

REPORT ON HILL PADI

BERNAMA, the Malaysian National News Agency Monday released a report on hill padi.

HILL PADI FARMERS LOOKING FOR Foothold IN NATIONAL AGRI POLICY  
By Jackson Sawatan

KOTA MARUDU: For the hill padi farmers, modern agricultural machinery is more of a nuisance than a help.

This is because their farms are not only on high, undulating land but also on slopes as steep as 70 degrees, a way of livelihood that has been handed down for generations.

The plots need not be fertilized, for it is enough for them to slash and burn before planting.

Other than pests and weeds, the padi do not have much problems.

There is however one taboo -- the roots of the seedlings cannot be too long from soaking in water for it can cause too much foliage and the plants "too lazy" to bear fruits.

These are probably the reasons why hill rice are fragrant, soft and tender and they can be grown only in those high and steep terrain.

"This padi has to be planted on slopes where water cannot stagnate, and that is why we must choose the right season to plant them. The end of the year is the right time because of adequate rain," said Kuliam Goling, 57, a hill padi farmer in Kampung Tombotuon, Kota Belud, about 90km from here.

If the timing is right, the crop can be bountiful. But if the timing is out and the dry season sets in before the padi can flower, the crop will be poor.

As practised by their ancestors, these farmers require only simple tools to plant their padi. Among them are parang to slash the vegetation cover, rattan baskets and other simple implements crafted from the available timber to plant the seedlings.

During the planting season, the men will poke holes into the ground, each some 30cm apart. They would be followed by the women, with basketful of seedlings on their back, planting about 15 seedlings in each hole.

These seem to be back-breaking work under the hot sun, but these farmers also seem to be a contented lot.

After planting, their tasks are to keep out the pests and weeds before harvesting in four months' time.

Although modern farming yield better returns, hill padi has its own niche in the market and lives of these people. In fact, some of them may have their own farm in the lowland, but they still till the slopes for their hill rice.

"They must have the delicious and fragrant hill rice for their own families," said Kuliam, who chose to plant hill rice because her land is too undulating for a traditional rice field.

"We can only plant one crop a year and use the same land for other crops like maize and potatoes, so we can earn extra income while ensuring the family has rice the whole year," she said.

HILL PADI FARMERS A VANISHING BREED

The plight of these farmers are probably not well known, though there are

still a sizeable number of them, especially in Sabah where they account for some 30 percent of the rural populace.

These people are really living on the fringes because there isn't much information about them in books or statistics about agriculture in Sabah. What is often said about them though, is that their "slash and burn" practice has caused environmental degradation.

For Kuliam, this traditional farming may be coming to an end in one or two generations' time.

"Most of the remaining farmers are old. The young people are not interested and then there won't be any more hill padi farmers," she said.

Will any move to revive this ancient farming method be seen as a retrogressive step?

"That's not so," said the Member of Parliament for Tuaran, Wilfred Madius Tangau.

He said although they are on the fringes, it does not mean that the hill padi farmers are not contributing to the nation.

"They are self-supporting farmers and as such they do not depend on imported rice. Their produce constitutes a saving on food import for the nation," he said.

#### STUDIES NEEDED TO AID HILL PADI FARMERS.

While the government is actively promoting agriculture, the fate of these farmers should not be forgotten, said Wilfred.

He suggested that a comprehensive study be made on these farmers who are not only found in Sabah but also in neighbouring Sarawak and the peninsula.

"The study should cover the number of households involved, their total output and how they can be assisted," he said.

Although they seem to be self-sufficient in food production, they are still the poorest farmers in Sabah.

"Unlike the lowland padi farmers who receive RM300 per hectare in subsidy from the government, these hill padi farmers do not receive any aid," he said.

For the hill padi farmers of Sabah who are mostly Kadazandusun and Murut, this unique practice is deeply rooted in the native culture and tradition.

According to Kuliam, the cultivation of hill padi has a higher standing among the community when compared to other crops.

"In the past, there are different types of ceremonies for each stage of cultivation. To the Kadazandusun, hill padi has its own spirit which must be handled with care," she said.

#### HILL PADI THE LIFE FORCE OF GOTONG-ROYONG

In some districts, hill padi gives the community members the occasion to help each other because of the labour and repetitive tasks that require many hands for perform.

In contrast, the "scattering" technique of lowland padi cultivation can be done by only one person.

During harvest, thousands of bunches of the padi have to be cut one by one with a special small sickle, unlike the lowland variety which can be harvested with machineries or a big sickle.

"So, we always have to cooperate when we plant hill padi," said Kuliam.

She hopes the government could assist the hill padi farmers, if not in the form of subsidies, then in the form of promotion and marketing. The Sabah hill rice sells for an average of RM5 per kilogram.

Kuliam said the government could also help with high quality seedlings, pesticide and weedkillers.

To her and her fellow farmers, their fate lies in the hand of the policy and

decision-makers who are planning the next wave of agricultural advancement.

#### NEW STRAITS TIMES EDITORIAL EXTRACT

NST among others comments on absenteeism in the Dewan Rakyat.

It says the ongoing session is the Budget meeting.

The 2001 Budget was tabled by the finance Minister three Fridays ago. But how many MPs take the Government's income and expenditure proposals seriously?

Attendance tabulated by the New Strits Times shows that since Oct 30 not more than 80 MPs were present in the Dewan.

And we have 193 representatives, elected by the people to be their ears, eyes and mouths in Parliament.

True, a good number hold executive office as Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary secretaries.

Their duties prevent them from being present all the time.

But the dispensation does not extend to about 140 other MPs.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has voiced concern over the absenteeism on more than one occasion.

He has even hinted that Government backbenchers with a poor attendance record might not be on the list of candidates for the nex general election.

But NST feels that warning has not quickened the malingeres to change their ways.

Some remain content with attaining the prefix Yang Berhormat. According to NST they wantonly ignore the attendant duties and responsibilities of an elected MP.

We know and they know, too, that the truant student is punished and the absentee worker's take-home pay is docked.

But the malingerers among MPs? They continue to draw their allowance, regardless of their attendance in Parliament.

NST feels as law-makers of the land, they present poor role models as did the Mps involved in the acrimonous altercation in the Dewan on Nov 8, in front of a group of students seated in the public gallery.)

NST also feels the behaviour displayed by two members in the Dewan Rakyat last Wednesday was not merely uparliamentary, it was simply and manifestly childish.

"Only children surrounded by gangs issue calls to fights, one by one.

"They known, of course, the dares would not elicit response.

"Friends on both sides would hold them back and keep the antagonists apart."

NST feels it is the height of irresponsibility when grown-up men, representatives elected to the august chambers of Parliament who would surely have children of their own, stoop to such silly antics.

"Worse, it is unbecoming of both protagonists to deny throwing down the gauntlet, that the other drew first blood when the Hansard has a blow-by-blow record.

"We say both, the backbencher and the opposition member are reprehensible.

"Indeed many others, on both benches, contributed to the shameful ruckus."

NST recalls the dewan has witnessed too many irresponsible interruptions over the past three weeks.

"The root cause of such misheaviour is a patent lack of understanding of the role of a Member of parliament."

#### UTUSAN MALAYSIA EDITORIAL EXTRACT

UTUSAN MALAYSIA talks about the proposal to extend the mandatory retirement

age from 55 to 60.

According to the newspaper the extension would help the Government retain capable and experienced officers who would in return enjoy an additional income.

The newspaper says it would a waste of money if resourceful personnel are not fully utilised for the development of the country.

The newspaper is also of the opinion that it is good to see old folks enjoy working right up to the age of 60.

Thus, the regulation on age limit working in the public service would have to be amended.

Commenting further, the newspaper says CUEPACS is supporting the proposal because it is in the interest of its members, while the Government is looking into the present needs of the country, and the impact in the future.

What the newspaper is hoping from the proposal of extending the working years is that the public service would vastly improve.

Besides that, the newspaper hopes the longer the officers stay in the service, it would not hamper the promotion for others who are waiting in line of succession.

The newspaper says on the whole, all public personnel have their respective places in the Government, and the Government would not simply misplace them in the public sector.

#### CHINA PRESS EDITORIAL EXTRACT

According to CHINA PRESS the forthcoming Lunas state seat by-election would be a ring for a test of strength between the ruling and opposition parties.

The daily among others recalls the reminder by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that the oppositions should not play up sensitive issues to fish for votes.

CHINA PRESS is confident that the Lunas by-election would be a fair and clean one where both parties abide strictly to the Election Act and a stipulated code of ethics by refraining to touch on sensitive issues pertaining race and religion.

Both the oppositions and BN could strive to woo voters through healthy political campaign focusing on their political achievements, political programme, past track records and quality of candidates.

Any attempt to resort to tactics such as threat, lure through material gains or mis-information should be condemned.

CHINA PRESS reminds the concerned parties not to resort to dirty tricks to secure votes. They should exercise restraint to avoid untoward incidents. As soon as the election is over, they should return to work to serve the people, it advises.

#### BERITA HARIAN EDITORIAL EXTRACT

BERITA HARIAN writes about inconclusive and hung situation of the 43rd presidential election in the United States.

The daily observes that the countries all over the world seem to be in euphoria mood in jabbing the American system of election.

Washington had always claimed that its democracy is the world's best without flaws.

But, the daily feels that it is the time run down the US model of democracy.

From India, the world's most populous country in democracy, right up to a tiny poor country in Africa, the Press have the field day in taking a swipe at the United States.

But, according to the daily, the German Press had the best summary of the

whole comic election episode.

The Germans' view is that the US election system is already out-dated because it does not recognise who is the eventual winner.

The Third World countries do not use machine to count the votes, and counting votes manually is very accurate.

The German Press suggest that perhaps observers from the developing countries should be sent to the United States to witness the whole procedure of the election.

In another editorial BERITA HARIAN comments on the withdrawal of 74 types of medicines which contain phenylpropanolamine that could cause stroke.

The daily hopes that the Health Ministry would monitor and check all pharmacy outlets so that the patients could be protected.

The daily also calls on all consumers to be on the alert on the dangers of phenylpropanolamine.

#### SIN CHEW JIT POH EDITORIAL EXTRACT

SIN CHEW JIT POH lauds the government's decision to increase medical charges for illegal immigrants who seek treatment in government hospitals effective January next year.

Applauding the move, the daily feels such action should have been taken much earlier in view of grave social costs brought about by illegal immigrants and their children on the society.

It is certainly unfair to use the money of local tax payers to subsidize the needs of illegal foreign workers.

The increasing number of foreigners seeking treatment in public hospitals, particularly at the out-patient department, not only exert extra work load on the medical staff, but indeed at the expense of the locals, who had to seek treatment in private clinics due to the long queues.

The current system of "get treatment first and pay later" practised in public hospitals also had resulted in mounting unsettled medical bills.

According to Health Minister Chua Jui Meng, RM28 million or 35 per cent of the total RM81 million outstanding medical bills in government hospitals are owed by illegal immigrants.

It is, therefore, time to introduce a regulation requiring foreigners to pay first before they could be rendered treatment.

The daily also advises that tax imposed on children of illegal immigrants studying in government schools be increased as the current rate of RM10 per month for primary students and RM20 for secondary students are not enough to recover for the costs incurred.

Malaysia, the daily stresses, has no obligations to provide free education for citizens of other countries.

BERNAMA