

Malaysia - - A Time For Change

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Malaysia's Federation School for the Deaf is housed in this new building—a monument to the patience and fortitude of the school's administration. The building was first planned in 1956, ground was broken 10 years later but not until 1969 did classes first meet in it. (This view shows a portion of classroom and dormitory buildings; the entire complex is too large to be photographed in a single view.)

Colonialism may seem like a strange word to use in beginning an article about the deaf, but as one travels through our part of the world (what the west usually calls "Southeast Asia" or "Indochina") one can't help but to be struck by how strong former colonial ties still are. Perhaps, being an educator, I'm more sensitive to these colonial ties. As a former American colony, our educational system in the Philippines is but an extension of the former American colonial system; even our textbooks, if not imported directly from "the States", are local reprints of American books or at best locally written versions of American books. Perhaps one measure of how close we still feel to our former colonial master is that in our post offices, the slot for mailing letters outside of the Philippines is labeled "FOREIGN AND U.S.!"

This is "a time for change." Recent political developments in Southeast Asia have forced us to look to our neighbors, rather than across an ocean, for our international dealings. And we've been discovering that people we've lived "next door" to all our lives, but never bothered to meet, aren't half bad! In fact, we've found that we share many of the same problems, hopes, dreams and foibles with our once faceless neighbors.

Discovering new friends in our old neighbors is exciting and enlightening; as I talk with educators in Singapore and Malaysia we find that they know more about educational trends in England than in the Philippines, and I know more about the American situation than about our neighboring Singapore and Malaysia. The Vietnamese and Cambodians are similarly aligned with the French and the Indonesians with the Dutch!

I'd like to share with DEAF AMERICAN readers some of my experiences during a recent trip to our neighboring Malaysia (where post office slots are labeled "U.K. and COMMONWEALTH"). One thing you notice immediately in Malaysia, is that most of the people are not Malay! In fact, only about 40% of the population is Malay—the rest is made up of Chinese (about 30%), Indians (about 10%) and various other minority groups. The next thing you notice, I guess, is just how very, very British the place is. With left hand driving on the streets and tea at three o'clock, you might just think you're back in Europe—especially in a place like Penang, my first Malaysian stop.

Penang, an island off the northwestern coast of Malaysia, is covered with quaint little British buildings; its principal

town, Georgetown, was obviously modeled after a part of London. Penang is also home of the Federation School for the Deaf, the one principal school for the deaf in Malaysia. Located in the pastoral "Vale of Tempe," the Federation School for the Deaf's new building was the start of my "discovery." There I met with Puan Yahaya Isa, the school's British-trained dynamo and we began to discover new worlds which neither of us knew existed!

Mrs. Isa explained how education for the deaf in Malaysia was started by a British lady (Lady E. M. Templer) back in 1954. Strange, education for the deaf in the Philippines was started by an American lady!* Initially, there were only seven students and the school operated in a private residence converted to a school. By 1959, the maximum capacity of 120 pupils had been reached. More significantly, the registration of all deaf children in Malaysia, begun in 1954, brought to light thousands of deaf children who had no education or hopes of obtaining any education. The dynamic Lady Templer made application to the Social Welfare Lotteries Board for M\$500,000 (Malaysian dollars, about US\$200,000) to build a school for the deaf. In 1956, the Lotteries Board pledged the money and the Penang state government was approached for a piece of land on which to build the new school. Everything seemed to be going smoothly, but the only land suitable for the school was located adjacent to a power station—the incessant noise precluded construction of a school on the site. The whole project was dropped!

In 1962, Mrs. Isa succeeded in having the project reviewed. By this time, the reader can well imagine the over crowded situation at the school, which was still housed in a converted residence. A subcommittee of the school board was appointed to look for a new school site. Twelve acres under private ownership were found, and the owners were even persuaded to sell the land at 15c off the 65c per square foot price—total cost M\$339,768. Again things seemed to be going smoothly. The old school site was put on the market and sold for M\$340,000! The school was even given two years rent free use of the old school after the sale, in order to provide enough time for the new building to be constructed and the school to transfer sites.

A monument to the patience and fortitude of the school administration, the building was finally occupied in January of 1969—13 years and M\$1,238,495 after it was first con-

* Dr. Deliah Delight Rice—see "Land of the Morning, Child of the Sun Returning, DEAF AMERICAN, December 1970.



Left: Vocational training is an essential part of the Federation Schools curriculum. These deaf girls use the latest in equipment and techniques to make each other even more beautiful than they already are! Right: Sewing and dressmaking, old standbys in vocational training for the deaf, find a place at the Federation School—but with a slightly different twist. Materials are made of Malaysia's beautiful "batik" (wax dyed cloth) and sewn into unique Euro-Asian and Indian designs.



ceived. The compound, which includes an Administrative Block, Assembly Hall and Gymnasium, Classroom Block, Vocational Unit, Domestic Science Unit, Woodworking Unit, Girls and Boys Dormitories, Sick Bay, Servants' Quarters, Staff Quarters and Principal's Quarters, was formally inaugurated on February 28, 1970, in a ceremony attended by Malaysia's then Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

As Mrs. Isa showed me around the school compound, I kept thinking to myself—what a real "operator" this little lady was! Everywhere you could see how she had "ripped off" laboratory equipment from one business firm, or money for books from another. She proudly showed me her latest project—a swimming pool. She had approached businessmen in the community for pumping equipment for the school's agricultural projects—when the system was installed, she used the "loose change" to build the swimming pool! Though school was out of session during my visit, some girls were still working in their hair dressing classes (stocked with the latest machines).

We talked about lots of things—how similar our problems were, for example. Enrollment in the school was just something over 200—so thousands of deaf children still go without education. Her problem, as with us in the Philippines, is trying to convince parents of deaf children that their children can be educated—that deafness is not "hopeless"—that allowing them to be sent to a residential school will not cause them to be "lost" from the family.

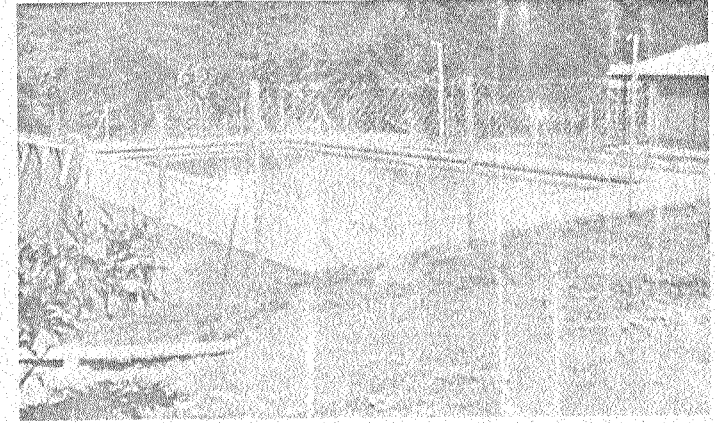
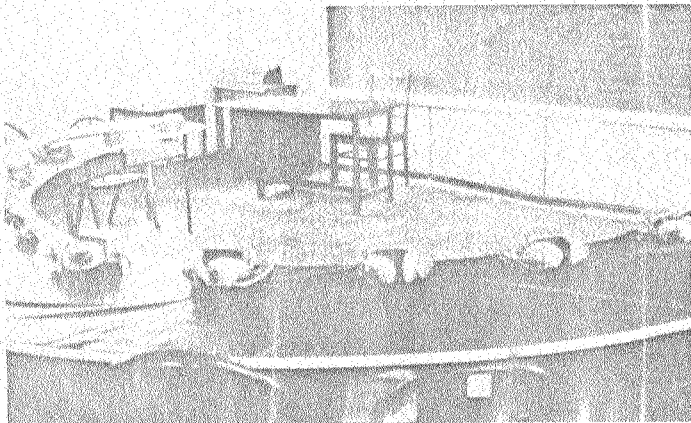
Our conversation inevitably turned to educational methods and total communication. Since we had just established the first total communication school in our region, I spoke with undisguised pride and enthusiasm about "TC." Mrs. Isa

confided that she had heard of "it" before—but was not about to consider anything as yet "unproved"—certainly not anything that went contrary to her Manchester training. She did mention, however, that the Malaysian Red Cross was establishing some local classes for deaf children—and that they did use "signs," but the whole thing was not connected with the state educational program—it was most unofficial.

So, off I went to see what other interesting tid bits I could collect for my new bag of discoveries. The first Red Cross office I could locate which knew anything about the deaf was in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia and several hundred miles south of Penang. In Klang, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur, the Red Cross has two classes of deaf children—using sign language. Since classes were not in session, I could not observe what "sign language" was being used—I guessed, from my conversation with the Red Cross folks, that it was the British sign language; however, the medium of instruction in the school was Malay!

It seems as though several large population centers have turned to the Red Cross to sponsor classes for the deaf—parents don't seem to know where to turn to—and little assistance is provided by the government (alas, an all too familiar story). Confusing the issue even more, I was told, was the state schools refusal to "touch with a 10-foot pole" anything using the sign language. I guess it is "a time for change" in Malaysia.

Next month, our travels take us to a completely different educational environment for the deaf—a country in which total communication (or something like it) was just a natural outgrowth of the peoples view of the deaf—and the "oral" method is virtually unknown! Next month: "The Deaf Around The World: Thailand—Tried and True."



Left: Academic classes at the Federation School utilize auditory training equipment. The school still clings (even if just barely) to its pure oralism philosophy—a hangover from British Colonial days. Right: Latest project of the "gal with the golden touch" the Federation School's dynamic driving force, Principal Puan Yahaya Isa, is this swimming pool. Because water for the school's agricultural projects had to be brought by hand from a nearby river, Mrs. Isa approached the community requesting funds for a pumping system. The swimming pool was built with left over donations!