INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is located in the heart of Southeast Asia. It consists of the Peninsular Malaysia and the states of Sabah, Sarawak and the Federal Territory of Labuan in the northwestern coastal area of Borneo Island. The South China Sea separates the two regions. Antiquity writers once referred to the Peninsular Malaya as the Golden Chersonese. Malaysia central geographical position in Southeast Asia has been responsible for many changes over the century in terms of political, economic and cultural influences coming from its neighbouring nations as well as from the West.

Malaysia is a land of diversity. It is a land of diverse races, diverse languages, diverse cultures and diverse religions. It has a total population of 21 millions consisting of the Malays, Kadazan, Dayaks, Bajaus, Melanaus, Muruts, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians and aborigines. The official language of Malaysia is Bahasa Melayu. However, different ethnic groups speak their own dialects. Its multi-racial population practice various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity. Under the Federal Constitution, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony. Each ethnic group has its own beliefs and practises its own cultures. The Malaysian culture places high value on courtesy, moderation and harmony, harmonious and cordial relations among family members, neighbours and community. As Malaysians respect each others beliefs and faiths, cultural and religious festivals and other auspicious occasions are regarded as important festivals. Gotong-royong or...
Community participation is a basis for community life in Malaysia and this is being practised especially in the rural community.

The 1991 census showed that about 51% of the Malaysian populations resided in urban areas compared with 34% in 1980. Urbanisation brings about changes in its population. The result of the 1996 survey of Reading Habits among Malaysians indicates that the literacy rate of Malaysian is 93%. Malaysia is expected to achieve 100% literacy rate by the year 2010. The survey also indicates that about 21% of Malaysia's urban population have accessed to computers.

**CULTURAL AND INFORMATION POLICIES**

The Malaysian government recognises that cultural programmes are instrumental to improve the quality of life and to promote national integration. The role of culture is to enrich national identity, strengthen cultural understanding among different ethnic groups and inculcate consciousness and appreciation of arts and culture among the people. In an attempt to establish national unity acceptable to all citizens, regardless of ethnic origins or religion affiliations, the government introduced "Rukunegara" (Malaysian nationhood) as pillars of national philosophy. The "Rukunegara" is guided by 5 principles, namely: (a) believe in God; (b) loyalty to the King and the country; (c) upholding the supremacy of the constitution and rules of law; (d) mutual respect; (e) morality and good social behaviour. All Malaysians are encouraged to inculcate a deep respect for moral values and adopt them as a code of conduct.

The National Cultural Policy was formulated in 1971. The policy consists of three important elements i.e. Malaysia gives greater emphasis on cultural programmes that enhance national identity, promote national integration and unity as well as maintain racial harmony. The policy states that the base national culture of Malaysia is the Malay culture, however other cultures of different ethnic groups practise their own unique cultures. The objectives of the Malaysian National Culture Policy can be achieved by adopting the following strategies; (a) reviving, preserving and promoting national characteristics to strengthen the basic of the national culture; (b) promoting and strengthening cultural leadership and relations; (c) establishing effective communication to foster nationalism among the people; (d) fulfilling the socio-cultural needs of the people; and (e) enriching the country's national culture development.

Vision 2020 was introduced in 1990, whereby the government set a national agenda to attain a fully developed nation by the year 2020. Vision 2020 emphasises that Malaysia to be developed in all dimensions: a nation united and at peace with itself and with others, with its people strong in moral and spiritual values. The thrust is to develop Malaysia as an information-rich society, imbued with science and technology culture.

As Malaysia moves forward into the next millennium, where information technology is being recognised as the strategic resource and the prime mover of the global community, the Malaysian government is aggressively promoting IT culture among its society. The government of Malaysia is committed to develop Malaysia as a digital nation. A digital city, Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), located in an area of 15km by 50km stretching from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and the new capital centre at Putrajaya is being developed. The MSC will be the nerve centre for the development of Malaysia as a global economy anchored by an information-rich and knowledge society. It will be the headquarter for research and development, the design and marketing of multimedia industries. In this respect, the government is encouraging Malaysian software houses to develop Malaysian local multimedia contents, which include Malaysian cultural heritage in multimedia formats. Cyber cities will be spreading throughout the country.
as every state takes initiative to develop its own IT city centres. In future, each state will be able to highlight its own unique cultures in multimedia forms accessible through the Internet or any computer networks.

In January 1996, Malaysia launched its own satellite - the MEASAT I and in December of the same year, the MEASAT II was launched. The Satellite technologies enable vast resources of multimedia knowledge, information and entertainment to be transmitted to homes even in remote places. The ASTRO, Malaysian's own satellite television channel, provides home viewers access to 30 TV channels 24-hour a day. Thus, the ASTRO provides Malaysian viewer with additional television and media services, in addition to the existing 4 channels of radio and television stations. Television and radio broadcasting form an important media for disseminating and reinforcing national culture to the general public.

The advent of the Internet forms another communication media that allows individual to exchange information interactively and to access global information resources from any locations at any time of the day.

The Malaysian Government has passed a number of policies that are relevant to cultural development of the country, namely the Dasar Buku Negara (National Book Policy), the National Policy on Library and Information Services, the National Film Policy and the National Telecommunication Policy. The National Book Policy was passed in 1984. The policy aims to improve the development of book industry in Malaysia. The Policy states that books published in the country should be of high quality that can stimulate intellectual, social and cultural developments of Malysians. The National Policy on Library and Information Services was passed in 1989. In line with the government’s objectives to create a reading and informed society, the Policy aims at the provision and progressive improvement of library services in order to contribute effectively to national development. It also aims to provide support for (a) the policy formulation and decision making process; (b) planning, research and development activity; (c) the educational process; (d) the intellectual and fulfilment of cultural and recreational needs of the society. The policy states that, as part of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the nation, all library materials published and produced in the country shall be deposited and conserved in accordance with legislative provisions in force and made as accessible as possible. Library shall have provision to access to databases at the national and international levels. In order to reduce the nation’s dependence on external sources of information, effective measures shall be taken: (a) to exploit national resources of information and develop databases, particularly in major development sectors; and (b) to establish specialised information centres and systems in areas deemed to be of national importance.

In 1997, the National Film Policy was passed by the government, which aims to raise the standard of Malaysian films in term of its aesthetics, quality and the industry to international standards. Among its objectives is to raise the quality of local films by emphasising the infusion of good cultural and humanitarian values.

The National Telecommunication Policy was formulated in 1995 to ensure that the growth of telecommunication services and its use of technology to support national development in line with national aspirations. The Policy will be the main catalyst towards the creation of an information-rich and intelligent nation. Some of its objectives are to: (a) provide modern, sophisticated and quality telecommunications services at affordable cost; (b) ensure that telecommunication services are extended to the urban and rural population; (c) increase communication links with other countries with the aim of making Malaysia an international telecommunication hubs.

LEGISLATION

Formulating Cultural Information Policy should take into consideration of the existing legislative provisions of the country as well as policies related to culture and
information. In term of legislative provisions, the Federal Constitution states that all persons are equal before the law and entitled for equal protection under the law. The Federal Constitution gives special power to the Legislative Assembly of Sabah and Sarawak to establish a native court system in addition to the existing common laws. Both states have utilised this power and set their own Native Courts, complete with procedures and using native law and customs (adat) as its substantive law. Malaysia recognizes that indigenous people relied upon their oral traditions where customs and rites were passed from one generation to another. Therefore, three legal systems coexist - the common, syariah and native law. The legal pluralism provides the necessary mechanism in protecting the cultural heritage of the indigenous people of Malaysia. The legal foundations of the Malaysian cultural policy are also derived from the following acts: (a) National Art Gallery Act, 1958; (b) National Archive Act, 1966; [Revised 1971], [Revised 1993], (c) Bernama Act, 1967, [Revised 1990]; (d) National Library Act, 1972, [Amendment Act, 1987], (e) Tourist Development Corporation of Malaysia Act, 1972; (f) Broadcasting Act, 1988, [Amendment Act, 1997]; (g) Antiquity Act, 1976; (h) Perbadanan Kemajuan Krafangan Malaysia Act, 1979; (i) Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia Act, 1981, [Amendment Act, 1984]. With the establishment of Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor, a series of Cyberlaws being introduced/considered, such as the Copyright Amendment Bill, the Digital Signature Bill, the Computer Crime Bill to name the few.

INFORMATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is widely acknowledged that information is a key factor in national development. One of the most important indicators for measuring the status of a developed nation is the availability of a systematic and integrated nation-wide information system, which permits every individual to have easy and equal opportunity to access and utilize information. Information and knowledge are needed not only for academic pursuit but also for decision making process, for effective technology transfer, for social and cultural development as well as for entertainment. Understanding of one's own culture as well as cultures of different countries will lead to better relationship among global communities. Hence, developing National Information and Knowledge Infrastructure within a country is as vital as developing the nation's physical infrastructure for economic progress. Many countries have taken initiatives to develop National Information Infrastructure (NII). The foundation for developing the National Information Infrastructure in Malaysia should be an integration of all knowledge-based institutions within the country. The NII should be linked up to the Regional Information National Information Policy (RII) and formed as an integral part of the Global Information Infrastructure (GII). The development of the National Information Policy should take into account the existence of the NII, the RII and the GII. Cultural information should be a component of the National Information Policy. The aim is to ensure effective dissemination, delivery and use of information by all individuals in the nation.

Information comes in various media and formats such as in print forms and in electronic forms. In the last decades, there have been tremendous developments in information technologies. The advent of new technologies such as affordable powerful microcomputers/workstations, with massive storage media and multimedia capabilities have changed the way information is being processed and delivered. The emergence of scanning, imaging and digital technologies allow photos and graphic documents to be converted into digital formats. The convergence of powerful technologies - computing, communication and media creates an era of informedia. The Informedia Revolution will change the people work, play, entertain and conduct their everyday culture. Today children are leading the change into the 21st century using the new media that is centered on the Internet. The Internet allows any individual to explore global information resources from any place at any time. The Internet makes it possible for information to be transmitted across national and regional boundaries. The expansion of satellite
services enables electronic transmission of vast resources of knowledge and multimedia information to any remote places. All these developments will reshape how society and individual interact, thereby imposing a new culture that is heavily dependent on interactive digital media. Globalization shapes the world community into a global village. Globalisation exposes the societies to the wealth and diverse global information resources created by various countries. However, Malaysia lacks digital local information/databases that can be accessible through the Internet. The rich and diverse culture of Malaysia should be systematically documented and create databases that can be accessed by anyone. Malaysia needs to preserve its distinctive cultural heritage taking advantage of the enabling technologies, such as the Internet and the availability of digital technology with compressed storage capabilities to develop digital culture information resources and databases that can be accessed by anybody. Developing a virtual exhibition of our cultural heritage and our socio cultural development will better understand and appreciation of our cultures and cultures of other society. The Development of National Information should also stress the importance in the systematic documentation of cultural information resources, preservation of cultural heritage and the creation of cultural databases that can be linked to regional and international networks. There is a need to develop or adopt standards for documentation of development of cultural heritage available in various formats and standards for graphic presentation of cultural products so that databases created at national level can be linked at regional and global cultural networks. This will ensure accurate, timely and integrated information on culture that will benefit global society.

CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Malaysia has rich cultural heritages. Much of its cultural heritages are recorded in various formats—manuscripts, artefacts, sculptures, traditional motif and designs on textiles and jewellers, etc. Some of these items are kept in libraries, museums, archives, art galleries and cultural centres. There are also traditional songs and musics, poems and rhymes, legends, traditional herbs and oral traditions, which are handed down from generation to generation. These rich heritages need to be documented for the appreciation of our future generation. Culture at its broadest term, may be considered to include every aspect of life. However, for this paper, culture is restricted to social and artistic aspects. Promoting, documenting, preserving and disseminating cultural information of Malaysia are as follows:

(a) The Cultural Division of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism is entrusted to be responsible for planning, coordinating and monitoring cultural programmes and activities at Federal and state levels to be consistent with the National Culture Policy. The Ministry has undertaken research and documentation works on various aspects of Malaysian cultural products. Some of the products of these research works are being published and some are available as unpublished works. A Resource Centre complete with Data Bank is being set up to house comprehensive resources on Malaysia cultural heritage. There are about 1,800 cultural organisations in Malaysia. Efforts are being made to strengthen cultural networking among various cultural institutions and voluntary organisations through activities such as music and arts performances, cultural shows, creative writing, research and various conventions and symposia and language and literature. Cultural and art offices were established in all states to organise and manage cultural networking and initiate cultural activities with cultural associations. There are Arts and Cultural Centres in various cities in Malaysia.

(b) The Department of Museum and Antiquity is the official repository of the country’s cultural and natural history. This was made possible through research and display of various items of interest relating to the country’s history, culture and flora and fauna. The Department plans to develop databases on museum products and to digitise the rich photos/prints of museum cultural products and have a virtual exhibition of its cultural products in the near future.

(c) The National Art Gallery acts as the custodian of Malaysian’s artistics heritage as well as an initiator for the development of arts in the country. The Gallery is responsible for collecting Malaysian art works, organising art exhibitions locally and abroad and promoting...
the learning and development of visual arts among the Malaysian society. The development of multimedia Malaysia arts databases will contribute towards the richness of Malaysian cultural heritage in digital forms.

(d) The National Library of Malaysia (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia) is responsible for acquiring and maintaining a comprehensive national collection of library resources reflecting the intellectual, literacy and cultural heritage of the nation. Its Malay Manuscript Centre is responsible for identifying, documenting, preserving, collecting manuscripts (in original forms, in microforms or in facsimile) and undertaking research on Malay manuscripts which are important components of Malaysia’s literary and intellectual heritage. The National Library strives to be the Centre of Excellence for Information Resources on Malaysia, thereby facilitating research pertaining to Malaysia. The National Library is also responsible for enforcing the Legal Deposit of Library Material Act, 1986 (Act A667) [formerly was Preservation of Book Act, 1966]. The act requires all publishers in Malaysia to deposit 5 copies of print materials (books, serials, maps and charts) and 2 copies of non-print materials (cinematography, film, microform, video, audio recordings and other electronic media) published /produced in Malaysia to the National Library of Malaysia. Thus, the National Library of Malaysia acts as the Depository Centre for local publications that constitute the major portion of Malaysian literary and intellectual heritage. From the statistical records of materials received under the legal deposit act, there are about 1,630 titles of publications related to customs, folklore and traditions being published from 1966-1996. The National Library promotes literary and cultural heritages through its activities such as organising exhibitions on cultural and literary heritage, promoting children and youth theatres, publishing special bibliographies/catalogues on Malaysian cultures and through continuous user education programmes. It has developed major bibliographic databases in Malaysian information resources that can be accessed through Internet and are also available on CD-ROM. In 1996, The National Library with the cooperation of Esso Malaysia, produced Puisi Kanak-Kanak dalam CD-ROM (Malaysian Nursery Rhyme on CD-ROM). This CD consists of a compilation of Malaysian popular traditional children nursery rhymes. The National Library has started a pilot project to digitise its rare illuminated manuscript. A project to scan collection of Malay Champa manuscripts is being done with the cooperation of Ecole Francaise d’Extreme Orient France. In future, the National Library plans to digitize collections of its rare photographs on various cultural heritages and have it accessible through the Internet.

In addition to mass media and education system, libraries in Malaysia can play an important role as a catalyst of acculturation of cultural heritage through their various promotional activities.

Malaysian libraries are beginning to introduce IT for public to access databases and information resources through Internet. Plans to set up hypermedia centres in all the 14 state libraries as well as in branches and village libraries are underway. A nation-wide network of digital libraries integrating all types of libraries is being planned. As a first step, the National Library of Malaysia has installed computer with Internet facilities at all State Public Libraries. Therefore, libraries can act as Cultural, Informedia and Edutainment Centres by providing variety of multimedia services, which include cultural products in print and non-print. With availability of modern technologies such as multimedia computers, libraries can encourage local youths to collect, compile and document cultural heritage and these can be done through the use of multimedia computers. Systematic User Education Programmes that integrate use of IT and appreciation of local cultural heritage are another means to inculcate IT appreciation of national heritage. Having virtual exhibition on cultural products accessible through the Internet will nurture younger generations to understand and appreciate their own cultural heritages.

(e) The National Archives of Malaysia collects, stores and preserves all records and information which has national value and historical heritage in accordance to the National Archives Act. It also maintains the Prime Minister’s Museums. The National Archives is in the process
of developing databases of its holdings, which include also digitisation projects of its important collections. Having a multimedia of information resources on archival products will contribute to the richness of cultural information in the country in multimedia formats.

(f) **The Karyaneka Exhibition and Marketing Centre** was set up to display the richness of the Malaysian handicrafts of the various ethnic groups. It has developed database on Malaysian art and crafts as well as Malaysian textual design. However, this database is only available for reference at its own premise.

The Malaysian Government has also set up facilities to house national artefacts of historical significance such as the **National Historical Museum**, **Tun Abdul Razak Memorial**, **Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial** and **Gallery Perdana**. In addition, there are Foundations and Ethnic Cultural Centres that have collected their own unique cultural heritages in various formats. A systematic programme on documentation, digitalisation and development of database and information resources of these cultural products will contribute to the richness of Malaysian cultural heritage in multimedia formats.

**CULTURAL INFORMATION SOURCES AND DATABASES**

Information sources on Malaysian culture can be obtained from libraries and resource centre of various cultural institutions. Most of the above-mentioned cultural institutions have developed in-house databases for internal use. Plans to link up various cultural centres, academic institutions, research institutions, libraries, museums, archives private sectors that have collected different aspects of cultural products of Malaysia is underway.

Some of the major databases on Malaysian cultures can be accessed from Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) of the National Library of Malaysia and major university libraries, especially the Universiti Malaya Library, the University Kebangsaan Malaysia Library and the University of Science Malaysia Library. The National Library of Malaysia, for example, has developed the following databases:

(a) **BINAR database** - consisting of more than 210,000 bibliographic records of the National Library’s collections, with an annual update of approximately 5,000 records. This database consists of approximately 265 entries on Malaysian culture, 920 entries on Malaysian music, 70 entries on Malaysian Drama, 42 entries on Malaysian festivals, 36 entries on Malaysian Dance, 12 entries on Malaysian traditional theatre, 11 entries on Malaysian ethnobotany, 10 entries for Malaysian customs, 7 entries on Malaysian traditional medicine and 3 entries on traditional house.

(b) **MENTARI database** - consisting of about 55,000 records of index to select periodicals articles published in Malaysia, with an annual update of 7,000 records. There are approximately 20 entries on Malaysian culture, 30 entries on Malaysian traditional theatre, 28 entries on Malaysian traditional medicine, 13 entries on Malaysian dance, 10 entries on Malaysian festivals, 5 entries on Malaysian music, 3 entries on traditional house and 2 entries on ethnobotany.

(c) **PANCARAN database** - consisting of about 9,000 records of index of working papers presented at conferences and seminars held in Malaysia, with an annual increase of 1,000 records. There are approximately 43 entries on various aspects of Malaysian cultures.

There are also databases on CD-ROMs published by private sectors that contain rich cultural elements. These databases are **Window to Malaysia : an interactive odyssey from antiquity** produced by Cosmopoint Sdn. Bhd., and **Almanak Utusan 1996/1997** produced by Utusan Malaysia Sdn. Bhd. In 1996, the National Library and ESSO (M) Sdn. Bhd. produced an interactive multimedia **Puisi Kanak-Kanak dalam CD-ROM (Malaysian Children Nursery Rhyme on CD-ROM)** which is a compilation of traditional children nursery rhymes of Malaysia. Software house, such as Mekktoon Sdn. Bhd. has produced Malaysian legend on multimedia CD-ROM. Some Schools of Information Science
have encouraged their student to develop multimedia products focusing on Malaysian culture as themes.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of Internet that allows linkages of global information sources. In Malaysia, MIMOS Bhd. initiated JARING (Joint Advanced Integrated Networking) as a research network that linked to other networks around the world via dedicated leased-line connection or the Internet. The general aims of the JARING are to promote information exchange and encourage creation of public domain databases accessible through the Internet at affordable costs. The objectives of JARING are:

(a) to establish an integrated data communication networks;
(b) to enhance multi-discipline R & D activities; and
(c) to study and evaluate the use of data communication technology and its impact on the socio-economic activities.

MIMOS has outlined the project statement of JARING as follows:

(a) to provide transparent access to the global Internet,
(b) at an affordable and predictable cost, through a nation-wide network based on open standards,
(c) for the purpose of nurturing information exchanges and database development,
(d) in support of more creative and innovative educational, research and commercial activities, and
(f) leading towards the creation of the information-rich society.

Towards these ends MIMOS has jointly undertaken research and development programmes to establish linkages with various institutions. Today, many libraries including research and academic libraries and individuals have used JARING network to access the global information resources from remote locations. MIMOS is actively encouraging Malaysian institutions to become information providers by creating public domain databases and to allow members of the public to access such databases. To facilitate technology transfer in the use of computer networks and developing databases among its members, MIMOS is conducting training, workshops and seminars relating to Internet.

Under the JARINGAN project, the following information networks have been developed:

(a) Jaringan Penyelidikan (Research Networks) - a network among research institutions in Malaysia;
(b) Jaringan Pendidikan (Education Network) - a network among schools and the Ministry of Education;
(c) Jaringan Awam (Public Network) - a network of information of interest to the general public;
(d) Jaringan Pertanian (Agriculture Network) - a network among agricultural institutions.
(e) Jaringan Ilmu (Knowledge Network) - a network among libraries.

Since the introduction of JARING, institutions and various organisations that are registered under JARING have developed websites and homepages to promote their corporate activities and programmes. However, information sources on Malaysian culture are rather dispersed and they are found in various websites. Cultural links may be found at the following websites:

(a) http://www.jaring.my.msia/newhp/general/sc.html
(b) http://www.jaring.my/kol/my;
(c) http://www.perak.gov.my/
(d) http://www.selangor.gov.my
(e) http://www.pahang.com/
(f) http://www.terengganu.gov.my
(g) http://www.tourism.gov.my
(h) http://www.jb-online.com/johor/culture.htm
(i) http://www.malaysia.gov.my/cal.html
(j) http://www.spl.pnm.my/-arkib/
(m) http://www.spl.pnm.my/-muzium
(n) http://www.cc.um.edu.my/library.html

Malaysia is planning to develop Cultural Heritage Information Sources as part of the above networks or JARINGAN accessible through Internet. This networks should form part of the Regional and Global Cultural Information Networks. At national level, the Cultural Heritage Information Sources should consist of the following:-
a) Directory of cultural and art centres which includes: addresses, personnel in charge, telephone, facsimile, email, core collections on culture and activities on culture;

(b) Legislation and policies on culture;

(c) Cultural cooperations and networks;

(d) Virtual exhibition of selected cultural products - arts, designs, crafts, artefact, traditional architecture, rhyme, traditional music and musical equipment, traditional games, etc. complete with descriptions of each cultural products;

(e) Archaeological sites, historic buildings and landmarks complete with descriptions;

(f) Experts on cultural heritage complete with addresses and their expertise;

(g) Awards on culture;

(h) On-going research and products of research;

(i) Publications/reports on Malaysian culture;

(j) Legends, oral history and oral traditions;

(k) Cultural products;

(l) Ethnobotany;

(m) Cultural events;

(n) Indicators and budgets on culture; and

(o) Hyperlink with other cultural information resources at regional and international levels.

See appendix I.

ISSUES PERTAINING TO COMPILATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Some of the issues that arise in developing Cultural Heritage Information Source are:

(a) Lack of standards on the description and graphic presentations of cultural products;

(b) Large portions of invaluable cultural heritage are fast deteriorating due to poor maintenance and preservation practices;

(c) Large portion of cultural heritages are in oral traditions, some are regarded as sacred;

(d) Most cultural products are located in different institutions and most often they are not properly documented;

(e) There are problems of documentation and bibliographical control of this cultural heritage especially at local and village levels; and

(f) Large portion of cultural heritage products are in private or individual hands and very little is known about it. There is a need for training on documentation of cultural information sources and database creation and on cultural information resources complete with graphic presentation of cultural images.

REGIONAL CULTURAL NETWORKS

Development of cultural information policy should take into consideration with the existing cultural information networks in the region. There are a number of regional culture co-operations in the region of Southeast Asia such as ASEAN-COCI (ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information), CONSAL (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians), Regional Association of Southeast Asian Librarians, and UNESCO especially in the area of Memory of the World project.

(a) ASEAN-COCI

Malaysia is actively involved with the ASEAN-COCI (ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information). This committee provides a platform for mutual understanding and exchanging of ideas among 9 ASEAN member countries (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) through culture and information. The Committees of ASEAN-COCI include Working Committee on Visual and Performing Arts, Working Committee on Radio/Television and Film/Video, Working Committee on Literary Works and ASEAN studies and Working Committee on Print and Interpersonal Media. Each working Committee have undertaken research projects and produced publications on various aspects of ASEAN culture.

ASEAN-COCI has outline the second ASEAN Plan of Action for culture and information for 1997-2000, among which is that "ASEAN shall seek to conserve, preserve and promote the cultural and artistic heritage as an integral part of life and spirit in ASEAN. Towards this end, ASEAN shall seek to foster a dynamic environment conducive to the creative expressions of indigenous, traditional, modern and contemporary cultural forms and values.
while recognising the commonalities (similarities) and differences in traditions as great source of artistic creativity”. Among its action programmes are ASEAN will:

(a) Optimise the use of the radio, news agency, print media and information networks to disseminate accurate, timely and relevant information and all aspects of ASEAN cooperation

(b) Expansion of the ASEANWEB to cover more member country activities and that is to establish linkages to websites of member countries. This programme will also look into the development of the the ASEAN Satellite channel

(c) Under the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Programme, it will integrate all project proposals and activities into a cohesive programme that would lead to the development, preservation and enhancement of ASEAN cultural heritage.

(b) ASEANWEB

The idea of ASEANWEB was first mooted by the 26th ASEAN Economic Ministerial Meeting in September 1994. The objective of ASEANWEB was originally to facilitate trade and investment among private sectors in ASEAN Member countries through the utilisation of a trade and investment databases. The databases provide up-to-date information on economic policies, trade opportunities, statistics and directory of services in each member countries to enable private sectors to have a better insight of the member countries economic performance and future direction. The ASEANWEB was officially launched in Bangkok, Thailand on 12 December 1995 at the joint Ministerial Meeting of the Fifth ASEAN Summit. The scope of information contains an overview of ASEAN activities, highlight of political and economic cooperation, calendar of meeting and list of new publications.

At the Fourth of the ASEAN Minister Meeting responsible for information held in Singapore on 7 March 1996, it was agreed that ASEANWEB be developed as a broad umbrella homepage while the detailed perspective should be established with hypertext links to the respective homepages set up by ASEAN members countries. The 31st meeting of ASEAN-COCI held in Bali, called for an experts group meeting to study the expansion of the ASEANWEB to include culture and information. The content of ASEANWEB continues to expand which multimedia showcase for the 30th ASEAN Anniversary. The ASEANWEB guiding principle is that it should be easily accessible, entail minimum cost of maintenance and be self-sustainable. To this end, Internet was chosen as the medium for disseminating information. The Internet address for the ASEANWEB is http://www.aseansec.org.

(c) CONGRESS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN LIBRARIANS

The Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CON SAL) has its bi-annual Conference in its member countries. At the 10th CONSAL held in Malaysia on 21-25 May 1996, it was recommended that each member country must develop its own indigenous databases which could in the future be integrated Southeast Asian network to be known as CONSALNET or SEANET. A major portion of these databases should include information sources on SEA Cultural Heritage. At the recent IFLA Regional Conference on Public Libraries: Planning for the Future, held at the National Library of Malaysia on 10-12 November 1997, it was also recommended that “Each country to establish library cooperation and networking amongst public libraries at both national and regional levels”. Each country therefore must take steps to create bibliographic databases of each library’s collection to facilitate sharing of resources within and outside the country, and to collaborate and establish linkages with other libraries using the latest technologies.
CONCLUSION

Cultural information should be an integral part of the National Information Policy of any country. Formulation of Cultural Information Policy should take into consideration some of the legislative provisions and policy decisions on information and culture at national and regional levels. The National Information Policy should stress the importance of developing a National Information Infrastructure that will link up all knowledge-based institutions in the country, such as cultural institutions/centres, academic institutions, research institutions, libraries, museums, archives and private sectors that have collected different aspects of cultural products of Malaysia. The aim is to ensure that every individual in the country has easy access, timely delivery and comprehensive utilisation of cultural information of its own country and also cultural information of other countries. The Cultural Information Policy should take into consideration the following strategies, that:

(a) Each country should strive to document and preserve its cultural heritage and to facilitate the creation of cultural Information databases by taking advantages of the new technologies.

(b) Cultural Information Resources and Data bases developed should be linked to Regional Information Resources and be an integral part of the Global Information Resources. Cultural Information Resources developed at national levels should have hyperlinks with other similar and specific cultural information resources accessible through the Internet.

(c) Each country should develop its human resources by organising training and workshops on documentation of cultural heritage, standards for digitisation of cultural products, creation of cultural information standards. Unesco should assist developing countries to provide or sponsor experts to conduct such training and workshops.
Appendix I

CULTURAL INFORMATION RESOURCES

Indicator Budget etc

Addresses of Cultural Centres

Virtual Exhibitions on Cultural Products

Legislation and Policies

Archeological Sites, Historic Buildings and Landmarks

Experts on Cultural Heritage

Cultural Events

Oral Traditions History

Hyperlinks with regional & global cultural information resources

Cultural Awards

On-going Research on Culture

Publications on Culture
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