

## Brunei Darussalam: Kite Flying Festival (KFF)



The KFF is a recent activity. It started around 1986. In the Kite Flying Festival two vital aspects are taken into account, flying the kite and the beauty of the kite. Kite flying can be divided into two categories: “**Flying ability**” and **intercepting and severing** the string of the opponent’s kite (*berpulut*). Kite *berpulut* is a challenge between two players trying to cut the string of the opponent. The one whose string is cut first is considered the loser. The **Kite Flying Festival** participants are from the teenage, young adult and middle-aged members of the population. Usually the festival is held from the month of July to August. During this time the wind blows at a desirable speed, and these are also the months when His Majesty’s birthday celebration takes place.

However kite flying is believed to have been started by Bruneians much earlier than that. During those early years, kite flying was normally carried out as an individual activity. As such, when a person was interested in flying a kite, he had to make his own kite and fly it himself.

Kite flying normally takes place during weekends, public holidays, or school holidays. This is the time when children are on school holidays and some adult kite enthusiasts are also on a break. Due to the increasing amount of time children spend in school, kite flying activity has been reduced quite dramatically since the 1960s (Hj. Abd Samad, 1993).

During recent years, kite flying has been confronted with **two challenges**. First is the **site for kite flying**. In areas where kite flying normally took place, physical development has taken place, making the area unsuitable for this activity. In some areas it is now not possible to fly kites at all, such as adjacent to roads, highways and the airport. Secondly, the **advent of new forms of entertainment** brought by technological advancement pose a formidable challenge to kite flying. Children find computer and video games more enjoyable and interesting than kite flying, and can play them indoor in all weather, whereas kite require a windy day.

The origin of kite (**kikik**) arguably comes from a Greek, archytas about 2,400 years ago. Some writers noted that the first inventor of the kite is **Han Sin**, a Chinese, about 300 years ago. He obtained the idea of kite making when his hat, that was attached to a string flew in the air. Even though these statements cannot be confirmed, within Brunei the role of the Chinese in introducing the kite is very important. It started when two Chinese princes were believed to have tried to take the **precious stone (kemala)** from the mouth of the dragon at **Mount Kinabalu**. These princes were **Ong Sum Ping** and **Ong Kong**.

Recognizing these challenges to the traditional sport of kite-flying, the Committee for His Majesty's birthday celebration in 1986 decided to concentrate the traditional festival into one event. In that year, the Kite Flying Festival was first introduced, and a recreation-centred traditional festival was newly established.

According to Hj Abd Samad (1993), one of the Committee members, five objectives were outlined for organizing KFF:

- to receive KFF as a traditional entertainment;
- to expose this entertainment to new generations;
- to make it an appropriate leisure activity;
- to make KFF a source of relaxation;
- to make His Majesty's annual birthday celebration more interesting and jubilant.

In summary, the KFF emerged and developed in Brunei Darussalam for clear reasons. Its history and origin can clearly be traced, unlike that of the AFF.

### ***Current Situation***

Nowadays, the kite flying festival is seldom organized, although it is still considered an important traditional game. Kite flying can be performed by all generations irrespective of race and ethnic group. In this decade, the Kite Flying Festival was only ever formally held in conjunction with H.M. Birthday.

Kite flying is not only fun to watch but participants can also win prizes. It may take the whole day and the afternoon session is the highlight with the final "match" and presentation of prizes to the winners.

On the festival day, participants arrive early at the venue. It will be attended by many people, predominately teens and children. At eight o'clock in the morning, events of the day are announced through the loud speakers. Music is played to accompany the events. Generally kite flying can be divided into three primary categories.

1. Best designed kite competition;
  2. Kite flying competition; and
  3. Kite intercepting and string severing match (*berpulut*).
- **Best Designed Kite Competition** is purely a physical competition. It is divided into several categories such as beautiful kite, the largest kite or kite with the best design and best workmanship. The organizers will judge the competition. The participants are informed of the terms and criteria adopted in judging the competition. At the festival usually all types of kites created by competitors will be lined up for observation by on-lookers. Kites of different colours, motives, sizes and design are displayed.
  - **Kite Flying Competition** considers how the kite is flown in the air. Although this is a subjective matter, the organizers and judges have their own criteria. A common criteria used is the **stability of the kite** when hoisted in the air and lowered down, and its stability when air-borne. In this category the design, size and beauty of the kite are not taken into account. The length of time used to fly the kite depends on the condition of the wind.
  - **Pertandingan Berpulut (Twisting Competition)** is considered the most interesting of all. For the participants, this is a very challenging competition. Two or three players will **intercept and tangle** the string of the opponents' kites in the air in an attempt to sever their strings. The kites whose strings have been severed are considered the losers. Sometimes this competition takes time, but for really good players, **tangling and severing** the opponent's string may take only a few minutes.

Usually the drifted kites of the losers will have a new owner. Any one who can catch it has the right to own the kite, so as soon as a kite's string has been cut, children chase after it. If the original owner wishes to repossess the kite, he has to join the chase and will usually be given first priority.

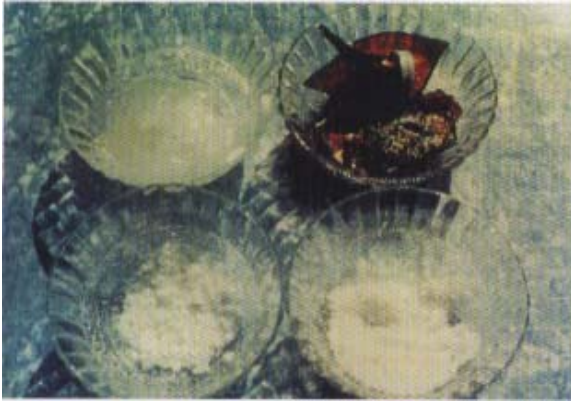
This competition requires strong and systematic skills. Most participants would make preliminary preparations long before the competition. The string will be **coated with glass powder**, sourced from ordinary glass bottles which have been pounded and ground to a powdery texture. This will be mixed with glue, and applied to coat the kite's string.

Apart from having kite-making skills, the participant should be good at the **art of intercepting or tangling the kite** (so-called *memulut*). A good technique of tangling can easily defeat the opponent. The **tangling and severing** competition becomes exciting when crowds cheer and support their favorite players. If one player succeeds in severing another kite, the crowd will cheer him as the champion. [end]

**More pictures:**

Although Bruneian kites all look similar, some kite makers break with the traditional shape by creating human figures. There are a variety of sizes, shapes and designs of kites called 'kikik' in the Bruneian dialect.





*Vital components of a kite: (clockwise from right) glass, tapioca flour, cooked and then mixed with ground glass (bottom left) to make the kite string stiff and sharp, and cooked sago (ambuyat) to make the paper stick to the framework. Most kite makers still prefer the traditional sago to modern-day glue.*



*The annual Kite Flying Festival which is normally held in conjunction with His Majesty The Sultan's birthday celebrations with several hundred participants. It is launched by a senior government official, seen here being introduced to competitors.*



*His Majesty Sultan Haki Hassana; Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah flying a kite at the festival.*



*Participants line up with their hand-made kites.*



*Winners of the kite-flying competition receiving prizes.*