THE PAGBUY’IS ritual is concerned with protection of all Tagbanwa from the dreaded salakap. The pagbuy’is is a two-part ceremony performed by a ritual specialist (mabuy’is).

Preparation of the paraphernalia

A large permanent ceremonial platform or piyanggaw is built in front of the house of the mabuy’is. The most striking feature is a pole (tarindak), erected next to the piyanggaw. This pole is at least 35 feet high and made of large bamboo. It has a single cross arm at the top. Long strips of leaves of the palm balasbas (Licuala spinosa Wurmb.) are stuck at the upper end of the pole and at the ends of the cross arm. A red and white flag (bandira) is hung on one side of the cross arm. The name of the “captain” of the boat, Sumurutun, is written in large syllabaric characters (an ancient script) near the top of the pole. The tarindak indicates to the deities (in this case, a diwata and her helpers) that a ritual is being held. Six smaller tarindaks are tied to the piyanggaw. Twigs of katumbal (Capsicum frutescens Linn.) with fruits are inserted with strips of balasbas at the ends of these smaller ceremonial poles (red peppers were the proper food of the “datu” of the deities).

While the piyanggaw is being prepared and the pole erected, the wife of the mabuy’is and other women prepare other paraphernalia:

a. two native beeswax candles with a piece of rolled cloth for a wick (the light is said to attract the deities);

b. eight red peppers impaled on two slivers of bamboo (during the ritual, these sticks of pepper are stuck in the pile of white rice);

c. two slivers of bamboo split to form pinchers and each holding eight ceremonial cigarettes, also to be stuck in the white rice pile. The cigarette wrappers are made from the split leaves of buri palm. The fillers of local tobacco are preferably native;

d. sixteen rolled betel leaves;

e. two stalks of native ginger and native onions;

f. two cakes of beeswax; and

g. two bowls, one holding the ingredients for betel chewing and the other, eight red peppers.

Just before dusk, the mabuy’is places a mat on the piyanggaw and arranges the offerings around the three piles of white rice.

Actual ceremony

As darkness falls, the mabuy’is covers his head with a bright red kerchief and stands directly in front of the ceremonial platform. He begins to pray. He heats the incense on a firebrand and censes the front of the mat and the bottom of the bowl holding the peppers.
This ritual is the most famous of the celebrations of the Tagbanwa. It is extolled by media and sought after by tourists, not due to its magnitude as a spectacle, but because of its indigenous religiosity. The pagdiwata is performed three times each year by a babalyan, a ritual practitioner, to thank Mangindusa for good harvest and general well-being.

Praying softly, he takes a pinch of the red rice and throws it into the air. He lights both candles and fastens them to the center tarindak on the left and right sides of the stand. Still praying, he takes a pinch of the betel mix, two peppers and white rice and throws these into the air. Following is a longer period of prayer where he stands in front of the piyanggaw. He takes his head covering off to end the ceremony.

The mabuy’is carries the ginger, onions and the two bowls holding the betel mix and red peppers into the house. Later, someone gathers the other offerings. The two candles are left to burn down. The mabuy’is then prepares a “prophylactic” from the offerings, chopping these up with a little water in a bowl. He goes about the room rubbing the foreheads of everyone with it. The children are treated first. There is a sizable crowd.

Building of the bankaran or banglay

A three- and-a-half meter ceremonial raft is constructed from fourteen poles of a kind of bamboo (lawas). Its sail is made from the atap palm and a mat-like kadiyang is set for the food offerings;

The panawag, an invocation to the spirits of the dead and the nine deities who ride the kawa on the sea, follows.

Next, the burning of incense on the kadiyang is done and the prayers by the ritual leader. Then these follow: lighting of the candles and offering of ritual food to the deities; the second call to the nine deities, signaling the children to dive in and eat; and the cleaning up and repairing of the raft which may have been damaged by the mad scramble for food.

The third invocation to the nine deities is performed, followed by individual family offerings represented by a woman. This is followed by the tying of a small chicken on the platform, lighting of candles, launching of the raft toward the sea, relighting of blown-out candles and throwing a pinch of rice to the sea.

Finally, singing and dancing through the night caps the ritual.

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