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ISSUE **184**



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Ipoh



Ipoh's Escalating Property Prices

By Emily Lowe

Ipoh has seen her fair share of property launches over the past few years. And like everything else these days, prices of these recently launched properties have been steadily going up. "Ridiculous" was how an investor described the scenario. Are property prices really shooting through the roof, or is it just that people have found yet another reason to complain about rising prices? Ipoh Echo attempts to put this issue into its right perspective.

Continued on page 2



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To Buy or Not To Buy and When is the Right Time?

It has been observed that as recent as 4 to 5 years ago, a new standard double-storey terrace house in Ipoh with a land size of 20' x 70' could be purchased at an average price of RM200,000. In 2013, new houses of this size are touching RM400,000, and they are further away from the heart of the city.

In the past year, a new housing development has seen an appreciation of RM111,000, or 44 per cent within eight months from the launching of the project's Phase One to Phase Three. An Ipoh-based manager for mortgage sales with a bank opined that depending on location, residential properties here are appreciating by 5% to 20% a year.

The recently launched Meru Eco-Village from Kinta Properties in Meru Golf Resort had all their linked villas which was selling for RM560 per square foot net, sold out even before their public launch in November last year. Also over 50% of their 84 apartments ranging in price between RM273,800-RM439,800 have been sold since their launch in January this year.

The above testimonies appear to support the fact that property prices and demand in Ipoh have in fact appreciated significantly in recent years. So what are the factors behind this increase in price and demand?

Demand-driven

The general improvement on the well-being of the economy has increased the demand for property in Ipoh, both owner-occupied and as investment. This improvement is mainly driven by growing touristic interests, as evidenced by the vibrancy of hotel and food-related industries.

More than a dozen hotels of various sizes have mushroomed in Ipoh in the past two years, with even more to come. Those involved in food and beverage, for example, have been enjoying brisk business due to Ipoh's reputation as a food haven.

Although property purchase in Perak is mostly driven by effective home ownership demand with little speculative element, demand is also contributed by those who work outside of the state; spurred by the need to upgrade the lifestyle of family members back home and also as a home to retire to in the future. Ipoh's improved connectivity has also seen increased demand from out of state purchasers both for residential, as well as commercial properties.



Launch of MAPEX 2012

Increase in Development Costs

This demand has not only driven up property prices, but also prices of land. Therefore, it is now more costly for developers to acquire land to build on. A piece of freehold land in Ipoh's prime zone along Tiger Lane that was sold for less than RM80 per sq. ft. four years ago has appreciated to RM120 per sq. ft. today. Other contributing factors are increase in cost of fuel, transportation, building materials and labour.

Meanwhile, contributions to various regulatory bodies and other service providers such as Indah Water Konsortium, Tenaga Nasional Berhad and Telekom Malaysia, have all increased, adding to the overall increase in development costs.

At the same time, as part of the Town And Planning Act 1976, developers are required to pay a quarter of the total appreciation in land value after its conversion to housing or commercial development as tax to the state government. According to a source, if this new development charge is fully passed on to buyers, they can expect to pay between RM50, 000 to RM100, 000 more per unit.

Bumiputera reserved lots

With effect from January 1, the new guidelines on Bumiputera reserved lots are:

- A price discount of 5% for houses under RM350,000 and 7% for houses above RM350,000,
- Fifty percent of the unsold Bumiputera reserved lots will be released upon 70% completion of the project and the balance 50% upon attaining Certificate of Completion and Compliance (CCC). A similar percentage sum will be payable to 'Akaun Amanah Hartanah Bumiputera' (AAHB) in consideration of this release.

This is a change from the previous policy which provided for a 5% discount on prices across the board. Also, developers need not make any payment to AAHB, which is managed by Perak State Economic Development Corporation (SEDC).

Curbing property speculation

a) Curtailment of housing loan

In an effort to avoid overheating of the market, since July, 2013, Bank

Negara Malaysia (BNM) has made it more challenging for property buyers to take out a housing loan. Moreover, the maximum housing loan tenure is now capped at 35 years, compared to 40 years previously.

b) Real Property Gains Tax (RPGT)

The tabling of Budget 2014 on October 25 last year saw the proposed revision of RPGT. With effect from January 1, for properties disposed within the first three years of purchase by an individual, RPGT has been substantially increased to 30% from the previous rate of 15% in the first two years and 10% in the third year.

Properties disposed during the fourth year are imposed 20% tax and 15% during the fifth year, an increase from 10% previously. From the sixth year and beyond, properties disposed are not taxed.

These are just two of the pre-emptive measures taken by the Government to prevent the development of a property bubble in Malaysia. More stringent controls can be expected to be in place to help cool the market down.

Genuine buyers would not find these measures an obstacle in owning a home that is within their budget. They would still be able to take out a maximum of 90% housing loan on their first home purchase.

Keeping Prices Reasonable

While businessmen would generally price their products to what the market can bear, not all developers are out to maximise on profit. According to Victor Lee, Executive Director of Golden State Properties Sdn. Bhd., developer of Casa Bintang Residence, he believes that it is more important to optimise returns for all stakeholders.

As such, despite the drastic increase in overall development costs, the company has managed to peg the selling price of Casa Bintang Residence at an attractive starting price of RM480 per sq. ft.

Conclusion

In an increasing environment of rising prices, it's not surprising that property prices are appreciating rapidly, even though prices in Ipoh are still relatively low compared to other major Malaysian cities.

According to the 2013 Property Market Report released by valuers C H Williams Talhar and Wong, the average price for 2012 in Ipoh was RM250,000 for a double-storey terrace house on a plot of 22' x 70' freehold land, while a similar property transacted during the same period was RM730, 000 in Kuala Lumpur, RM800, 000 in Penang and RM420, 000 in Johor Bahru.

With spillover demand from Klang Valley and Penang, coupled with the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) effective April 1, 2015, prices of property will continue to stay firm, if not escalate, although anti-speculative measures as well as expected reduced spending power may curtail it somewhat.

Dato' Francis Lee, Perak Chairman for Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia (REHDA) Perak has this to say, "Property development will remain as a core development into the next decade, as home ownership within family units is still low at about 65%. That is to say that 35% of family units will need to buy a house as and when they feel financially secure to do so. House prices will continue to move upwards over the years, due primarily to the cost of delivery of houses."

The two burning questions on every Ipohite's lips today are to buy or not to buy? And when is the "right" time to buy?



Dato' Francis Lee



Casa Bintang's Victor Lee



SE7EN @ Thompson

IPOHecho

• **From the Editor's Desk**
by **Fathol Zaman Bukhari**

PARKING PROBLEM CRITICAL

In spite of the many "goodies" coming the way of Ipoh's general hospital, no mention is made of ways to overcome the onerous problem facing Ipohites on a daily basis – parking!

Malaysia's healthcare, according to a survey, is considered the third best in the world. This is no idle boast as being tagged world best, regardless of the number, is the icing on the cake for our nation's leaders. After all, our education system has been claimed as the best in the world and, likewise, our country - the best democracy on Earth!

Although many may consider the latter two as hogwash, the fact remains that our healthcare is considerably good comparatively, given the kind of money that is being invested annually to upgrade existing facilities. If we were to compare to our neighbours within Asean, we definitely have a head start. Kudos to the government for making this happen. Either by commission or omission it does not really matter, as the fact speaks for itself.

Well, I am not about to dwell on the merits of being third best and not first or second best. I shall leave it to the critics to make sense of the numbers game. My deliberation, however, shall be confined to Ipoh's Hospital Raja Permaisuri Bainun, the flagship of our state's medical service.

Based on archival records, Hospital Raja Permaisuri Bainun, Ipoh was started by the British as a district hospital in 1891. The Pangkor Treaty of 1974 signalled the beginning of British intervention in the Malay states. The period between the two events was less than two decades apart. This could be the result of an expanding economy driven by the robust tin and rubber industries then. There was definitely a need for a rudimentary medical facility to service a growing population.

Prior to the Japanese Occupation in 1941, the hospital was upgraded to a state hospital catering for the needs of the populace. It remained in abeyance, but not necessarily ignored, during the reign of the Japanese Imperial Army (1941 to 1945).

The prominent 8-storey building, by which the hospital is identified, was built in 1980. Other add-ons came in drips and drabs - the specialist clinic in 1992 and the out-patient complex in 2005. A major development, however, was in the offing. On the occasion of HRH Sultan of Perak's 80th birthday on June 12, 2008 the facility



Hospital Raja Permaisuri Bainun to better reflect its the state. From a humble beginning of only 50 beds today boasts a capacity of almost 1000 beds.

As cardiac care is still in its infancy, the state government plans on spending RM 6 million to build an invasive cardiology laboratory to treat patients with heart ailments. This will invariably reduce the hospital's dependence on IJN (Institut Jantung Negara) in Kuala Lumpur. The federal government has promised RM 9 million for the unit, which is scheduled to operate this month.

A sum of RM240 million has been approved by the state government to upgrade existing facilities in the hospital. Of the said amount, RM160 million will be allotted for the building of a pediatric unit and a maternity unit while the remaining RM80 million for the establishment of a cardiology department. In the pipeline is a RM300-million allocation from

the federal government to augment the proposed facilities.

In spite of the many "goodies" coming the way of Ipoh's general hospital no mention is made of ways to overcome the onerous problem facing Ipohites on a daily basis – parking! Overcrowding and the lack of parking space within the hospital complex have forced patients, visitors and medical staff alike to use the main road as a convenient alternative.

The problem is becoming more acute each passing day. Since space is a constraint, the only way out is to go upwards – build a dedicated multi-tiered parking lot similar to the one at KLIA. Unfortunately, there is no monetary allocation for a car park in the expansion programme. This problem should not be overlooked no matter how insignificant it may be. The free shuttle bus service from Velodrome Rakyat introduced in 2011 is not viable, as the response has been poor due to a number of reasons – lack of publicity being one.

As Ipohites grapple with this deficiency, they risk getting booked by traffic police for their bravado. But do they have a choice?

Sam Chai's Rebuilding Fund – An Update

In a previous issue of Ipoh Echo, dated June 1, 2013, we highlighted SJK(C) Sam Chai's appeal for public donations to realise its school rebuilding project.

Nine months later, today, the 4-storey building has been completed and the multi-purpose hall is in its final stages of construction but the school is still short of RM1.5 million in construction fees and another RM500,000 to furnish and equip both the buildings.

This school rebuilding project started some 12 years ago, and although it ran out of funds, the contractor continued to build the school according to schedule despite delayed payments.

Despite the hiccups, SJK(C) Sam Chai will be ready as a single-session school in April after the school holidays, to fully meet the requirements set by the Ministry of Education, including the running of single-session classes.

The 4-storey block has fifteen classrooms that can accommodate forty pupils per classroom, an administrative office, a laboratory, a library, a meeting room and a dental clinic. The building is currently awaiting the Certificate of Fitness for Occupation.

Meanwhile, the multi-purpose hall, which is located behind the 4-storey block, is the size of six badminton courts and will be used as an assembly hall as well as to host school functions. It can accommodate up to 2000 people at a time.

The last piece of roof was covered on February 16, and the hall is in its final stages of construction. Only the external work is left to be done. There are also plans to beautify the school grounds with landscaping, as the grounds are barren now.

Updating Ipoh Echo on the progress of the school rebuilding project, Chairman of the Board of Governors, Lee Chau Ju took the opportunity to thank all who have supported the cause.

"It'd been a challenging 12 years but our struggles are definitely far from over. I'd like to express a word of appreciation to everyone who has generously donated to our rebuilding project and all who have supported Chinese education, including our teachers, parents of students and the Board of Governors."

The school's student enrolment presently stands at 1350. This is expected to increase to 1500 next year with the implementation of single-session classes.

Readers wishing to contribute to the school building fund can do so via cheque issued to: "Tabung Pembangunan SJK(C) Sam Chai" or deposit cash to its Maybank Account No.: 508038 127860.

For details, contact the school directly:

Tel.: 05 241 5483 or 05 254 8807

Email: samchai_cs@yahoo.com.

Emily



EYE HEALTH



World Glaucoma Week
March 9 - 15, 2014

In conjunction with World Glaucoma Week 2014, Ipoh Echo talks to Consultant Eye Surgeon Dr S.S. Gill about this "silent thief of sight." – Part 1

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that result in progressive damage of the optic nerve (the "main cable" that carries visual information from the eye to the brain). If glaucoma is not treated, it permanently damages vision in the affected eye(s) and results in blindness. It is often, but not always, associated with increased pressure of the fluid in the eye (aqueous humour).

Glaucoma has been nicknamed the "silent thief of sight" because the vision loss normally occurs gradually over a long period of time without much symptoms until you eventually lose significant vision. In other words, it means that one will only notice poor vision when the disease is serious and the damage to the optic nerve is advanced.

Worldwide, glaucoma is the second leading cause of blindness after cataracts. Glaucoma affects one in 200 people aged fifty and younger, and one in 10 over the age of eighty. As many as 6 million people are blind in both eyes from glaucoma today. Most of these people were once unaware they had this disease until they lost significant vision in one or both eyes.

One reason why a person may not realize that he or she is losing vision is because the vision loss involves the peripheral part of a person's vision (adjacent pic). This peripheral vision loss is the reason why it goes unnoticed by the patient until the very late stage when the central vision is completely lost. Rarely, in some patients there may be symptoms of slight eye discomfort, mild headache and haloes around lights.

Any person who is 40 years and above should go for glaucoma screening. More so, if you have a family history of glaucoma and have never been screened for glaucoma yourself, you should go for an eye check as soon as you can.

More on Glaucoma in the next issue of the Ipoh Echo.

For more information, call Gill Eye Specialist Centre at Hospital Fatimah (05-545 5582) or email gillyecentre@dr.com.



Dr. S.S. Gill
Resident Consultant
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A Sporting Challenge

Perak needs more women in public life, and it is encouraging to see more women taking an active role in the development of the physical and mental health of our youth.

One such woman is 33-year old Farhawahidah Ahmad Puad, from Kuala Kangsar, Perak. Married with three young children, Farha as she is affectionately called, is a Bachelor of Sports Science graduate from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in Shah Alam. She is currently pursuing her Masters in Education (Sports Science) at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI).

Farha's early schooling was at the SRK Datin Khadijah, in Kuala Kangsar, then she boarded at the Raja Perempuan School in Ipoh. She lists her hobbies as housework, she hates an untidy house, and when her chores are done, she likes walking and cycling. Her other passion is to travel and explore foreign countries.

Farha is now a Youth and Sports Officer attached to the Tun Hussein Onn University (UTHM) in Batu Pahat, Johore. She is responsible for the sporting facilities in the university and she manages sporting activities for the university students, both at national and international level.

When asked why she chose her particular line of work, she said, "I like to work with young people of different ages. I find the constructive ideas of each age-group most beneficial. I focus more on the youth as they will inherit the country and one day be in charge.

A healthy body must also be physically and mentally fit."

She believes that despite the numerous sporting activities organised by the government and the private sector, such as marathons or tai chi sessions, many Malaysians choose a sedentary lifestyle, because they do not have the right attitude.

She said, "Most of the sports facilities are in poor condition because no one feels a sense of

responsibility. Today, we find a lot of private gymnasiums and classes for swimming or aerobics, but the various programmes are costly. The expense tends to prevent people following a healthy lifestyle in Malaysia."

When asked about the skills needed for her job, she said, "Proper planning is critical and experienced people to manage it, will make the event a success. Networking with people and society helps to influence how the event turns out."

Her workload is variable and she often travels around the country for the events she has organised. She said, "My work involves both managing sporting activities and sports facilities. Both the students and university staff take part in the sporting activities we organise. They have participated in our rugby tournaments, football competitions, inter-departmental carnivals and courses dealing with health issues."

She manages the university's sporting facilities and explained that the facilities are open to the public, at a small cost.

One major sporting event that she is looking forward to in 2014 is the 'International Pencak Silat Championship for the Deputy Prime Minister's Cup 5th Edition, 2014' (Kejohanan Pencak Silat Antarabangsa Piala Timbalan Perdana Menteri Edisi 5, 2014).

Her university, UTHM was appointed the 'Pusat Sukan Tumpuan Pencak Silat IPT Malaysia' or the exhibition centre for silat. She said, "This means we have to manage all the tournaments, the courses, the identification of the talented athletes and arrange the referees, to increase the development of silat and help produce future Malaysian athletes."

According to Farha, the silat competition will be divided into three categories, for local institutions, international institutions and teenagers. She said, "We hope to spot new talent as well as study the various techniques and styles. We aim to elevate the profile of silat, which is a Malay form of martial art."

The success of her efforts to promote silat is reflected in the support she has received and the increasing numbers of silat groups which enter the competition.

Farha believes that she and her team have elevated the promotion of silat, as a sport, in Malaysia. She finds it remarkable that the tournaments she organised, have been useful platforms for the selection of athletes to represent the nation. The championships have also gained the support of the National Silat Federation or *Persekutuan Silat Kebangsaan*

(PESAKA) which is responsible for organising silat events in Malaysia.

Despite her heavy workload, and periods of being away from her family, she said, "I am very determined and I never give up. I find every challenge a spur to make me want to succeed. I never crack under pressure."



THINKING
ALLOWED

by Mariam Mokhtar



KEJOHANAN PENCAK SILAT ANTARABANGSA 2010
PIALA TIMBALAN PERDANA MENTERI
UTHM SPORT CREW

CHILD HEALTH

Dr Shan Narayanan

Consultant General Paediatrician, Hospital Fatimah

Down Syndrome

Down Syndrome is a Genetic Disorder. An individual with Down Syndrome has all or part of a third copy of chromosome 21. Thus they have 3 chromosomes in position 21, and therefore it is also called trisomy 21.

This syndrome was fully described by a British doctor, John Langdon Down in 1866. Hence it is called Down Syndrome. It is the most common chromosomal abnormality in humans. It occurs 1 in 1000 babies. It occurs in all races and economic levels.

Children with Down Syndrome have all or most of the following features



such as short stature, upward slant to the eye, short neck, a single deep crease across the centre of the palm, shortened hand, bent 5th finger tip, separation of 1st and 2nd toe and large, protruding tongue.

They have an increased risk for certain medical conditions like congenital heart disease, respiratory problems, hearing problems, squint, duodenal atresia, undescended testes and low muscle tone.

Every child with Down Syndrome is unique and they have the above characteristics and associations at different degrees. However, they all have growth delay and intellectual disability.

The incidence of birth of children with Down Syndrome increases with the mother's age. As mother's eggs age, there is a higher risk of the chromosome dividing incorrectly. Therefore the risk of Down Syndrome increases with the mother's age:

Mother's Age	Chances of having a child with Down Syndrome
20	1 in 11,600
25	1 in 1300
30	1 in 1000
35	1 in 365
40	1 in 90
45	1 in 30



Couples who have had one child with Down Syndrome have a slightly increased chance (1%) of having another child with Down Syndrome. Parents who are carriers of the genetic translocation are at increased risk of having a child with Down Syndrome.

There are screening tests that can indicate a possible increased risk of having a child with Down Syndrome. These include blood tests and Ultrasound Scan in early pregnancy.

If the results of these tests are suspicious then tests with more definite answers called diagnostic test is done. These are :

- Chorionic Villous Sampling, done around 10 to 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- Amniocentesis done around 15 to 20 weeks of pregnancy.

There is no cure for Down Syndrome. These children have developmental delays leading on to learning difficulties of varying severity. They benefit from early intervention which includes speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. The various medical conditions associated with Down Syndrome can be treated.

They need more support in school. In our system most of these children go into special education. In other countries, children with Down Syndrome with mild learning difficulty go into mainstream school with extra support.

Individuals with Down Syndrome with mild learning difficulty may lead an independent life and gain employment with support. However, many of these individuals will need a lot of support throughout their life. With improving health care, these individuals live a healthier life and longer.

World Down Syndrome Day is on March 21. This day was chosen for the trisomy of the 21st chromosome. The United Nations has officially observed this global awareness day since 2012.

For more information, call Dr Shan's clinic at Hospital Fatimah 05-546 1345 or email shanlea02@gmail.com.

MUSINGS ON FOOD



By **SeeFoon Chan-Koppen**

Pics by Ginla Chew

I love steamboat. I love everything about it, the steam opening all your pores and ruining your makeup; the decision as to what to put in the pot first; the trawling for cooked bits and making sure that your beef, lamb or fish is not overcooked; the mixing of the various dipping sauces and deciding what to dip into which sauce, and finally the **aaahh, mmmm**, grunts of satisfaction as one sips the broth at the end of the meal, each soupy mouthful after the other, steeped with all the delectable juices and nutrients of all the ingredients which have all but disappeared down our gullets.

Alas, steamboat is a meal I often avoid. Short of the occasional specially ordered treats at Overseas or East Ocean Menglembu where the chef is admonished to lay off the MSG and make the broth from scratch, all of the steamboat meals I have ever had have been MSG laden nightmares with most ingredients coming from food factories dishing out plastic-ky balls....fish, pork, beef, you name it. Or sticks, as in fish sticks, sausage on sticks, etc.

To my delight, a newly-opened steamboat restaurant called **Treasure Pot Steamboat** is putting an end to my nightmare on steamboats.

Located a few doors down from Sushi Zento on Festival Walk, this is a well decorated air-conditioned restaurant with both booth seating as well as large round tables for up to twelve people. Heating plates are all induction which do not contribute heat nor gas smells to the whole space and the bigger tables have two induction plates on each table which makes cooking and reaching much more accessible. If there is one criticism to be levied at the design, it's the noise level which when the restaurant is full, can reach very high decibels, making conversation impossible. So my advice if noise drives you to distraction as it does me, is to go after 9pm when the main dinner crowd would have thinned a little.

The food though is worth sacrificing some of your hearing for though. The first step in dining at Treasure Pot is to order the soup. Unlike other steamboat restaurants where the soup is free, one will have to pay for the soup base which is replenished as much as is needed. If this is the only way to avoid MSG laden broths, then I applaud the move.

There is a choice of the **Special Bone Pot** (braised from pork bones) at **RM20**; the **Chonqqing Chicken Pot** which is my favourite, a spicy broth with special Szechuan peppers or Ma Lat and the fiery dry chillies. **RM48 large** and **RM28 medium**; or the **Imperial Pork Stomach with Chicken** at **RM28**. There is even a **Special Fish Pot** for the non meat eaters at **RM25**. **Mixed Pots** can be ordered at **RM38** per pot.

There is a wide selection of ingredients for the hotpot with a checklist to choose from. Noteworthy in the meat section are the beef, mutton and pork slices, paper thin and cooks instantly. I particularly liked the **pork slices** which were too fatty for some, coming from the belly but perfect for my fat-loving taste buds – **RM9** per portion. Must have also include the **homemade pork and beef balls** **RM8**, although the **factory prepared pork balls** were pretty delectable **RM7**. Other items which I didn't sample were the abalone slices, mussels, Taiwanese

SeeFoon Finds Treasure at Festival Walk

sausage and pork kidneys at **RM8** and squid at **RM9**. Noodles are plentiful ranging between **RM3-4** including **Fish Meat Noodles** at **RM7**.

Seafood is where it gets interesting. There is a row of fish tanks on the right as one comes into the restaurant. Here one can order the fish of the day at market prices. On the day I was there, there were three types of live fish. The regular live **Sek Pan** or **Garupa** was going for **RM95** per kilo while the special **Loong Fu Pan** with vivid black bands across a white body was priced at **RM120** per kilo. The night I was there, another table had ordered half of the **Sek Pan** and I was offered the other half which I accepted. The fish proved to be firm fleshed and utterly delectable.

Other seafood on offer included live **medium prawns** at **RM90** per kilo and our half kilo satisfied our table of six. These prawns were irresistibly sweet and when cooked to the right degree of doneness, was heaven in a carapace. Fresh scallops are available occasionally and like all live seafood, subject to market prices. The standard live fish which is very reasonably priced is the **red and black Tilapia** – **RM23** per kilo.

Needless to say, vegetables are plentiful and just choosing from the list can be quite a task. Ranging from between **RM4-6** per plate, we found ourselves wolfing down the likes of lotus pods, enoki mushrooms, *choi sum*, seaweed, tofu, winter melon and bitter gourd. And then came the noodles. Followed by the utterly delectable broth.

This is what I would call a singularly satisfying meal.



Treasure Pot Steamboat

#2-20, 21 Festival Walk @ Ipoh

Jalan Medan Ipoh 1, Medan Ipoh Bistari.

Tel: **05 543 9423**

Manager Nick Cheong: **017 690 8919**

Business hours: 5pm-1am. Closed Mondays.

GPS: N 04 37.1 52 E 101 07. 082



HAWKER FOOD

by VWSL

Restoran Hui Wei Chai Can Shi

12 Selasar Rokam 32, Gunung Rapat, 31350 Ipoh. Opens 6am to 11pm; no fixed closing days.

Hui Wei Chai Can Shi or Hui Wei kopitiam, occupies a double shop lot in the midst of a housing estate, operates from morning to night but not all the stalls are open the whole day.



Morning:

Pork Noodles, which is available the whole day, is mee sua with flavourful pork and broth (**RM4**) and Seafood Lo Shi Fun (**RM4**) is also sold at the same stall. Chicken Rice is lovely with siew yuk (roasted pork) which has nice crispy crackling (**RM4.30**). For those who like a crunch, try the Fried (sang meen) noodles – **RM4.50** and there is also Curry Mee (**RM4.30**) and Wan ton Mee (**RM4**).

Night:

The night stalls are Ba Kut Teh – **RM8**; Duck Rice – **RM4.30** and above; and Fried noodles – **RM4** and above.

Coffee lovers will appreciate that the coffee is smooth and has a nice roasted flavour – **RM1.50**.



How to get there:

From Jalan Raja Musa Mahadi (Dairy Rd.) towards Ampang, (just before the Esso station) turn right at Selasar Rokam 14 and make a left at Persiaran Sri Ampang 3. Selasar Rokam 32 is just in front on the left.

Community

Family in Dire Straits

The Roslan family of Lahat has definitely fallen on hard times. This is evidenced by the hardship the family of 14 has to face on a daily basis. “Even as we talk, I am not certain whether we’ll eat today,” said Aziah Mohd Hashim, 43, the matriarch of the family who lives in a dilapidated kampong hut in Lahat, which is about to fall apart.

Husband Roslan Samsuddin, 46, is the sole breadwinner. But a vicious motorcycle incident five years ago has left him permanently impaired. “The pains coming from my injured hips are so unbearable that I am unable to work for most part of the day,” he told Ipoh Echo when met at his late father’s lean-to which has definitely seen better times.

Roslan worked as a labourer at construction sites and the odd jobs that came his way. That was when he was hale and hearty. Now reduced to an invalid with a fractured hip he can only move about with the aid of a walking stick.

“Fate has dealt me a cruel blow,” he decried. “My condition has affected the welfare of my family, as my daily earnings cannot make ends meet.” Roslan is one of the many scrap hunters scavenging dumpsites and dustbins in the city. They barely make enough to see them through their daily life, let alone that of their dependents. Roslan makes about RM20 daily but nothing on a bad day or when it rains.

With 14 mouths to feed, his wife, eight children ranging in age from 21 to 5, an unemployed son-in-law and three grandchildren, Roslan is at his wit’s end. “I feel like giving up,” he said, raising his arms to the sky in despair. “I leave it to the Almighty to help in my hour of need.”

To make matters worse, his son, Mohd Hafiz, 20, is similarly indisposed. He too was involved in a motorcycle accident recently which has permanently scarred him. Roslan’s other off-spring don’t attend school. “I simply can’t afford the fees,” he declared.

There is salvation on the horizon and it comes in the form of a pending assistance from Yayasan Bina Upaya Darul Ridzuan. The state-based welfare foundation has promised him a new house under its Infrastructure Programme for the hard-core poor and the marginalised in the state. “Baitumal too has made overtures,” said Roslan. But in spite of these silver linings he is still unsure as to whether these aids will materialise. “I’ve been promised assistance before but they are irregular and far between.”

For the moment the family is dependent on well-wishers and the many good Samaritans kind enough to help them when and where it matters. Those wishing to help can call on the family at No. 149, Kampong Pengkalan Gate, 31500 Lahat.



You can bank-in your donation into Aziah’s Bank Simpanan Nasional savings account No: 08001-41-00004374-8.

Luqman

Opinion

Should You Emigrate – The 64,000 dollar question

Recently I received a reference to a new book written by two emigrant Malaysian brothers who have lived abroad for more than 10 years with advice for would-be emigrants. Their advice includes tips such as never taking things for granted; never to burn your bridges; to be objectively optimistic and the importance of financial freedom amongst the various freedoms.

These tips are useful in any major decision you make about life and career. In fact many “how to succeed” books – whether they deal with the stock market or changing jobs – come out with similar or variants of this advice, although the advice may be presented in different languages and with different styles.

The most important point that the book seems to emphasize is that every country has its good and bad points. This again is sensible. Every would-be emigrant – unless he or she comes from the most god-forsaken and wretched country on earth should know that the new country he or she is intending to emigrate to will not be a paradise on earth.

What the book seems to be concerned about is that many Malaysians are being driven to emigrate in the false hope that somewhere in some countries, the governments care for their people, practise freedom of speech, and promote fairness and equality.

Actually, I think few Malaysians have the expectation of a completely level playing field and fair play in Australia, New Zealand, United States, Britain or any other country that they are intending to emigrate to. I also do not believe that any departing Malaysian has an ideal picture of the host country and its various freedoms and racial policies as their main reason for emigration.

Why Malaysians are Emigrating

What is driving them – especially Malaysian Chinese and Indians, and also Malays – to emigrate is that the political and social situation in Malaysia has gone from bad to worse. They see growing ‘ketuanan Melayu’ and ‘ketuanan Islam’ intruding into their personal and public lives. They see a Barisan Nasional government which is unable to reform and increasingly giving way to Perkasa, Isma and other extremist forces in public policy making and implementation – a development which even moderate and liberal Malays cannot stomach.

Of course, they are fully aware that they are exchanging one ‘ketuanan’ for another in the countries that they are migrating to. But the important difference for many that make the hard decision to leave is that, even though the playing field may be uneven when they arrive at their new home, it will be a more even and fairer one for their children – in terms of education and jobs – even without taking into account the higher quality of life in these countries.

This then is the 64,000 dollar question which many Malaysians – especially those who have succeeded so well and are the top of their professions – face. Just on the economics of it, for these businessmen or professionals, Malaysia is a good country to live and die. Many Malaysians (I am part of this group) have done well for themselves. Despite the NEP and other forms of discrimination, we remain privileged in our economic standing.

But the younger generation face an increasingly bleak future. As the economic pie grows more slowly, the fight for good jobs, contracts, commissions and a better life is becoming fiercer. A young graduate today without assistance from his parents will never be able to afford a decent apartment in Kuala Lumpur or Penang. A house within an

hour from his place of work in the city center is a dream which can only be achieved by winning a big lottery prize.

When you combine the economic with the political, social and educational factors, then the decision on whether to emigrate or not becomes a more urgent one – even for Malaysians who have done really well in their careers here.

For them, it is the future of their kids which becomes the final push factor.

What the Government Can Do to Stem Emigration

While the decision to emigrate or stay back is an individual and personal one, the Government must realise that most Malaysians – I would say over 90 per cent – are loyal and patriotic. We know that we are living in a good and in some ways, a lucky country. The majority of Malaysian Chinese do not want to leave for a new land and to start afresh all over again. But we, and our children, must not be treated as “pendatang”.

Our contribution to the country’s prosperity and well-being must be recognised. It is an undeniable fact that all the urban towns, mega-malls, apartment buildings, amusement centers, roads, railways, ports, rubber plantations, manufacturing plants were built solely or mainly with Chinese and Indian labour and capital. The foundations of our educational system – our schools and universities – similarly owe much to non-Malay teachers. It is also an undeniable fact that modern Malaysia and its amenities and standard of living – what Perkasa and Malay and Islamic supremacist groups take for granted – will not exist without the Chinese and Indian contribution.

It is not only on the economic side that we have contributed. Our contributions have also been in art, culture, architecture and social. Just think of how much Malay food has borrowed from, and has been enriched by the Chinese and Indian communities – even right down to the language – taugheh, bihun, kuettiao, pohpiah, sotong, lobak, chapchai, tauhu, chapati, roti canai, mee mamak, thosai, sambal, nasi biryani, etc.

Do Not Kill the Goose that Lays the Golden Egg

Our talent and abilities must be given equal opportunity so that we can contribute to a more prosperous and greater Malaysia. Our young people must not be driven to feel they have an inferior place in this country.

The Malay ultras and those in UMNO must come to their senses regarding the place of the Chinese in Malaysia. Malays may have control over all the major sectors of the country – political, social, cultural, educational, and a large part of the economy through the GLCs and new Malay business elite. But it is the non-Malay component that created the old wealth. It is also the non-Malays that can provide much of the driving force and dynamism that enables new wealth to be created and shared with the less productive and needy.

Don’t kill the goose that lays the golden egg for Malays and Malaysia is my advice to them.

Finally to those facing the dilemma of emigration, I wish to point out that the Pakatan Rakyat manifesto during the last elections acknowledges the need for reforms to dismantle the racially discriminatory policies put in place by the Barisan Nasional. Since the opposition coalition won more than 50 per cent of the popular vote, there is hope still for a fairer society to emerge.

Koon Yew Yin

Tourism

Gua Tempurung's Earnings Drop

■ by Rosli Mansor

Tourism revenue at Gua Tempurung dropped by as much as 50% following inaccurate media reports of a fire.

Nolee Ashilin Mohammed Radzi, Executive Councillor for Health, Tourism and Culture, clarified that the fire was actually at Gunung Tempurung, some 2 km away from the iconic caves. The spread of inaccurate reports, according to Nolee, resulted in the cancellation of 17 tour packages worth RM13,420, which were booked for 500 visitors for a week-long trip to Gua Tempurung.



Addressing the press after welcoming 17 tour agents, bus operators and media representatives from Singapore at Gua Tempurung recently, she said, "The fire happened at Gunung Tempurung, located about 2 km from Gua Tempurung. The forest fire has not affected tourism products and services available at Gua Tempurung."

She continued, "Unfortunately, as word spread about the alleged fire, many bookings were cancelled due to safety concerns despite Gua Tempurung's management making clarifications through Facebook." Nolee was confident that with this explanation, visitors would return to explore the natural beauty of Gua Tempurung.

An average of 14 million tourists from Singapore visit Malaysia every year and Perak plans to attract about 3.5 million of them to Perak during Visit Malaysia Year 2014. The 17 Singaporean visitors at Gua Tempurung spent a total of one week in Perak. Besides Gua Tempurung, they visited heritage buildings in Ipoh, Kellie's Castle in Batu Gajah and Pangkor Island. They too sampled a wide variety of local food.

Heritage

Perak Man Returns to Lenggong

The country's oldest prehistoric man uncovered 24 years ago, Perak Man, finally returns home to Lenggong Valley, and was opened for public viewing effective Saturday, February 20.

The homecoming ceremony was officiated by Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz. "Today is a historical day for all of us and especially me because I come from Lenggong Valley."

The skeletal remains of Perak Man may have been exposed to the elements for almost 24 years, but the high level of conservation by the National Heritage Department has kept the skeleton in perfect condition.

"The skeleton was placed in a conservation chamber and inspected twice a day through a computerised system to ensure that it was kept at a proper temperature and humidity level to prevent fungal growth on the bones," said Nazri.

He added, "I am pleased to announce that the National Heritage Department has successfully prepared the Lenggong Valley Conservation Management Plan within the required time frame and has submitted it to

UNESCO."

Lenggong Valley can be said to be the earliest capital in the country, as no where else have people been found to live at that time. The Perak Man has a malformed left hand. Since the discovery 24 years ago, no other prehistoric skeleton with genetic defects was found in the world.

The return of Perak Man to Lenggong Valley will, undoubtedly, turn Lenggong Valley Archaeological Gallery into a major tourist attraction, both domestic and international.

Lenggong Valley was listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site on June 30, 2012, making it the 953rd site to be included. It is the 4th site in Malaysia to be accorded this status after Malacca City, George Town, Kinabalu National Park and Mulu National Park.

RM



Entertainment

A Helping Hand for Artistes

To help local artistes who have fallen on difficult times, Koloni Karyawan Amanjaya or PORT will be hosting 'Konsert Blues Buat Teman Tour 2014' at Kinta Riverfront Hotel on Saturday, March 22 commencing at 8.45pm. Legendary rocker, Datuk Ramli Sarip will play the lead at the concert.

Addressing the media at a recent press conference, Datuk Ramli said, "This is going to be a relaxing evening. However, the concert carries a serious objective, which is to raise funds to help fellow artistes who are afflicted with health issues and burdened by medical bills.

"We'll be presenting another local rock legend, Mus May, at the concert. I'll also be accompanied by one of Malaysia's top guitarists, Man Kidal and other experienced local musicians."

Director of PORT, Dato' Zainol Fadzi Paharuddin said that besides the concert, there will be music workshops during the day, conducted by Man Kidal and other musicians.

Tickets to Konsert Blues Buat Teman Tour 2014 are priced at RM53 each and limited to 1800 people only. Those who purchase a ticket will also receive an exclusive T-shirt from PORT. "The success of the event will be able to provide the necessary financial support to our local artistes who are in need," said Zainol to reporters.

For details on the concert and tickets, please contact PORT at 05 241 2287.

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BRT – The Gentle Path to Wellness (Part 3)

SeeFoon Chan-Koppen continues her exploration of Bioresonance Therapy (BRT) with a report on her ongoing sessions and own personal experience.

Electromagnetic devices are commonly used in mainstream medicine such as EEGs which measure electrical activity in the brain and EKGs which measure electrical patterns of heartbeats.

Science has proven that our bodies actually project their own magnetic fields and that all 70 trillion cells in the body communicate via electromagnetic frequencies. When communication between cells become blocked, disease is the result. Bioresonance Therapy (BRT) is yet another non-invasive way to ensure that the communication between cells can continue to flow unhindered.

The BICOM® device at Oasis of Hope checks for a person's frequency patterns and compares those patterns with the harmonious patterns stored within the machine's vast database. Anything outside the normal ranges will be treated until healthy patterns are restored.

My Results After 10 Sessions

They found energy blockages in the meridian of a whole host of organs at my first test but what was encouraging was that after the first series of ten sessions, these have dropped from 24 organs with energy blockages (the first time) to 14 organs a month and a half later. Therefore the next series of treatments will probe deeper into these recalcitrant organs to restore harmonious frequencies back to them.

In the heavy metals category, the list of heavy metals found in my body dropped from 13 to 6; food allergens from 21 to 15; preservatives from 3 to 2; and the one mould fungus and pollen allergen discovered in the first test has disappeared. And the good news for me was that I can drink white wine again where formerly I tested allergic.

Every session of BRT begins with a clearing of energy to remove geopathic stress, electromog and radiation, scar interference and adhesions. Then begins the treatment proper with the machine indicating how much and how long the harmonious frequencies are needed by each organ. It was fascinating to watch as the therapist holds a spoon like device in front of the metal plate which measures the intake and absorption of frequencies. As long as the spoon device moves horizontally back and forth, my body was still absorbing and once it moves vertically up and down, whichever organ was being treated had had its share of harmonious frequencies.

One very dramatic reversal of symptoms occurred after one session where I complained of swelling of my legs and ankles. Vivienne my therapist then placed the electrode pad on my kidneys and began to clear my lymph and my kidneys. The following morning, the swelling had gone down and I wasn't feeling bloated any longer. That's what I call instantaneous feedback!

Next issue: More on Degenerated Cells.

Call 012 510 2555 (Mr CM Wong) or 05 241 5122
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SeeFoon having a treatment

News

Launch of Coffee Table Books



“The habit of recording or documenting has to be cultivated in the young, lest we forget our history over time,” said Perak Menteri Besar Dato’ Seri DiRaja Dr Zambry bin Abd Kadir, at the launch of a set of five coffee table books by the Perak Town and Country Planning Department at Casuarina@Meru recently.

Zambry observed that unlike Westerners, Malaysians are far behind in the documentation of important events in their lives. Therefore, the set of five coffee table books on small towns in Perak, from the perspective of town planning, is a breakthrough for the Department. The history of Perak will now be remembered and passed on to future generations.

The idea for the bilingual 80 to 100-page books was mooted during a working trip overseas where the Menteri Besar realised that there are a lot of treasures in Perak, left undiscovered or forgotten.

Tasked with the book project, Director of Perak Town and Country Planning Department, Dato’ Dr Dolbani bin Mijan proposed to begin with five towns, namely, Karai, Bagan Serai, Beruas, Papan and Gopeng, with the approval of the Menteri Besar.

The Department has plans to publish more books on other small towns in the state, similar to this first batch, which will be used as gifts and souvenirs for visiting dignitaries.

Besides launching the books, the function was also to celebrate the department’s recent achievements; obtaining 4 stars in the Accountability Index by the National Audit Department and 5 stars in the Malaysia Government Portals and Websites Assessment 2013.

In attendance were Dato’ Saarani Mohamad, Executive Councillor for Local Government, State Secretary Dato’ Abdul Puhat Mat Nayan, State Financial Officer Dato’ Haji Mohd Ghazali Jalal, the Director-General of the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia and invited guests.

Emily

Health

Our Invisible Doctor

“We can heal ourselves by connecting to our invisible doctor.” This is the message given by Nunnappatt Sucharit, Natural Healer from Thailand during her talk on ‘The Art of Connecting with our Invisible Doctor’, which was organised by Brahma Kumaris Malaysia, Ipoh Branch and held at Fit Pit Studio, Bercham.

Nunnappatt said that breathing is automatic and caused by movement of our diaphragm. Normally our posture restricts movement of the diaphragm and because of bad posture most people do not breathe properly. This is one of the main reasons why we get pain while doing routine chores at home and at work.

Due to bad posture people develop humps or other abnormalities over the years. She checked the spines of the participants and explained what was not normal. She informed the group that some of the causes for disproportion of the left and right shoulder were due to slinging bags on the shoulder, carrying bags in one hand and wearing high heel shoes.

She emphasised the importance of performing stretching exercises daily to loosen stiff muscles, the need to consume more alkaline food such as vegetables and fruit and where possible, to avoid meat and meat products which are acidic. She also admonished participants to drink fresh juice instead of coffee.

As part of an active workshop, Sucharit also demonstrated a few exercises which could be done in minutes to heal ourselves. This was followed by a short meditation session and the participants were guided on how to open their chakras which are energy centres in the body.

She reiterated that we understand ourselves best and should avoid negative thoughts and practise having positive thoughts. She also stressed the need to understand the power of silence.

In summary, the whole workshop was an enlightening session with the emphasis on creating the awareness that our health is in our hands. We can heal our body and soul from within with some simple exercises, meditation and positive thinking.

AJ



Fisheries Department Entertains Media

The Perak Fisheries Department treated over 100 media representatives to dinner on Wednesday, February 19. The event was held at a leading hotel in Ipoh.

Guest of honour and Director of the Perak Fisheries Department, Hj Sani bin Mohd Isa, in his opening remarks, welcomed the guests and reaffirmed his commitment to establishing a cordial working relationship with the media.

“I am thankful to the media for the assistance they have rendered in promoting the state fisheries department’s efforts in enhancing the state’s economy.”

The fishing industry, according to Sani, has thrived in spite of the difficulties fishermen faced, as the industry is so prone to weather conditions. “The state’s annual haul for 2013 is most encouraging. A total of almost 308,000 metric tons of fish were landed from the deep sea. The net worth is in excess of RM1.8 million.”

Offshore fishing has contributed a sizeable amount to the overall figure. “Last year alone the haul was about 243,000 metric tons. That represents almost 79 per cent of the annual catch.”

Sani handed a mock cheque for RM1,500 to the representative of the Perak Media Club. It was the department’s contribution to the club’s upcoming mountaineering trip to Mount Kosciuszko in Australia. He then presented mementoes and letters of appreciation to all the bureau chiefs present.

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LETTERS

We reprint some of our reader's comments from our online paper. Go to <http://www.ipohecho.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.

Abolish Fare Discount for Senior Citizens and OKU?

Starting this coming April, Perak Transit has cancelled the issuing of discount cards for the above. A spokesman from the company said that their buses are operating at a loss due to this plan, and also the compulsory minimum salary scheme since last January.

We hope SPAD will look into this matter. Bus companies making losses is due to poor management: running the buses without schedules, rude drivers and rejecting feedback from passengers. I have observed often times, buses running on the road with only five passengers!

It is hoped that the company will continue to give discounts to the poor jobless senior citizens who are travelling only once a week to go home or seek medical treatment, while those senior citizens who use the bus daily for work should pay the full amount, as they have a

source of income. Just the few of us jobless seniors will surely not have any impact on the company's earnings.

Chris Ng

Deejays' Contributions to Society

From the beginning till now our deejays' contributions to society have been much appreciated by the general public, especially television viewers and, to an extent, radio listeners.

They are not only professional in their presentation but are also knowledgeable in all fields, be it news-reading, interviewing high-profile personalities in both the public and private sectors and sporting activities.

I am awed by their talents and have always followed

their presentations, on air and on the tube. They are able to crack jokes spontaneously. And this is what holds them dear to me.

As a retiree, I am always thrilled by their wisecracks and innuendos, which are harmless by all means, less for the sensitive few.

It is fortunate that the country is blessed with capable government officials who manage the national television and radio networks professionally. They are, indeed, an inspiration to the younger generation who should learn to follow in their footsteps.

The Information Ministry and related government departments should reward these presenters (there are plenty) for their dedication and hard work. There is no better honour than to be acknowledged by their own ministry for their efforts.

Kudos to these unsung heroes.

K. Letchimanan

Announcements

Announcements must be sent by fax: 05-255 2181; or email: announcements@ipohecho.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.

Malaysians for Malaysia – A Walk in the Park. Perak Women for Women Society (PWW) is organising this event to celebrate the country's social, cultural and religious diversities. The walk will be held at Taman Rekreasi Sultan Abdul Aziz (Polo Ground), Ipoh on Sunday, **March 9** beginning at 9.30am. All peace-loving Perakians and Ipohites are welcome to participate. Come one come all. For details call PWW at **05 546 9715**.

YMCA of Ipoh Toastmasters Club Meetings, Wednesday **March 12 and 26**, 7.45pm at YMCA Ipoh (first floor). *Mission Statement: "We provide a supportive learning experience in which members are encouraged to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth."*

Public Forum on 'Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) and Ageing' and 'Dietary Management for CKD,' Saturday **March 15**, 9am to 11.50am at Dahlia 1, Level 4, Pantai Hospital Ipoh. Admission is FREE! There will be Free Blood Pressure Check, Blood Glucose and Creatinine Test for 40 participants based on first come first serve basis. For further information, call Ms Renuka or Ms Gloria at **05 540 5712** or **05 540 5725**.

English Language Communication Skills Training Course for Women. Perak Women for Women Society (PWW) will commence training of the second intake of students beginning April. The 3-month course is free and is fully funded by CIMB Foundation. Classes will be held on **Saturdays between 9am to 1pm**. The course is tailor-made for women who

need to improve their spoken and written English so as to secure better jobs and business opportunities. Application forms are available at PWW office. Please call 05 546 9715 for details. Closing date is on Saturday, **March 23**.

Dementia Society Perak 4th Annual General Meeting, Saturday **March 29**, 2pm at The Dementia Care Centre, 15 Jalan Foo Choong Nyit, Ipoh. All are welcome to attend. Light refreshments will be provided. For more information call Ms April **019 571 2738**.

Parkinson's Awareness and Fund Raising Open Day, Sunday **March 30**, 10am to 6pm at Leong Wan Chin Hall, (Perak Girls School), Jalan Kampar, Ipoh. An invitation to: people with Parkinson's, family members and caregivers. Admission is free. Register early. Call: Ms Terry Wong **011 1640 8406** or **05 545 5610**. Email: ppaipoh@gmail.com.

The Ipoh Down Syndrome Centre (IDSC), formerly known as the Kiwanis Down Syndrome Foundation, Ipoh Centre, has moved to a temporary location at 7 Persiaran Tasek Timur 2, Taman Medan Bercham, 31400 Ipoh. Tel: **05 546 8386**. The move is to make way for upgrading work at its permanent premises at Taman Sri Kurau. The renovation is due to complete end of the year. The IDSC is a non-profit making organization providing training and education to down syndrome children from as young as 2 months to 7 years. It currently has a vacancy for an Occupational Therapist. Recent graduates or other interested parties are to call the centre for an interview appointment.

News

Forum on Assessment Rates in Ipoh

Ipoh City Watch (ICW) organised a forum to discuss 'Issues of Assessment Rates' which was held at the Open University Malaysia. In his opening address, Associate Professor Dr Richard Ng, Chairman, (ICW) said that in view of the concern voiced by residents on the increase of the assessment rates for 2014 imposed by Majlis Bandaraya Ipoh (MBI), ICW decided to invite speakers from different backgrounds to speak on the issue.

The first speaker Dato' Chang Ko Youn was the former State Exco Member for Local Council and is currently the Advisor of Party Gerakan Malaysia. He said that the sources of income for local councils are federal grant, state grant and internal sources like assessment, licence and parking fees. This income is spent on development costs and operating costs which are mainly salary for staff. The assessment is based on a percentage of the annual rental value of the property. At 16.5%, Perak has the highest rate in Peninsula Malaysia for residential property. The rates vary for different sectors. The rate is based on the valuation done in 1982. The authority to fix the rate is with the state government, pursuant to Local Government Act 1976. The local authority can carry out evaluations every five years, however, this is not done due to the high cost of doing so. He informed the gathering that during his term as Exco for Local Council he did not allow MBI to increase the rates.

Chang also said that local councils throughout the world are not financially independent and need grants from the federal government. He quoted the case of the bankruptcy of Detroit City in USA.

The second speaker was Howard Lee Chuan How, ADUN Pasir Pinji and Youth Secretary, DAP Malaysia. Howard said that the assessment rate is based on the highest and best rental value of the property and the state has the right to set the value. The rate must be fair and based on the ability of the person to pay. He queried the rationale to increase industrial property rate from 10% to 16.5%. The former Mayor has said that increase in rates would improve services, an assumption which Howard doubted.

Howard informed the gathering that as per MBI Finance Report, during 2011 and 2012, RM32 million and RM34 million in assessments were not collected respectively. He questioned whether the increase was to make up for this shortfall. Are the law abiding ratepayers being over taxed to compensate for those not paying? With the current increase in cost of living, is this the right time to increase assessment rates?

The third speaker was Burhanuddin Maamor from the Department of Valuation and Property Management from MBI who said that since assessment rates were based on 1982 valuations, they were out of date. The Local Government Act allows the state to impose a maximum rate of 35% for assessment. There are more than 200,000 properties out of which about 180,000 are residential and about 5,000 are industrial. So as not to burden the majority, the residential rate was increased by 0.5% only. He



informed that in 1987 the industrial rate was reduced from 16% to 10% and now it is back to the old rate. The rates are based on built-up areas and many house owners prefer to make unauthorised extensions so as to avoid paying the council.

Burhanuddin said that MBI operates a balanced budget in that its expenditure is within its income. Due to increasing expenses, if the rates are not increased, MBI would have to close down.

During question time, an industrialist (who only wanted to be known as Lee) commented that the increase in rates is making it difficult for them to operate their business. During 2013 they received a backdated assessment while also bearing the additional cost of minimum wages. This year the tariff on electricity has gone up. Some businesses may have to close down as a result.

Chan Kok Sun, a retired government auditor said that Ipoh depends on industries for its progress and revenue. We should not kill the goose that lays the golden egg. He compared the actual assessment rate of similar terrace houses in Shah Alam and Ipoh and said that Ipohites were paying RM100 more. The rental income in Shah Alam is RM1,400 and in Ipoh RM500. Businesses should have been given advanced notice so that they can prepare their cash flow and avoid problems.

On the question of what efforts are being taken to collect outstanding assessments, Burhanuddin said that there is a special unit in his department whose staff work seven days a week to collect the outstanding amount. He added that the provision of seizing the property for non-payment is seldom enforced. Meetings are held with those who cannot afford to pay and instalments plans are worked out with them.

Burhanuddin said that the new rates have been gazetted and must be de-gazetted if they are to be revised. Participants felt this is not a problem and can be done.

When asked whether this is the right time to increase rates, Howard felt that it is not. He said that MBI must reduce wastage and be more prudent. A manufacturer cannot keep on increasing the price of his products due to the increase in manufacturing costs. MBI cannot keep on increasing their rates to cover their costs.

AJ

Perak JPs and their Community Service Projects

The Council of Justices of the Peace, Perak, in line with two of their several objectives: aiding and promoting charitable and social welfare work; and sponsoring the promotion of understanding, goodwill, peace and unity of the country and its people, recently carried out a Road Safety Awareness Campaign at three locations.

In conjunction with the celebration of the Chinese New Year and the launching of Pelancaran Ops Selamat within Perak, the JP Council participated in this project organised jointly by the Perak state government, PDRM, JPJ, JPAM, JKJR, Bomba, St John Ambulance and PLUS. This was carried out at the Ipoh Selatan (Ampang) Toll

Plaza and later at the Jelapang Toll Plaza, both for inbound motorists into Ipoh.

The campaign was again held at the Sungkai Toll Plaza for motorists going into Sungkai and for those going out of Sungkai. This project was carried out by the JP Council with assistance from PDRM, Jabatan Keselamatan Jalan Raya Malaysia (JKJR), PLUS and a group of people from Sungkai, Bidor and Tapah, including a team of local ladies specially dressed in sashes highlighting the campaign.

Goody bags containing mandarin oranges, Spritzer mineral water, and various pamphlets explaining the Objectives of the JP Council, Perak, and those issued by PDRM and JKJR giving information on road safety precautions and crime prevention

were distributed. When giving out the goodies the motorists were reminded to drive safely and be aware of the importance of wearing safety belts in their cars.

The JP Council have also lined up several projects to be carried out in Perak, some of which are granting scholarships to poor and needy students, providing health care services to rural and orang asli villages, arranging luncheon talks to familiarise them on state protocols. A golf competition and dinner to raise funds to carry out the welfare activities is being planned. Further charitable and welfare projects to cater for those celebrating the various respective festivals are on the cards.

Following another of its objectives – to serve as a liaison body between the government and members of the JP Council, visits were made and will continue to be made to department state heads to discuss ways for the co-ordination and carrying out of activities towards local charity and welfare. A proposal to go to Australia is in the pipeline to visit our counterparts over there.

The President of the JP Council Perak is Dato' Seri Yeop Junior bin Yeop Adlan who is also the Orang Besar Jajahan, Batang Padang, and who has great ideas to implement all the duties and powers vested in the Justices of the Peace.



News

Psychological Torture by Debt Collectors

Over the past seven months the BN Perak Service and Complaints Centre has received complaints from more than 40 people on being harassed by agents from debt collecting agencies for not repaying their loans from the banks. Mohd Rawi Abdullah, head of the complaints centre said that the agents hand deliver the letter to the defaulter and thereafter go to their house at awkward hours asking for repayment. They call the persons at odd times on their land line and on the mobile phone and send SMSs. It is a mental torture and he is worried that it may lead the victims to commit suicide.

Rawi said that when he discussed this with his lawyers, they said that there is no clause in the agreement with the banks that states that the banks can appoint debt collecting agencies to collect on their behalf.

Rawi added that he contacted a few branches of Standard Chartered Bank and they informed that they do not use the services of debt collecting agencies. The Personal Data Protection Act 2010 does not allow banks to reveal particulars of their customers to third parties. Rawi questioned how the agencies managed to get particulars

of the defaulters? He said that when he contacted Bank Negara, they agreed that banks cannot reveal particulars of customers to third parties.

Rawi said that the normal practice is for banks to send a Notice of Demand to the defaulter through their lawyers asking him to meet in court. During this meeting, agreement is reached on how the loan can be settled.

Rawi said he had written to Bank Negara about this problem, but no action has been taken.

AJ




A Remarkable Programme

The 'Beyond Developing Ordinary Producing Remarkable Programme', which was officiated by Perak Menteri Besar Dato' Seri DiRaja Dr Zambry Abd Kadir, attracted some 300 participants to its workshops.

The inaugural programme, jointly organised by Koloni Karyawan Aman Jaya and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), which successfully implemented innovative elements of art, was hosted at *People of Remarkable Talent* (PORT) along Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah recently.

In his opening remarks, Zambry congratulated the organisers, saying, "I am very proud of the works on display here. Each has its own identity. The participants do have artistic talent."

He continued, "Art is an important and unique element. We're proud of our artistic heritage. It's our identity. A programme like this is a good platform for the young to further explore their talents."

Executive Councillor for Health, Tourism and Culture, Nolee Ashilin Mohammed Radzi, the patron of the programme, said, "Beyond defines the artistic culture of life, especially for the younger generation. This is the second programme we organised that placed importance on three elements of art; in ceramics, photography and fashion."

Through the award 'Anak Jati Perak', Beyond honoured three big names in the three categories of art. They were Datuk Radzuan Radzi (fashion), Bustamam Mokhtar (photography) and Associate Professor Ham Rabeah Kamarun (ceramics).

"Recipients were selected based on their contributions to their respective fields, including achievements in Malaysia and internationally," said Nolee.

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Personality

Ipoh's Unheralded Poet

Writing poetry again after a hiatus of ten years seemed to be a good move for Raj Dronamraju. His third volume of poetry, "Travels With The Anti-Johnny Appleseed (2012)", has been receiving rave reviews, not only in the United States, where he is from but also in Malaysia.

Raj also had the opportunity to read from the volume at the 33rd World Congress of Poets held in Ipoh in October last year.

Born in Buffalo, New York in 1965, Raj, of Indian and Caucasian American parentage, graduated from the University of Oregon majoring in journalism.

Raj has always been fascinated by the English Language, his mother tongue, and began writing poetry while still in school. Thinking that he could not go far with his poems, even after winning a poetry competition at high school, Raj concentrated all his free time writing novels instead.

His efforts resulted in a six-volume semi-autobiographical series of novels, three of which are already published and three are still in drafts, all of which are fiction based loosely on his own life experiences, the people he met and incidents that he had read about.

An eloquent speaker and prolific writer, he also has three volumes of poems published, The Return Of The Magnificent Ninny & Other Poems (2010), Solidarity With The Flesh Eating Mosaic & Other Poems (2011) and Travels With The Anti-Johnny Appleseed (2012), which garnered a larger fan base than from his novels. Not surprisingly, Raj would rather be known as a poet than an author!

Interestingly, marriage to a lovely Ipoh-born lady, Sashikhala, brought him to Malaysia, and eventually, Ipoh, where he has lived for the past six years.

Being outside of his home country has given him a better perspective of life in the United States, the people, and other aspects of the country, which was the inspiration behind Travels With The Anti-Johnny Appleseed. It has three sections, Past, Present and Future. The Past touches on childhood, though not necessarily his own, while the Present is about social situations and Future, about achieving peace of mind.



Famous poets who have inspired Raj's style of poetry, which is written with meaning, form and rhythm in mind, are William Wordsworth, Wallace Stevens, Philip Larkin and Anne Sexton.

Raj, who is currently job-hunting after his English Language lecturing contract at Universiti Kuala Lumpur Royal College of Medicine Perak (UniKL RCMP) expired, said, "I also get inspired by my travelling experiences. While living in Kuala Lumpur, I really enjoyed the sense of the flow of life in the city. It brings life to my own writing."

At the present moment, Raj has no plans to go into writing as a career, although he would like to devote more time to attending poetry conferences and giving live readings.

Those interested may check out excerpts of Raj's three novels, namely Crippled Hearts (2011), The Absent (2012) and The Strong and the Wrong (2013), a novel which is set in Malaysia, and the three full volumes of poetry at www.rajbooks.com.

Other poems could be read at Raj's regularly updated personal poetry blog at www.rajdronamraju.wordpress.com.

All of Raj's books, ebooks for novels and soft cover books for poetry, are available for sale at major online book stores such as Amazon.com. Search for the name of author, Raj Dronamraju.

Emily

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