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Wishing You A Happy & Prosperous Chinese New Year



Traditions of Chinese New Year

• By Chris Teh

Gong Xi Fa Cai! It is the time of year again where festive songs can be heard on play, decorations rock the malls and sales, deals and bargains doing their best to attract the community!

Welcome back, loyal readers of Ipoh Echo. For the first issue of chapter 2020, let's delve deeper into what makes Chinese New Year an auspicious and wonderful festive event!

FULL STORY ON PAGES **2 & 6**





Shooing Off the Bad, *Shu* (Count) in the Good



Ipohites buying Chinese New Year snacks

Chinese New Year, also known as **Lunar New Year** in other parts of the world and **Spring Festival** in China, is a celebration of the new year on the traditional Chinese calendar.

Observed for a duration of 15 days, it is a major holiday in China and has spread its festive influence to neighbouring countries such as our own, Vietnam, Korea, Thailand and Singapore.

For Year of the Rat, according to Chinese zodiac astrology, the occasion will last from **January 25** till **February 8** which interestingly coincides with Thai Pusam.

Preparations

Before the first day of Chinese New Year, the festivity actually starts from the 23th or 24th day of the last Lunar month of the Chinese calendar. During this period, many activities have to be done to welcome the New Year in its entirety.

Firstly, honouring the Kitchen God and cleaning the house are usual activities that follow the beliefs of saying goodbye to the old year.

To some households, cleaning and wiping commonly worshipped statues, such as *Guan Yin* (Buddhist bodhisattva, Goddess of Mercy) is believed to be crucial for a blessed new year ahead. Metal and ceramic vessels used for the prayer tables are also cleaned and refilled with new ashes.

Also during this anticipation period, new year cookies will be prepared, such as all-time favourites like *hup toh soh* (Chinese walnut cookies) and peanut cookies. Some even deep-fry *nga ku* (arrowhead) into crisps that are very popular among many Ipohites – this scribe included – to the extent of finishing a jar of them even before the new year!

Towards *chu xi* (Chinese New Year's Eve), reunion dinner is one of the necessary new year traditions, with its history dating back to at least 2,000 years ago, signifying the strengthening of familial relations and cohesiveness, thus the name *tuan yuan fan*.

Family members, near or far, are expected to gather and have dinner with parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. **Pan Cai** (literally meaning basin vegetables, also regarded as Basin of Treasure) is a usual dish during reunion dinner, which typically contains high-end food items such as abalone and dried scallops, not to mention various types of common vegetables, meats and seafood.



Ipohites buying Chinese New Year decorations

For the Hokkiens, *cuo tang yuan* (rolling glutinous rice balls) is a common tradition during *chu xi*. After reunion dinner, family members gather around the table to help out with rolling *tang yuan*.

Rolling *tang yuan* in big and small rounds is another signification of the Chinese idiom 'you da you xiao' (literally meaning got big and small), widely understood to younger individuals as respecting elders. A similar tradition applies to the celebration of Winter Solstice too.

On another note, *tang yuan* now comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes to appeal to the modern generation.

It is also common to visit temples to pay respect to Chinese deities and obtain their blessings during *chu xi*. In town, Tow Boo Keong Temple and Old Paloh Chinese Temple will gain visits from many Ipohites in the wee hours of midnight during the first day of Chinese New Year.

Starting Celebration

For the first day of Chinese New Year, phrases wishing good fortune or health can be heard being exchanged from a family member to another or friends and acquaintances as well. 'Gong xi fa cai', 'wan shi ru yi' (may all undertakings go smoothly), 'shen ti jian kang' (good health) and 'sheng yi xing long' (good business) among others are few common phrases.

Depending on personal beliefs and preferences, certain families maintain a vegetarian diet to honour the Buddhist tradition that no living thing should be killed on the first day of the Chinese New Year.

Also, lion dances accompanied with upbeat melodies from Chinese drums and instruments are some of the very unforgettable scenes during Chinese New Year.

Next, *bai nian* (visiting relatives' house) is also an important Chinese New Year custom. Members of the younger generation will receive *angpou* (red packets containing money) from elder family members as a wish of good luck.

Sweeping the floor on the first day of the new year is discouraged as it is akin to sweeping away good luck.

The second day of Chinese New Year is also known as *kai nian* (beginning of a year) in China. This is the day for welcoming sons-in-law, or visiting the wife's side of the family. Married daughters visit their parents' homes with their husbands.

Gifts such as cookies and mandarin oranges are usually brought as gifts, but in view of convenience, red envelopes are becoming more commonly given to the children in their family's home today. Daughters and sons-in-law will have lunch in their parents' home.

Most offices, eateries and schools will reopen during the fourth or fifth day of Chinese New Year. For Chinese New Year 2020, we will be having three days of holiday, due to the second day falling on a Sunday.

Hokkien New Year

On the eighth and ninth day of Chinese New Year, families especially of Hokkien ancestry will pay respect to the Jade Emperor (Heaven God), also known as *bai tin gong*.

Legends stated that the Hokkiens in Ancient China survived oppression during Chinese New Year by seeking refuge in a sugar cane plantation for nine days. On the ninth day itself, when they emerged and found that their enemies were gone thanks to the protective cover of the sugar cane stalks, this date has been symbolised by the Hokkiens for their survival, thus the homage to the Emperor ever since.

During *bai tin gong*, several food items with their names rhyming with Hokkien dialects such as the sugar cane stalks (*kam chia*, sounding similar with *kam xia*, meaning conveying thanks) and pineapples (*ong lai*, similar pronunciation meaning prosperity has come), among others like *huat kueh* (steamed prosperity cupcake), *ang ku* (red tortoise pastry filled with sweet filling, i.e. green mung bean paste), *mi ku* (steamed tortoise bun) and *bee koh* (steamed glutinous rice with dried dates and longans on top) are decorated with red or gold stickers with Chinese wordings before being offered to the Emperor.

Apart from that, joss papers (*kim cua*) are folded into scythe-shaped ingots (physical form used as real currency in ancient China) to be burnt as an offering to the Emperor. Fireworks may also be lit to mark the beginning of the Hokkien Chinese New Year.

Prosperity Toss

Ipohites and Malaysians in general can never forget about *yee sang*! Also known as Prosperity Toss, the popular Cantonese-style raw fish salad is a must-have during Chinese New Year.

With strips of raw fish (usually salmon), bits of sesame seeds, crushed peanuts, pomelo pulp, various sorts of sliced vegetables and topping of sauces, especially plum sauce, the irresistible dish adds auspiciousness to the celebration of Chinese New Year.

Yee sang literally means raw fish, but the word 'yee' in Mandarin is pronounced 'yu', a homophone of another Chinese word which means abundant, thus the idiom 'nian nian you yu' (abundance every year). Addition of pomelo or other types of citrus fruit pulp reflects the meaning of 'da ji da li' (good luck and smooth sailing).

Sesame seeds and crushed peanuts respectively allude to 'jin yin man wu' (meaning household filled with gold and silver) and 'sheng yi xing long'. To top it off, plum sauce, which is commonly used for *yee sang*, signifies 'tian tian mi mi' (meaning 'may life always be sweet').



Yee sang among other Chinese New Year dishes

How Ipohites of All Ages Celebrate the New Year

"My family stays at home during the first day of Chinese New Year, but my cousins and I prefer going out to malls," said 23-year-old Ipohite **Gisele Soo**, a student from Quest International University Perak (QIU). "I visit my grandmother's side of the family during the second day."



Gisele Soo (choosing lanterns)

"Chinese New Year isn't that much of a major celebration for my family and I," 71-year-old Ipohite **Andrew Ong** noted. "We usually go through the festive holiday with simple visits to my relatives' houses. It's mostly about food and more catching up with them."

For 30-year-old Ipohite **Alvin Lee**, he travels back to his mother's hometown in Malacca for Chinese New Year, who said, "My mom has a huge family. Since my maternal grandfather is the eldest of nine siblings, thus a large extended family. I usually stay there for a few days."

Living overseas sure takes the fun out of Chinese New Year, especially if one has career priorities. 24-year-old Ipoh boy **Darren Lee Yeu Jyn** residing and working as a research scientist in the land Down Under is no exception.

Continued on page 6

YOU ARE FIRED!

My take is, the education ministry was too complex a job for Maszlee, the former lecturer, to handle. He has done enough damage and is beyond reproach.

Maszlee Malik, arguably the most uninspirational education minister ever, was finally shown the door by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. It happened two days after New Year's Day and was gleefully greeted by the long-suffering rakyat. He was in the seat for 20 months following GE14. He was assigned the hot seat by none other than Mahathir himself since he is from the old man's party – Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia. One other “infallible” fella from Perak is also from the same party.



The fact that he refused to go quietly, but made a mountain out of a molehill about his “achievements” while complaining about how his efforts were not being appreciated, goes to show that he had resigned reluctantly. Obviously, he had no plans of leaving. To gain a modicum of respectability, Maszlee insisted that he was “returning” the post to his mentor, the prime minister.

When Maszlee presented his 2019 report card, he was all smiles. He did not expect to be fired so soon. But some leaked examination questions set by Universiti Malaysia Perlis, including one which elevated hate preacher Zakir Naik to a religious icon, was the straw that broke the camel's back.

The Education Ministry washed its hands over the university's exam question, which was roundly condemned as insensitive. Questions relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender were also posed. No one accepted Maszlee's reasoning that the education ministry does not interfere with public universities' autonomy.

Non-Muslims were still furious over the Jawi-lesson fiasco being forcibly shoved down the throat of Chinese and Indian primary students. Adding Zakir Naik to the controversy was like pouring petrol onto the fire. It confirms the suspicion that the education ministry was on an “Islamisation” mission all along.

Even if Maszlee did not have a clue about the university questions, the Education Ministry has to fix the problem and not plead ignorance. When he was questioned on the lack of educational reforms, he told critics to read his ministry's report card instead.

It brought back memories of Najib Razak proudly holding a RM1 chicken and kangkong (water spinach) when people complained about the escalating cost of living in 2014. Maszlee was being irresponsible.

Maszlee Malik, for whatever he is worth, was never meant to be the Education Minister of the new government that replaced the corrupt Barisan Nasional government. Mahathir wanted the post himself. He announced on May 17, 2018, that he would take over the Education Ministry portfolio because “Malaysians needed to be re-educated”.

However, he gave up the idea when reminded that, as the prime minister, he could not hold other portfolios as it goes against Pakatan Harapan Government's manifesto. Mahathir relented and appointed Maszlee the following day.

Never in his wildest dreams had Maszlee expected to be given such an important portfolio. He was neither a politician nor a technocrat. In fact, he was just a run-of-the-mill lecturer without even the benefit of heading a department. His selection had led many to believe that the old man was out to create trouble. Or perhaps he had an agenda up his sleeve.

Some six months into his appointment, the poor fella had earned the moniker, “Black Shoe Minister”, a comedic reference to his proposed switch of students' shoes from white to black. He then got mired in the controversial International Islamic University Malaysia presidency crisis, creating uneasiness over his insistence to become the 7th president of the institution.

In November 2018, Mahathir complained that Malaysia's national school curriculum needed to be revamped. The prime minister was not happy that Islamic subjects were given priority over students' proficiency in English language, maths and science.

Too much time was allocated for religious studies. The prime minister argued that despite ample time given to religious studies, indiscipline and poor ethics were rampant among Malay students.

The premier told Maszlee to “overhaul” the school curriculum to produce citizens with good moral values, good work ethics and integrity. Something he had advocated during his days as Education Minister (1974 to 1977).

The next day, Maszlee proudly announced that his ministry would formulate a new curriculum, expected to be out by the end of 2020 or early 2021. The new curriculum would ensure that the subjects to be taught in school would not burden the students and teachers.

Malaysians were ecstatic. Finally, the government was doing something to correct the sorry state of the education system after 61 years under the old regime. Quality education would come soon, many reasoned. But nothing was heard since. Perhaps Maszlee did not really understand the prime minister's requirement.

Less than a year after the black shoe fiasco, the education minister did it again. In his rush to defend the discriminatory matriculation programme's special preference for Bumiputera (son of the soil) students, he had argued that if his critics did not want the matriculation quota system, then job opportunities should not be denied to Bumiputera because they do not speak Chinese.

The matriculation programme was designed to help low-performing Malays enter local public universities. The PM admitted it was actually a “back door” arrangement to increase university intake for the Malays.

The biggest brouhaha was none other than the introduction of Jawi lessons to vernacular schools. It is still an issue today and I find it hard to imagine how it could be resolved. While the nation's attention was focussed on Jawi lessons in vernacular schools, Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia (YADIM) dropped a bombshell.

A leaked memo granting permission to YADIM to conduct religious propagation in schools, polytechnics, community colleges, public universities and private universities made its rounds. It proved beyond a reasonable doubt that “Islamisation” was real and Maszlee was the man behind the project.

After being caught with their pants down, officials from the Education Ministry insisted that vernacular schools (Chinese and Tamil) would have the option of whether or not to allow preaching activities. But the words “optional” was not mentioned in the letter to YADIM to preach Islam in almost all types of schools.

Sure, the minister had done some good things like ending the ban on university students from being involved in political parties and access to education for the poor. Free breakfast

for primary school children is commendable but it lacks transparency leading to allegations of cronyism and profiteering to the tune of between RM800 million to RM1.67 billion.

My take is, the education ministry was too complex a job for the former lecturer to handle. He has done enough damage and is beyond reproach. If the intention was to bring religious education to another level, he has succeeded, hands down.

On hindsight, Maszlee could be a pawn in the larger scheme of things. There may be more to it than meets the eye. When things go wrong and when unhappiness prevails among the rakyat, finding a scapegoat becomes the norm. Maszlee is the obvious choice.

I do not question his contribution to the ministry. Let history be the judge of that. But I am just being sceptical whether he got it right from the word go.



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PUBLISHER
Ipoh Echo Sdn Bhd
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153 Jalan Dato Lau Pak
Khuan, Ipoh Garden, 31400
Ipoh, Perak Darul Ridzuan.
Tel: (605) 543 9726
Fax: (605) 543 9411
Email: editorial@ipohecho.com.my

EDITORIAL
Fathol Zaman Bukhari

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Rosli Mansor Ahd Razali
Luqman Hakim Md Radzi

MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION EXECUTIVE
Yugin Foo

REPORTERS
Tan Mei Kuan
Chris Teh
Joelyn Jonathan
Jo Lynn Chong

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Lot 2, Jalan Sepana 15/3,
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Seksyen 15, 40200 Shah Alam, Selangor.

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Amy's Permaculture Farm: Benefits to the Community and Environment

In Part I of her story, Amy Tan, and her husband, who owned and ran a permaculture farm on the hills overlooking Lenggong explained the concepts of permaculture and the benefits to her and her three young children.

In this excerpt, she explains the impact of permaculture on the community, climate change and the environment.

Mariam Mokhtar: How does permaculture empower Malaysians? Are there many permaculture sites in peninsular Malaysia?

Amy: Malaysia is fortunate that the permaculture concept has been very popular over the past five years. Many people, especially urbanites, who have land or gardens, choose this method, to cultivate their sites.

Urban community gardens in KL, like 'Kebun Kaki Bukit' in Bangsar, 'TTDI edible gardens', and social enterprises that promote permaculture, such as 'Urban Hijau' and 'Eats, Shoots and Roots', offer educational workshops and programs where one learns about permaculture and sustainable living skills.

2. How does permaculture benefit the community?

Amy: Reports from other permaculture projects around the world have shown that the locals are initially suspicious. The establishment of a pioneering permaculture project has this effect because it is very different from conventional agriculture and gardening.

We expect farmers to grow vegetables in neat rows. A permaculture garden may look unkempt when one first enters it; but as one walks through the farm, one sees a variety of herbs, vegetables and fruit trees growing together.

Some Lenggong residents considered us odd. We collected bags of coconut residue, which were thrown away after the coconut milk had been pressed from the coconut shavings. They saw rubbish or waste, but we saw food for our chickens and fish!

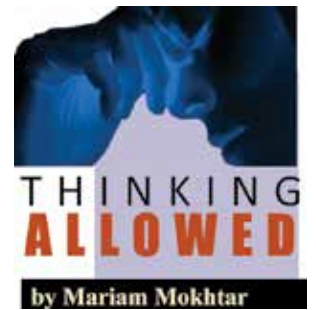
The locals were curious and asked us lots of questions. In time, we were unable to find more discarded coconut, because the locals were feeding it to their livestock!

After the initial curiosity, people began to appreciate the values of this system of farming.

In permaculture, individuals influence one another. They embrace new ideas and change their existing ways to serve their goals more economically. It helps both their wallets and the environment.

3. Do you think your permaculture project could help the environment?

Amy: Definitely! The manner in which the land is used makes it more productive and resilient.



Most people, in Lenggong, have land that they work, but often, they abandon the land, because they feel it's too hard to make a living. So, they leave for the cities.

As more people learn about permaculture, they begin to grow their own food. Their financial burden is reduced and they become healthier as the quality of food

is superior. Any excess produce can be sold at a premium, as it was grown without chemicals.

Climate change can affect many aspects of our lives and the most fundamental one is food. We feel more secure knowing that we can grow our own food, in our garden.

4. You appear to be self-sufficient and use solar energy and water from the jungle stream for cooking, drinking and washing, while your food comes from your farm and livestock. Are there any modern appliances which you cannot live without?

Amy: Of course! We are not attempting to live a backward jungle life. We have young kids, and a washing machine is crucial! We use a range of appliances as long as they are suitable for an independent off-grid solar system. Hairdryers, electric kettles and irons are a no-no.

5. Can anyone "do" permaculture? Or does it need a tough and resilient person, who is prepared to overcome teething problems, to succeed?

Amy: Being resilient is crucial to pursue some things in life. It is a choice. The temporary setbacks will make you tougher. With the right frame of mind, we accept problems as part of the learning process.

We have a little ritual for people coming to our farm as apprentices. On their first day, they need to proclaim confidently, "I am a farmer!". This empowers them to channel the "common sense" of a farmer to solve any problems which may arise.

6. What is your advice to others who wish to learn about permaculture?

Amy: They should pursue it, if it feels right for them, for their children or for their community. Permaculture is rewarding, beyond just chemical-free fresh produce and delicious food!

News Residents Worried

By A. Jeyaraj

Residents of Taman Chepor Sentosa are worried that the new agricultural project being carried out at the Kledang Saiong Hill would lead to floods, landslides and mudslides.

During a press conference at a local surau on January 5, neighbourhood watch committee chairman Shamsul Kamar Ani said work started on the 151.49ha piece of land – which he claims is part of the Kinta Valley Geopark – about one month ago. He said this would not only affect the flora and fauna there but is also a safety concern for the over 1000 nearby residents. About two years ago, illegal corn farms were set up at the base of the hills and whenever there is a downpour, the area gets flooded.

Now with a new agriculture project planned higher up on the hill on land belonging to the Perak State Development Corporation (PKNP) the potential calamities would be serious. A number of streams are flowing from the hill and lately, the water has turned muddy. Residents fear that a popular waterfall nearby would soon turn muddy as well. Eventually, it would affect Sungai Pari into which the water would be flowing. People staying downstream of Sungai Pari would experience frequent floods.

Shamsul said that they had lodged a police report over the matter on January 4 and hope PKNP and the state government will stop the project immediately.

Surau chairman Datuk Ahmad Mohd said by going on with the project, the authorities were not respecting the declaration on the Geopark made by the Sultan of Perak in 2018.

Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman, field officer of Sahabat Alam Malaysia said that although the clearing activity is within a 500.2ha area that had its forest reserve status degazetted, it is still part of the Kinta Geopark Valley. He added that although the land was degazetted by the previous administration, the current government should consider all



aspects before pursuing the clearing.

On December 11, 2019, PKNP issued a statement stating that the land was being cleared for an orchard. It stated that the state Environment Department had done an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and on January 21, 2009, approval was given for the clearing. Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Ahmad Faizal Azumu is the PKNP chairman.

However, Meor Razak questioned the validity of the EIA conducted in 2009. Usually, EIA is valid for two years, but it is 10 years now and a new EIA must be done. "If the project was approved by the previous government and no activity was carried out, why must the current government go on with the project?" Meor asked.

The clearing cannot be seen from the ground. The extent of the clearing was viewed from a drone.

Why is the present government blindly continuing with the projects initiated by the previous government without doing further studies? Projects not beneficial to the people should be stopped, especially potentially hazardous ones.

SeeFoon drops in on Lodge 163



The facade jumps out at you as you drive down Jalan Sultan Iskandar Shah or Hugh Low St. as locals still call it. The signboard is hand-painted in a whimsical retro style, with a tinge of shabby chic and the big number 163 jumps out at you in a mauve red.

163 is as its signboard says, both a lodge and a cafe. The lodge upstairs has 10 rooms with one accommodating up to four and another five persons in one room. Very reasonably priced from RM80 for double, a group of friends or family can easily split the costs which works out to an average of RM40 per pax. All rooms have their own attached bathroom and are air-conditioned. This makes it perfect for backpackers and students and travellers looking for good clean, comfortable accommodation and it's right in the heart of Ipoh town.

The cafe downstairs is pleasantly decorated again with whimsical touches and booths and open tables make up the seating area. The cafe opens at 8am where the lodgers can have breakfast and throughout the day the cafe serves very interesting dishes all home prepared by proprietor Mdm Shirley Chong.

This is not your usual "Tai Chau" restaurant but a very comfortable cafe serving individual portions of various noodles and dishes, mostly meant for one. But as is the usual habit with me, I was there with my troupe and we ordered up a storm and tried many items on their menu.



Whimsical wall adornment



A 5-person room



Hi-Tea Set



Crispy Pork Lard Rice

Lodge and Cafe 163 is a whole family effort with father Stanley Tham (a Feng Shui Master) presiding, mother Shirley Chong in the kitchen curating the dishes aided by a chef de cuisine; brother Tham Kuen Wei who is also a Feng Shui Master and two sisters Elizabeth and Evaynne Tham. Together and with mum Shirley as the creative chef behind the dishes, the team serves up an impressive array of dishes, with one of the largest selection of vegetarian and vegan selections I have seen, mixed in with meat dishes. So it's a haven for groups with different dietary habits to enjoy a meal together, without one group having to accommodate the other.

The best thing on the menu is the promise of NO MSG and add clean toilets and air-conditioned comfort to boot and Lodge 163 cafe has a fan in me.

I am not much of a veggie fan but I enjoyed their **vegetarian Bibimbap**, the famous Korean Rice speciality which you mix yourself at the table, **RM8.50**; and their **Malat Spicy Noodles**, a borrowing from Sichuan cuisine using the Sichuan pepper sauce which is mixed into the noodles to give a slightly tongue-numbing peppery impact, **RM9.50**. An interesting veggie snack dish is their **crispy sweet potato rolls**, **RM8**.

Naturally, the carnivore that I am immediately gravitated to the meat dishes, the excellent **Black Vinegar Pig's Trotters** or *Tsu Geok Tsou* which was seasoned perfectly with the right blend of vinegar to soya to sugar ratio, the trotters braised to a tender but chewy texture and the sauce, a touch of ambrosia, **RM12**.



Malat Spicy Noodles



By SeeFoon Chan-Koppen
seefoon@ipophecho.com.my
For more info go to www.ipohfooddiva.my

Crispy Pork Lard Rice with fried ikan bilis was heavenly given that I love crispy pork lard done any which way, **RM8.50**; as was the **Rice with Curry Mutton and fried crispy bean curd**, **RM13.50**.

We also tried the **Giant Curry Noodles and Beehoon** (you can have both or singly), a heaping bowl with roast pork, fried and boiled fish balls, pork balls, fried wonton, char siew, fried bean curd and pigskin complete with yummy curry sauce and vegetables. Unless you have a humongous appetite, this one dish which I will recommend that you share amongst four if you have a normal appetite, **RM25**.

Finally (there are many many more items on the menu), which I cannot possibly write about given my space limitations, I can recommend the **Tom Yam Noodles** which come with fish paste, tao fu pok, fu pei, roast pork, egg and large prawns: tangy and mildly spicy but can be made more so with the addition of the thick chilli paste which they give you, **RM13.50**.

Lodge 163 Cafe is a great place to pop in for a snack, meal or even just a drink, with my favourite being the blue-pea-flower tea which you can have with lime and sugar. And did I mention that they have a high tea which is served all day? The traditional fancy three-tier high tea tray chock full of a mixture of sweet and savouries and served with your choice of English tea on fine China.



Black Vinegar Pig's Trotters



Tom Yam Noodles

LODGE 163 CAFE
No. 163, Jalan Sultan Iskandar Shah, 30000 Ipoh.
Tel: 05 253 1888 (Lodging) (Food & Cafe
Ordering) 016 5434 262/016 5477 510
Open daily except Wednesdays (8am to 4pm)



Cai Shen Ye (God of Wealth) spreading cheers around malls in town

"Given that Chinese New Year is not an official holiday here in Australia, I have to work. The festive mood here is undoubtedly lower than in Malaysia," he remarked. "But I do, of course, have a *makan-makan* session with fellow Malaysian friends who also live here. *Yee sang* is always one of the must-have dishes."

28-year-old Ipohite journalist **Tan Mei Kuan** opined that the core of Chinese New Year celebration should be about what truly matters – family and friends.

"One should respect and follow the taboos, rites and customs of the festivity but not to the extent of being tied down and ruining the festive vibe. For me, the absence of dishes deemed abundant or auspicious during Chinese New Year would not bother me much," she expressed. "If

the people who prepared or ate those dishes are stressed out by the strict superstitions, what is the point of having them?"

"Also, the vibrant colours that one is dictated to wear should be reflected upon his or her face too," Tan further stated.

To 27-year-old Ipohite **Marcus Chong**, his Chinese New Year activities are mostly spent with his maternal family.

"Apart from reunion dinner, my paternal family does not celebrate the festivity much due to recent passing of my grandmother," he explained. "On Chinese New Year Eve, my brother and I will help my maternal grandmother to pack the *angpows*."

"My family and I go to **Kek Lok Seah Crematorium** in Bercham every first day of the new year to pray for our ancestors. It is usually very crowded by 10 a.m.," Marcus mentioned. "Lunch and dinner will be prepared at my grandmother's house, after catching up with my relatives in between accompanied with nice Chinese New Year snacks and beverages."

"My family and I always have a reunion dinner at **Sam Poh Restaurant** in Tambun during the eve," said 17-year-old Ipoh girl **Jo Lynn Chong**. "While on the first day of Chinese New Year, we usually head to **Tuck Kee Restaurant** in Pasir Pinji."

"My mother will bake butter cake, marble cake and carrot cheesecake, while my father makes egg sponge cake and capon chicken. Afterwards, they will chat with their siblings about people and vacation," she elaborated. "My cousins, on the other hand, go for karaoke session or hang out at the malls, if not meeting up with their friends."

"Some of my family members stay up until very late at night during Chinese New Year," Jo Lynn added.



Chinese New Year decorations at Ipoh Parade



More decorations for sale

Without further ado, Ipoh Echo wishes our loyal readers a very prosperous, wealthy and healthy Chinese New Year! May the year ahead always be happy for you.

Community_

Furry Friends at Cats Cottage

By Murni Fazira

Located at Taman Pengkalan Pertama, the 'Cats Cottage' studio has been operating since April 2019 with 22 cats of various breeds.

This studio opens daily between 12pm to 10pm. The entrance fee is RM5 per person for a duration of 30 minutes to play with the cats. Incidentally, it is the only studio of its kind in Ipoh.

Lisut, the owner of the facility, said that their cats participated in a few competitions and won a few.

Besides being a cat studio, other services for cats are also offered like grooming and boarding.

Prices are rather reasonable. For adult cats,



the fee is around RM40 to RM45 per animal while for kittens it is around

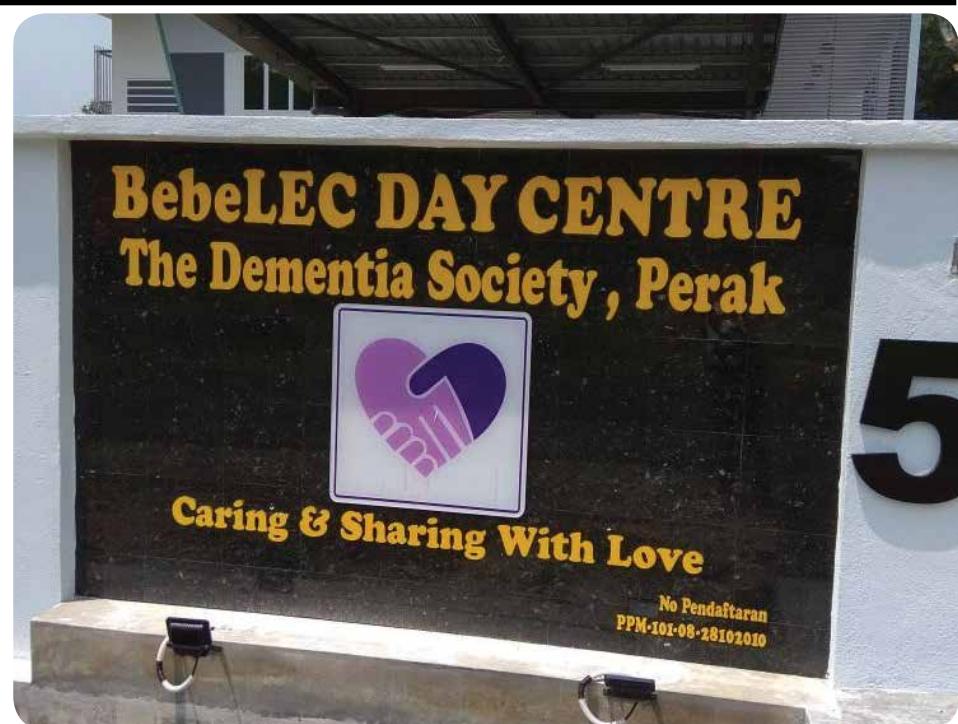
RM30 to RM35. For flea treatments, an additional RM10 is charged. Boarding for vaccinated cats is RM15 per night.

A vet visits the studio on a monthly basis. The staff are trained to nurse and treat sick felines.

On weekends, the studio will be filled with families dropping by to play with the cute furry friends.

The studio is well-maintained. It is clean and is customer-friendly. The cats are well-mannered, they do not scratch or hiss at visitors. It is definitely a perfect place for children.

For more information, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/catscottageipoh1 or their Instagram at www.instagram.com/catscottage_ipoh



A Dedicated Dementia Centre

By Chris Teh

In view of Perak being an ageing state, a dedicated centre for dementia treatment could not have come at a better time.

With the objective of increasing public awareness about dementia, its causes and providing support to caregivers, the Dementia Society Perak launched BebeLEC Day Centre currently located at Jalan Lang, Ipoh. The centre can accommodate up to 40 patients.

In his welcoming speech, Executive Councillor Howard Lee

Chuan How, conveyed his gratitude to the society, "With the availability of this centre, dementia patients could be accorded better care, thus lifting the burden off their relatives".

"The state government has allocated RM10,000 to assist with the centre's daily operations," he added.

"If there is a crisis, there is somewhere to turn to for assistance. Despite dementia being an untreatable disease, with the right kind of care, we can prevent patients from feeling that they're a

burden to everyone around them," Howard said, disclosing the fact that his late maternal grandfather suffered from dementia too.

"Even though I was still young back then, I felt the burden and the heartbreak the condition brought to our family," he recalled.

BebeLEC Day Centre is located at 56 Jalan Lang, 30100 Ipoh.

For more information and updates, go to their website at www.thedementiasocietyperak.wordpress.com

Community.

Christmas Charity Lunch

By Murni Fazira



A charity lunch with orphans, organised by JJJ Fashion and Star Mansion, was held at Star Mansion Restaurant, Greentown, on Sunday, December 22. Raja Puan Besar Perak, Raja Nazhatul Shima, was the guest of honour.

The event began with a welcoming speech by the emcee, Mohd Anizam Azizun. This was followed by the Tāngyuán (round dumplings in soup) session. A bowl of dumplings was served to Raja Puan Besar Perak.

The objective was to celebrate Christmas with the less fortunate and to provide them with basic necessities for school.

Guests were then entertained to performances by Perak Kaying Association, Toong Onn Perak Association, Tadika Chung San and Persatuan Persahabatan Kesihatan Taichi 18 Perak.

The lunch ended with Raja Nazhatul Shima presenting supplies to the three participating orphanages namely, Precious Gift Home, Kasih Sayang Orphanage Centre and 1Malaysia Care Centre.

Connexion

By Joachim Ng

Vote for non-partisan governance



Will there ever be non-partisan governance in Malaysia? Will 2020 bring fresh hope? Only if we adopt a wholesome democratic vision, similar to the emerging spirit of newness in mainland Europe — a region loathed by pious Asians for alleged moral decadence.

But Europe has produced Greta Thunberg, a spunky 16-year-old who dares to scold world leaders for their obsession with national self-interest and reluctance to improve climate care. Now, tiny bits of mainland Europe are slowly reverting to non-partisan ab-original democracy. In small corners, local laws have recently been enacted to empower non-political citizens' councils and assemblies whose members decide on policies related to issues of direct concern to citizens.



These wholesome citizens' councils and assemblies are winning support from governments who appreciate the capabilities of their well-informed and experienced members. It is honest recognition of the fact that when you cast your vote at the polling station, you are donating your voice to the politicians and they use it to serve their party agenda above all else.

Ipoh Echo's Connexion column has long campaigned for empowerment of neighbourhood committees so that ordinary folks can make decisions on issues that they know and care a lot about. Unsurprisingly our politicians don't support advancements that reduce the citizens' utter dependence on them.

Malaysian politics is trapped in a racially oriented, party-controlled, highly partisan gladiatorial style of democracy that barely resembles the genuine thing. This style encourages factional disputes and narrow interests at the sacrifice of good basic governance. While our parliamentarians rant at each other, the drains stay clogged and killer mosquitoes soar triumphantly.

Growing public disenchantment is revealed in a Sept-Oct 2019 survey conducted by EMIR Research. In the survey, 17 percent of Malaysians polled indicated that they would rather vote for independents than for candidates aligned with any of the political alliances.

Partisan democracy has the long-term consequence of splitting a nation, as its operating principle is bifurcation or division into halves. Take Brexit as an example. British politicians asked citizens to choose between leaving or remaining in the European Union. A clear 52 percent of voters, especially citizens in Scotland and Northern Ireland, chose to remain. But three pro-Brexit parties won a majority of parliamentary seats despite receiving only 48 percent of the votes.

By casting the issue in a Remain-or-Leave mould with no middle ground allowed, partisan politics has divided Britain into confrontational halves. Are politicians in Malaysia treating sticky issues the same way by excluding the middle ground and shepherding diverse groups into taking extreme positions?

Inspirational Ladies

By Mei Kuan

Perak Women for Women Society (PWW) gathered inspirational women working in the B40 category via an empowerment session brimming with motivational tips and positive vibes.

Held recently at Syeun Hotel, over 40 ladies were invited to share their experience on how they support their families with their jobs and manage their financial situation.

Angeline Philip, 60, who sells fritters shared, "In 1981, my work as a labourer ended due to retrenchment. Thus in 1982, I started my business selling various fritters at only RM0.10 per piece by the roadside with a three-wheel bicycle along Jalan Tun Perak (Connolly Road). I got my recipe from my late mother. My daily income was only RM18 and below. However, I never gave up and continued the business until today at the same location. With my income, I made my business permanent."

"Nowadays, if you find it difficult to look for work, you can try to do some small businesses. At least do something instead of staying jobless!" she advised.

Meanwhile, Rohana Hamzah, 52, and Nor Azzah Jaafar Halmi, 30, work as parking attendants, the former stationed in Batu Gajah while the latter in Ipoh.

"Before working as a parking attendant, I worked as an operator in a few factories. As a parking attendant, one has to have plenty of patience, especially when handling fussy customers with a temper whom we encounter daily. We have to carry out our duty," Rohana explained.

Here's Nor Azzah's advice: "First and foremost, do not be choosy about jobs."

Sumathi Sivamany, President of PWW added, "Our PWW Shop is where we help single mothers and underprivileged ladies. Whatever proceeds we had, we want to share it with these ladies. Thus we are having this event for the first time which also serves as a platform for networking".

"I always feel, when it comes to accolades and acknowledgement, it's always someone with education-linked success being recognised. However, these ladies are heroes in their own ways. They contribute to the economy. At a time where we need two incomes in a family, they are actively contributing. They are all proud to do what they are doing and are financially independent," she enthused.



Giving in Kind

By Rosli Mansor

"We'd reuse whatever that was left in 2019 for this year," said Siti Hajar Mat Said, 16, from Pertubuhan Kebajikan Kanak-kanak Yatim Darus-salam, an orphanage based in Kampung Melayu Sungai Rapat.

Siti Hajar, a form four student from Sekolah Menengah Rapat Setia, thanked Mimbar Nusantara Holding Sdn Bhd, Mydin Mall Meru Raya and Perak Media Sports Club for the assistance rendered.

"We'd manage with whatever we had until some kind people give us a helping hand," she said. Siti represented some 50 less fortunate kids who gathered for a special occasion at Mydin Mall Meru Raya on Saturday, December 28.

According to Nazrin Chong Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer of Mimbar Nusantara Sdn Bhd, a sum of RM150 had been allocated to each child. They each received a pair of uniforms, three pairs of socks and shoes. School bags were sponsored by Mydin Mall Meru Raya.

"We've been doing this for over ten years under our Corporate Social Responsibility programme. During this back-to-school session, we extend a helping hand to the mentioned orphanage and provide the orphans with necessities.

Perak Media Sports Club president, Rosli Mansor, told us about the kids' problems and that's what prompted us to help out," he added.

Mimbar Nusantara Sdn Bhd is a property development and management company with ongoing housing projects around Kampar, Batu Gajah, Gopeng and other parts in the state.

According to Rosli Mansor, the orphanage had sought assistance from many individuals and organisations. The response was mixed.

"I wish to express my gratitude to Mimbar Nusantara and Mydin Mall Meru Raya for their assistance. Hopefully, others would emulate their efforts," said Rosli.

BRIMMING WITH NEW HEALING HANDS AT KMC MEDICAL CENTRE

I was bewitched, bedazzled and brimming with new health information after KMC Medical Centre tasked me with interviewing 4 doctors who have recently joined the hospital as Resident Consultants.

• By SeeFoon Chan-Koppen

Dato' Dr Sothy Kandiah, Consultant Physician

I love talking to Physicians because they are general specialists in a variety of illnesses and not focused on any particular part of the body. When I have a medical complaint, the first person I see is my physician who keeps track of all my ailments.

That's how Dato' Dr Sothy describes herself – a first-line medical manager or a primary physician who diagnoses and treats patients and if need be, sends the patient to a specialist as required.

This may sound simple on paper but with 25 years experience in Ipoh GH, retiring as Head of Department, one of the first batches to receive an M. Med. in Internal Medicine from USM, Dato' Dr Sothy says that the job can be harrowing, especially when dealing with infectious disease.

"I attended the first patient with Nipah virus here in GH, Ipoh. And as the infected numbers grew, we had all hands on board and the situation was quite tense. Thankfully, that was over but we still have Dengue. Dengue requires 24-hour care and recently, I had a patient here at KMC and I was looking in on him every two hours. Thank God he recovered."

"As a generalist, I manage events from head to toe. I spend a lot of my time counselling patients, especially diabetic ones on the management of their disease. Patients need to collaborate with their doctor. Eighty per cent of the effort is with the patient and the doctor provides the remaining 20%. A lot of patients think that because they have been given medication or provided with insulin, their problems are taken care of. That is not at all true," she emphasised.

"As for diet, diabetic patients must watch their sugar intake. Everything you eat turns into sugar in the body. Avoid sweet fruits particularly durians. Eat apples, pineapple and guava which is full of vitamin C. Cut down on your rice intake and cut out MSG which causes hypertension," are Dato' Dr Sothy's advice.



Mr N. Jeevaraj, Consultant General Surgeon

Mr Jeeva is a qualified medical doctor. He is addressed as Mr because, since the mid-19th century, UK surgeons have also had to obtain a university degree in medicine. As a result, today's surgeons start out as "Mr" or "Miss" in medical school, become "Dr" on qualifying and revert to "Mr" or "Miss" when they pass surgical exams for the Royal College. This only applies to surgeons.

An affable man, Mr Jeeva also refers to himself as a generalist like his wife Dato' Dr Sothy. Except in his case, he uses the "knife". A veteran of PCSH (Perak Community Specialist Hospital) followed by six years with BP Lab, Mr Jeeva is also affiliated with Hospital Fatimah and KPJ Ipoh Specialist Hospital, although he is now the Resident General Surgeon at KMC.

"I do all types of surgery like breast whether total mastectomy (removal of the whole breast) or breast conservation surgery (where only the lump and some surrounding tissue is removed), to colon surgery." Of course, if you have an ingrown toenail, he'll do that too.

Mr Jeeva admits to seeing more colorectal issues and recommends regular colonoscopies, especially past the age of 50 with repeats every five years if there are no adverse signs, more often if there are polyps and probably every year if any parent, sibling or a close relative has a history of colorectal cancer. "If there is any change in bowel movements, constant bloating and in particular, any rectal bleeding, go straight to a doctor and get examined. Colorectal cancer can be cured at the early stages," he stressed.

As for breast cancer which is very common these days, he advocates giving yourself a breast examination every month and going to a doctor at the first sign of a lump. Like colon cancer, breast cancers are easily treated at the early stages and full remissions are possible. "A mastectomy assures no local or regional occurrence as the whole breast and underlying lymph nodes are removed but breast conservation surgery requires a very strict follow-up. I make patients aware of that when they make a choice," he added.

Finally, Mr Jeeva advises all patients to choose a doctor whom they like and can talk to. "Do not be dictated by your doctor," he emphasised. "Do get a second opinion if you're uncertain and especially if the diagnosis is a serious one," he added.



Dr Ho Shu Fen, Consultant Ophthalmologist and Oculoplastic, Lacrimal and Orbit Surgeon

Dr Ho Shu Fen looks almost like a teenager and admits to her looks sometimes working against her as patients doubt her experience. In fact, Dr Ho is in her forties and is more than able to cope with any issue concerning the eye, having an impressive background both educationally and in practice.

After getting a full scholarship to study medicine at the University of Melbourne, she decided to specialise in Ophthalmology. She worked under the tutelage of many famous eye surgeons in the UK. After getting FRCOphth (London) she decided to sub specialise in Oculoplastics. She had her fellowship in the world-renowned Moorfields Eye Centre in London.

I thought I "knew it all" about eye problems having had a few myself but some of the delicate and complicated procedures she performs truly "opened my eyes"! Such as lifting the eyelashes in patients whose eyelashes slant downwards and obstruct their vision (especially in Chinese eyes) or correcting Ptosis (drooping eyelids) that do the same, even in the very old.

She can perform a wide range of oculoplastic surgeries including eyelid reconstruction for tumour or post-trauma; facial nerve palsy and orbital decompression and eyelid lowering for thyroid eye disease. Aesthetic surgery services such as double eyelid surgery, eyebags removal, autologous fat transfer in addition to less invasive procedures such as botox and filler are also provided. She is also a competent cataract surgeon who can perform complex cataract surgery with a wide variety of premium



intraocular lens implant and squint surgery.

She adopts holistic management to her patients as she believes 'eyes are the window to the soul' and eye health is a reflection of general health. No eye problem is too big or too small for this very empathetic doctor. She currently practises in Ipoh, as well as Kuala Lumpur.

Continued on page 9

... Continued from page 8

Dr A. Amalourde Raj, Consultant Orthopedic Surgeon

Having received his undergraduate training at University Malaya, Ipoh-boy (St Michael's), Dr Amalourde is a Certified Medical Impairment Assessor (CMIA) with emphasis on Spine, Sports, Foot and Ankle Surgery. He worked in government hospitals but in 2007, set up his own private clinic in Johor Bahru, returning to Perak in 2014 where he had a clinic in Taiping.

Settling now in KMC, Dr Amalourde has great plans for an extended clinic where he will manage all sports injuries and rehabilitation, perform all orthopaedic surgeries as called for and also a wound-care centre.

"Why wound care? That doesn't sound like orthopaedics?" I asked. His reply was surprising, "Most people who have wounds or skin lesions that may appear shallow and dismiss them. Oftentimes, because many have lost sensation in their extremities, the small wound may go deeper and go right to the bone. And that is what we want to prevent, particularly the possibility of amputation. This applies to many diabetic patients."

As for sports injuries and rehabilitation, this extremely enthusiastic surgeon who is an avid sportsman himself has his own ultrasound machine in his clinic where he can immediately assess the degree of injury and take remedial action right there and then. This conscientious doctor will even work with patients to demonstrate specific



exercises to help overcome the injury. And he plans to keep his consultation fees affordable in line with KMC's mission.

As for knee replacement surgery, Dr Amalourde prefers to use conservative methods before recommending the "knife". He may use PRP or Platelet-rich plasma, also known as autologous conditioned plasma, which is a concentrate of platelet-rich plasma protein derived from the patients' own blood, centrifuged to remove red blood cells; hyaluronic injections or the use of a hinge brace which has metal on both sides to support the knee (see pic).



Address:
KMC Medical Centre
20A Jalan Chung Thye Phin,
30250 Ipoh, Perak.
T: 05-2425333

Extensions:
Dato' Dr Sothy: 246
Mr Jeeva: 261
Dr Ho: 256
Dr Raj: 227

Visit Malaysia

2020



New Year Celebration 2020



State-level celebration at Manjung



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New Year Babies



By Rosli Mansor

Five married couples witnessed the birth of their babies at Pantai Hospital Ipoh on New Year's Day, Wednesday, January 1, 2020.

The pair from Tronoh, Asma Shuib, 44, and her husband Taib Ibrahim, 48, welcomed their baby son who weighed 2.6kg at 3.55pm.

Another couple from Taman Rimba Tambun, Ipoh, Nor Syarfa Wahida, 30, and husband Mohd Hanapi Mamat, 35, had a baby daughter weighing 3.7kg at 2.22pm.

"We're happy with the birth of our daughter. Pantai Hospital is indeed one of the best hospitals in Ipoh, not to mention the experienced staff and comfortable wards," said Mohd Hanapi who works as an engineer.

Three other baby boys were delivered the same day one at noon and the other in the evening.

Dying Craft

Appreciating the Beauty of Handcrafted Rattan

By Gisele Soo

Aun Hin Enterprise Sdn Bhd is a furniture shop in Ipoh with historical significance as it is one of the last few shops that practices the craft of hand-weaving rattan furniture.

As we move towards the future, things of the past will end up becoming memories and ghosts to the younger generations.

As the saying goes, "Never forget your roots, never forget where you come from, because when you do it's a long road home," but what are we doing?

Abandoning and leaving behind the things that were once so meaningful to us.

In recent years, people's lack of interest in rattan has become increasingly visible. "People no longer visit our shop and the business is dying," said 89-year-old Cheong who has been working at the shop for more than 70 years.

He added, "Despite the slow business, I have always enjoyed the task given to me, weaving rattan is fun and at the same time it still is challenging".

Cheong still hopes that people will learn to appreciate the beauty in craftsmanship from a bygone age.

If you have an eye and admiration for the craft of rattan furniture, do drop by Aun Hin Enterprise. You can find a vast variety of goods including a rattan rocking horse for kids.



It is located at 52 Jalan Sultan Iskandar, Hugh Low Street, 30000 Ipoh.
For more information, call **05 254 7001**. The shop opens daily from Monday to Saturday, from 8.30am to 5.45pm.

Heritage

First-of-its-kind Marker Trail

By Mei Kuan



To add on to the city's heritage trails, the first-of-its-kind marker trail of Dr Sun Yat Sen and his comrades in Ipoh kicked off its first phase of installation last December.

Produced and managed by Sue Meng Heritage Sdn Bhd, the trail is based on a book published in 2013 that links Kinta Valley to Dr Sun Yat Sen titled, "Dr Sun Yat Sen and His Comrades in Ipoh" by Chan Sue Meng.

"Not long after I started this journey eight years ago, I realised there was a lot that was not known about Ipoh's role. Then, I saw there is a Sun Yat Sen trail in Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and of course, all over China," shared Chan Sue Meng, founder of Sue Meng Heritage and fifth-generation descendant of Lee Guan Swee, friend and supporter of Dr Sun.

"This book eventually should be a trail that would be a shared platform for businesses and society to develop new products to serve society," the Ipoh-born Sue Meng added.

For the first phase, 11 signages would be installed at the entrances of the sites or buildings to mark their former functions as places that were occupied by supporters and who ran activities in support of Dr Sun.

For instance, The Happy 8 is an Instagram-worthy establishment that occupies the former home and clinic of Dr Sun's supporter and classmate in Hong Kong Medical College, Dr Wong I Ek. Dr Wong was also one of the first two western-trained doctors in Malaya from Ipoh.



Thumbs Down

Drain blocked and thick bushes behind
Jalan RCM Rayan No. 215A



Fabricated in aluminium, these signages each feature a unique image, site title corresponding to that in the book and QR code that would lead visitors to learn more. Over time, ten more signages would be added to the trail.

Around the turn of the 19th century, Mainland Chinese were indentured into Malaya by the thousands to labour in tin mines of Perak, historically the most productive tin-producing district in the world. Along with them, many more Chinese arrived to establish businesses to serve these communities. Many of them shared and contributed hard-earned income to realise Dr Sun's vision of a better China.

This marker trail was enabled with the main sponsorship of Jenson Ng Productions and support of Tourism Perak, Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall Singapore, Sun Yat Sen Cultural Foundation Hong Kong and Perak Chinese Assembly Hall.

Sue Meng Heritage is a responsible tourism development company that aims to support the community in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. For more info, visit www.suemengheritage.com or its Facebook page by the same name.

LETTERS

We reprint some of our reader's comments from our online paper. Go to <http://www.ipophecho.com.my/> to read more. The views expressed in these letters are not necessarily shared by the Editorial Board. We reserve the right to refuse or modify the letters we publish.

Historical Facts Lacking

The cultural character and identity of our Perak state are moulded and represented by its cultural heritage. Nevertheless, our heritage is the DNA of our cultural make-up and expression. Thus, it's originality must be maintained and be told.

The heritage plaques at the heritage sites at the Ipoh Old Town are supposed to provide information and descriptions of past happenings. Unfortunately, some of the plaques have limited facts.

Firstly, there is no heritage plaque at the Ipoh Police Station. The heritage plaque at the Ipoh Railway Station hasn't mentioned the Majestic Station Hotel. At the Ipoh Padang heritage plaque, the following facts are missing:

in 1897, C.G. Ogilvie and G.J. Perry raised the funds for a private recreational ground in Ipoh to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Chinese community supported the fund and contributed \$43,000 Straits dollars, and the list goes on.

I also wish to suggest to the Ipoh City Council to investigate a "lost" underground tunnel said to connect the High Court, Ipoh Railway Station and the Police Station. I was told that the entrance of the pre-war tunnel, which is closed off to the public, is located at the Ipoh Town Hall. This is a historical legacy that we must show to our tourists. The tunnel was built to facilitate the movement of terrorists and high-profile criminal suspects between the Police

Station and Ipoh Railway Station to the Ipoh High Court. I strongly suggest that we should promote a "historical trail" covering the hidden tunnel. I had visited the tunnels of Cu Chi at Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It was a mesmerising experience. Thus, we should investigate it soon.

Next year is Visit Malaysia Year 2020. Hopefully, Tourism Malaysia and Ipoh City Council will update the heritage plaques and open the hidden tunnel for visitors and tourists.

We must not forget that these buildings are part of the fabric of our society, hence, information about our past would enrich our history.

S. Sundralingam

Opinion

5 Regrets of a Dying Person

By Koon Yew Yin



On January 1 (an auspicious day), I wrote this useful piece to help people to live a happier life. Although the title looks morbid, nevertheless the subject matter is very important because everyone has to die one day.

About 10 years ago, while I was on the Board of Directors of the Perak Community Hospital, I invited Joy Newton, an expert in palliative care from Sydney, Australia, to teach us how to take care of cancer patients.

For many years she had worked in palliative care. Her patients were those who had gone home to die. Some incredibly special times were shared. She was with them for the last three to 12 weeks of their lives.

People grow a lot when they are faced with their own mortality. She learnt never to underestimate someone's capacity for growth. Some changes were phenomenal. Each experienced a variety of emotions, as expected, denial, fear, anger, remorse, more denial and eventually acceptance. Every single patient found their peace before they departed though – every one of them.

When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently, common themes surfaced again and again. Here are the most common five from Joy Newton:

1. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me. This was the most common regret of all. When people realise that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honoured even half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made.

It is very important to try and honour at least some of your dreams along the way. From the moment that you lose your health, it is too late. Health brings a freedom very few realise until they no longer have it.

2. I wish I hadn't worked so hard.

This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. Women also spoke of this regret. But as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.

By simplifying your lifestyle and making conscious choices along the way, it is possible to not need the income that you think you do. And by creating more space in your life, you become happier and more open to new opportunities, ones more suited to your new lifestyle.

3. I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming.

Many developed illnesses relating to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result.

We cannot control the reactions of others. However, although people may initially react when you change the way you are by speaking honestly, in the end it raises the relationship to a whole new and healthier level. Either that or it releases the unhealthy relationship from your life. Either way, you win.

4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

Often they would not truly realise the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying.

It is common for anyone in a busy lifestyle to let friendships slip. But when you are faced with your approaching death, the physical details of life fall away. People do want to get their financial affairs in order if possible. But it is not money or status that holds true importance for them. They want to get things in order more for the benefit of those they love. Usually though, they are too ill and weary to ever manage this task. It all comes down to love and relationships in the end. That is all that remains in the final weeks, love and relationships.

5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.

This is a surprisingly common one. Many did not realise until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called 'comfort' of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to themselves, that they were content. When deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again.

When you are on your deathbed, what others think of you is a long way from your mind. How wonderful to be able to let go and smile again, long before you are dying.

Life is a choice. It is YOUR life. Choose consciously, choose wisely, choose honestly. Choose happiness.

Conclusion: As I am already 87 years old, my life expectancy must be only a few years. I have been working very hard to make money which will be useless to me when I die. So, I have been helping many poor students to complete their tertiary education. Poor students can google Koon Yew Yin scholarships to know how to apply for my scholarships.

I realise my ultimate aim in life is happiness and I will get more happiness if I can help people to be happier.

HAPPENINGS

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Announcements must be sent by fax: 05 543 9411; or email: announcements@ipophecho.com.my, by the 9th or 23rd of every month in order to meet deadlines. Announcements by phone will not be entertained. Ipoh Echo reserves the right to verify any announcement before it is published.

ARTS AND CULTURE

AN EVENING WITH THE GUSTAVUS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & JAZZ LAB BAND. JANUARY 31, 2020, 8pm at Weil Hotel Ballroom, 292 Jalan Sultan Idris Shah, 30000 Ipoh. Organised by Lighthouse Hope Society Ipoh and Gustavus Adolphus College, USA. Entry by donation in support of Lighthouse Hope Society, Ipoh. To book a seat, call 05 545 5582 or 012 523 6558. Email: Lighthouse75@gmail.com.

COMMUNITY

PUBLIC FORUM – #MYCERVIXMYLIFE. JANUARY 18 (Saturday), 2.30pm at 5th Floor, Dewan Anugerah, KPI Ipoh Specialist Hospital, Ipoh. Speaker: Dr Noorashikin Maan, Resident Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist (Reproductive Medicine & Infertility). Open to the public. Free admission. For enquiries/registration, contact customer service at 05 240 8777 ext. 8111/8110.

CHINESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATION. FEBRUARY 7, 4pm-8pm at Wesley Methodist School Ipoh International, 42 Jalan Silibin, 30100 Ipoh. Performances by Guzheng, Chinese Drum, Bells-Chinese New Year Songs; colouring competition for 4 to 9-year-olds; calligraphy competition for 10 to 12 year-olds; art: hand painted lantern and Chinese fans; photo frames and many more. Admission is free and it is kids-friendly. Those who are interested in attending can contact 012 500 5033 or 05 254 5122, or email info@iph.wms.edu.my to enable necessary preparation work.

ANTENATAL CLASS 2020. FEBRUARY 15, APRIL 11, AUGUST 08 & OCTOBER 31 (Saturdays), 1pm-5pm at 5th Floor, Dewan Anugerah, KPI Ipoh Specialist Hospital, Ipoh. Speakers: Obstetrician & Gynaecologist, Paediatrician, Anaesthetist, Nursing (breastfeeding talk), Physiotherapist and Dietitian. Free admission + goodies. Registration is now open to the public. For enquiries/registration, contact customer service at 05 240 8777 ext. 8111/8110.

ALPHA @ CGMC (For Non-Muslims only). Starting MARCH 1 (every Sunday for 11 weeks), 1pm-3pm at Canning Garden Methodist Church, 23 Jalan Keliling, Canning Garden, 31400 Ipoh. An opportunity to explore the meaning of life and faith through a series of talks in an open and friendly setting. Lunch will be provided. For further information, call 05 546 2023 or email: cgmcipoh@gmail.com.

HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAMME ON MENTAL HEALTH will be conducted at the Ipoh Adventist Community Services Center. This programme has helped many to optimize their brains and has equipped others to help loved ones recover from mental health illness, with proven results. It runs for 2 hours, every Saturday afternoon for 8 weeks, from July through August. For further details, WhatsApp us at 016 400 0271.

NEDLEY DEPRESSION & ANXIETY RECOVERY PROGRAM™ will be run by the Ipoh Adventist Community Services to equip those who are struggling with anxiety disorder or depression, or those desiring to assist loved ones with mental health disorders. This programme can help improve EQ and help students achieve peak mental performance. For further info, WhatsApp 016 595 0829 or 016 400 0271.

Kechara Earth Project. LET'S RECYCLE FOR GREENER EARTH. EVERY 4TH SUNDAY of the month, 9.30am-11.30am in front of Ipoh Garden Post Office, Jalan Dato Lau Pak Khuan, Ipoh Garden, 31400 Ipoh. Carton boxes, paper, metal/aluminium, electronic equipment, plastics, light bulbs, batteries and used clothes. Funds are channeled towards Kechara Food Bank that serves the urban poor and underprivileged community in Ipoh. For more details, contact: 016 532 8309 (Mr So) or 012 522 3200 (Ms Yee Mun).

FREE REALITY-BASED STREET DEFENSE WORKSHOP. Organised by Urban Street Defense's Centre for all NGOs and Women's Groups in Ipoh. Workshop covers what to do when you are attacked, defend against various real life attack scenarios and more. Call 016 538 4562 to book a FREE session. Booking confirmation on a first come, first served basis.

REPORT BULLYING. All schools in Malaysia have an Anti-bullying Guideline. Anti-bullying hotline: Talian Aduan Disiplin 1800-88-4774 or email adudisiplin@moe.gov.my. You can also call 15999 Childline to report bullying.

Education

A Stellar Student from Tg Piandang

By Chris Teh

Hailing from Bagan Utara, Tanjung Piandang, Perak, Tan Sing Ying graduated from Quest International University Perak (QIU) obtaining a medical degree with distinction in the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme.

The youngest of five siblings, the 26-year-old recipient of the Best Medical Student Award by the Malaysian Medical Association Perak, Tan is the second in her family to undergo tertiary education despite her modest background.

Tan received her primary education at SRJK (C) Nam Hua, Tanjung Piandang and her secondary education at SMJK Krian, Parit Buntar. She did her Form Six at Institut Bukit Mertajam, Penang, and her foundation at Allianze University College Medical Sciences, Penang before joining QIU for her degree course.

"When on her study breaks, Tan helped out selling fish at the local market. As a family, we've experienced plenty of hardships. I'm glad that despite the challenges, she found the motivation to excel in her studies," said her father, Tan Kok Choon, a fisherman. "I knew very early that my daughter could excel academically, thus I hoped she would get a good education and graduate from a good university."

During her five-year course at QIU, Tan recorded the highest overall aggregate marks for the MBBS programme. She underwent an elective posting at the prestigious National Heart Institute (IJN) and did joint-collaborative research with the Department of Medicine



at Hospital Taiping.

"The contact with patients I received during the practical sessions and the emphasis on putting theoretical knowledge into practice was what excited me the most. In medicine, you have to literally marry theory and practice as not many courses give you that human contact," Tan said.

Being the pride of her family, hometown and the fishing community where she grew up, her achievements at QIU in academic and other aspects have inspired other youths from her hometown.

"I thank my lecturers at QIU for their support. They were simply fantastic and reminded us to keep our feet firmly on the ground, as a physician's life is not easy. It's serious and hard work – always try to treat each one as

your own regardless of race, creed, colour or position," Tan said. She too won the Outstanding Oral Presenter Award at AIMST International Conference on 21st Century Trends in Medical Education and Sciences.

One of the papers which Tan co-authored was accepted for oral presentation at the 4th International Conference on Tropical Medicine and Infectious Diseases held in April 2019 in Kuala Lumpur. The abstract for the paper was also published in the Indian Journal of Medical Microbiology.

Another paper co-authored by her was accepted for oral presentation at the 2nd International Conference on Fostering Interdisciplinary Research in Health Sciences 2019 held at AIMST University in September.

Speaking on her future plans, Tan, who is currently waiting for her housemanship posting, will attend the Good Clinical Practice (GCP) workshop to obtain the GCP certificate. "I'll continue involving myself in research and participating in conferences to keep myself updated with the latest medical information while gaining additional knowledge and applying it in my medical practice. Hopefully, I'll be able to sit for the Membership of the Royal Colleges of Physicians (MRCP) examination, as I wish to specialise in internal medicine."

This is indeed a proud moment for Perakeans.

For details regarding QIU's courses and programmes, call Martin Soosay 012 637 5029 or Loghun Kumaran 010 399 1776.

Kinder Labz Celebrates Buzzing First Year

Students have had a buzzing first year at Kinder Labz in Ipoh as the kindergarten celebrates its first anniversary.

The new kindergarten takes on the challenge to give the students more hands-on learning experience. The youngsters, aged two to six years, regularly take part in festivals and events, from field trips to cultural celebrations.

The international curriculum is rich in art, music and drama. A highlight of the year for families was the first concert and graduation ceremony at Wisma Chin Woo. More than a hundred students brought the audience to the different lands in Enid Blyton's classic children's novel, 'The Magic Faraway Tree', while adding a few local and modern touches to it through songs like the local classic 'Chan Mali Chan' and Justin Timberlake's, 'Can't Stop The Feeling'.

The inaugural graduating six-year-olds gathered in their robes and mortar boards as they received their



certificates, becoming the first class of students to graduate from Kinder Labz.

Parents, Azmin and Aisyah said, "It's a wonderful feeling watching small kids performing and thanks to all the teachers and school staff for extracting the best of their potential."

According to Evelyn Chen, Director of Education at Bonanza Educare, "Incorporating dancing, acting, and also music-making into a child's learning journey today does more than just giving them the confidence to be on stage but also fuels them to succeed in a world that demands for more creativity in solving its everyday problems."

Staff benefit from in-house training and are expected to meet very high standards. The end of year parent survey highlights how parents are kept well-informed about children's development, through weekly newsletters, social media and parent meetings.

Kinder Labz Head of Academics, Mrs Puvanes said, "Children thrive in this wonderful, vibrant and fully inclusive kindergarten. Staff know all the children really well and we are all passionate about providing families and children the very best start."

"Children are happy and children are learning; our core value of 'care' is truly at the centre of everything we do at Kinder Labz."

Apart from providing early childhood education and



care to children aged two to six years old, the kindergarten also provides a before and after school care service for children between the age of seven to 12 years old, giving busy parents an extra hand with their children amid busy schedules.

Kinder Labz has limited availability to some classes and the before and after school care service. For more information or to join the waiting list, call or Whatsapp 010 664 4211 or email puvanes@kinderlabz.edu.my.

Seri Botani International School

By Gisele Soo

Education is vital not only for our children's future but also for the general betterment of the community.

Last December 2019, Ipohites got a glimpse of the newly-launched Seri Botani International School (SBIS) during its open day.

The school opened its doors to the public on January 1. It offers the Cambridge Primary and Secondary curriculum that prepares students for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Seri Botani International School is under the management of the Taiko Group of companies.

Its primary objective is to equip students with a balance of hands-on activities and theories through the provision of an all-inclusive approach. Students are in good hands, where their development will be guided throughout their entire academic year. At the same time, the school creates an interactive environment that allows more engagement in the learning process.

According to Lee Tat Choy, the commercial manager

of Taiko Group, modern learning is crucial in preparing the students for future education and career path by strengthening their learning skills.

"The school would like to stress on six core values namely, creative and innovation, fun learning, receptivity to changes, mutual respect, potential and talent development and discipline," said Lee to reporters.

Despite the utilisation of English, the Chinese language will be taught to prepare students for the Chinese Proficiency Test (Hanyu Shui Ping Kao Shi).

Various facilities are available like science laboratories, ICT laboratories, cafeteria, language laboratories, medical bay, spacious classrooms, library with digital and leisure sections where students can relax and discuss, music and dance studio as well as art room to broaden their learning capacity.

Early bird enrolment will enjoy RM2500 registration fee waiver. Students will get a 30 per cent discount off for term fee in the first year. Also, there will

be no increment in the term fee for three academic years until January 2022. The school is accepting students from Early Years, Year 1 to Year 9.

For more information, contact 05 318 2288 or email info@sbis.edu.my. You may also visit their website at www.sbis.edu.my or drop by SBIS at No. 26 Bougainvillea A/3, Bandar Seri Botani, 31350 Ipoh.



News

MAJU Roadshow Goes North

By Mei Kuan

Designed to be an organisation aimed at changing the social and political landscape of the country towards a more progressive and dynamic Malaysia, MAJU (Malaysian Action for Justice and Unity) sets out to create a voice for the people by having citizens as its supporters. The MAJU roadshow made its Ipoh stopover recently. It featured an informal dialogue with lawyer Siti Kasim, founder of MAJU and Prof Tajuddin Rasdi, MAJU Advisory Committee member.

An independent, apolitical, non-governmental organisation and a registered foundation, MAJU strives to be the pre-eminent platform to drive the agenda of social and human rights advancement for a progressive Malaysia. Its purposes are, among others, to promote a united multi-ethnic multi-religious society, provide legal and social services to persecuted and marginalised people, enhance the understanding of citizen rights and civic duties and promote educational reforms that would enhance equality and unity.

"This is the second leg of our roadshow about

awareness on the existence of MAJU which is the movement of the *rakyat*. We want the *rakyat* to know that there is an alternative besides what is being given to us right now by political parties. We want to tell the *rakyat* that we are going to save ourselves. Plus, to empower the people and tell them that they have rights. We are saying not to rely on politicians, we have to actually do things on our own," said Siti Kasim to Ipoh Echo at the Tow Boo Keong Temple hall in Ipoh.

"The membership is open to all Malaysians from the age of 18 and above. We want Malaysians to put their money where their mouth is. Do not stop complaining, do something. We want to change the mindset of Malaysians. Political parties are not the only way forward, we can actually stand on our own as *rakyat* and together we choose our own representatives in our parliament," she reiterated.

For more info, check out its Facebook page (Maju Malaysia) or visit its website: mymaju.org



Leaving No One Behind

By A. Jeyaraj

Association for Community and Dialogue and CSO SDG Alliance Malaysia jointly organised a talk cum discussion at Syeun Hotel on "Leaving no one behind" by Professor Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, Principal Research Fellow UKM.

The talk was part of a roadshow to explain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 to the public. Their aim is to get NGOs and Residents Associations (RAs) to go to grassroots to strengthen community participation in implementing the policy.

He added that SDG is a good policy document and has 17 goals including No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Gender Equality and others. To put the policy into practice and for people to enjoy the benefits, NGOs and RAs should play a major role.

The UN disputed the poverty figures released by Malaysia which stated that its poverty figures were down to 0.4% in 2016 when compared to 49% in 1970. The UN stated that realistic poverty rate in Malaysia is from 16% to 20%. Nearly three in 10 Malaysians feel that they do not have enough money to buy food, said the World Bank's Malaysia Economic Monitor – Making Ends Meet report released on December 9, 2019. Malaysia has a long way to go to achieve these goals. The document focuses not just on development concerns but also human rights and environment and partnership with Public, Private Sector and Civil Society.

There are specific targets on inequality and to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. It ensures equal opportunities and reduces inequalities of outcome including eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, promoting appropriate legislation, policies and actions in this



regard.

The main guiding principles are to have a multidimensional approach with the emphasis to be placed on youth, the one major group that is often neglected especially from among the B40 communities. Youth are a potential for good or evil.

Efforts to be made to ensure marginalised groups are involved. Nine target groups have been identified namely B40, poor and economically vulnerable; communities in transition; indigenous community, Bumiputera in Sabah and Sarawak; people with disabilities, youth, women, children and senior citizens.

Social workers have an important role to address these concerns by working with youths, their families and local communities in finding effective solutions. Social workers require competencies in undertaking neighbourhood and community mapping exercise. Empower local youth groups to self-organise and find local solutions.

Denison said that there are some 500,000 unemployed and under-employed youths. This would lead to social ills among youths and affect the country. Address youth unemployment and train them for self-employment. This problem needs to be solved immediately.

UN and the Malaysian Government have prepared the policy documents. From these documents Action and Execution Plans must be prepared and qualified individuals should be identified and appointed to carry them out within a specified period. Until then these policies would only remain as policies.

Hopefully we can expect an improvement in the quality of life for all Malaysians by 2030.

Another Feather in Ipoh Echo's Cap

It's another feather in our cap as Ipoh Echo was honoured by Tourism Malaysia in the online news category at its Media and Industry Appreciation Dinner held at Glasshouse at Seputeh, Kuala Lumpur recently.

Rosli Mansor, our senior graphic cum reporter, received the award on behalf of Ipoh Echo from Muhammad Bakhtiar Wan Chik, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia.

Some 350 guests from the media industry, local tourism industry players, social media content editors and writers, hoteliers, tourism associations, travel agents and tourism product owners were invited to share the special evening. The objective was to acknowledge the support and cooperation given by them throughout 2019.

Director-General of Tourism Malaysia, Datuk Musa Yusof noted the positive exposure on Malaysia provided by the Malaysian media and thanked them for their professionalism.

He also expressed gratitude to the industry players for promoting Malaysia internationally through the "Malaysia Truly Asia" brand, and domestically with the "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" campaign.

"One of the major briefings we had for the industry was on the GEMELAN incentive. This refers to the matching grant aimed at assisting the tourism sector in enhancing their promotion and marketing efforts to increase domestic and international tourist arrivals to Malaysia. I'm very happy to see the positive response and I hope the industry will



continue to take advantage of this initiative so that, together, we can promote Malaysia to the world," Musa Yusof remarked.

He added, "I look forward to even closer working ties with everyone next year during the Visit Malaysia 2020 to welcome 30 million tourists and RM100 billion receipts. We should be proud to showcase to visitors from all over the world, Malaysia's peace-loving, multi-cultural society, consisting of more than 200 ethnic communities who have lived in harmony all these years."

A media trip around Kuala Selangor was organised in conjunction with the occasion featuring among others, the Sky Mirror also known as the Salar De Uyuni of Malaysia.

Personality

Raj: Poet, Writer and Teacher

By Gisele Soo

Raj Dronamraju is a multi-talented guy with an impressive background. Not only is he an educator, he is also a writer/poet who owns a tuition centre, Ask English Tuition and Training and the editor/publisher of an online poetry magazine, 21st Century Flow.

Raj, who is now in his early 50s, has spent most of his life in the U.S. having grown up there. He has settled in Malaysia as a Permanent Resident after tying the knot with a local.

In his school days, Raj won several prominent prizes in national high school journalism competitions. Fast forward to adulthood, he pursued a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Oregon and a Master's Degree from the University of California. He has always had an eye for poetry from a very young age. "As far as poetry goes, one cannot be trained in the literal sense," he expressed.

He elaborated on the keys to writing poetry, adding, "Peer review and feedback and finding an audience is important in developing a poetic voice as well as a competency in language but in the end, it is what you have to say and how you say it".

Having to publish both collections of his poetry and novels and receiving fan letters from all over the world, is indeed applaudable. But what makes him as happy as Larry is being published in many magazines and websites such as Black Heart magazine, Synchronized Chaos, Eksentrika, The Bitchin' Kitsch and many others.

We must wonder what inspires this guy? What keeps him going?

Well, passion plays a big part, of course. "I feel I have something to say, and it is cathartic. I also like to experiment with language. I like to write about, one, things I see myself in my day-to-day life – people, places, etc. Two, feelings and ideas and thoughts perhaps as they are mingled with culture. I like to have a fair amount of social criticism in my poetry. Sometimes I combine it all together," he enthused.

He shared with us a poem he wrote about Ipoh.

MIST ON THE HILLS OF IPOH

In the morning, the hills speak, who hears?

Who registers the gurgle of mist sounding like an entertained baby

Gently spreading its hand palm down to touch the hilltops

On an otherwise sunny blue panorama, here's a private moment of nude wilderness in her essence

By afternoon, the spidery emissary has vanished

Mist commutes on subsequent mornings in thin veined envy of true solid matter

Loving dewdrop leaf imprints and grasping people free coolness of earlier tamed nature

Silent rendezvous of waterfall type ghosts with no breeze to hurry their passion

Just above the treeline where the mist stops and hugs original forest without hesitation or reluctance

Knowing as always that this time will be fleeting but they'll melt into each other again tomorrow

Asked on how to define a quality piece, Raj explained, "A quality piece engages with original language and a clear theme and flow or construction that helps the poem, they should all be working together".

The poet himself is also very fond of the works of other writers and has mentioned some of his favourite poets and poems of all time, 'My Heart Leaps Up' by William Wordsworth, 'The Heavy Bear That Goes With Me' by Delmore Schwartz, 'Waving Not Drowning' by Stevie Smith and 'An Elementary School Classroom In A Slum' by Stephen Spender.

People are less inclined towards poetry and the reading culture among teenagers is gradually deteriorating. This happens due to lack of comprehension and appreciation of poetry, its value and meaning as well as how to produce it. It is the fear that students and teenagers have to overcome and not be cowed by that fear. Raj agreed that interest can be developed because poetry is in concise form compared to long narrative prose and can tie in better with social media such as Instagram as a form of expression.

So, how to start?

"First, start writing, keep a journal or other method to hew to a discipline for writing that forces you to create regularly. Secondly, form a good network with other writers and editors to receive feedback from different sources. This will help you improve and find your own voice," he said.

Despite his success, Raj still faces challenges in this competitive environment. Running a tuition centre (small business) is not an easy task and one of the biggest challenges is getting enough students to tutor. According to Raj, this business is seasonal, it is normally busy during the beginning and towards the end of the year and less busy in the middle of the year.

Readers can find more information on his work and his poetry platform with the latest poetry as well as past issues of 21st Century Flow at <https://raj-books.post-egoism.media/>.



Food

Impiana CNY Treats

By Mei Kuan



Whether it is a family or company get-together, look no further as The Coffee House of Impiana Hotel, Ipoh, has an array of festive treats and events lined-up beginning January 11 till Chap Goh Mei on February 8.

To kick off the celebration, an appreciation dinner aptly named, "sau kong cau" to celebrate the break from work and business with fellow colleagues is on the cards from now till January 23 at RM688 nett and RM888 nett per table with a choice of six or eight courses. For reservation of five tables and above, guests get to dine in comfort at the hotel's private rooms with free corkage.

As the Lunar New Year of the Metal Rat unfolds from January 24 to 26, the premier business and leisure hotel features three nights of Prosperity Buffet Dinner showcasing a wide selection of Asian delights and specialities. Besides having a DIY yee sang (prosperity toss) counter, every dining family or group will be given a prosperity mandarin orange cake specially crafted by the pastry chef. To be served from 6.30pm till 10pm, the buffet dinner is priced at RM88 nett (adult) and RM62 nett (child and senior citizen).

On the first day of Chinese New Year, the hotel's grand lobby will witness a lion dance from 10.58am till 11.58am. Plus, there will be a calligraphy booth and a prosperity toss session with the hotel management staff and invited guests.

Afternoon tea aficionados can opt for the Double Happiness Hi-Tea Buffet available from January 25 to 26 from 12.30pm till 3.30pm. Did I mention there will be door gift and ang pow lucky draws whereby one will stand a chance to win dining vouchers worth up to RM100? High-tea buffet is priced at RM58 nett (adult) and RM41 nett (child and senior citizen).

"This year my F&B culinary team has come up with something unique and that tells a story. Our theme for this year is nature and garden. The hotel grand lobby houses a prosperity garden done by the housekeeping staff. We hope the New Year brings everyone a lot of prosperity, good health and everything that is sweet," Gerard Sta Maria, General Manager of Impiana Hotel Ipoh explained during the media review on Friday, January 10.

For more info, call 05 255 5555.

Community

Celebrating Centenarian

By Mei Kuan

It was double the joy as the Home for the Aged (CWS) Simee celebrated the birthday of its two oldest residents namely 102-year-old Kuan Lek (pic) and 97-year-old Mary Chin Swee Yoon on Saturday, December 28.

Kuan Lek, formerly a Tai Chi Master hailing from Ipoh, shared his longevity tips, "I exercise daily when I wake up in the morning for about half an hour. As for my diet, I do not avoid any food in particular and I consume my rice as usual."

"I'm happy staying here as I eat well and have enough to wear. I just wish for continuous good health in the new year," he added.

At present, the home is supporting 44 residents from 63 to 102 years old, two of whom have been there for 20 years.

The home depends entirely on public donations for its running expenses. Since 2018, the operating expenses have exceeded the total cash donations received and the home has had to utilise the reserve fund for its operating expenditure.

In view of the depleting reserve fund, the home will be holding two fundraising events: **Family Day Food Fair on April 26** and a charity dinner by the end of 2020.

"The monthly expenditure of the home is RM35,000 approximately. The targeted amount to be raised from both fundraising events is RM500,000 and we hope members of the public will support the cause," Vincent Lee, Chairman of the Board of Management for Home for the Aged (CWS) Simee stated.

The home is a non-profit organisation registered with the Welfare Department to provide shelter for the homeless and abandoned elderly.

The home also welcomes volunteers and donations in the form of dry grocery and daily essentials such as detergent and rice.

Readers who would like to lend a helping hand can contact the home at 05 547 3252 or visit its website: www.kgsimeehome.com

Located along Jalan Kompleks Sukan, the home is open from 8.30am to 5.30pm daily.



Lifestyle

All About Social Media

By Jo Lynn Chong

The social network is so prevalent nowadays that we cannot really imagine a world without it. What would we be doing if there was no WhatsApp or YouTube or Facebook or Instagram?

Ipoh Echo sought the views of young social media users to find out how the world of social media has impacted them.

Most of the interviewees stated that they cannot live without social media with some of the reasons being for entertainment and connecting with friends or family members living afar.

Some of them explained that although social media platforms may have caused them to change the way they look at themselves and be envious of what other people were doing or having, it is not necessarily a bad thing.

Elaine, 17, who spends approximately 7 hours per day on social platforms stated, "I wouldn't say it is totally negative, like loss of self-confidence but it is also some sort of motivation for me to be better when I see someone posting a nice picture or someone who is prettier."

"I'd be envious and then, try to learn from other people's selfie-taking skills. I can live without social media but I'd rather not because it's this generation's way of reading news," a 17-year-old Ipohite expressed.

"I used to set unrealistic expectations for myself after looking at the Instagram feeds of people I admired," said Foo Siew Jack, 18. He intimated that given a choice, he would rather communicate with someone face-to-face. "I have a lot to thank social media because it has made me a more global citizen and just more intelligent in general but I've also a lot to criticise about it as I've had bad experiences. But I consider them just a part of the modern human experience."

Another 19-year-old Ipohite told Ipoh Echo that when he first started using social media, he suffered from loss of self-esteem and FOMO which stands for "Fear of Missing Out" and defined as "a feeling of worry that an interesting or exciting event is happening somewhere else" by the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. "Now I no longer suffer from those as I've come to know true people," he enthused. "I also discovered that social media photos never represented real life."

"Using social media can allow one to rethink the words they want to use aloud without fear of being overheard by the other person whilst face-to-face communication is more personal and easier to speak out ideas rather than typing all of it down," another 16-year-old Ipoh boy elaborated.



Bonnie Wong, 16, stated, "Social media has made me less focused when I study as it makes me want to look at my phone and procrastinate. Nevertheless, I'd rather use social media over face-to-face communication because I am not very good at communicating and I can express myself better when I am given time to think."

Social media, however, can also be a notorious place as we further uncovered.

A 20-year-old Ipohite shared, "I was cyberbullied through an app where people anonymously talked bad about me. It took me quite some time to gain back my confidence because I got an anxiety attack. I fear going out and facing others because of the things they said to me. I'm still suffering from the anxiety which disturbs my life like I cannot focus on small things or even big things, so like right now, even to tell you about the event is hard for me," she told this scribe.

"My advice about it is that if you don't like something or if you are just not satisfied with something, don't judge someone straight away and talk bad about them, even if it's anonymously or not. It's just not a good thing to do and not the right way. Plus, talking behind the screen doesn't make you any better than anybody else," she asserted.

When asked about how she would react when she saw someone else posting nicer photos or selfies than her, the 20-year-old said, "I'd feel insecure because they're better than me and because I've very low self-esteem."

"I'd prefer face-to-face communication because I get to read their facial expressions, whether that person is sad or mad and I don't misunderstand them easily," she added.

Besides that, it is worth mentioning that one can receive nasty negative comments on online posts. In the event that they encountered negative comments, most of the interviewees said that they would ignore them. A few said they would feel angry and unhappy.

Conclusion

There is really not much to say but to emphasise that we need to be aware of the good, the bad and the ugly of social networking.

Meanwhile, an article "ChickTok: Indonesian kids given pets to wean them off smartphones" published by The Star on November 22, 2019, stated, "BANDUNG, Indonesia: Officials in one Indonesian city have hatched a plan to wean children off smartphones – by giving them their own fluffy chicks to raise."

Well, perhaps what we all need is a little distraction once in a while.

Sport

Vat 69 Triumphs

by Murni Fazira



The Perak International Skydiving Championship 2019 ended on Sunday, December 22.

The closing ceremony took place at Sultan Abdul Aziz Recreation Park (Polo Ground) from 1pm to 3pm. It was filled with performances by local artists such as Zahid AF2, Amir Masdi and X'cess Band.

The prize-giving ceremony was led by Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Bador, Inspector-General of Police and Dato' Zainol Fadzi, Menteri Besar's Adviser.

It was double the joy for police commando, VAT 69 as they were crowned champion in the accuracy and canopy formation categories and third in the formation skydiving category.

Abdul Hamid hoped that the championship would be made an annual affair with a greater number of participants.

"I'm glad that this championship has received an overwhelming response from the skydiving sports fan," said Abdul Hamid.

He added that since the event was well received by men, women and veterans, age and gender should not be a limitation for this extreme sport.



Military

Squadron Celebrates 66th Anniversary

By Mei Kuan

A parade consisting of four Officers and 103 Other Ranks was held to commemorate the 66-year anniversary of the Taiping-based First Royal Engineer Squadron. The detachment was established on January 1, 1954.

Held on Wednesday, January 1 at the parade ground of Sangro Camp, Taiping, the contingent was led by Captain Syuriya Binti Mohamad, the squadron's second-in-command. Major Mohd Dzul Hakim bin Hj Khalid, the squadron commander, was the inspecting officer.

Among those present were former Chief Engineer, Brig-Gen Dato' Mohd Hashim bin Hj Abdullah (Rtd), former squadron commanders, serving members of the squadron and members of the unit's wives' club.

In his speech, Major Mohd Dzul Hakim congratulated



those who were recently promoted and those who received letters of commendation from the regiment.

After a photography session, officers and guests proceeded to the unit's historical corner where achievements of the squadron were highlighted.

A pantomime dedicated to L/Cpl Mohd Jamal bin Abd Rahman (Rtd) who was wounded during Operation

Kota at Temenggor Dam in 1975 was the highlight of the celebration.

Major Mohd Dzul then presented a cash donation to Mohd Jamal and a representative of the late Staff Sergeant Gahani who passed away on December 12, 2019.

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