information Department officers normally write the scripts for skits explaining the necessity to register all residents, using a buffoon-like character who cannot grasp the reasons behind voter registrations and a wise person who tries to explain to him. Such skits are interspersed in variety programmes featuring singing and dancing by local youth organisations.

The Malaysian Minister of Information stated his government would emphasize folk media. He said at that time: Folk tradition is being used by the Ministry of Information to send messages to the people in the rural areas and the department is trying to use other fields for this purpose. Oral tradition is used as an agent for socialisation in the society for the purpose of national identity. As such a number of traditional media have been part of Radio Television Malaysia.
However, it should also be noted that the Malaysian government has yet to fully utilise the various forms of traditional media in the country. For example, Derwent Kell in his book *A Doctor’s Borneo* described a form of folk media that has yet to be utilised. Derwent wrote that "Suburban type newspapers flourished in the jungle. Signs called "tatandu" were set up typically near the intersection of native paths. These tatandu consisted of small branches marked appropriately and stuck in the ground. A few bones tied together and hung of the tatandu clearly indicated the nature of the last meal eaten by the Murut travellers. If a hunter had killed a dear he hung a forked branch resembling dear horns on the tatandu; if a python, a coil of rattan; if a pig, a broken stick bent acutely and with the bark sliced off each end, this representing a pig's lower jaw. Direction of travel was indicated by by the inclination of the tatandu, a return journey by breaking the top of the tatandu over backwards. Often we stopped at the intersection of jungle paths and had someone read to us the latest jungle news as recorded in the tatandu.

Nevertheless, the Malaysian government have long utilise traditional media for various purposes over Radio and Television in Malaysia (RTM) in order to reach the rural people as effectively as possible. RTM's regional stations are also to give priority to folk media that are especially popular or indigenous to their area of operations. Further, to keep the Malaysian aborigines inform of what is going on in the country, Radio Malaysia broadcast special programmes two hours a day in Temiar and Semai dialects. Their traditional media are also utilise here.
Supporting the traditional media and the mass media, Malaysia’s Information Department continues to utilise interpersonal communication as the main technique in carrying out its activities to reach the rural folk. It employs various communication tools and strategies such as public addresses, group discussions, civic activities, film shows, publications and exhibitions to help the rural folk to understand and accept the role they are expected to play in achieving the objectives of national integration, security and development. Hence, any campaigns by the Department of Information to reach the rural people will be supported by films and slide shows, exhibitions, hoardings, banners, the distribution of publications such as booklets, folders, posters, relating to these policies and by the performances of the Pentarama (an abbreviation of the words "penerangan" (information), "tarian" (dance) and "drama" (drama)). The Department’s three Pentarama units employ entertainment media such as songs, dances and drama in its stage shows to convey its message to the people. These troupes tour the country, attracting large audiences, drawn from various ethnic groups.

Further, the department’s fleet of mobile units, comprising 296 land units and 48 riverine units, reaches the people in the towns and rural areas, the border regions and even the most remote villages along the rivers in Sabah and Sarawak. These units are equipped with public address systems, and cinema projectors as well television and VCRs. They are manned by field officers who are responsible for explaining government policies and projects and topics of national importance.

Here, it is also appropriate to note the acceptance of the
mass media, especially the print media in the rural areas. Supriya Singh who stayed in village for advance degree field work made some interesting observation. According to her there is the television and the radio, but they only give the headline stuff. It’s the sidelights you miss, the written word.

She observed that it is not that there are no newspapers at all in the kampong. It is just that few houses have them as one has to go to town to get them. Then at 60 to 70 cents (Malaysian) a copy for the Kuala Lumpur papers, a magazine often seems a better investment. And these Kuala Lumpur papers are not considered particularly relevant anyway. The local papers are largely in English with only a page or two in Malay and are also not particularly riveting. So it is hardly worth the trouble and expense.

"The only time I saw anybody excited over a newspaper was when the brother-in-law of one of the kampong people was involved in stabbing case in Kota Kinabalu, the capital state of Sabah. The report of the local paper was read again and again by those who can read. All the relevant details were repeated for those around who could not read – the age of the boy, the age of the girl, the number of stab wounds, other possible injuries. After the report had been read, the paper was passed around and the photographs were scrutinized. Everything was noted – the height of the building, the position of the boy, how his eyes were open, his arm lying under the body, how there were cushions on the floor. Then the children looked at it. It was a neighbourhood happening. What is relevant here is the price of timber, the amount of royalty to be paid, who has land and who is selling it."
whose wife has run away - this is the news."

CONCLUSION

Obviously much can be done to improve the rural media in Malaysia as well as the effort to reach the rural folks. However, it must be noted that the traditional media are fairly utilised and that the latest communication technology are employed whenever possible. In fact the Malaysian government seemed to have a penchant for the newest communication technology in its effort to reach her rural citizens. Nevertheless, it is heartening to note that in reaching the rural folks interpersonal communication are being given due consideration.

As for the print media, especially newspapers more effort should be geared towards truly establishing a rural press. For now, the rural press in Malaysia is still being urban oriented. News from rural areas and information that are useful to rural folks are still negligible. Also, it can be seen that a substantial portion of rural newspapers contents are from BERNAMA (Malaysia National News Agency) stories. This is especially so for the smaller newspapers. In fact one of BERNAMA function was to assist in the growth of local newspapers by providing them with news that are otherwise beyond their small scale of operations. By providing these local newspapers with national and international news as well as local news at a much scaled down prices it has helped to make them more competitive and healthy. As such BERNAMA is being urged by public interest groups like the Federation of Malaysian Consumers (FOMCA) to
continue play this vital role. In fact POMCA would like BERNAMA
to give more concentration to rural coverage. After all about
two-thirds of Malaysians are still in rural areas. Even though
BERNAMA now has the monopoly of distributing international news
in Malaysia, it must remember that it is the rural folks that are
the soul of the nation and also they are the people that are
needed to be informed as well as mobilised towards a speedy
nation building and development.

NOTES

1. Paper presented at AMIC Seminar on "Developments and Trends in the Rural Media in Asia".
2. Senior Lecturer, School of Mass Communication, Institut Teknologi MARA.
3. In John Lent Four Conundrums: Mass Media In the Third World Unpublished.
6. Ibid., p. 80.
7. Ibid., p. 83.
9. In Sabah there is no paper specifically in Bahasa Malaysia even though there are local Chinese newspapers.
10. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Malaysia Information Department in Sabah and Sarawak, participants of the workshops "Training of Rural Journalists" by AMIC and MPI, etc.
### APPENDIX - A

#### PRICE AND CIRCULATION OF NEWSPAPERS IN SARAWAK - 1968

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL NEWSPAPERS:</th>
<th>COST PER COPY</th>
<th>DAILY CIRCULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utusan Sarawak</td>
<td>30 cents</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(twice weekly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Tribune</td>
<td>40 cents</td>
<td>$10.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borneo Post (Kuching Ed.)</td>
<td>40 cents</td>
<td>$14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 cents</td>
<td>$16.00 (inclusive above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 cents</td>
<td>$16.00 (&quot; &quot; )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Mirror</td>
<td>30 cents</td>
<td>$09.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chinese Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Hua Daily News (Kuching ed.)</td>
<td>70 cents</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70 cents</td>
<td>(inc. above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70 cents</td>
<td>(inc. above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Times</td>
<td>50 cents</td>
<td>$14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin Wan Pao (Special Ed.)</td>
<td>40 cents</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Petang (Afternoon News)</td>
<td>40 cents</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Daily News</td>
<td>40 cents</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miri Daily News</td>
<td>60 cents</td>
<td>$16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia Daily News</td>
<td>60 cents</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Hua Weekly (given free with See Hua Daily)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Sales</th>
<th>Copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Straits Times (English)</td>
<td>60 cts</td>
<td>$0.60</td>
<td>04,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarita Harian (Bahasa)</td>
<td>60 cts</td>
<td>$0.60</td>
<td>04,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pada Kini (Bahasa)</td>
<td>85 cts</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>02,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pusat Malaysia (Bahasa)</td>
<td>65 cts</td>
<td>$0.65</td>
<td>01,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mingguan Malaysia (Bahasa)</td>
<td>85 cts</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>01,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay Mail (English)</td>
<td>55 cts</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>05,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanyang Siang Pau (Chinese)</td>
<td>70 cts</td>
<td>$0.70</td>
<td>06,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin Chew Jit Pao (Chinese)</td>
<td>70 cts</td>
<td>$0.70</td>
<td>06,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star (English)</td>
<td>60 cts</td>
<td>$0.60</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NEWSPAPERS AND NEWSLETTERS PUBLISHED BY THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT IN SARAWAK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Sales</th>
<th>Copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahasa Malaysia</td>
<td>Pedoman Bakyat (monthly)</td>
<td>30 cts</td>
<td></td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedoman Masyarakat (twice monthly)</td>
<td>30 cts</td>
<td></td>
<td>06,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melayu Language</td>
<td>Bumburita (monthly)</td>
<td>20 cts</td>
<td></td>
<td>02,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harang Seri Sejati (weekly)</td>
<td>20 cts</td>
<td></td>
<td>02,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** Information Department publications are generally distributed free or sold at very low prices.

**SOURCE:** Department of Information Malaysia, Sarawak

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## APPENDIX B

### NEWSPAPERS IN SABAH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Newspaper</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Daily Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Daily Express</td>
<td>Sabah Publishing House (in English, Bahasa and Kadazan)</td>
<td>15,000 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sabah Times</td>
<td>Syarikat Sabah Times Sdn. Bhd. (Pemodalan Bumiputra Sabah, Syarikat Donson, Datuk Herman Luping)</td>
<td>14,000 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Asia Times</td>
<td>Encik Tiong Tan Hua/ Encik Chong Fook Loi</td>
<td>16,000 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sandakan Jih Pao</td>
<td>Lampayan Palung Sdn Bhd. Mr. Chong Fook Loi</td>
<td>13,500 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Morning Post</td>
<td>Miew Min Yong (in Chinese)</td>
<td>95,000 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Sabah Shi Pao</td>
<td>Syarikat Sabah Times (in Chinese)</td>
<td>93,000 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Borneo Mail</td>
<td>N/A (in Bahasa and English)</td>
<td>10,000 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Borneo Bulletin</td>
<td>Brunei Press Ltd. (in English)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. New Straits Times</td>
<td>New Straits Times Press (Malaysia)</td>
<td>4,300 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Berita Harian</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; (in Bahasa)</td>
<td>5,500 copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. New Sunday Times</td>
<td>&quot; &quot; (in English)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kemaraan "pembangunan" telah merubah kawasan pantai yang membaikkan panas, yang dulunya lengang, kepada kesibukan sebuah "istana" yang tersergam dengan lebih 400 bilik berhawa dingin.

Istana besar putih itu adalah sebuah hotel pantaian yang dibina khas untuk para pelancong -- terutama dari luar negara -- dalam masa dua tahun dengan kos $200.

Kawasan itu asalnya -- dan masih terus menjadi -- satu kawasan perkampungan nelayan yang pesat berubah wajah. Seolah-olah sekeli mata saja, projek hotel itu telah merubah bandar "koboi" Teluk Bahang yang berhampiran dan kampung itu, daripada kawasan pinggiran kepada bakal bandar lipuran antarabangsa.

Dasar kerajaan untuk memajukan sektor pelancongan dapat dilihat daripada kesungguhan usaha meneroka kawasan yang terpencil itu.

Kemaraan pembangunan itu bukan sahaja memberi faedah kepada negara daripada segi tukaran wang asing bahkan masyarakat setempat berpeluang mencuburi kegiatan sampingan melalui industri hiliran.

Sehubungan itu, penduduk di kawasan itu kini mengharapkan masa depan yang lebih cerah dengan mempelbagaikan kegiatan sara hidup.

Seorang Ahli Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JKKK), Mohamad Yusof Abu Bakar berkata hotel itu boleh membantu meningkatkan taraf pendapatan penduduk kampung tersebut.

Kewujudan hotel itu telah membuka peluang pekerjaan baru kepada anak tempatan yang sekarang lama t erpaksa bekerja sebagai buruh biasa di kilang dan bekejra sambilan.

Di samping itu, ramai pekerja hotel menyewa rumah di sekitar kampung. Secara tak langsung memberi pendapatan tambahan kepada ibu bapanya.

Pihak pengurusan hotel juga menawarkan lima gerai di perkarangan hotel itu untuk diusahakan oleh penduduk tempatan.
Gerai-gerai itu meliputi penjualan makanan cenderamata dan kraftangan.

Sebelum ini pihak pengurusan hotel ada menawarkan penduduk tetapatan untuk membekalkan bahan makanan basah seperti sayur-sayuran tetapi ditolak oleh penduduk tempatan kerana tidak berkemampuan.

Penghulu Mukim Satu dan Dua Teluk Bahang, Encik Abu Hanifah Abu Bakar berkata pihaknya telah memenuhi pengurusan hotel untuk membincangkan soal memberi pekerjaan kepada penduduk tempatan.

Hasil pertemuan itu pihak hotel berjanji akan memberi 25 peratus pekerjaan kepada penduduk tempatan. Tetapi sehingga kini hanya 20 peratus sahaja telah diisi.

pihaknya bercadang untuk mengadakan satu lagi pertemuan dengan soal pengambilan pekerja tempatan.
Intro 1

Jika anda mendekatinya dari laut, anda mungkin kagum dengan sebuah bangunan yang putih terserlah yang tersergam antara haris pokok kelapa...

Intro 2

Entah sudah berapa ribu tahun pantai putih itu

Intro 3

Amir, yang dalam darjah dua, sudah bercita-cita bekerja di hotel yang tersergam di kampungnya, Kampung NeJayan, Telok Bahang, Pulau Pinang. Alangkah indahnya bangunan itu berbanding dengan rumah buruk binaan ayahnya, seorang nelayan di kampung itu.

Intro 4

Kemaraan "pembangunan" telah merubah kawasan pantai yang membahang panas, yang dulunya lengang, kepada kesihatan sebuah "istana" tersergam dengan lebih 400 bilik berhawa dingin.

Mereka datang dari pelusuk huti untuk beristirehat dengan sepuasa-puasnya tanpa menghirau alam sekeliling.

Intro 5

Alangkah jauh perbezaan keadaan di pulau ini --- antara kemiskinan dengan kemewahan, antara resam dengan kemodenan, antara pantai dengan bangunan. Namun Teluk Bahang terus "membangun" dalam bahang panas lautan Pantai Utara Pulau Pinang.

Jolong di tengah laut bersama usia yang semakin meningkat.

Pandangannya tertumpu pada sebuah bangunan putih yang berdiri di puncak bukit. Pemuda itu mengeluh sendirian.

Matanya beralih memandang ke rumah usang di hujung teluk.