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**23-25 October 2009**  
**Minden Campus, Pulau Pinang**

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# THE LEADER

ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA



*Bangau, Oh Bangau...*



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**SPECIAL FEATURE**

2 Enlightening Darkness

**WHAT SAY WE...**

5 What Say We...

**SUSTAINING HERITAGE**

6 The Sound of Siren

**STILL REMEMBERED**

10 Ong of The Mangroves

**BRIDGING IDEAS**

12 One Water, One Air  
16 A Different Fingerprint  
18 The Weekend Farmer

**PERSONALITY**

21 Enamoured by a 'New Reality'  
24 Passion's Reach

**THE OTHER RESIDENTS**

30 Biawak!

**CAMPUS LIFE**

27 Greening Young Minds  
34 Hope in the Hub  
37 Muniandy's Turf  
40 Hiss Love  
42 Bury The Coffin

**MINDEN MEMORIES**

44 Cat's Claws in Concert

**BEYOND THE GATES**

48 Pearls from Plants  
51 Averting an Apocalyptic Future

**TANJUNG TUCK**

54 Roti Bites

**THE PIONEERS**

56 Arts (Education) 1982

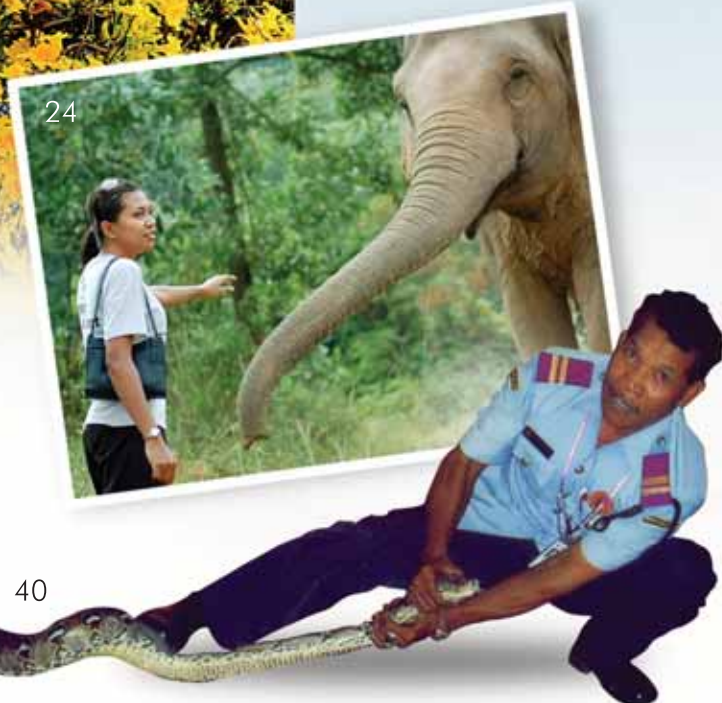
**HIGHLIGHTS**

57 A String of Gs

**KEEPING TRACK**

60 Keeping Track

21



24

40

34

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Cover photograph by Mohamed Talhah Idrus showing a **bangau** (egret) flying by an apartment block along the Jelutong Expressway. **Bangau, Oh Bangau** is a popular Malay folk song about ecological balance.

**The Contributors**

## From The Chief Editor

In the song *Dirge* (1973), Bob Dylan ridiculed those who have been blinded by 'progress'.

"... so you sing your praise of progress  
and of the Doom Machine,  
The naked truth is still taboo  
whenever it can be seen".

Fast-forward 30 years, the singers of progress have multiplied, as is evident by the scale of environmental destructions all over the planet. But so too has the voices of concern, growing and spawning a new generation of stewards who have devised various approaches to address the environmental crisis.

Some of our alumni have joined this cause, abandoning lucrative jobs to be with the common man and the environment. Along their side is another group who champions the cause via their pens and oratory skills. Both want to shape the future into sustainable environments.

In this issue *The Leader* carries features on and by a sample of this force. We are sure there are more out there. Make yourself heard, pen your thoughts and experiences.

We hope these few articles will be inspirational to everyone to take that big step to reduce our ecological footprint.

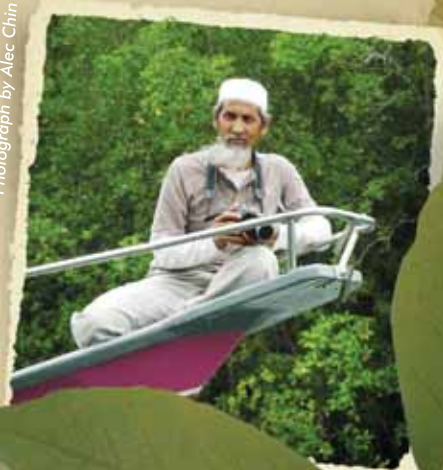
Our handicap at writing poetic insinuations like Dylan does not relieve us of our roles as stewards of this planet; we have all been gifted with the power to make small incremental changes.

USM too has been empowered in this direction. Its Transformation Plan, *Transforming Higher Education for A Sustainable Tomorrow* clinched us the coveted APEX status.

Alumni, unite to create this tomorrow!

**Chief Editor**  
Mohamed Talhah Idrus  
B. Soc. Sc. '74

Photograph by Alec Chin



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

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# ENLIGHTENING DARKNESS

*Dzulkifli Abdul Razak  
B. Pharmacy '76*

60 Earth Hour was observed on 28 March around the world. It had one mission: an act by the global population in unison to create a new awareness on the state of affairs of planet Earth.

Organised by World Wide Fund for Nature, Earth Hour has been hailed as the biggest ever global movement involving millions of people who participated by switching off non-essential lighting for an hour on that day.



Cities ranging from Las Vegas to Sydney, from Cape Town to Kuala Lumpur went dark for an hour.

It was a highly symbolic event that demonstrated an opportunity on how the problems of the world can be collectively tackled.

One such problem relates to the seriousness of climate change. One such opportunity is in Copenhagen this December where world leaders will discuss and hopefully agree on the need for a global climate deal.

For this purpose, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reportedly urged citizens around the world to join Earth Hour to demand action on climate change from their leaders, apart from taking concrete action to conserve energy even for a relatively short time.

“Earth Hour is a way for the citizens of the world to send a clear message. They want action on climate change,” he was quoted as saying.

He underlined the seriousness of climate change and the consequences ahead. “We are on a dangerous path. Our planet is warming.”

Hence, we must change our ways to protect the people and the planet.

“We need an ambitious agreement. An agreement that is fair and effective. An agreement based on sound science,” said Ban Ki-moon.

This prompted many to regard Earth Hour's global participation as a kind of a global referendum. The aim was to transform Earth Hour into the world's first global election against global warming.

According to Ban, it would be “the largest demonstration of public concern about climate change ever attempted”.

Voting for Earth Hour was by switching off all non-essential lights for an hour last night. Leaving them on would have contributed to global warming.

The number of votes targeted was one billion, especially from populations that had the privilege to make a choice.

Enlightening Darkness

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The result of the votes will be presented to world leaders at the Global Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen 2009.

The outcome of the 'voting' is significant as it will help to determine the course of future actions that will replace the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in a couple of years.

Earth Hour, which began in Sydney in 2007, managed to persuade about 2.2 million homes and businesses to switch off their lights for an hour.

Last year, it grew into a global sustainability movement, with about 50 million people switching off their lights.

Universiti Sains Malaysia's campus proudly joined other famous landmarks in the world, such as the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Rome's Colosseum, the Sydney Opera House and the Coca Cola billboard in Times Square, by remaining dark for 60 minutes.

It is believed about 3,000 cities, towns and municipalities in more than 80 countries participated in this global event.

In Malaysia, the Petronas Twin Towers, the KL Tower and the Penang Bridge were some of the landmarks that supported 60 Earth Hour.

Universiti Sains Malaysia, with its mission to be sustainability-led, participated again this year.

Although the impact of such action is bound to be a far cry from what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stipulates, that is, a 50 to 85 per cent reduction in emissions to turn the current warming trend around, especially when it is held one Saturday night a year, it is the will that counts.

In other words, if 60 Earth Hour can emerge as a global success, chances are that more intense collective action can be taken in the near future, especially when world leaders can come to a global understanding, if not consensus. **L**

*(This article appeared in the **New Sunday Times** of 29 March 2009 under the title "We can make a difference to Earth")*

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Professor Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak can be reached at [vc@notes.usm.my](mailto:vc@notes.usm.my)

(Source: [www.bernama.com](http://www.bernama.com))



# What Say We...

What Say We...

Congratulations to the editorial committee for producing this magazine. Keep up the effort which will thrust USM into the international arena.

Shariffah Afifah Syed Abbas  
B. Sc. (Edu.) '82

### Chief Editor replies ...

Shariffah has informed us that she is now the headmistress of Sekolah Menengah St. George Pulau Pinang. Thank you.

Splendid! Great review to promote Pulau Pinang particularly USM. It is a great magazine about great people from a great university.

Izady Ibrahim  
B. A. '05

Very informative, it is a challenge to work on this kind of periodical to retain the interest of readers. *The Leader* is doing fine. Try getting views from financial experts (USM alumni of course) on current issues and what readers can do to help improve finance.

G Nathan  
B. A. '82

At a glance, I feel the editorial team has done a fantastic job. I wonder why *The Leader* carries no advertisement as you may be able to earn some revenue to help alumni in general. My very best wishes to the editorial team!

Tuan Ibrahim Tengku Abdullah  
B. A. '73

I am glad to have received *The Leader*. I managed to read through the latest and the article written by the chief editor entitled "Message Less Heeded" caught my attention as I think I am able to discuss it in one of my environmental ethics lectures. I really admire the ability of the writer to come up with such an article using not only religious but also ecological approach. Looking at the skillfully photographed avians, amphibians, insects, etc., by the writer de-stresses me.

Rodziah Ismail  
B. Sc. '79



A recent photo of Habshah and Paizin

I graduated from USM in 1982. I just managed to look at *The Leader* today around 4.00 pm. I am Habshah Abdul Kudus and my photo was on page 20 (Sciences Education 1982) March 2009. I am now Principal of SMK Sungai Choh Rawang Selangor. I have been here since August 2007. Before that I was Senior Assistant of SMK Syed Mashor Batang Kali, Hulu Selangor.

I am married to Nor Paizin Ibrahim (photo on page 22 of the same magazine). We were married in 1981 (when we were in final year then). Now he is the Principal of SM Sains Hulu Selangor, Hulu Yam Bharu, Batang Kali for more than five years.

We have three kids: two sons, aged 24 and 21, and a daughter, aged 19. Photo shows my husband and I.

Norhapipah Abu Hanif (the photo next to Nor Paizin's), currently Senior Assistant of Student Affairs of SMK Sungai Choh, was the one who showed me *The Leader*.



Norhapipah

Nice to know about others. Thank you.

Habshah Abdul Kudus  
B. Sc. (Edu.) '82

### Chief Editor replies ...

Habshah,  
Since "Keeping Track" and "The Pioneers" departments were introduced in *The Leader*, this is the first time we receive feedback, and a comprehensive one at that too. Your response has the editorial team naturally excited and high-spirited. Thank you for this invaluable update.

# The SOUND OF SIREN

Text and Photographs by  
Rusli Jamaluddin



No cause for panic! The wailing sound of an air raid siren should ring a bell if you are a war movie buff. The campus is never short of curiosities and it has long had a love affair with its war memorabilia. No one would have thought that the skies above Minden Barracks would become airspace for enemy bombers during World War II. It has witnessed the tumultuous days of war and tasted the sweetness of peace thereafter. Old as the contraption may be, it is ready to wail again if its service is needed.



The Sound of Siren

There are two common warning alerts that can scare the wits out of civilians upon an impending air raid. First is the attack warning signal that sounds with a rising and a falling note to announce the imminent danger of a strike, with the second being the all-clear signal which sends out a steady note to notify that the air attack has ceased.

Historical reports reveal that air raid sirens were fully deployed and blared everywhere in the city when Japanese Zero fighter aircraft bombarded George Town and Pulau Pinang harbour on 11 December 1941. However, little was mentioned about what happened to the old Minden Barracks. Was Minden spared the air strikes?

A quick jaunt back in time to the records of the air raid reveals some plausible clues as to how the attack took place. Former civilian worker at the Minden Barracks Royal Army Service Corps Syed Mohammad and his late father Sheikh Syed Ali, who at the time was the kampong headman, witnessed the air raid. Syed Mohammad vividly remembers the Japanese aircraft flying over Minden and Kampung Batu Uban, presumably heading towards the harbour.

"It was daylight and at about 1000 hours," explains Mohammad, "the incessant drone of aircraft engine was heard from afar, approaching from the direction of Bayan Lepas. Suddenly there was a loud explosion!. I don't really know what hit the kampong."

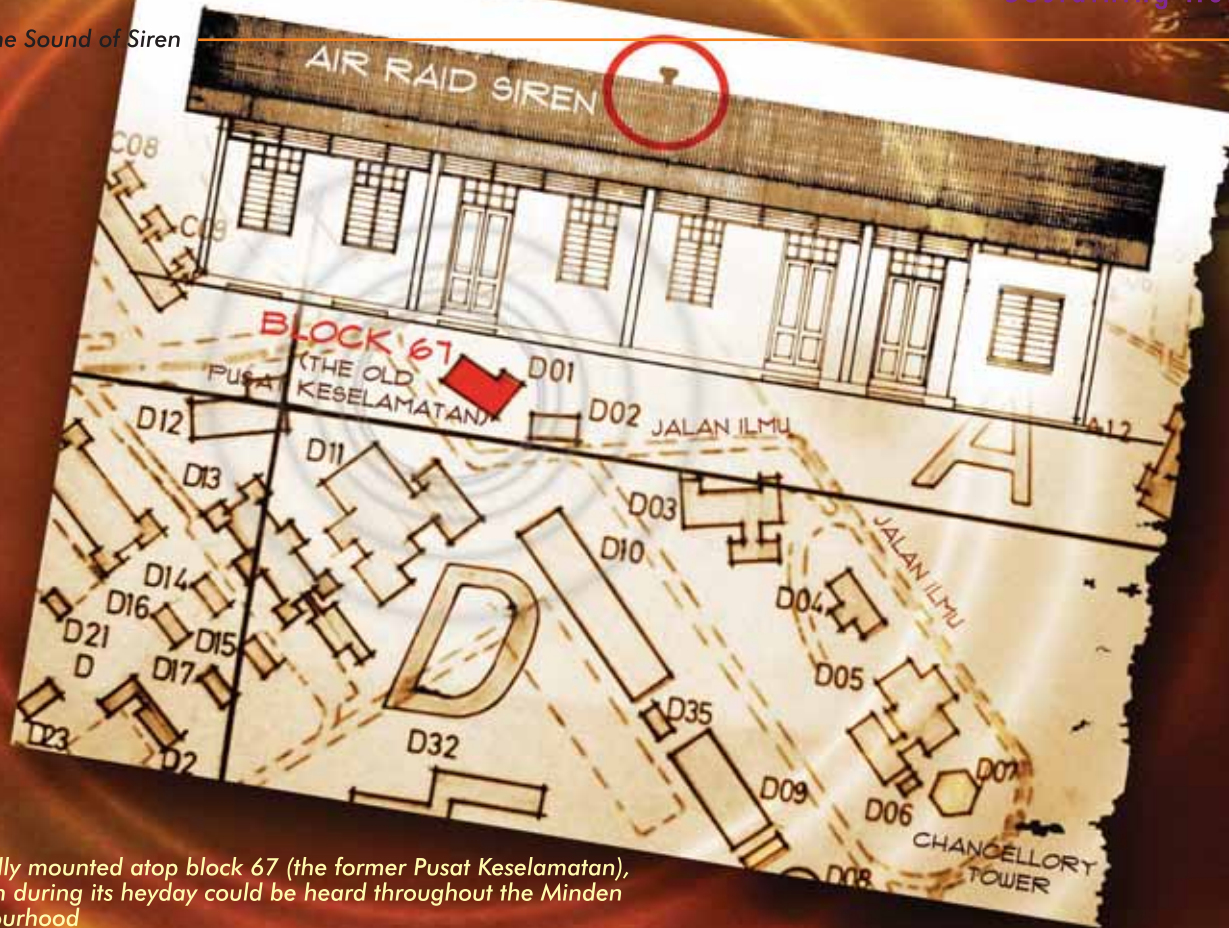


*Veteran, Syed Mohamad Sheikh Syed Ali, recalling his traumatic experience at the time of the air raid*

I asked him, "Did you hear any warning siren from the Minden Barracks?"

"No, the siren didn't sound or otherwise we would have been alerted of the air strike! A deafening roar rent the air and the ground shook under us," he recalled.

## The Sound of Siren



Originally mounted atop block 67 (the former Pusat Keselamatan), the siren during its heyday could be heard throughout the Minden neighbourhood

"Bullets from the machine-guns of the many Japanese aircraft whizzed above us, strafed across the Minden coconut grove and set a clump of trees ablaze near one of the kampong houses about 100 feet from our home. Thank God, it missed the army fuel depot at the nearby coconut grove which otherwise would have exploded! As I recall, no one was killed," said Mohammad.

Minden had a close shave from the bombing run but for some strange reason, the air raid warning was deafeningly silent. All of which goes to prove that the siren which sat atop block 67 (building D01) was perhaps not on 'standby' mode or possibly the army personnel at Minden had already withdrawn to take defensive positions elsewhere. Sure enough, the siren was inexplicably muted and fell into disuse as the war rapidly went in favour of the invading Japanese forces.

*This 16.5 kilogram cast iron siren is still fully functional in its weather-beaten dignity. It has a distinctive wailing sound produced from its spinning air intake rotary drum*



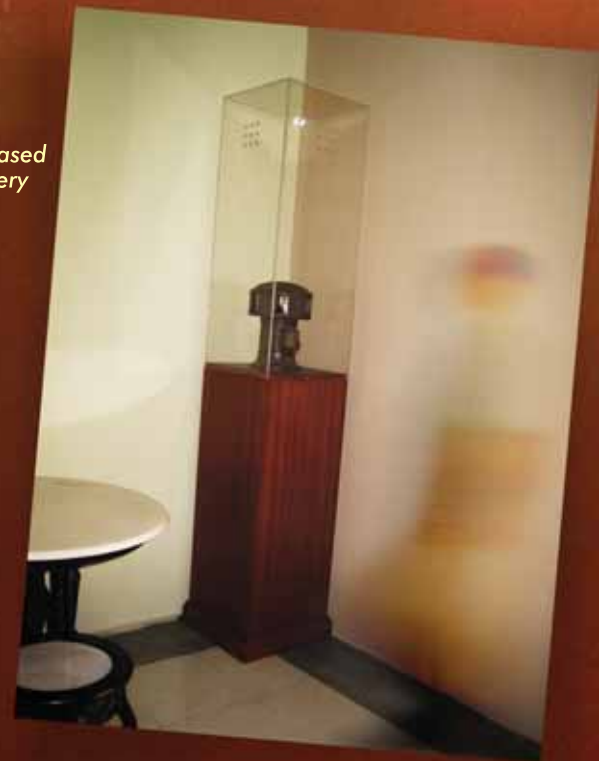
*The Sound of Siren*

*The School of Housing, Building and Planning restored and encased the siren which is now a permanent exhibit in Anjung Budi Gallery*

The story of the siren continued after the war. The siren provided years of meaningful service to the campus as it was intermittently used until the mid-'80s. For those who joined the Universiti in the later years, they would be startled by the high pitched screams of the siren announcing the time for breaking fast during the Muslim month of Ramadhan.


The campus authorities also took the liberty to digress from the stiff rules by joining in the New Year's Eve revelry by sounding the high decibel siren in the '70s. It became a tradition that many early students cherished. This dovetailed with the customary sounding of fog horns by ships in the Penang Channel heralded the festive occasion.

*The siren wailed its loud 'welcome note' for 20 seconds during the opening ceremony of Anjung Budi*



Gradually in the '90s, the siren fell into disuse and its history became a blurred memory. With the priorities of the Universiti's turning towards campus development and the students' preoccupation with academic pursuits, the siren faded into virtual obscurity. It lay forgotten all those years and during that time it served simply as a place for birds to roost.

The deafening silence was again broken when the siren was awoken from its slumber at 1600 hours on 25 March 2009 at the snip of the ribbon by Prof Tan Sri Dzulkipli Abdul Razak. This was during the opening ceremony of Anjung Budi. The newly renovated alumni house offered the siren a permanent home and if you ever hear the sound of the siren, you will know that Anjung Budi has reinstated it into full service, as in all its full glory of the past.

Visitors are forewarned. The siren might be reactivated this year. So stay alert! 

*Rusli Jamaludin is currently a lecturer at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, USM. He can be reached at [rj\\_hbpusm@yahoo.com](mailto:rj_hbpusm@yahoo.com)*

**W**ading knee-deep through mud in a mangrove swamp with an unquenchable thirst for the secrets it may yield, is irresistible to scientists like Dr Ong Jin Eong. This is how Ong has earned his nickname 'Mangrove Ong' from his colleagues and students. Although 'retired' he is still actively promoting the conservation of mangrove swamps which he said "not only provide valuable goods such as wood and fish but also vital ecological and other services such as sequestration of carbon, navigable waterways and prevention of coastal erosion."



On a field trip in Matang district

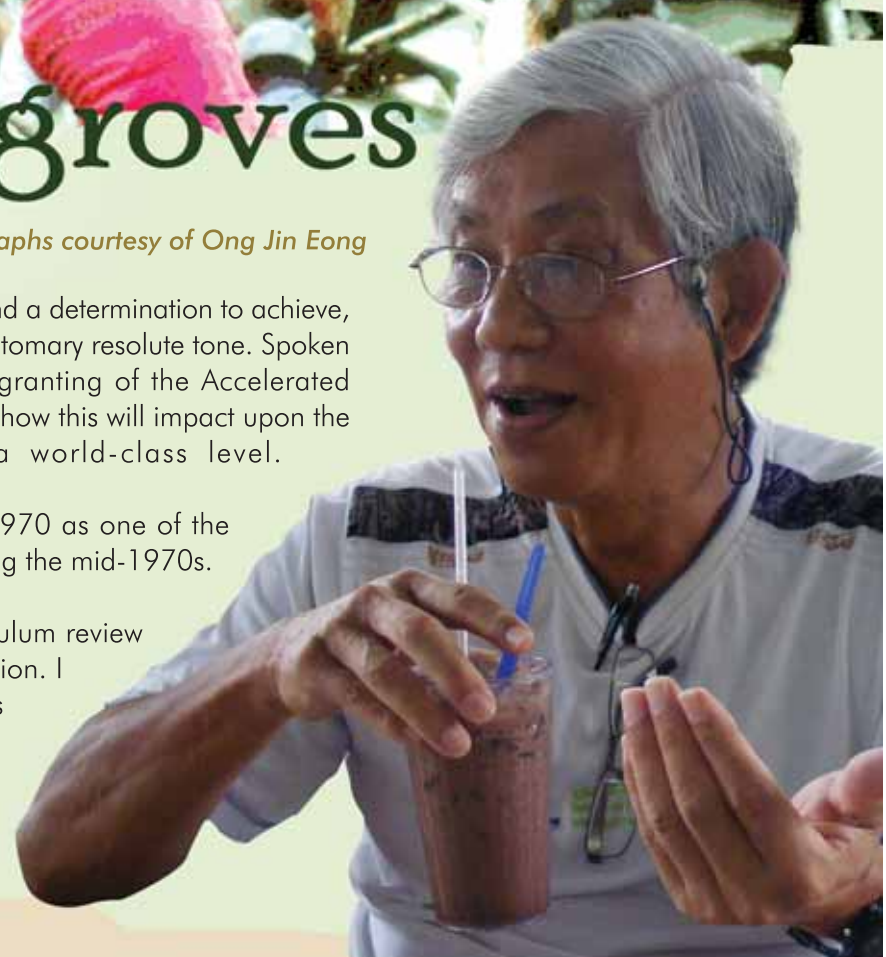
# Ong of the mangroves

Saw Cheang Kee and Yong Check Yoon      Photographs courtesy of Ong Jin Eong

"We need more people with a passion to do things and a determination to achieve, more so now with APEX in hand," said Ong in his customary resolute tone. Spoken like a true academician, Ong is referring to the granting of the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) status to USM and how this will impact upon the Universiti to raise its research profile to a world-class level.

Ong joined the School of Biological Sciences in 1970 as one of the pioneering lecturers and became Deputy Dean during the mid-1970s.

"Those years, I was involved in teaching and curriculum review besides the full spectrum of the School's administration. I had to assist the Dean in setting up new laboratories when the School moved over to Minden from its temporary premises at the Malayan Teachers College in Gelugor," he recalled.



Dr Ong (Photograph by Yong Check Yoon)

## Still Remembered

### Ong of the Mangroves

A chance conversation with another delegate at an international conference triggered his 'return' to research upon realising how much time in the School he had devoted to non-academic work.

"It was a wake-up call to revalidate my academic credentials," Ong explained. His field in ecology led to his passion for research on the mangroves.

In the School and later as Professor and Director of the Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies (CEMACS), his work on mangrove studies contributed to USM's reputation for research excellence. Good networking was developed with such international institutions as the Plymouth Marine Laboratory in the United Kingdom, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the University of Osaka and others. Ong also worked on cooperative projects with universities in Southeast Asia and occasionally runs training courses in mangrove ecosystems sponsored by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP).

In his clarion call, he said that about 63,000 sq km (or about one-third) of the world's mangroves can be found in Southeast Asia but he warned that this only constitute about two per cent of the land area. Despite its importance, mangrove swamps are still being decimated at an alarming rate: what you see today of the swamp is about half of what it was 50 years ago.

Ong identified three major threats to mangroves, namely population pressure that has invaded coastal zones, the large-scale harvest of wood chips for the production of rayon, and the development of shrimp aquaculture ponds.

He called on developing countries to conserve their mangroves on a sustainable-use concept such as the Matang Mangrove in Peninsular Malaysia where small areas of mangroves are clear-felled "in a patchwork manner, and allowed to re-grow before the next harvest". Citing Malaysia as an example, he warned that without such a sustainable-use concept, most mangroves in the country would be gone by the year 2020.

Ong and his team have certainly blazed a trail with infectious enthusiasm into the murky waters of the mangroves. It remains to be seen whether 20 or 50 years hence the mangrove will continue to flourish and help maintain the ecosystem along the country's coastline. 🇲🇾

*Saw Cheang Kee is currently with Alumni Liaison Office, USM. He can be reached at [sck@notes.usm.my](mailto:sck@notes.usm.my)*

*Yong Check Yoon is currently an editor in the Alumni Liaison Office, USM. He can be reached at [check\\_yoon@yahoo.com](mailto:check_yoon@yahoo.com)*



*A **tongkang** (barge) loaded with mangrove wood heading to a charcoal kiln*



*The fiddler crab is among the species supported by the mangrove ecosystem*



*The mangrove flower opens mainly at night and is bat pollinated*



*Mangrove swamps provide fishermen their livelihood*

A 1955 photo of Anwar having fun with nature

# One Water, One Air

Anwar Fazal  
Photographs courtesy of Anwar Fazal

Someone once said that the future is not some fixed destination out there waiting for us. It is a journey we take, and that journey, as well as the destination, changes us.

If planet Earth were 50 years old, it is estimated that in the last minute, the last 60 seconds, mankind has brought about so much devastation to the soil, the air, and the water that it can be said that an 'ecocide' is taking place.

A detailed study in Japan several years ago on past civilisations concluded that destruction of the environment was a fundamental cause in the decline of great civilisations.

Today, if an 'Intergalactic Commission' were to assess how we are managing our trusteeship of planet Earth, they will definitely be shocked at the structural violence we have inflicted upon the natural environment. The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) on climate, water, air, forest and soil deterioration and corruption will shame us. The toxic and nuclear terrorism we have unleashed will be damning us not for 'distinction' but 'extinction.' Both weapons of 'Mass Destruction' and weapons of 'Mass Corruption' are the twin terrors.

The late James Robertson called for a paradigm shift, from the HE (Hyper Expansionist) to the SHE (Sane, Humanistic and Ecological).

Is there a future? Is there hope?



Anwar, giving a 'street lecture' on history of local democracy outside the City Hall, Pulau Pinang

Firstly and sadly, we have to recognise that too many people are still in a state of denial with regard to the seriousness of our 'ecological crimes' and still have not woken up from that dream of 'conspicuous consumption'. We are hovering at a dangerous tipping point, too often blind to the danger that lies ahead

Secondly and happily, all over the world there are good people rising against this brutality against the planet. They work at the personal level to make lifestyle changes, to shape their community to be 'eco-friendly', to become advocates for a change in national policies on the environment and then globally they network to get global frameworks for a more sustainable world such as those on biodiversity and toxic chemicals.

This is what has been called by Paul Hawken a 'blessed unrest' - a world with a bubbling, expanding civil society movement working at all the five levels - personal, family, community, national and global. It is asserting itself, little by little, and is beginning to make a difference. There is the joyful spring of 'green movements' of islands of hopes and actions that make for real change.

Universiti Sains Malaysia is one part of this new hope and is fast becoming a leader in this journey in Malaysia. Its 'University in the Garden' and the 'white coffin' campaign (to fight toxic waste and plastics) are both bold and inspiring. Further, its selection as an APEX University based on its forward-looking and progressive agenda for a sustainable tomorrow is making it a model to be observed and to learn from.

Recently, USM was again honoured by being selected as the global secretariat of the Right Livelihood College (RLC), the capacity-building hub that brings together the wisdom and experiences of some 130 laureates from 57 countries. These are outstanding individuals who have been conferred the Right Livelihood Award or what is often described as the Alternative Nobel Prize (see [www.rightlivelihood.org](http://www.rightlivelihood.org)).



*The Right Livelihood College honoured  
USM as its global secretariat*

One Water, One Air

The College is hosted by the Centre for Public Policy and International Studies (CenPRIS),USM and will be promoting education, research, public understanding and practical activities which:

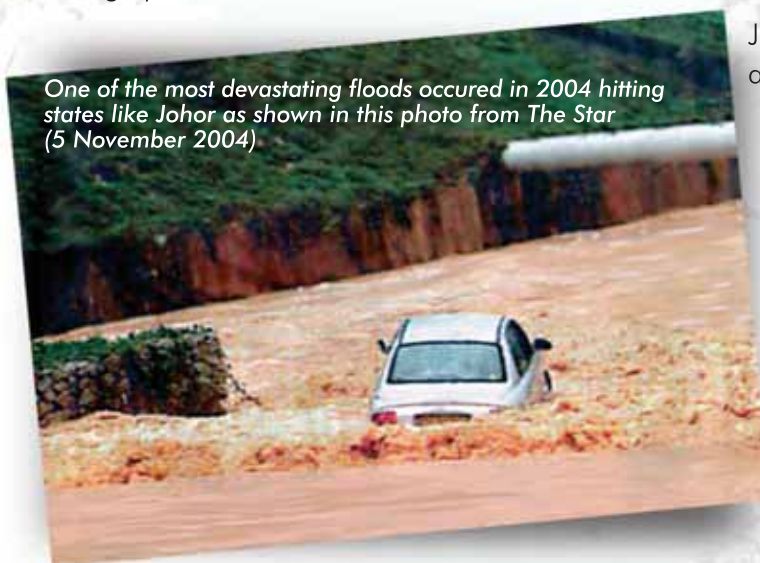
- contribute to a global ecological balance;
- are aimed at eliminating material and spiritual poverty; and
- contribute to lasting peace and justice in the world.

Specific programmes to be carried out at USM will include Laureates lectures, the provision of postgraduate fellowships, international seminars and workshops, the publication of monographs and popular booklets, the production of films on cutting edge issues and a series of days of action.

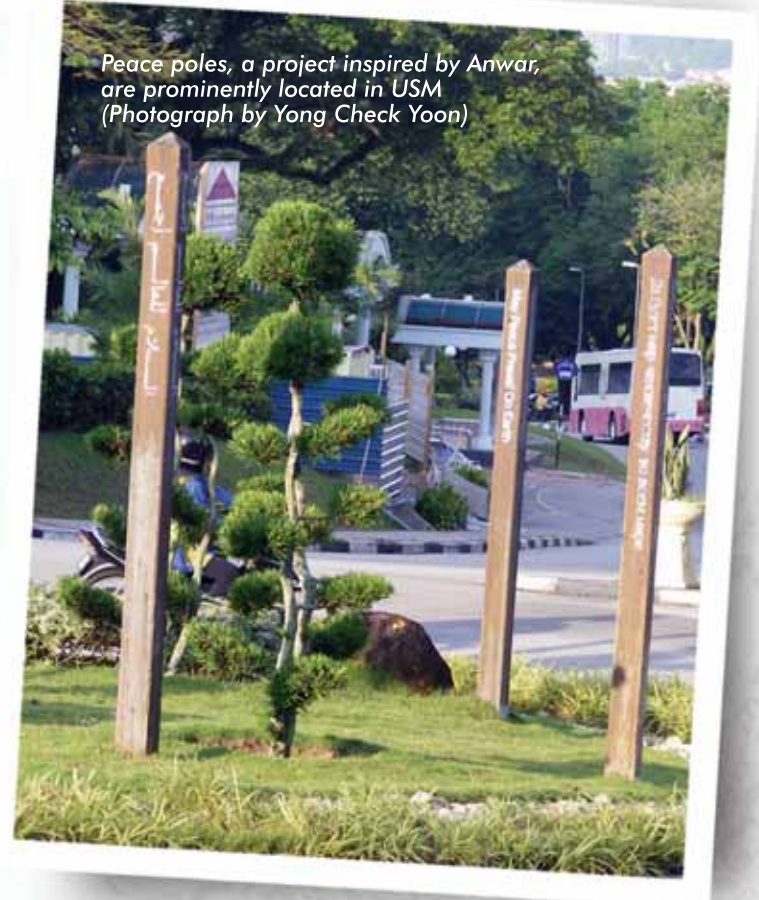
If you would like to be a part of the work of the new college and link with the 'Living Libraries' that are the Laureates and their skills, wisdom, vision and passion, do get in touch with us.

Be part of the energising ripples that will make a sustainable tomorrow.

As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "You must be the change you want to see."



One of the most devastating floods occurred in 2004 hitting states like Johor as shown in this photo from The Star (5 November 2004)



Peace poles, a project inspired by Anwar, are prominently located in USM (Photograph by Yong Check Yoon)

Join us in this exciting new journey for a better world and just remember these words:

*We all drink from one water  
We all breathe from one air  
We rise from one ocean  
And we live under one sky  
Remember  
We are one*

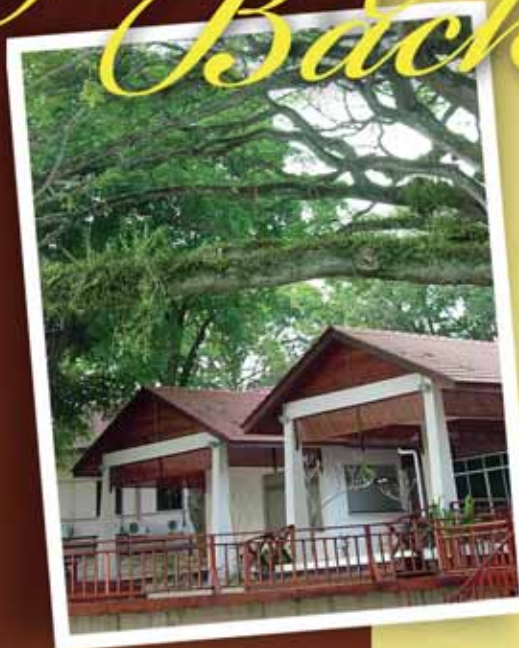


Professor Dato' Anwar Fazal can be reached at [college@rightlivelikelihood.org](mailto:college@rightlivelikelihood.org).



# It's Us!

## Giving Back



*A gift from your heart will certainly touch the heart of the receiver.*

*Let your gift begin at the Alumni Liaison Office so that it can help support the activities of our alumni members.*

*Sincerely*

Associate Professor Mohamed Talhah Idrus  
Chief Editor  
The Leader

### My Contribution

Yes, I wish to contribute RM \_\_\_\_\_ to the Alumni Endowment Fund.

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### Alumni Liaison Office

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2009  
WIBIARIES

# A DIFFERENT FINGERPRINT

Syahidah Akmal Muhammad  
B. Sc. (Chemistry) '03

Photographs courtesy of  
Syahidah Akmal Muhammad

Artwork by Rusli Jamaludin

Even in those days, when I could hardly tie my shoelaces without my mother's help, I remembered seeing people throw rubbish indiscriminately into the drains. "That is not right," I thought.

Amidst society's ignorance and disbelief about climate change and how our actions could affect the future of our environment, I vow to make a difference in my own way, no matter how small my contribution may be. Upon completion of my undergraduate studies in chemistry, I decided to pursue higher degrees in environmental chemistry, an interdisciplinary science of atmospheric, aquatic, and soil chemistry.

My interest which developed when I was doing my Master's degree where I monitored the levels of organic contaminants in the environment led me to the emerging scientific discipline of environmental forensics. In that process of monitoring pollutants, I was curious to know where the contaminants came from, who is liable for the contamination and should be held responsible for the clearing of the contaminated area.

With supervisor Dr Frew



### A Different Fingerprint

I recall one particular occasion when I saw an oily patch covering the shoreline of a beach where I did my sampling. Turning to my then supervisor, I asked, "What happened here and who did this?"

He replied crisply, "Only God knows."

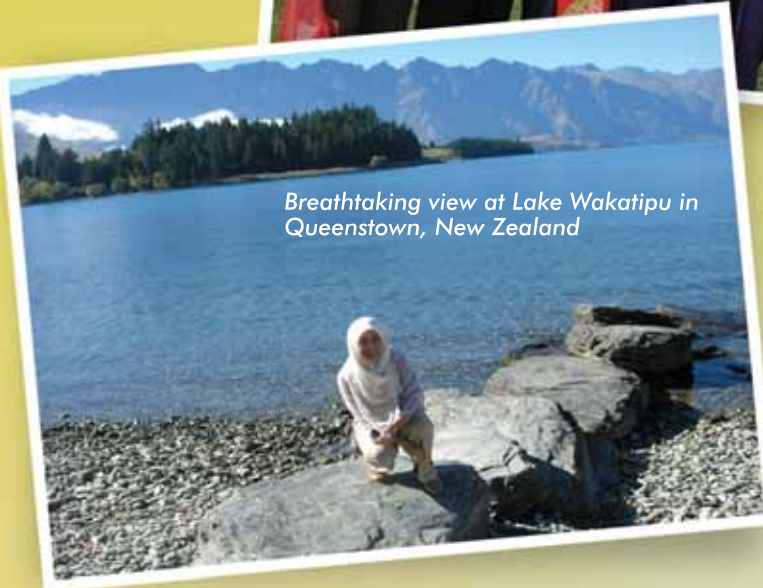
There must be a way to find out since my monitoring work was able to yield sufficient clues to answer some questions such as those. However, my questions went unanswered until I came across the relatively new field of study called environmental forensics. It is because of the systematic examination of environmental information to determine sources of chemical contamination, the timing of releases to the environment, the spatial distribution of contamination, and the potentially responsible party or parties involved.

Hence, environmental forensics can provide solid scientific evidence capable of withstanding legal scrutiny, public debate, or arguments. Bearing that in mind, I decided to focus on forensic fingerprinting for my doctoral degree.

*Celebrating graduation day with family and friends in 2006*



*Breathtaking view at Lake Wakatipu in Queenstown, New Zealand*



At the Chemistry Department, University of Otago, I am researching to develop a robust method to fingerprint oil spill contamination and correlating the contaminants to its sources. It is exciting to be at the front of advanced knowledge, doing research which is hardly talked about among Malaysian scientists and having the opportunity to work in a state-of-the-art laboratory headed by my graduate supervisor. Assoc Prof Dr Russell Frew.

Besides my academic pursuits, I do take time off to smell the roses and take in the freshest of fresh air. Other than the freezing cold Antarctic wind, all is good for me. In New Zealand, *Aotearoa* in Maori (the Land of the Long White Cloud), it is certainly difficult to find clogged drains. 🇳🇿

*Strict enforcement of the law and good environmental education result in clear and clean New Zealand waters (Photograph by Mohamed Talhah Idrus)*



# THE WEEKEND FARMER

Text and Photographs by Alec Chin  
B. Comm. '92

I was thrilled when I finally get the opportunity to highlight Poh Choy's farming story. The SMS reply from him was equally exciting, "...welcome. i like 2 share the hill with people who appreciate nature." The message had travelled half the globe to reach me as he was on his way to a meeting somewhere in the Middle East.

Chin Poh Choy, a humanities graduate and a Reserved Officers Training Unit (ROTU) mate of mine, is currently heading a marketing team in an international firm dealing with wood products. The high-flying job exposed him to many facets of agriculture and forestry-based industries, including issues on environmental impacts and sustainability.

"Apart from the frequent travelling, my growing up in a *kampung baru* (new village) in Selama, Kedah, had implanted in me the passion for farming, and eventually opted for 'organic farming' to promote healthy living," explained Poh Choy.

The sky has just cleared after a heavy downpour when we reached the hill top after negotiating his

rusty four-wheel drive along the winding road that leads to his orchard on a small hill named Bukit Selaya in Sungai Lembu, about 10 km from Bukit Mertajam town. Here is where Poh Choy has his dragon fruit plantation with sporadic plots of *pisang awak* (banana species), *durian* and *nangka* (jackfruit) trees. Noticing I was a little disturbed by the unkempt vegetation around the orchard, he quickly explained, "Relaxlah, in a balanced ecosystem, plants are naturally taken care by friendly predators and micro-organisms. The bushes serve as a 'biological control' and gnawed leaves are good indicators that the fruits are 'healthy' and fit to be consumed."



Poh Choy's farm on top of Bukit Selaya

Poh Choy passed me a freshly-plucked banana, "Here, try this." Indeed the organically grown banana tasted so much better. He then led me on a tour of his farm, pointing out that I might be stepping on animal and human waste in the process.

"Animal and human waste are the best organic fertilizer," Poh Choy explained. "I added enzymes to enrich the soil and the enzymes are produced from household garbage and plant discards. The essence of green farming is the complete recycling system, where each and every entity takes care of each other." Poh Choy said, beaming a smile.

We were walking through the dragon fruit plot when Poh Choy suddenly turned to me and pointed to a spot about 100 meters from where we stood.

"See, my privileged visitor...," he introduced.

It was a baby wild boar prying open a durian using its powerful jaws and it appeared unperturbed by our presence. "With it relishing my fruits means that they are safe and free of pesticides because animals are fussy eaters," he explained.



Rain or shine, Poh Choy insists on doing maintenance work at least once a week



Reaping **pisang awak** and durians, the fruits of his hard labour

The Weekend Farmer

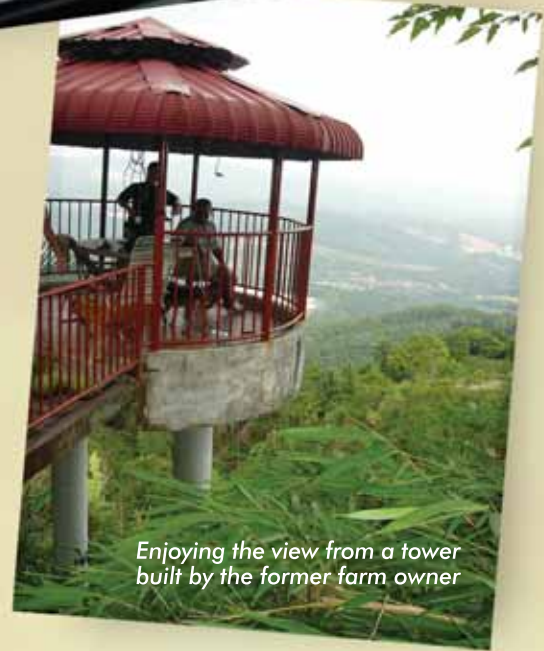
Poh Choy, however, pointed out that 'green farming' is not a bed of roses as it entails continuous research, maintenance and constant monitoring of the soil and plants. They are physically taxing and also time-consuming.

"My worst experience was to deal with these alone when my partners left because of slow returns and the need of tough labour," he said. "However, I believe that we have to stay true to our belief no matter what happen. *Biar putih tulang, jangan putih mata* (Better to be brave than to live in indignity), come on comrade, we learned it in ROTU!" Poh Choy playfully slapped me on my shoulder.

Being committed to his corporate job, Poh Choy reserved most of the weekends for his wife, two daughters, two sons and farming. He encourages his children to be involved in farming and is pleased that they share the same passion.



The road leading to the farm is accessible by 4WDs



Enjoying the view from a tower built by the former farm owner



Poh Choy's daughters take a keen interest in farming

When asked about the Return on Investment (ROI) of the farm, he said that the yields of the farm are for sharing with friends and neighbours. Poh Choy also donated some of the fruits to charitable organisations.

"After all, the produce is not big enough to make a profit," he explained. "Hash House Harriers are also given a treat to the fruits when they come after the runs just to chill out and enjoy the view."

Currently, Poh Choy is developing a 'green' community network to reach out to people who are interested in learning about responsible farming or dropping by his orchard just to get close to nature. He even named his farm as Bukit Selaya Eco Park. As we sat at the pavilion overlooking the undulating lush green valley with Kulim town in the far distance, mist started to roll in and blanketed the valley in a shroud of white. 🌄



Panoramic view of Kulim town from the top of the hill

Alec Chin is currently a designer at Timur Communication. He can be reached at [alec@timurcomm.com](mailto:alec@timurcomm.com)

# Enamoured by a NEW REALITY

Mohamed Talhah Idrus  
B. Soc. Sc. '74

Photographs courtesy of  
Nizam Mahsyar

*Meet Nizam Mahsyar, the geophysicist who became an environmentalist.*

*Nizam is now a full-time environmentalist, working with Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) since graduating with a degree in geophysics in 1999. He is completely contented trundling the wild and being with the locals.*

*Enamoured by a 'New Reality'*

*Roughing out in an orang asli hut is a normal routine for Nizam (second left) and colleagues*



One would wonder why any geophysicist would want to leave such an impressive field for a job with an NGO.

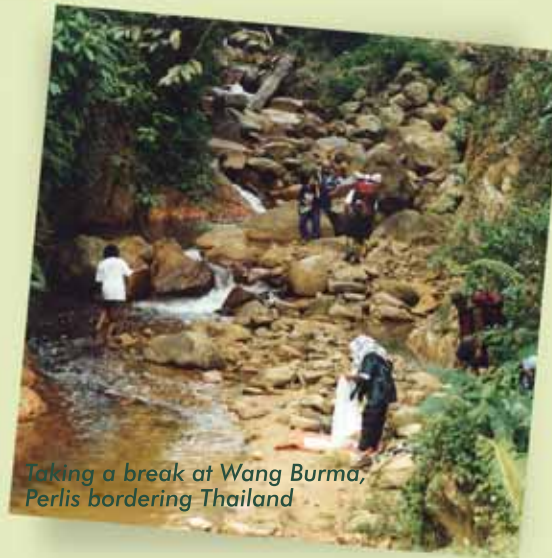
"It's a new learning curve; a real university," Nizam philosophised. "It is really satisfying, working with people, hearing their problems and advocating their rights".

Working with people means that one is on an ever expanding horizon. Nizam too has discovered that there are many issues that need to be wisely approached and tackled. From the woes of coastal fishing to those regarding toxic waste, Nizam has found that the average man needs to have his cause heard and addressed.

*Exploring Gua Kambing, Perlis during USM's Kelab Kembara (Explorers Club) trip*



He often acts as mediator between the public and policy-makers. This has drawn him into the international circle which share valuable information such as those relating to climate change which he uses to educate the locals.



*Taking a break at Wang Burma, Perlis bordering Thailand*

The change from geophysicist to environmentalist did not happen upon Nizam's graduation. It actually began much earlier during his student field trips into forests and hills. The trips must have triggered an eagerness to explore nature further. His active

participation in student organisations, in turn increased his awareness of the 'new reality' between man and nature.

*While still a student, Nizam climbed Gunung Tahan, Peninsular Malaysia's highest peak*





During a nine day trekking trip from Temenggor, Perak to Gunung Chamah, Kelantan with other expedition members in 1995

Enamoured by a 'New Reality'

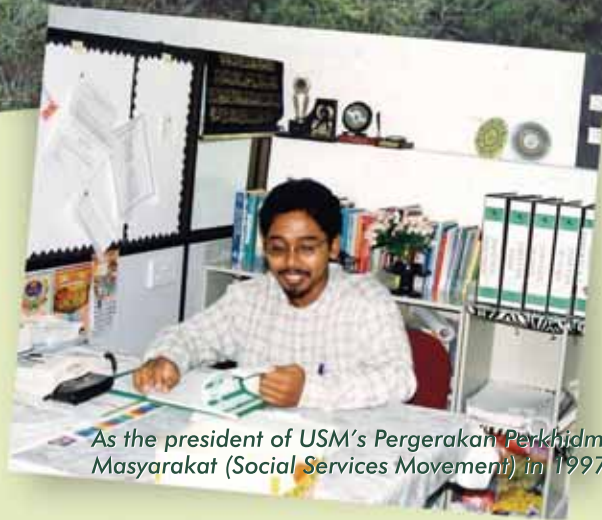
Although he may have left academia for 'the real world', he is still very much in touch with academicians who deal with the environment. He often comes to the USM Minden campus to collaborate with the scientists and educators in conservation project. However, Nizam regrets that most scientists are now removed from the 'new reality' that he is constantly in touch with.

"It's a shame that many environmental projects are getting too commercialised, and the researchers distance themselves from reality. They should spend more time with the people that the researches are trying to address," Nizam observed.

"The environment is in bad shape, but we cannot give up. We need more academicians and graduates to come down into the fields to help turn things around," he summed up. ▮

Personality

Overwhelmed by Banjaran Titiwangsa (the Main Range)



As the president of USM's Pergerakan Perkhidmatan Masyarakat (Social Services Movement) in 1997

Associate Professor Mohamed Talhah Idrus is currently a lecturer at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, USM. He can be reached at [tolamhaha@yahoo.com](mailto:tolamhaha@yahoo.com)

# SURVIVAL IN THE GARDEN



"WE MUST BE GETTING CLOSE TO DURIAN VALLEY"

(C)Rusli Jamaluddin 2009 [rj\\_hbpum@yahoo.com](mailto:rj_hbpum@yahoo.com)

# Passion's Reach

*Syazreen Sara Sukor  
B. Sc. (HBP) '05*

*Photographs courtesy of World Wide Fund for Nature*

*A trained elephant greeting the writer in Jeli, Kelantan*

*“The animals’ inability to speak human language does not deny them their rights for survival.”*

Most of us always assume that to work in the conservation line, especially for an international organisation like the WWF (as World Wide Fund for Nature is better known), we would have to be a genius-scientist, animal-loving, vegetable-eating person. I was not a genius (my brilliance has shone only a few times in my life), I was not a scientist (dissecting Barbie dolls does not count), I hate vegetables (except those in *nasi kerabu*) but I am one hundred percent... an animal lover. I am not into amphibians, insects and most of the reptiles. I basically have 2 things to offer WWF -my overflowing passion and writing skills. (Thanks to Robert Raymer, my Creative Writing class lecturer at the Pusat Pengajian Bahasa, Literasi dan Terjemahan)

Armed with only two miserable articles I wrote during my university days and my mum’s *du’a* (supplication), I applied for the position of a Communications Officer, Tiger Conservation Programme. I was overwhelmed when I was accepted. I have now been in WWF-Malaysia for four years and have never once looked back. I guess I always knew I was not cut out to do the ordinary and definitely would not be applying what I studied during my coursework at university.

I joined the School of Housing, Building and Planning in mid-2000 after completing my one-year matriculation at the university with high hopes; I wanted to change the world, clean it up and make it look better, especially through my eyes. I felt unfulfilled, incomplete and lost.

After graduation, I was even more confused. At that tender age, we’ve always been told we should know what we want and supposed to do in life, for the rest of our lives. I did not have a single clue, and I didn’t know where to start looking.

Passion's Reach

I then job-hopped – worked in a bank, a telecommunications company, and even a short stint at a shipping company, too short to even mention actually - while thinking about my road to self-discovery. When a friend of mine e-mailed me a job advertisement for WWF-Malaysia's Tiger Conservation Programme Communications Officer, I thought, "Why have I not thought of that before?"

That was how I joined WWF.

It took me more than a year to learn and get used to the fast working pace of the project and the organisation. I learnt on the job, slept a little less and worked on weekends (to my friends and parents' horror) but never regretted joining this fight.

Because I am in this line of work, people often have the perception that I would somehow feel indifferent since I have seen thousands of injured and dead wildlife.

On the contrary, it never gets better.

Guess who's inside the panda suit?



Tears still well up whenever I see videos or read about tigers shot, elephants injured by snares, wildlife carcasses and body parts seized by authorities. In a way, these motivate me to work harder, to reduce these atrocities.

As a communicator for WWF, I am also speaking on behalf of the wildlife. The animals' inability to speak human language does not deny them their rights for survival. If I could make one person refrain from eating tiger meat, or make him interested in an article on wildlife, that would be gratifying.

I have learnt so much over the years by associating myself with passionate people, not just in WWF, but in other conservation organisations as well, who had taught me to appreciate quirky animal and plant jokes. Certainly, conservationists are not boring. Colleagues who started as volunteers or interns a few years ago are now full-time staff. You cannot help but be affected by their enthusiasm for wildlife conservation.

Being the Communications Officer for the Peninsular Malaysia Tiger and Rhino Conservation Programmes, my views of the world have changed. For the first time in my working life, I am contented and I love my job! 🐼



Last day of matriculation at Desasiswa Gemilang in 2000

# Greening Young Minds

Saw Cheang Kee  
Photographs courtesy of CETREE

The Malaysian government had recognised the importance of energy conservation and the need to educate the public on the benefits of renewal energy when the country embarked upon its Eighth Development Plan (2001-2005). This was considered timely in view of the country's depleting reserves of fossil fuel whilst biomass, solar energy and other alternative sources could potentially be used to generate electricity.

Greening Young Minds



CETREE uses its modified vehicle to get children interested in renewable energy

Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak, helps to promote the use of cooking oil as alternative fuel in the CETREE vehicle

"Discussions were held between the Malaysian and Danish governments in the 1990s on possible cooperation in renewal energy. There was an agreement that a centre be set up in Malaysia to disseminate knowledge and provide training in renewal energy and energy efficiency," said Assoc Prof Haslan Abu Hassan.

"USM was selected to be the implementation body under the agreement and the Centre for Education, Training and Research in Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CETREE, pronounced as 'C3') began operating from the School of Physics. It was formally launched in July 2002 upon moving to the Eureka Complex where USM's holding company is located," explained Haslan who has been Acting Director of the Centre since March 2009.



Assoc Prof Haslan Abu Hassan

The Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) worked in partnership with USM by extending advisory and funding support to CETREE during the early years of its operations. Prof Kamarulazizi Ibrahim was involved with the initial set-up and co-ordination of the Centre's activities and helped guide its subsequent development.

The scope of CETREE's programme covers raising public awareness, producing education modules and professional training. The programme targeted primary and secondary schools, universities, energy professionals, and the general public.

According to Haslan, "For its first project, the Centre collaborated with the Ministry of Education to produce a co-curriculum text book for secondary schools promoting energy conservation and preservation of the environment by using renewal energy sources."



Prof Kamarulazizi Ibrahim

To enhance impact in schools, workshops were conducted to train senior science teachers as instructors to coordinate awareness programmes and disseminate information among pupils.

The need to engage industry is not overlooked. CETREE has collaborated with the Malaysian Energy Commission in training and certifying appropriate technical staff as energy managers. This represents the professional group responsible for monitoring electrical use and associated safety aspects in their workplace.

*The bus is a one stop facility on educating the public about renewable energy and energy efficiency*

Campus Life

### Greening Young Minds

"The mobile unit used for roadshows impacts strongly on the minds of the public by reinforcing CETREE's message regarding renewable energy," said Haslan. Its van is powered by a modified engine which runs on cooking oil solely as fuel.

A recent addition to its inventory is a minibus which is jointly funded by the Danish government and the Malaysian Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications. It similarly runs on cooking oil supplied by Sime Darby Berhad and is an innovative showcase of government-university-industry collaboration to help maintain a green environment. The company concerned has also been sponsoring several of the important activities undertaken by CETREE.

However, he acknowledged it was not all smooth going, "Cooking oil is currently priced around RM2.50 per litre, substantially higher than petrol or diesel. It is therefore not practical to promote cooking oil as an alternative fuel as long as this price disparity prevails."

Both the minibus and van can still run on used cooking oil but the oil would have to be first filtered. Cooking oil as a fuel is not yet widely accepted by society especially among less developed countries because it is an edible item. Many are thus averse to it being used as a means for powering vehicles.

On CETREE's public awareness programme, it has worked alongside a leading electrical company to help promote energy saving in the media. CETREE has experience in carrying out energy audit on buildings




occupied by government agencies. There are plans to explore with the private sector on producing and marketing solar energy panels for households at competitive prices.

Haslan said, "We have been maintaining a high profile through participation in the National Science Carnival since 2002. Our contribution consists mainly materials and technical advice in support of such events as the solar car race project, designing a solar cooker and setting the criteria for building an energy efficient house."

Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), CETREE will be producing a co-curriculum textbook for primary schools to help expose younger pupils to the benefits of renewal energy and energy efficiency. The Centre received RM4.7 million for this project with an outreach involving more than 8,000 primary schools.

"This builds upon the success of the earlier secondary school textbook project. We feel encouraged that our efforts on energy efficiency are paying off as the cost of producing this textbook is met from a trust account contributed by the Independent Power Producers!" exclaimed a jubilant Haslan.

In the longer term, CETREE aspires to be a national centre of excellence supporting the University's sustainable approach to its campus development in accordance with the APEX (Accelerated Programme for Excellence) objectives. 

*CETREE regularly conducts roadshows to create awareness*



*Saw Cheang Kee is currently with Alumni Liaison Office, USM. He can be reached at [sck@notes.usm.my](mailto:sck@notes.usm.my)*



Text and Photographs by  
Mohamed Talhah Idrus  
B. Soc. Sc. '74

# Biauwak



## The Other Residents

They may be the most 'watched' wildlife in campus, the true other residents, roaming relatively free in and around the campus lakes.

Maybe due to their menacing look, stout features, and arrogant gait, they are not very well-liked. I am talking about the infamous *biawak*, or *bewak* to those in North Malaysia. They are so disliked that the word *biawak* is also used to degrade a person.

## The Other Residents

**Biawak!**

A large **biawak** swallowing a piece of bone



A fish feeding on bread becomes itself a prey

In the Minden campus, say “*Biawak!*” and you will see those of the fairer sex suddenly freeze in their steps. Such is the power that this creature commands.

But like all the other residents in the campus they have a specific role to play. As scavengers, they dispose leftover meat and especially carcasses very effectively. They devour dead tortoises, terrapins, fish and even their own species that the lakes yield.

There are two species of *biawak* in the Minden campus. While one species congregate around the lakes, another species spend more time on dry land living on tadpoles, bird eggs found in lowly built nests. Chicks of nightjars which hatch on the ground are especially vulnerable. They have even been seen to devour large chunks of bones!

The absence of few higher predators contribute to their large population, raising them to the status of pests, when they stray into buildings, especially residential ones.



A rogue **biawak** being corralled for relocation

## The Other Residents

Biawak!

By keeping a low profile, they camouflage themselves effectively



A snake-like stalker



The ability to inflate itself makes the **biawak** a good swimmer

Their only noticeable predator is the *lang kawi* (brahminy kite) which often swoop over unsuspecting juveniles. As a matter of fact, their abundant presence may have contributed to the thriving population of the raptor.

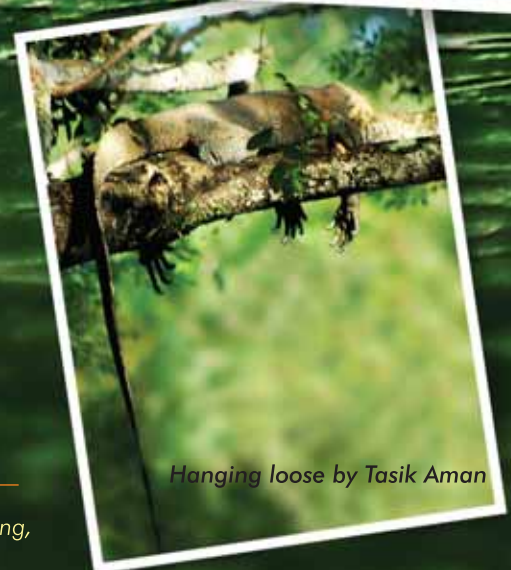
Though their demeanour may be repulsive to many, they can actually be interesting to watch, especially when they flaunt their excellent swimming prowess. They are also opportunistic. When visitors feed the fish in the campus lakes, the *biawak* would swim in and pounced on the fish from behind. Once they had their fill, a few of these reptiles would find large branches to sleep on and hang their limbs loose.

Yet despite all the amusing antics the *biawak* will most probably remain an unwelcome resident. 🐢

The predator becomes lunch for a *lang kawi*



Hanging loose by Tasik Aman



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Artwork by Rusli Jamaludin

# HOPE in the HUB

Hamima Dona Mustafa  
B. A. '73

Photographs by Mohamed Talhah Idrus  
B. Soc. Sc. '74  
and Rusli Jamaludin

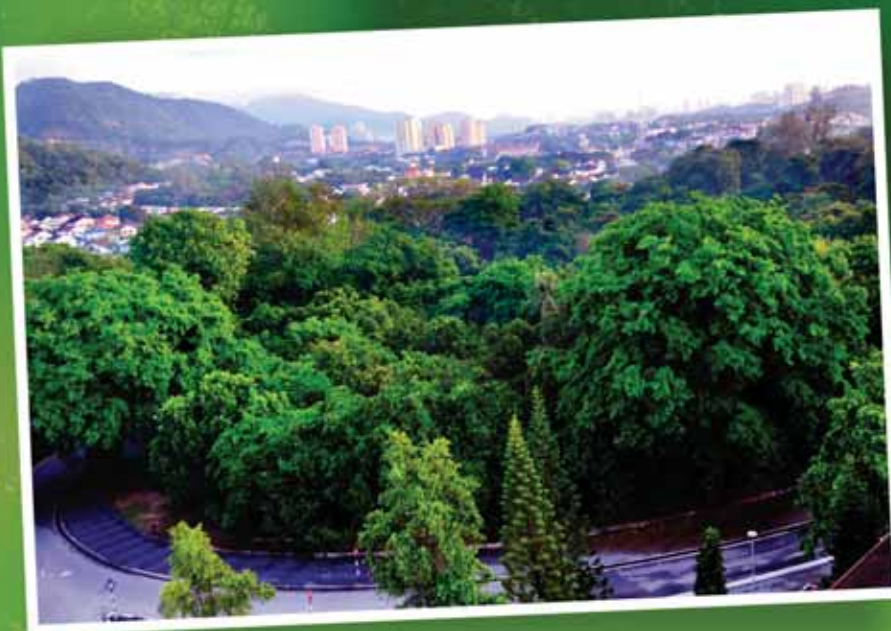


Eco-Hub visitors' centre

“Yes, let’s go eco,” declared Prof Asma Ismail, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation Division, USM after an intensive ‘course’ and a tour of the ecosystem trail of the Minden (main) campus.

The ‘going eco’ effort marked the culmination of the innovative learning concept that was first mooted in the late 1980s. The ‘arboretum’ project as it started then was headed by the Vice-Chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak when he was a lecturer in the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences. This project had been conceptualised as a park which the public can visit, learn and appreciate the value of traditional medicinal plants in line with the concept of University in a Garden.

“We are also planning to have an eco-trail, which covers the valley, the Eco-Hub and the heritage buildings nearby, and recover a small piece of wetlands for the park,” he announced earlier this year.



A bird's eyeview of the Durian Valley where the Eco-Hub is located

Hope in the Hub

This Eco-Hub development has the fervent support of Assoc Prof Mohd Saad Othman who has been tasked to restore, preserve and improve the Minden campus' ecosystem. An equivalent proverb in the Malay language which would aptly describe Saad's reception of the announcement would be *Pucuk dicita, ulam mendatang*, "As I was wishing for some young succulent shoots of edible plants, a plateful was put in front of me."

It had bothered Saad, who used to roam the campus' five hectares of 'orchard area' with friends, during his matriculation days of 1977, that some of the trees, native to the area's ecosystem, such as the *keriang dot* (an antidote) and *binjai* no longer existed. Similarly, *jarum emas* (with aphrodisiac values) and *keladi agas* (a cure for shingles) have disappeared. Was the demise due to natural factors, he pondered. Conversely, some exotic plants that had been introduced to the area were thriving. Most troubling were the invasive species, posing a threat to the native ones and upsetting the ecological system.

The massive buttress roots hints the age of some trees in the Durian Valley



(From left) A shallow, clear stream would irrigate the forest after a heavy downpour. The **telinga musang**, an edible mushroom. **Cempedaks** are in season around July.

Ever since he returned to lecture at the School of Pharmaceutical Sciences in 1997, Saad was determined to reintroduce those endangered species. He explained with much enthusiasm, "The whole campus would form the ecopark which will be managed by an ecoteam, consisting of the combined skills and expertise of several departments in the university. This team will be aided by USM staff and students who will be the ecofriends. They will provide help, such as clearing up the valley for an ecotrail, when necessary."

It was envisioned the Eco-Hub would be at the focal centre of this ecopark. The concept of ecosystem coexisting alongside herbal research and development was put to Asma in 2008 and the Eco-Hub became a reality with funding for new environmental programmes.



The **sewah** (Sparrowhawk) uses the underside of the waterpipe to scan for prey

*Telinga kera* mushroom

Hope in the Hub



Adenan (right) and Saad explaining the flora found in the small forest.


The Leader editorial team, accompanied by Ecohub research officer Adenan Jaafar and other staff members, recently traced the ecotrail of the Durian Valley. Adenan's vast knowledge in traditional medicinal plants came in handy as we followed the trail.

He directed our attention to the various trees explaining their properties and values. "This," he said, pointing out to *telinga gajah* (elephant's ear), "is an antibiotic."

Holding a leaf from another plant, Adenan continued, "This is *kayu manis hutan* (wild cinnamon) which is an important ingredient in medicinal cure." Further along the trail we came upon some other types of medicinal plants where healthy new shoots were growing.

"This means that the environment is suitable for the growth of such plants," he explained.

Adenan and his team have thus far documented 50 species with data stored in the computer to facilitate speedy accessing for various research projects.

Indeed by 'going eco' USM has set the benchmark of an environment-friendly campus which can make people become truly aware of the importance of conserving flora and fauna for sustainability. 

Campus Life

## Where Kings Reside

*It is the largest green patch in the Minden campus, especially to the pioneers in 1971. The young men who explored this green lung made an exciting discovery... there are durians here! It was too tantalizing to be kept a secret. Words spread fast. The place was soon dubbed the Durian Valley. Even though Lurah Burung (Valley of the Birds) was 'officially' posted as its name in the early '80s, Durian Valley could not be dislodged from the minds and parlance of many.*

*The three fruiting trees have always stolen the show. During the pioneering years, the reputation of this king of fruits not only drew 'crowds' into the valley, but also made it a strong campus icon.*

*Imagine a thousand hopeful students with dreams of relishing on free durians! They would devise creative antics to monopolise harvesting rights and be the first to reach the fallen fruits. Some would flash lights under white robes to scare others off, while a few would even climb the trees and kick down the unripe fruits.*

*Security officers eventually guard the place. As students slowly shy away from it, poachers filled the vacuum.*



Dr Hamima Dona Mustafa is currently a lecturer at the Women's Development Research Centre (KANITA), USM. She can be reached at [hamima@usm.my](mailto:hamima@usm.my)

Artwork by Rusli Jamaludin

# Muniandy's TURF

Nor Rafizah Md Zain  
Photographs by Rusli Jamaludin

**"The concept invites us to preserve the campus greenery as part of efforts to develop an intellectual world/setting. We need to kindle the spirit and practice of conserving the campus environment in the hearts and minds of each campus citizenry, in fact, continually nurture the love and appreciation of the grandeur of nature and the ecology as bequeathed to us by God"**

- University in a Garden

Photograph by Mohamed Talhah Idrus

As I write this article I can see tiny blossoms of yellow floating past my office window, heralding April when *pukul lima* (Rain tree) and *angsana* trees are in full bloom. Many of the roads in USM are carpeted with bright yellow flowers of the *angsana*. The *pukul lima* trees are laden with feathery pink-and-white flowers and brown pods dangling from the branches.

Towering Anjung Budi is the knoll where the six-storey Chancellory building - reputed to be the highest point in the campus - stands and in the surrounding area are landscaped with red palm trees (also known as lipstick palm), green pine trees, Tecoma shrub, *sepit udang* (Bird-of-Paradise) and spider lily.

The plants and trees are well tended to and the person who cared for this 'turf' is the 55-year-old P. Muniandy who has been with USM for the past 34 years. You can recognise him from his mop of wavy hair, sideburns and a meticulously trimmed moustache working among the plants that he had over the years tended with love and passion. He knows every plant within his domain and its status just like a concerned parent.

Muniandy quit school after completing his Standard Six education to cultivate *rastali*, *emas* and *tanduk*

bananas at the Brown Estate (the plantation is now developed into a housing estate known as Brown Garden). He then joined USM as a general worker in January 1975.

Reminiscing the early years of the Minden area, he said: "Jalan 10/11 of Minden used to be a stable in the '60s and the place was known to the locals as Bukit Kuda (Horse Hill). In the immediate vicinity was Brown Estate where my father worked and I made use of the Estate's land to cultivate bananas. From banana cultivation I managed to earn some money to supplement my family's income, especially my being the eldest of three siblings."



Work becomes tougher during the flowering season



Muniandy used to work on this plot of land behind the bungalow once occupied by David Brown's descendants



## Campus Life

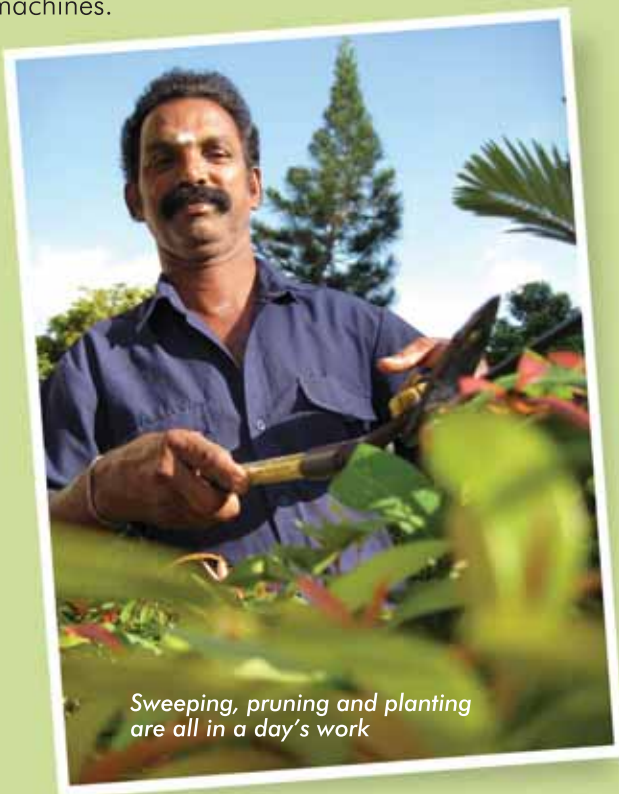
### Muniandy's Turf

Muniandy has a younger brother who is also now working in Desasiswa Gemilang, USM, and one elder sister. His interest and skills in gardening was developed while working with USM.

"After finishing my job in USM at 5.10 p.m., I will do part-time gardening at several houses in Minden including the house of our ex-staff, Dato' Shahrom Ahmat" said Muniandy.

There were 30 grass cutters on the first day of work - 10 January 1975 - and he was one of them.

"During that time, we had to use sickle to cut the grass. The people around here in late 1970's will normally see us swinging the sickle over the head" said Muniandy, swinging his arm in an arc to describe how the sickle was used to cut the lallang (known as 'blady grass' in Australia) without grass-cutting machines.




*Sweeping, pruning and planting are all in a day's work*



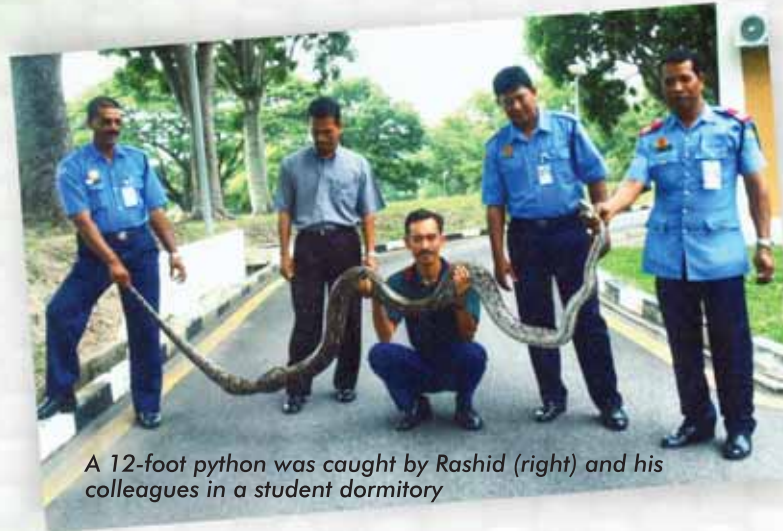
*A 1992 family photo (Photograph courtesy of Muniandy)*

After spending three years as a grass cutter, he successfully changed his job to become a cleaner. However, open spaces drew him out apply a job as a gardener which he managed to clinch in 1998. Since then Muniandy and a fellow colleague Andrew are responsible for landscaping and gardening around the Chancellory building. Life is very much better for gardeners such as him as grass-cutters with motorized machines will get the grass trimmed in just a fraction of the time using sickles.

Gardeners like Muniandy have helped USM cultivate the University in a Garden image through their dedication. Although he might be a gardener, Muniandy's three children have grown out of his shadow. Two of them are now working in USM while another is studying in Universiti Utara Malaysia. 

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It was not the intention of Abdul Rashid Sulaiman to earn the respect of his colleagues and friends as *Raja Ular* (King of Snakes). He started working in Minden Barracks in 1967 for a contractor installing electric cables before being employed by USM as a janitor for Desasiswa Cahaya seven years later. He became a security guard in 1979.



A 12-foot python was caught by Rashid (right) and his colleagues in a student dormitory

At other times, there were complaints about snakes found near the Vice-Chancellor's residence and other parts of the campus which he was called upon to handle. Over the years he has caught more than 30 snakes and they included *ular sawa* (reticulated python), the non-venomous *ular tanah* (sunbeam snake), grass snakes and venomous *ular senduk* (cobras). There were occasions when people sighted snakes lazing under the sun by the roadside grass verge, particularly

His first encounter with the slithery kind took place behind Desasiswa Permai in the '80s and it was not out of passion but rather it was in the line of duty.

"I felt that it was my responsibility to catch snakes and I was quite nervous about it then but eventually got used to it," Rashid told *The Leader*. "Somebody lodged a report with the Security Department that a python had devoured a cat."

Subsequently a group of the guards together with Rashid went to Desasiswa Permai and caught the 12-foot python.

near the slope overlooking the golf putting green and in the Durian Valley.

"There was a record catch for me to bag five grass snakes in the Guest House area," Rashid said. He added that non-venomous types such as these would be released outside the campus and away from inhabited areas while the poisonous ones would be handed over to licensed pet shops.

Rashid has over the years trained his son Mohd Rashidi Abdul Rashid and another guard Ghaffar to identify poisonous from the non-poisonous ones, how to 'read' the 'body language' of snakes and the correct method of catching them.

# Hiss Love

Yong Check Yoon

Photographs courtesy of Abdul Rashid Sulaiman

Hiss Love

"For example, cobra does not necessarily strike when it raises its head but a strike is imminent when it retracts its head slightly," Rashid explained.

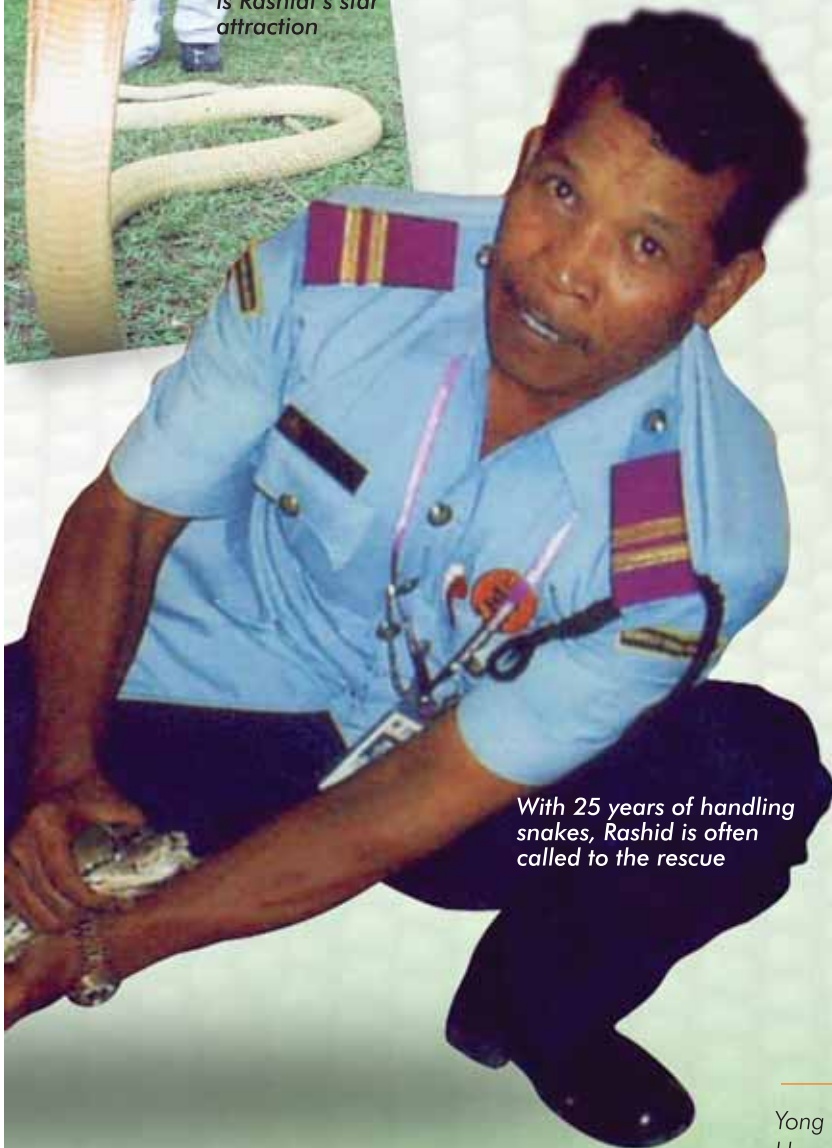
He added that a rope inserted through a pipe would be used to put the noose over the neck to capture a snake alive, something that he tries his best to do.

However, there was only one occasion that he was forced to kill a king cobra in front of Balai Islam because it tried to escape despite several attempts to capture it alive.

Rashidi joined USM as a security guard recently and he has been following his father's footsteps since a teenager.



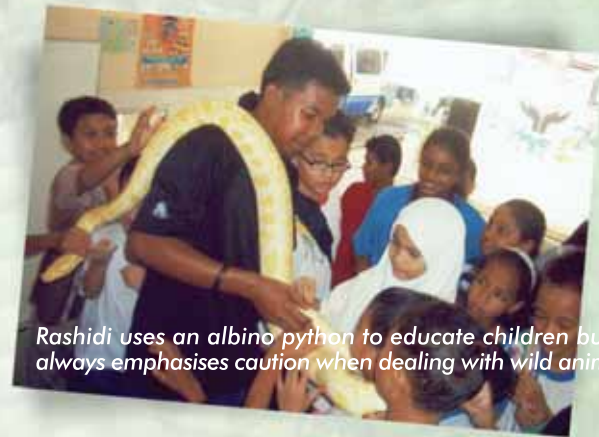
The king cobra is Rashidi's star attraction



With 25 years of handling snakes, Rashid is often called to the rescue

"From my experiences, I realised that I have a flair for handling snakes too. Besides my father, I learned the 'tricks of the trade' from a colleague who is licensed to catch and organise snake shows by helping him out," Rashidi said.


Over the years, Rashidi and his colleague have performed at numerous snake shows at places such as the Alma Jaya Primary School, the Taman Tun Sardon Village Safety and Development Committee Hall, and the Pulau Pinang Marine Police Department.



Rashidi uses an albino python to educate children but always emphasises caution when dealing with wild animals

"If one is to encounter a snake, it is best to avoid it," Rashid cautioned. "Do not attempt to find out whether it is poisonous or otherwise. For the inexperienced it is difficult to tell the difference between the two types from a distance. It is always risky to hazard a guess."

Rashidi added to his father's statement that probably the person would be in near panic and therefore should not do anything rash. It is more likely that any sudden movement will provoke the snake to strike, thinking that it is under attack. He also said that sprinkling sulphur on the ground is one way to deter snakes.

With his impressive experience in catching and performing with these reptiles, there is little surprise how Rashid had earned the nickname *Raja Ular*. Often when others cringe with fear and revulsion from the mere sight of snakes, the father and son team would rush in like a cavalry to the rescue! 

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Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal  
B. Sc. '07

Photographs courtesy of Mahfuzah Othman

**T**he Youth Agenda of the First East Asian Seas Youth Forum was a catalyst of change for biology students Mahfuzah Othman and Mervin Low Ze Han. It was held in mid-December 2006 at Haikou City in Hainan Province, China.

The participating youths were empowered by the *Forum* to uphold the protection and management of the environment, particularly the seas of East Asia.

"We were motivated by the *Forum* and decided to establish a club to educate people about the environment," said Mahfuzah Othman. "With the help from Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Students Affairs and Development Division Prof Omar Osman, we revived the Environmental Club of USM for a project to create awareness among the campus community.

From that point, Mahfuzah and Low were then advised to work with the Co-ordinator of Healthy Campus Associate Prof Dr Lee Lik Meng who put them through to work with other groups involved in the 'white coffin' project. 'White coffin' is used to describe Styrofoam boxes that looks like miniaturized coffins.



Artwork by Alec Chin

Bury the Coffin



Getting the message across at the Sungai Dua gate

“We were the first university in the country to go all out with posters, talks and pledge cards on the campus and the surrounding area,” she said. “With the success we then went to the USM Engineering and Health Campuses before proceeding to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.”

This campaign was aided by Student Representative Council, Community Service Programme (Rancangan Khidmat Masyarakat) and Tzu Chi Youth Collegiate, a Non-Governmental Organization involving in charity and environment.

Styrofoam is known to leach out toxic chemicals into food and many of these are known to be hazardous to health and the reproductive system, and also a probable carcinogen. Moreover, Styrofoam takes about a million years to degrade at dump sites as compared to paper (between two to five months) or aluminum cans (200 to 500 years). These are the prime reasons why the ‘white coffin’ project was undertaken.



Mahfuzah (Photograph by Nor Rafizah Md Zain)

“Subsequently we launched the ‘Container Campaign’ whereby we encourage students and the campus community to bring their own food containers,” Mahfuzah said.

From this campaign the banning of use of the ‘white coffin’ came about as a campus project and it was launched on 7 January 2008.

“It is difficult for us to talk about environmental issues as many people are not bothered by them,” Mahfuzah explained. “But when we talked about how polystyrenes (of which Styrofoam is one) can cause cancer, our listeners then showed keener interest to participate in the campaign.”


After the launch of the campaign, the ‘white coffin’ project was extended to all cafeterias and students were approached to educate them on the hazards.



2008/2009 intake pioneered the use of reusable containers courtesy of the Alumni Liaison Office

The campus community then introduced biodegradable eco-packs that were made by oil-palm by-products. Some of the regulars of takeaways started to bring their own containers while others preferred to enjoy their meals in the cafeteria instead.

“There was a positive change and there are always some diehards who resisted the switch and we would ask them why they wouldn't want to opt for safer products,” Mahfuzah said.

She added that it is normal for opinions to differ, but what is correct cannot be denied. However, Mahfuzah recalled what an environmental officer of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) said during his lecture: “When we manage environment, we are actually managing humans.” It is true that it is us who need to change our behaviour so that, as Michael Jackson sings in “Heal the World”, the world be “a better place for you and me”. 

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Artwork by Mohamed Talhah Idrus

# CATS' SOCIETY

*in*

# CLAWS in Concert

*Text and Photographs by  
Mohamed Talhah Idrus  
B. Soc. Sc. '74*

Cal's Claws in Concert

## *The Duet*



*...I came along,  
I wrote a song for you  
And everything you do  
And it was called yellow...*

*(Coldplay, Yellow, 2000)*

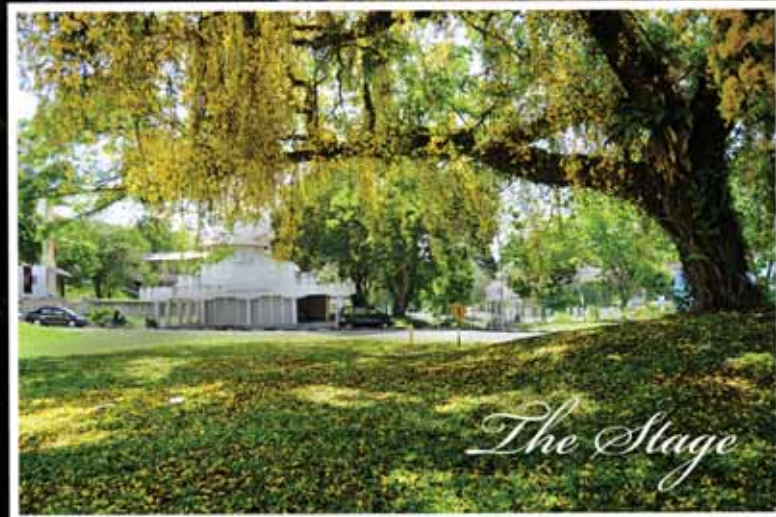
All who have seen it would agree that it was one of the greatest performances anyone could have witnessed.

This annual concert was staged outside Panggung Sasaran. It was a truly amazing 24-hour exhibitionism of beautiful arrogance, a symphony of yellow blooms serenading every passer-by. In March, since 2004, without practice silent music would suddenly erupt, filling the strategic campus corner with yellow on green. Then, after four days, the 'music' began to fade as the blooms of the cat's claw creepers dropped to carpet the grass leaving the vines which covered the *pukul lima* (rain tree) tree scraggly and untidy. The symphony is over though the performer remains.

An encore? Wait for another year. **L**

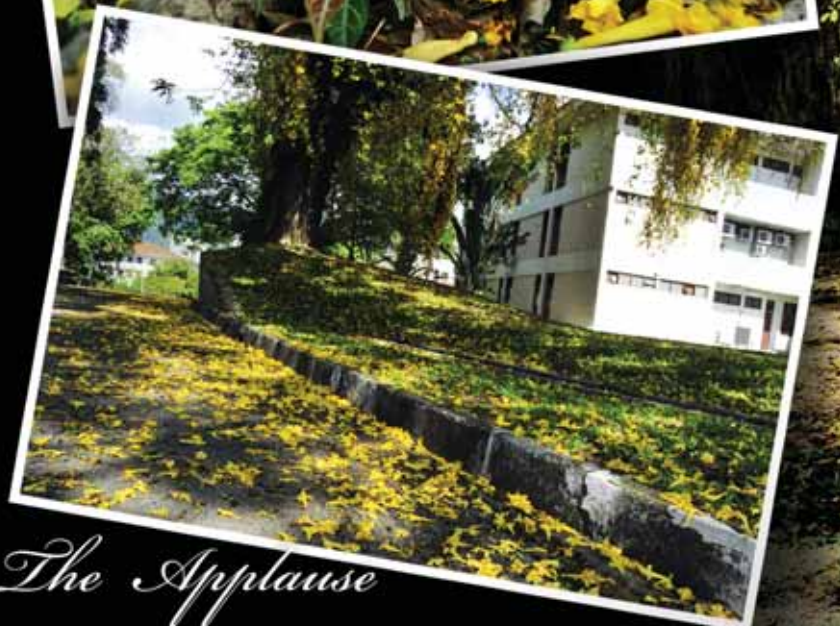
Minden Memories

## *The Centre Stage*



## *The Stage*

## *The Backstage*



## *The Applause*



Minden Memories

Cat's Claws in Concert



*The Lingering Audience*

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# Pearls from Plants

Haslina Haroon

Illustrations by Rusli Jamaludin

Malay literature draws heavily from the environment and from elements of nature, and this can perhaps be observed most clearly in Malay proverbs. The *buluh* (bamboo), the unassuming *serai* (lemon grass), the *padi* plant and the *tebu* (sugarcane plant) are among some of the plants mentioned in popular Malay sayings. Even the *lalang* (blady grass) and the *keladi* (yam) have secured a place in Malay literature through Malay proverbs, although they are often mentioned in less complimentary ways.

The *rebung* or bamboo shoot, the basis of the motif much favoured by Malaysian batik designers and a popular ingredient in many Asian dishes, features prominently in Malay sayings. The pliable nature of the bamboo plant lends itself to the well-known and often-quoted saying *Melentur buluh biarlah dari rebungunya* (bend the bamboo while it is still a shoot). A similar saying that carries the same meaning is *Sedang rebung baik dipatah, jadi buluh melepuh jari* (Break the bamboo plant while it is still a shoot; once it is fully-grown you will develop blisters if you try to do so). *Rebung* is also popularly used to symbolise the young, as evident in the saying *Rebung tidak jauh dari rumpunnya* (the bamboo shoot does not grow far from the clump), the meaning of which is also carried by another Malay saying *Bapak borek, anak rintik* (If the father is spotted, the son will be speckled). Interestingly, this saying has an equivalent expression in English which also draws from elements of nature, albeit one that is foreign to Malaysia - "The acorn does not fall far from the tree".



The bamboo has many uses, among others, as a cane and fishing rod whereas the shoot is used in cooking and as motifs in batik sarongs



The *padi* plant whose scientific name is *Oryza sativa* - the source of the Malaysian staple food - is used, like the *rebung*, to signify goodness. *Menyisip padi dengan lalang*, literally “to mix the rice plant with the blady grass”, is one such example, with the rice plant used to symbolise the good and the blady grass the bad. The rice-plant-blady grass combination is seen again in the saying *Tanam lalang takkan tumbuh padi* (If you plant the blady grass, never will padi grow out of it). This saying has an English equivalent which, like its Malay counterpart, is also rooted in agriculture: “As you sow, so you shall reap”. The meaning carried by this Malay saying is also represented by the English saying that you cannot “gather figs from thistles”, which draws from biblical tradition. The association between *padi* and goodness can also be observed from the saying *Padi masak, jagung mengupih* (both the padi and the maize plant have matured). Here, both the *padi* and the maize are used to symbolise not only continuous good luck but also the yielding of good profit.

The *serai* and the *tebu*, like the *padi* plant, have also had the good fortune of being bestowed with positive qualities. The Malay saying *Serumpun bagai serai, selubang bagai tebu* is often used to signify strength in unity, drawing on the way the plants grow. In the Malay proverb *Tebu takkan pahit rasanya* (real sugarcane would not taste bitter), the perennial grass is again associated with the positive. Carrying across the meaning that a really good person is not likely to indulge in vice, the proverb is among the many that pays tribute to the sugarcane. Proverbs also has a way of teaching us about the botanical world. This is perhaps best exemplified by the proverb *Diminta tebu, diberi tembarau*, which defies translation to some extent, as *tembarau*, also known as *gelagah*, *temerau* and *teberau*, is one of the many species of the sugarcane.



**Tua-tua keladi, makin tua makin menjadi** is a Malay proverb to describe the lust which increases with age in a man just like the itch caused by the matured yam

We are again introduced to the wonders of the botanical world through the Malay saying *Seperti birah dengan keladi*. Similar to the previous example, this proverb also perhaps cannot be adequately translated, as *birah* (giant yam) is actually a type of *keladi*. It is fitting then that the proverb is often used to signify likeness or similarity. The *keladi*, however, has had the misfortune of being associated with the negative. *Tua-tua keladi, semakin tua semakin menjadi*, for example, is a proverb that carries a range of meanings but is most often associated with the lustful desires of a man which becomes worse as he gets older. The negative connotations of the *keladi* are further strengthened by

the saying *Buang daun keladi, berselimut daun birah* (Discard the yam leaf and cover oneself with the giant yam leaf). If in the previous proverb the *keladi* is associated with a lustful old man, in this proverb the *keladi* is likened to a bad wife. The *birah* suffers a worse fate, as it is used in this proverb to mean 'a woman that is even worse than the bad wife'.

There is much that we can learn from plants in our own environment. They not only feed us, sustain us, clothe us and heal us, but perhaps most importantly, they also teach us. ▮

**M**ovies on environmental issues have become an increasingly popular theme since the '70s. My earliest memory of which was a 1973 apocalyptic sci-fi movie *Soylent Green* which depicted the future of our planet of depleted resources caused by global warming and overpopulation. However, environmental issues highlighted in the movies were often thought of as a concoction of paranoid ideas of what would become of the world.

# AVERTING AN APOCALYPTIC FUTURE

Yong Cheek Yoon



Aerial view of a destroyed residential area with rubble and people.

Overpopulation leads to foothill development, courting disaster such as soil erosion and landslides. (Source: [www.bbcatlover.blogspot.com](http://www.bbcatlover.blogspot.com))

Terms such as global warming and population explosion were then fresh from the mint. Environmental pollution was a term unheard of. It was a time when Malaysians were still enjoying haze-free days and with a weather that ran almost with clockwork precision according to the seasons. We, Malaysians, bought our curries in recycled milk tins and food in tiffin carriers. Toys were mostly made from wood or galvanised iron sheet. For washing, we have the good and environment-friendly lye soap.

Then came plastics, mostly Bakelite (for electrical appliances use) and polyethylene, in the late '70s or early '80s and Malaysia was transformed. They helped to fulfil what sci-fi writers had prophesised of environmental pollution. Electrical fans, for example, are not made to last as long as the G.E.C. models of yesteryears. Many of the modern electrical appliances coax consumers into a 'use-then-throw' mentality, thereby aggravating the situation. Things were no longer recycled as it appears less viable to get them repaired. It was only in recent years that the habit of recycling is being inculcated but at a painful pace as compared to the amount of trash we dispose daily, especially plastics that will remain non-degradable for at least hundreds of years.

Upon reflecting on the sci-fi genre of those early years, few of us would have associated the movie *The China Syndrome* with the

Sci-fi *Soylent Green* (1973) depicted a grim future (Source: <http://www.moviewallpapers.net>)

tragedies at the Three Mile Island (Pennsylvania, USA) nuclear reactor in March 1979 and again in Chernobyl in the Soviet Union in April 1986. Ironically, *The China Syndrome* was released just 12 days before the Three Mile Island disaster. In fact there was the first case of a partial meltdown in the world involving an experimental nuclear reactor at Chalk River, Ontario, 27 years before and the term 'China Syndrome' was coined in 1971.

'China Syndrome' was coined from the concept that during a total nuclear meltdown, the products of the molten reactor core will flow downwards through the containment building in the United States, then diametrically across the Earth crust, reaching China on the other side of the planet.

Besides taming nuclear reactor threats, world population had burgeoned from 1.3 billion during the start of the Industrial Revolution circa 1850 to the current 6.4 billion. According to the United Nations estimates, world population is expected to touch 8.9 billion in 2050. Population growth comes when people have longer life expectancy and lower birth mortality with better healthcare, along with other factors.



According to the estimates of population expert Lester Brown, the Earth can accommodate 10 billion people if their food-consumption level is equivalent to an average person in India. However, it can only feed about 2.5 billion people with an average food-consumption as an American. Lester claimed that at the current population the Earth is already stressed out in the production of food. *Soylent Green* envisaged the time when the dead is processed into high protein wafers. Although the movie is a fiction, it carries a very grim warning about the ramifications if we continue to populate the planet like rabbits.

Thick haze enshrouding this region has been almost a yearly recurrence because of peat fires. It has been estimated that up to 2.57 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide was released into the atmosphere in 1997 alone. This would be equivalent to 13-40 percent of the average global output of carbon dioxide from fossil fuel. As we know, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere helps to trap heat in what is known as Greenhouse Effect, leading to global warming and climate change that we are experiencing now and the effects of which the apocalyptic movie *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) showed on an exaggerated scale and rate. Nevertheless documentaries such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2004) and *The 11th Hour* (2007) helped to drive home the point that it is our responsibility to hand over a planet with a clean bill of health to our future generations.

**The symbolic impact of humankind on Earth in *The 11th Hour* (2007)**  
(Source: [lotushaus.typepad.com](http://lotushaus.typepad.com))



Deforestation and animal poaching has become subjects of movies such as *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988) or *Fire on the Amazon* (1993). Currently some 12 million hectares (about the size of North Korea) of forest in the world are being cleared annually and this is almost 36 per cent of the total land area of Malaysia. In Malaysia, about 140,200 hectares of forest are lost every year since 2000 and this would be roughly equivalent to the size of the Kuala Lumpur and the state of Pulau Pinang combined!

Despite having the Protection of Wild Life Act as early as 1972, there were numerous loopholes that enabled poachers to circumvent them. Although there are organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (known as World Wildlife Fund when it was established in 1961) and Sahabat Alam Malaysia that did a terrific job in environmental protection and education, it is next to impossible to stem out the lucrative international trade. It was early this year when Malaysia was ranked among the top 10 illegal smuggling hubs in the world, specialising in transporting pangolins, birds and clouded monitor lizards.

USM was conscious of the importance of the environment and wildlife since its establishment. The campus has been a home to many animal and plant species that have made the sprawling campus ground their home. You can also spy upon regal kingfishers and lately the Brahminy Kite hunting around the area too. It launched the 'University in a Garden' project in 2001 and has banned the use of Styrofoam containers which has been nicknamed as 'white coffin'. ♣

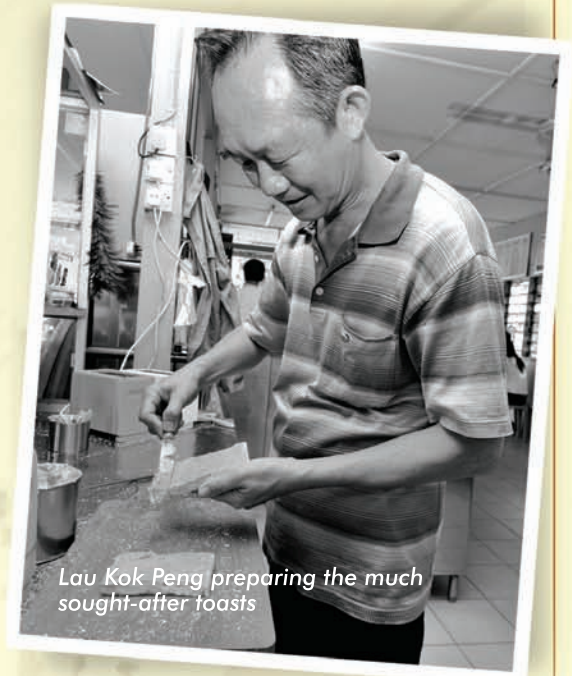
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It is the third generation of the Lau family operating in this nondescript half-timber coffeeshop for the last 40 years at Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah (Sungai Tiram area), about 1 km from the junction that leads to the Penang International Airport terminal.

Despite having an unimpressive and ordinary looking façade, one could not miss it whenever Joo Leong Café is open for business because one can see cars, including posh ones, parking along by the road curb around the place.

Lau Kok Peng, aged 54, started working for his father in 1960. Kok Peng who was a teenager then, learned the skill of producing perfect buttered toasted *roti* (bread) and getting the half-boiled eggs right. Eventually Kok Peng who took over the business after the retirement of his father introduced *nasi lemak* (rice cooked with coconut milk and eaten with curry, deep fried anchovies, and selected dishes) and fried *bee hoon* (rice noodles) to the breakfast items.

"During the early years we had to toast bread slices over charcoal fire and ensured that the slices are crispy while maintaining an even golden brown colour without getting charred," he said. "Since the late '90s we have switched to using electric toasters."



Lau Kok Peng preparing the much sought-after toasts

# Roti bites



Yong Check Yoon     Zulkifli Osman  
Photographs by David Chew



## Tanjung Tuck

### Roti Bites

Kok Peng roped in his son Swee Chin, 25, to help run the business four years ago. The coffeeshop serves breakfast from 6.30am to 11am and dinner with seafood porridge and noodles on the menu from 6pm to 11pm.

"We serve only buttered toasted *roti* and half-boiled eggs for breakfast and normal beverages," said Kok Peng. He added that his breakfast menu does not serve *roti-and-seri kaya* (a rich custard made with coconut milk, sugar and eggs) fare that most other places do.

He recalled the coffeeshop being located next to the vast Ban Hin Lee coconut plantation, fronting the two-lane road in the late '60s. In 1972, eight multinational corporations set up operations at the newly established Bayan Lepas Free Trade Zone and it helped boost the business of the coffeeshop.

"During the early years we used to sell a *kole* (mug) of *kopi-o* (black coffee brew) for 10 cents," Kok Peng added.

When the road was widened as the Free Trade Zone expanded, the original coffeeshop had to be demolished and reconstructed in the present location.

"It used to be there when it was just a two-lane road," said Kok Peng, pointing to the road divider in front of the coffeeshop that bisects Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah which has widened to accommodate a total of four lanes.

A common breakfast set consists of two slices of buttered toasts, a half-boiled egg and a cup of steaming hot *kopi* (local coffee with sweetened condensed milk) or *kopi-o*. The 'secret' of his breakfast lies in the fact that he uses



Yong, an early bird, waiting for the famed breakfast set

imported butter to spread on the *roti* that he ordered fresh from a regular bakery. Even his coffee powder used is supplied by a supplier who roasted coffee beans according to a recipe used over the years.

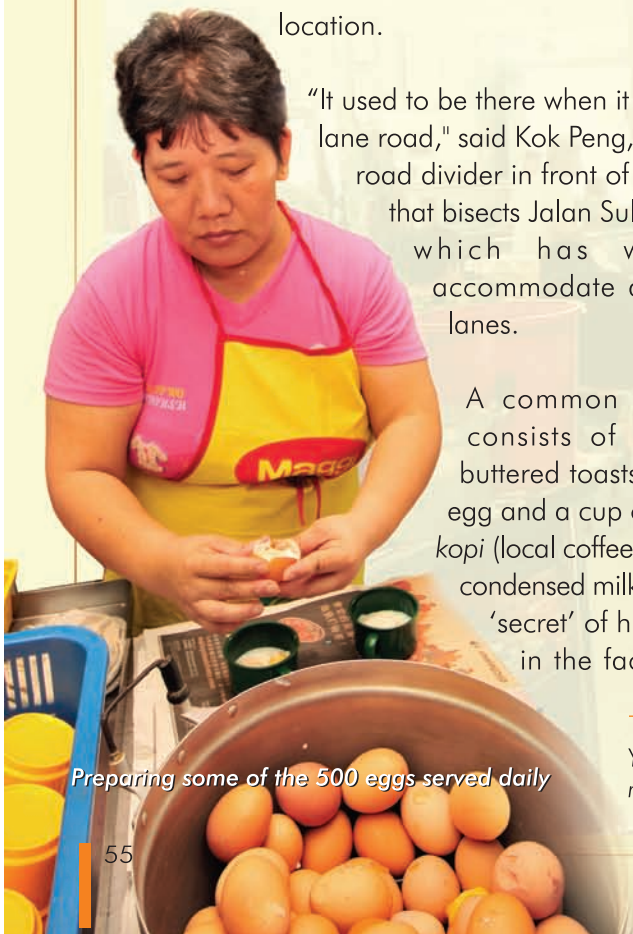
"When we switched from charcoal to electric toasters, we bought different brands and models to test them out before deciding which one of them is most appropriate," Kok Peng explained. "It was not only being able to toast *roti* but has to be heavy duty as well since we may need to toast up to 960 slices daily."

For the basic menu he has to offer, Kok Peng said that he uses more than 1,200 blocks of Australian butter on the 240 loaves of *roti* and the 13,000 eggs he orders every month. We shall explore a little more of the figures out of curiosity. In order to produce the monthly consumption of 1,200 blocks of butter (let us assume, each weighs 250 gm), it takes about four good cows to produce 303 kg of milk to manufacture the 10 kg of butter to spread on 108 slices of *roti* cut from the nine loaves daily! Assuming that one hen can lay about 300 eggs per year - with modern technology of course - it takes about 650 dedicated hens to do the job of supplying the eggs every day.

At the pace the customers are making a beeline to the coffeeshop, it is apparent that retirement is far from Kok Peng's mind. It also means that the cows and hens will be kept busy the entire year. ▮



The butter that makes the toasts irresistible



Preparing some of the 500 eggs served daily

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# Arts (Education) 1982

## The Pioneers



ABD MAJID  
ABD GHANI



AMIAH  
HASSAN



AMINAH  
AWANG



CHAN MEI  
YOKE



CHAN THIO  
HAO



CHENG SWEE  
SEAM



CHONG PIT  
YEAN



CHUA LAY  
TIN



EWE CHUAN  
SENG



FATIMAH  
OMAR



GOON  
SIAUYEN



GUMBANG  
PURA



HAMIDAH  
HUSSIN



INSON  
DERANI



JENIRI AMIR



JISO RUTAN



JUITA  
SANAWI



JURIAH  
BAHALI



KOH GUAT  
SOR



KOK FOONG  
PENG



KUSALA  
KUMARI  
SARANGAPANI



LIAO LEE  
LIAN



LIM POH  
ANN



LIM SU SEE



LOH ENG  
HOE



LOW CHO  
NGOH



MADIDAH  
MHD  
RASHID



MAIMUNAH  
MOHD SIDIN



MARFO'AH  
SAARANI



MAZMIN  
MOHD



MD RAZI  
MAHMUD



MICHAEL  
CHOONG  
ENG HOCK



MOHAMAD  
ARSHAD  
A BAKAR



MOHAMAD  
GHAZALI  
MAT SALEH



MOHAMMAD  
ZAKI RAJIKIN



MOHD FAUZI  
MAMAT



MOHD NOOR  
CHE A RAHMAN



ROAINI  
JAAFAR



ROHAYATI  
ABDULLAH



ROKIAH SAAD



ROSIDAH  
ABDUL SHUKOR



SAFIAH  
AHMAD



SALMAH LEE



SAM PUI  
CHENG



SANNEE JAID  
PARKER



SITI ZARINAH  
CHE OMAR



SOTHERLINGAM  
RAMANATHAN



TAJUDDIN  
MD NOOR



WAN AZIZAH  
WAN MUSTAFFA



WARDAH  
OMAR



WAT PHAIK YOONG  
@ NURHAYATI  
ABDULLAH



WAZIR  
MUSTAFA



WEE CHAI CHIN



WEE LEE CHU



WONG LEE  
HOON



WOO TAI KWAN



YASIM MAT  
SAAT



ZALINA AHMAD

# A String of GS

There is one thing surer than the rain would fall ... if it had not been the goodness and generosity of our alumni and the University, Anjung Budi would have remained an idle dream. For that, the Alumni Liaison Office (ALO) is grateful for being able to construct a great place where its members can gather to network and promote alumni welfare.

Costing at RM1 million, the clubhouse Anjung Budi was designed and built with ecologically friendly features in-line with USM's environmentally sustainable policy in mind.

"Besides harvesting rainwater for the watering of plants, its light bulbs are energy-saving type and the building's ceiling was designed for optimal ventilation even in hot weather," said ALO Manager Sharifah Munirah Syed Mohamed.

She added that the building is named Anjung Budi to signify the generosity shown from the donations by the alumni through the USM Alumni Association (AUSM). The university and the ALO also contributed to the project.

By 1989 when AUSM was formed, USM had produced more than 14,000 graduates from a cross-section of disciplines in the sciences and arts. As graduate numbers continue to increase over the years, ALO was then established in 2001 to complement the efforts of AUSM fast-tracking closer networking and promote alumni welfare. USM now has 98,000 alumni.

"The situation gives rise to an aspiration among alumni for a common venue to congregate, a place where all can proudly identify themselves with," said Sharifah.



Anjung Budi was conceptualised in 2006 to meet the need for a space to enable USM alumni members to network, conduct intellectual discourses especially experience sharing among its members and involving current students, the launching of books and social events.

Amidst much pomp, Anjung Budi was officially opened by Vice-Chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak on 25 March 2009. Despite being a week day, it drew in a crowd of 250 participants who were greeted by the wail of a restored air raid siren when Dzulkifli snipped the purple ribbon across the main glass door.

The event was marked with the performance by Tabula Rasa - a USM alumni music band formed in the '70s. For this one of the rare occasions that these alumni went on stage and let their hair down to sing, dance and joget.

A cafeteria at Anjung Budi serves the alumni, the university community and visitors with regular events to be held on its wooden terrace. The opening of Anjung Budi, with a floor area of 6,503 sq m (70,000 sq ft), marked a new chapter for the ALO but it would never have happened if it were not for the generous donors.

Photographs by Yong Check Yoon



### Convocation

The University's 39<sup>th</sup> Convocation ceremony was held on 25 March wherein 800 graduates received their scrolls from the Chancellor, DYMM Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail. Of this number, 364 were postgraduate students. Dr Concepcion Campa Huergo, President of Finlay Institute, Cuba was conferred the honorary Doctor of Science in recognition of her contribution towards children's health and her lead role in developing the meningitis B vaccine.



Photograph by Mohd Fairus Md Isa



### Branding Success

USM has received the prestigious BrandLaureate Award 2008/2009 under the Corporate Branding, Best Brands in Education-Tertiary Category. Prof Ahmad Shukri Mustapa Kamal, Acting Vice-Chancellor, received the award on behalf of USM from the Prime Minister at a presentation ceremony held in a prominent Kuala Lumpur hotel on 31 March.

### Nobel Laureate Lectures

USM was honoured by the visit of two Nobel Prize laureates. Prof Sir Martin Evans (left photo) from the United Kingdom delivered a public lecture on 23 February entitled "The Origins of Embryonic Stem Cells". The other public lecture, "Biomedical Science, World Health and World Peace" was given by Prof H. Robert Horvitz (right photo) from the United States on 18 March.



Photograph by Mohd Fairus Md Isa



### Reader's Digest Asia Trusted Brands 2009

USM was selected to receive the Trusted Brands 2009 award from Reader's Digest on 5 May. The award recognises USM as the institution of choice among Malaysian universities based on a survey conducted by Reader's Digest involving 43 categories of listed products and services. This survey covered seven countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region to determine the most trusted brands among consumers.

Photograph courtesy of Public Relations Office, USM

### Hi-Tea by Alumni Association USM (AUSM)

The AUSM Executive Committee (Exco) 2009-2011 hosted the Deans of Schools, Alumni Chapter Presidents and invited guests to a hi-tea reception held at Anjung Budi on 9 May. The occasion enabled the newly elected AUSM Exco to build cordial ties and discuss various ideas with members of the campus community that will contribute towards furthering the interests of the Association.

Photograph by Mohamed Talhah Idrus



## Wayang

The charity screening of *Wayang*, directed by Prof Dr Mohamad Hatta Azad Khan (B. A. '77) and produced by Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) was held at Dewan Budaya on 31 March to raise funds for Gaza victims. Earlier in the day, three of Hatta's books were launched at the Literature Section in the School of Humanities: *Muzikal Kampung Baru*, *Drama Tiga Teater Muzikal* and *Menggala Maya*.

## FAM Games

Cheers to the USM Staff Soccer Team for having qualified to compete in the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) League Cup 2009. A total of eight teams from the country qualified for the FAM games and the match series was held from 19 April. The team manager, Mohd Azizudin Mohd Shariff (B. Tech. '97), mustered good support from the campus community to support the 'home' team during their match at the university stadium.



Photograph by Yusuf Suid



## Eminent Persons

Following conferment of the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX) status, USM has invited eminent persons (local and overseas-based) from various backgrounds to discuss and advise the Universiti on the strategies set forth under its transformation plan. The Eminent Persons Committee held its first meeting on 24 March under the chairmanship of Pro-Chancellor, Tan Sri Razali Ismail.

Photograph by Mohd Fairus Md Isa

## Sanggar Sanjung

In an atmosphere of grandeur, Malam Anugerah Sanggar Sanjung was held on 24 March at Hotel Equatorial. The Sanggar Sanjung Award was given for 10 categories whilst the Merit Reward comprised six categories.



## Micro-credit

USM initiated a micro-credit scheme (*Mikro Pinj*) to help its staff in carrying out business for income supplementation. Ten staff members who formed the first group received loans of between RM3,000 and RM5,000 each at a ceremony held on 3 February. Subsequently five staff members received their loans on 13 April at Anjung Budi. Money for this scheme was contributed by USM staff and the RM100,000 collected thus far is fully managed by USM Micro-credit Consultant, Prof Sukor Kasim.

Photograph by Yusuf Suid

## Dinner Talk

In conjunction with a dinner function for final year Mathematics students, the Director of the Alumni Liaison Office (ALO) was invited to talk on the role and functions of ALO. The talk forms part of the nurturing process and the students were briefed on the various activities organised by ALO to engage them after graduation.

Artwork by Mohamed Talhah Idrus





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