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# **THE** **LEADER**

A L U M N I M A G A Z I N E O F U N I V E R S I T I S A I N S M A L A Y S I A

Right Move

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Cover artwork by Alec Chin. Photograph by Yusuf Suid. Cover depicts traditional bottle caps used in a game of draughts. It does not matter if the pieces are of gold or discarded bottle caps; it is the strategy and right moves that count.

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# From the Chief Editor



An early photograph of Speakers' Corner in USM  
(Photograph courtesy of Hamzah Sendut Library, USM)

Cancer, a Latin word for 'crab', is a thief that stealthily steals life and hope. It robs us of our loved ones just as it did to Assoc Prof Mohamed Talhah Idrus of his wife, Assoc Prof Sharifah Norhaidah Syed Idros. Talhah, the Chief Editor of this magazine and the director of Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), sought to take a deserving leave to grief and reflect on the events that overwhelmed him and his family.

I was asked to take over as the Chief Editor during this period and would, in the best of my ability, continue the tradition of light reading and impressive graphics. *The Leader* will remain as an entertaining magazine besides serving its informative role.

The theme for this issue is on decision making and this is reflected in the articles such as *Curried Flavour*, *Hak Kita*, and *What's in Store*. This issue goes on to show that decision making is not in the exclusive domain of the high-flying executives but the humble *nasi kandar* seller, a storekeeper and the students who have to make a crucial decision before they deposited their ballot slips.

The department *Giving Back* has two articles: one on the funds collected over the past year and the second is about USM's efforts in rehabilitating the scenic Tasik Harapan (facing the School of Computer Science). Although PPPA is the secretariat, it can never be able to function without the unrelenting support given by the many stakeholders.

As usual, for future issues we are in need of your help. Do you have any stories about your university days to share? Write to us (about 300 to 500 words) and share your experience with the rest of the alumni. If possible, provide about six photographs (softcopy if possible at a resolution of at least 300 dpi) with a short caption.

The editorial team would like to take this opportunity to wish you all *Selamat 'Eid-ul Fitr*.

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Yong Check Yoon



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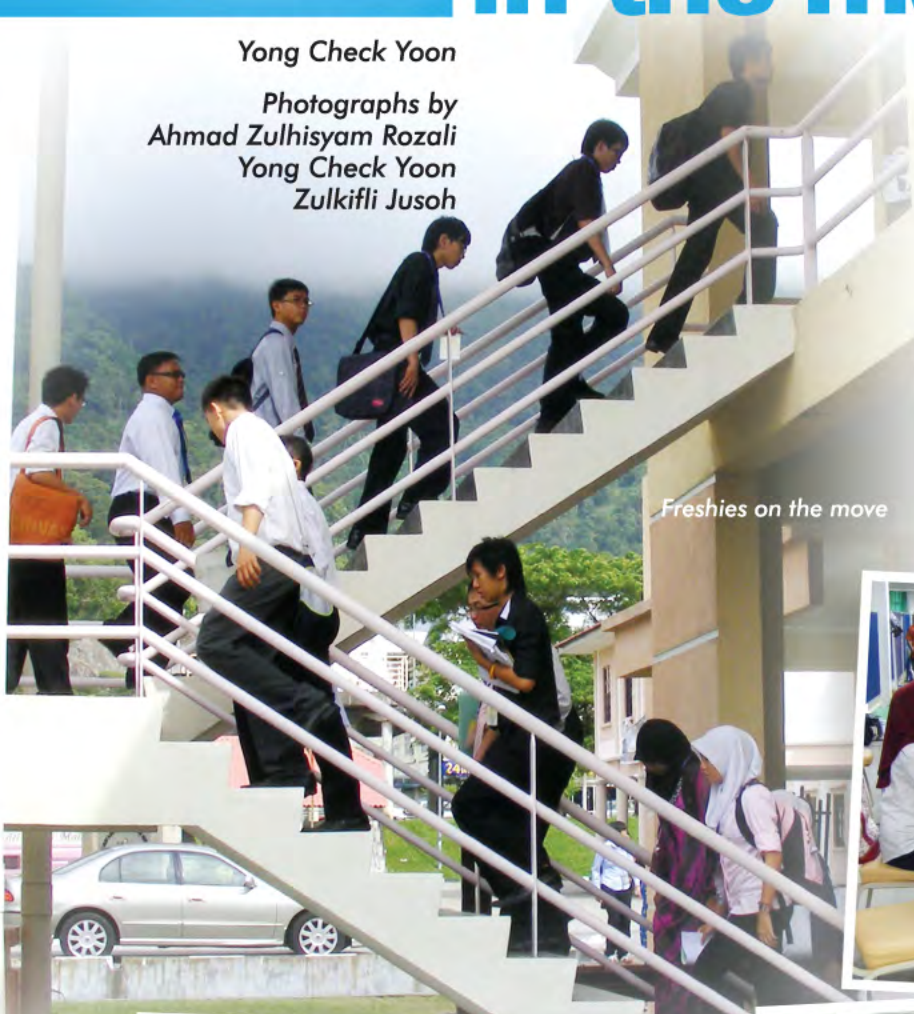
**Art Directors**

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# alumni in the making

Yong Check Yoon

Photographs by  
Ahmad Zulhisyam Rozali  
Yong Check Yoon  
Zulkifli Jusoh



Freshies on the move

On 4 July, 4,038 local and foreign students were registered for the new academic year 2010/11 at USM's Main Campus, Engineering Campus (Nibong Tebal), and the Health Campus (Kubang Kerian, Kelantan). These fresh new faces will become our future alumni when they graduate and the Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA a.k.a. Alumni Liaison Office) extends them a warm welcome as they embark on the life-long journey of learning.



Artwork by Alec Chin

## Alumni in the Making



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# Hak Kita

Khairol Azhar Abd Jalil  
B. A. '08



Artwork by Alec Chin

**J**ohn Quincy Adams, Presiden Amerika Syarikat yang ke-6, pernah berkata, *"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."* (Kalau tindakanmu memberi perangsang kepada orang lain untuk bercita-cita lebih banyak lagi, belajar lebih lagi, berusaha lebih lagi dan menjadi lebih lagi, anda ialah seorang pemimpin).

Mutiara kata ini, menggambarkan ciri-ciri yang perlu ada pada seorang pemimpin: tutur kata, keterampilan, idea dan pendekatannya. Pendapat ini disokong oleh Tony Alessandra dalam bukunya, *Charisma: Seven Keys To Developing The Magnetism That Leads To Success*, yang menyatakan bahawa salah satu ciri utama karisma adalah potensi menyampaikan visi dan idea secara berkesan. Tuntasnya, boleh kita simpulkan bahawa pemimpin yang berwibawa ialah pemimpin yang berkarisma.

Dalam konteks kepimpinan mahasiswa, adalah penting untuk memilih pemimpin yang berkredibiliti dan berketerampilan untuk menentukan perjuangan mereka diberi perhatian memandangkan kepimpinan mahasiswa sering dikaitkan dengan keupayaan sesebuah universiti melahirkan graduan yang berkarisma untuk melaksanakan misi dan visi universiti selaras dengan aspirasi negara.

Hak Kita

Hal ini dapat menyangkal pendapat sesetengah pihak bahawa perjuangan mahasiswa kini sudah semakin tumpul taringnya.

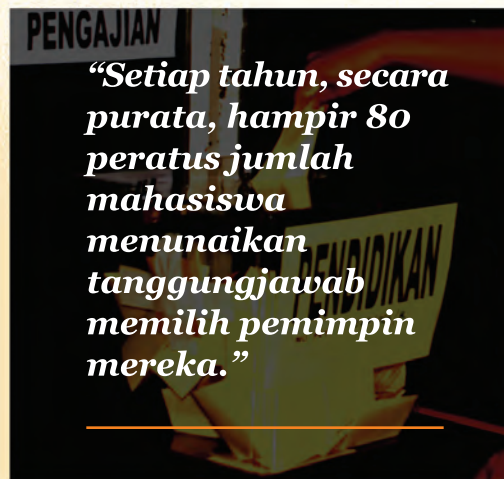
Bagi memenuhi tujuan ini, Urus Setia Majlis Pemilihan Siswa menggalas tanggungjawab yang bukan ringan untuk memastikan Proses Pemilihan Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar berjalan dengan lancar dan pada masa yang sama memuaskannya semua pihak. Tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa Pemilihan Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar atau 'pilihanraya kampus' menjadi medium yang sesuai untuk mahasiswa menilai dan memilih pemimpin mereka berlandaskan prinsip demokrasi.

Setiap musim pilihanraya kampus tiba, perkara yang paling kerap dibangkitkan oleh sekumpulan kecil mahasiswa adalah mengenai ketelusan proses pemilihan melalui e-voting yang telah diperkenalkan di kebanyakan universiti di Malaysia untuk mengelakkan pencetakan kertas undi yang banyak dan memudahkan pengiraan undi. Kaedah ini ditanggap boleh dieksploitasi untuk kepentingan pihak-pihak tertentu. Kesudahannya, pilihanraya kampus di universiti-universiti tersebut kurang mendapat sambutan. Peratusan mahasiswa yang mengundi berkurangan sehingga tidak sampai separuh.

Ini berbeza dengan Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Sistem pengundian cara konvensional yang menggunakan kertas undi yang dimasukkan ke dalam kotak lutsinar masih lagi diguna pakai. Faktor yang diutamakan adalah memastikan ketelusan proses pengundian untuk mengelakkan timbulnya dakwaan bahawa sistem demokrasi telah dicabuli. Pendekatan sebegini memberi implikasi yang positif dan memberangsangkan kepada suasana pilihanraya kampus di USM. Setiap tahun, secara purata, hampir 80 peratus jumlah mahasiswa menunaikan tanggungjawab memilih pemimpin mereka.



Di tempat mengundi



Mengira undi



Menunggu pengumuman

## Hak Kita

Kesedaran mahasiswa USM terhadap amalan demokrasi ini juga memberi impak yang positif terhadap suasana pilihanraya kampus. Buktinya, dalam sejarah pilihanraya di kampus USM, belum ada pemberontakan, pergaduhan antara kumpulan-kumpulan penyokong, demonstrasi mahupun boikot yang boleh mencalarakan imej universiti. Hal ini menunjukkan kematangan mahasiswa USM terhadap penghayatan nilai demokrasi kampus. Suasana ini secara tidak langsung mendorong calon-calon yang bertanding menjadi lebih kreatif sepanjang tempoh berkempen. Fokus calon adalah kepada manifesto dan kaedah kempen, bukan bertikam lidah dengan pihak universiti. Kematangan yang ditunjukkan oleh calon-calon ini akhirnya membawa kebaikan kepada universiti kerana kabinet mahasiswa yang bakal dibentuk terdiri daripada kelompok mahasiswa yang berpemikiran wajar.



Mengemukakan pandangan

## Calon memperkenalkan diri



Perjuangan mereka bukan sekadar menambah bilangan bas komuter untuk ke kuliah atau mengurangkan harga makanan. Mereka bertanggapan bahawa peranan mereka termasuklah menjamin kestabilan serantau, memupuk kesedaran terhadap perubahan iklim dunia, nilai kemanusiaan sejagat malah aspek moral dan insaniah. Ketika pemimpin mahasiswa di universiti lain sibuk bercakap tentang kempen alam sekitar, pemimpin mahasiswa USM telah pun menjalankan projek-projek mega tentang kelestarian di peringkat global. Sewaktu pemimpin mahasiswa di universiti lain sibuk berbicara untuk mewujudkan sudut pidato, pemimpin mahasiswa USM sudah pun mencadangkan kepada Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia untuk menubuhkan Parlimen Mahasiswa. Inilah produk kepimpinan yang dihasilkan menerusi pilihanraya kampus di USM. [▶](#)

## Mendengar kempen



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Artwork by Rusli Jamaluddin

Ishak conducting a Japanese language class

# What's in STORE

Yong Check Yoon Photographs by Rusli Jamaluddin



With an average of 110 official events to attend to per month and helped by a group of 15 people, the Development Department's storekeeper Ishak Ahmad Mazar Ali and his assistant Yusoff Mahmud have to do a lot of coordination in order to deliver and arrange furniture and equipment. Sometimes they have to handle several events at different places on the same day and some of the events may end at 3 a.m.

Ishak and his team are used to working at odd hours, coordinating and maximising the use of existing logistics. From his nondescript office Ishak described how he managed to get things done. *The Leader* discovered that he does not run the show entirely from his 'operations centre' but goes down to the ground to see things done as well.

"If I am unable to fulfill my promise of delivery by a certain time, I have to inform my client," he said, adding that he cannot request his client to sketch the plan of furniture arrangement for his men to arrange accordingly while he takes it easy and makes his way home.

Similarly, he wishes that his client is on hand at the venue when the furniture is being delivered and arranged. It is because the event organiser is the most appropriate person to liaise with the venue owner as he knows best the situation.

"Usually the presence of the event organiser is helpful as he is able to coordinate with the venue management personnel to facilitate the work," Ishak explained. "We appreciate whatever cooperation extended to us to make work more pleasant."

He also said that some organisers complained about delays as well as the arrangement when everything was done.



*Uploading and unloading - a daily chore*

"Nobody likes delays because they cost time, money and they are inconvenient to everyone," he added.

Essentially, to make things work, Ishak prescribed warm friendship between all ranks. He said that he and his colleagues work as a team and a family.

"I may chastise them if they make a mistake but I would be specific about it and I bear no malice," he said. "If you use your position to order people around you won't get things done because dissatisfied employees may work by the book but become clock watchers."

When someone makes a request, Ishak said that he would listen and may give counter-proposals if he has better ideas or if there are logistic problems such as time, personnel, and the availability of transport and furniture.

"I listen to you. You listen to me. We discuss and then compromise to get the best option," he said.

*On time delivery makes customers happy*



## Campus Life

### What's in Store

Sometimes, handling transport arrangement is not easy, Ishak conceded, especially when the store has just one lorry for furniture delivery. Problems arise when it is sent for maintenance or is on outstation assignments. Under such circumstances Ishak has either to use a lorry that is meant for transporting rubbish or one that is used to transport machinery, depending on their availability.

Ishak has over the years, inculcated in his team members the perception of 'this is our Jabatan (Department) and our Universiti' and being stakeholders, they were used to working on weekends and public holidays.

"If they have to attend a kenduri (feast) or a family-related event, they would go but they always return to join the others at work immediately after that," Ishak explained. "Family comes first. However, should they have problems they have to banish them from their minds. Otherwise the problems will affect their attention, and mood. They may also pose a danger to themselves and others at work."

Multi-tasking has been the practice since 1980. The workers have to do minor repairs or varnish the furniture. They have also been trained to do minor welding because the department does not have a carpenter or technician to do the job. For major repairs, the damaged items will be sent to a contractor.



Store's personnel multitask from simple maintenance of furniture to their delivery

Ishak, who in 1979, was working with the Ministry Youth and Sports in Kuala Lumpur recalled how pleasantly surprised he was when he received a telegram from USM asking him to report for duty in February 1980. He had applied to work with USM when he saw a newspaper advertisement.

The Development Department has moved its operations three times, he recollected. From the Registrar's Department it was relocated to a building that stood on the site of USM's Al-Malik Khalid Mosque. Later, it was shifted to the spot where the School of Physics is, before demolition work began to make way for its establishment. Finally, it found a permanent place off Jalan Universiti where it can call its own.

Raised in Batu Uban *kampong* (village), Ishak studied elementary Arabic and 1963, picked up the Japanese language from the popular black-and-white Ninja television series which were popular then. When he was with USM, Ishak learned more of the language from a lady office assistant who had worked with a Japanese officer during World War II.

With the languages that he had learned, he conducted Arabic language classes for the university's general staff and Japanese language classes for staff members' children after work, during school holidays, for free.

"It's a form of giving back to society," he remarked. Obviously it is an understatement because he also shares his varied working experiences at a German-owned factory, Kah Motors, the airport, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, before joining USM. 🇲🇾



A well-stocked warehouse

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It just took two inconsiderate drivers to hold up the traffic for more than 30 minutes. The passengers of the buses have to disembark and walk, fearing of being late for their classes.



"The traffic is terrible. Seeing the buses parking haphazardly upsets me as they should have used the allocated parking space and their passengers should walk or use our bus facilities. You should know that protecting the environment is very important."

- Qaisar Khan (Pakistan) Social Science, Ph. D

"We walk most of the time because we live near the School. However, we find that the traffic condition within the campus is very bad during peak hours. Pedestrians may find fast moving vehicles a nuisance particularly when office finishes work around 5 pm."

- From right: Jacylne Portia (Sarawak) and Loke Sau Mun (Ipoh)



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# TRAFFIC on the BRINK

Artwork by Rusli Jamaluddin



Daylight robbery... The parking space allocated for the physically challenged being 'robbed' by an inconsiderate driver.



A fine for haphazard parking being written by a security officer

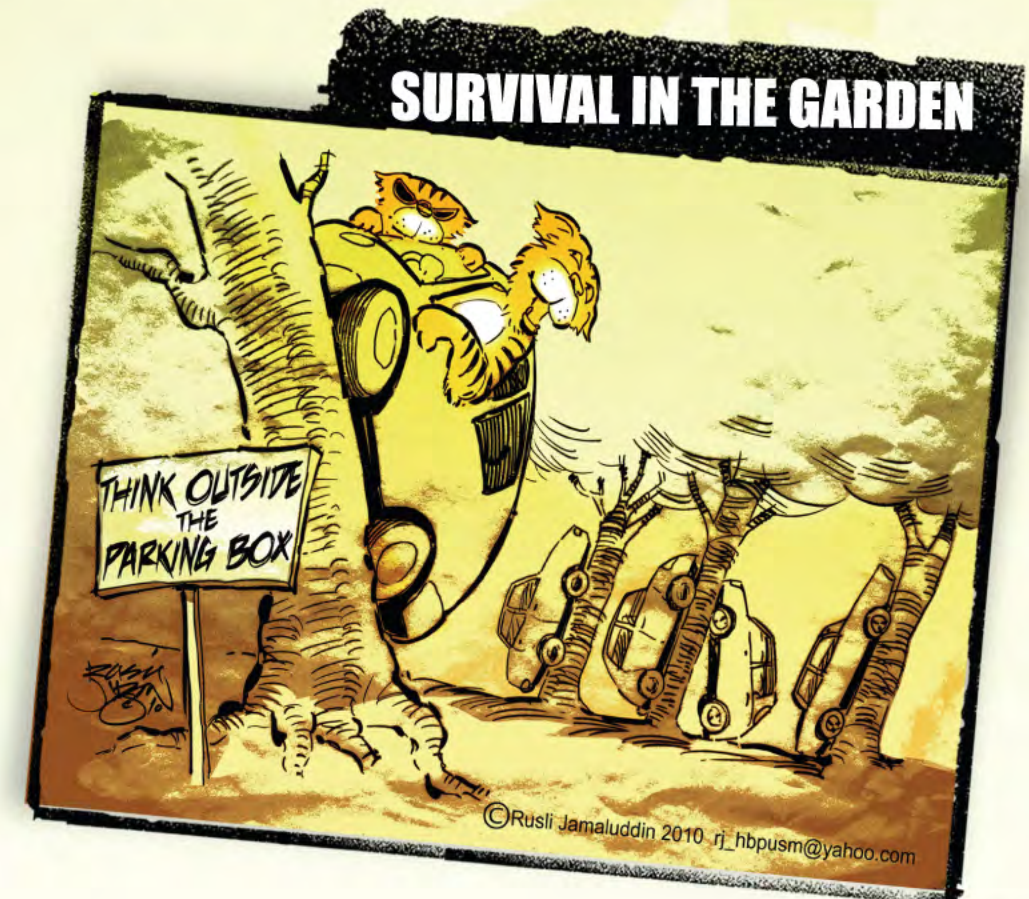
Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal B. Sc. '07

Nor Rafizah Md. Zain

Photographs by Yong Check Yoon

"We walk to the class even though we are staying far from the campus. Students should walk more on the campus. You wouldn't want to be stuck in the traffic, besides you can ride a bus if you do not like to walk. That will help to reduce the number of cars ensnaring the roads on campus."

- Intensive English Programme students from Nigeria and Iran



©Rusli Jamaluddin 2010 [rj\\_hbpsm@yahoo.com](mailto:rj_hbpsm@yahoo.com)

# @ Anjung Budi



## Scrumptious Food

The revamped cafeteria at Anjung Budi has increased its operators to seven, offering a larger variety of food, ranging from *nasi campur*, *char koay teow*, *yong tau foo* to burgers. It was opened for business on 14 June and operates from 8 am to 5 pm on weekdays.

## Good Buy

A sale of clothes, *tudung*, accessories was held in conjunction with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Convocation from 4 to 6 August. Also available were a photography package for children and personal loans by a local cooperative.



## Going Korean

The Penang Korean Society held its *Hi Korea* (Korean Malaysian Nite) on 28 July featuring a potpourri of cultural and friendship promotional activities such as Korean and Borneo traditional dances, free photo sessions and internship launching.

## Public Policy Forum

A luncheon in conjunction with the forum was organised by the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CenPRIS) on 28 July involving a group of 12 panelists under the aegis of the CenPRIS forum 2010.



## Ramadan Market

The cafe at Anjung Budi was opened from 10 am to 5 pm during Ramadhan (fasting month). To serve customers who want to buy food home for breaking the fast, there was a mini bazaar that sold a range of delectable dishes, cakes, desserts and barbeque chicken/fish for two hours, starting 3 pm, with a brisk sale.

Text by Saw Cheang Kee and Yong Check Yoon.  
Photographs by Yong Check Yoon and Dr Yeoh Gim Chye.

The contents are informative, useful as well as interesting. I appreciate very much your effort to keep me in touch with USM since my graduation in 1976.

Mok Soon Sang  
B. A. '76

For an old student like me (now 66 years old), I find it most rewarding to continue receiving The Leader. Thanks again and wishing you the best always.

Haji Bashah Mahmud  
B. A. '77

*Chief Editor replies...  
We are glad that most of you enjoy the magazine. However, wouldn't it be great if the younger alumni are able to tell us their stories for Campus Life? We are sure university life isn't all that monotonous.*

I would like to congratulate you and your team for all the effort in producing such an informative magazine. I love the diversity of the featured articles which are simple yet touching our hearts as USM Alumni members and Penangites. The top notch photography with exuberant colours and page layout are very attractive. Thanks for a good read always.  
P/S: If we would like to help the environment, I suggest using paper of thinner quality.

Surjeet Kaura Chatar Singh  
M. D. '89

I am an alumna from the 80's and I am following USM on the news and your articles too. You have made us proud with your views and stand on current issues in Malaysia.

I am writing to give some honest feedback and I hope it is well taken. I do not have the editor's e-mail and neither is it listed in the magazine.

There is a need to point out several grammatical errors in the magazine, especially in the editor's note.

The magazine should carry better quality articles. Now I see, it is all about photography and has very little value. I suggest that some research be done to find out what alumni overall need to read about as I am sure USM has more news to report. I have contributed to the USM Annual Fund and I think that is a great activity of value. I am touched by the van bought for the wheel chair students of USM.

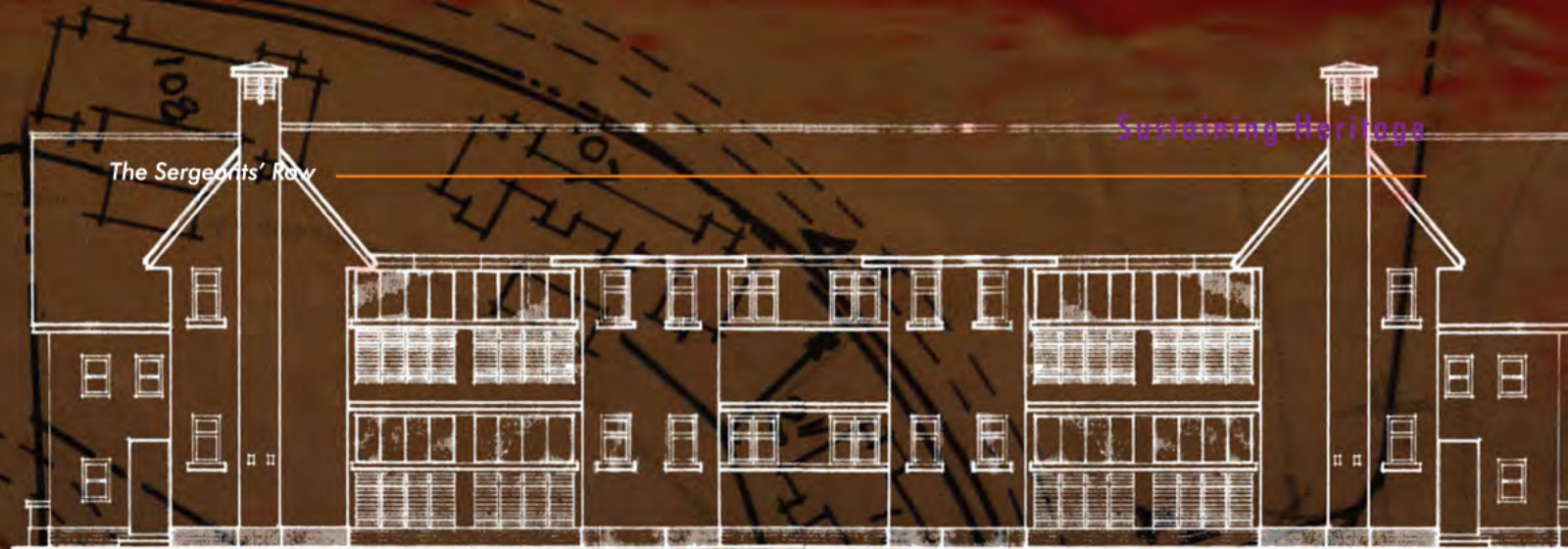
I want the best for USM and my son too is hoping to study there soon.

Lee Abdullah

*Chief Editor replies...  
Thank you, Lee Abdullah. Your comments are noted and we will try to improve because this magazine is meant for your reading pleasure. As for The Perfect Gift, we are sure many of the readers may want to know how the money contributed is spent.*



Typical front elevation



Typical rear elevation

Sustaining Heritage

Sustaining Heritage

The Sergeants' Row

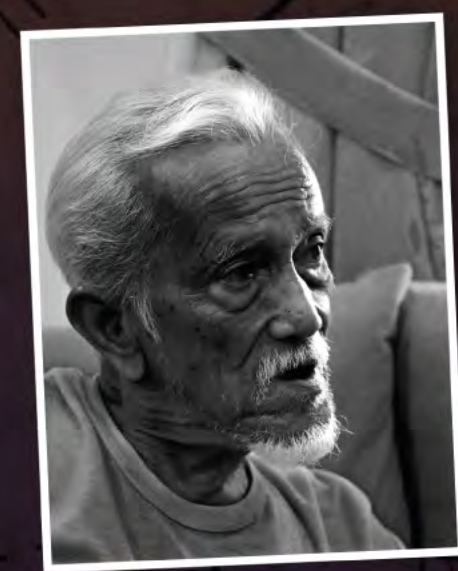
# SERGEANTS' ROW

Text and photographs by Rusli Jamaluddin



“**S**tand upright when I'm talking! Where do you think you are going in those dirty boots?” the sergeant barked at the private who stood stiffly at attention.

The private could only answer crisply with a single word "Sir". The stereotypical image of a sergeant bawling orders was a military norm. It was the way of the British army at the time. The sergeant's belligerence was just an act to exercise his power of authority.



Ismail said, "The old chimneys once emitted a welcoming smoke to greet its occupants..."

Minden Barracks then was dull and depressing, with hordes of bodies in khaki uniforms saluting everything that moved and as always, toiling away at the 'spit and polish' tasks of everything, from boots to rifles.

According to Ismail Ibrahim, an ex-Royal Army Service Corps (RASC), "The sergeants were unremitting 'tormenters', whose every whim had to be obeyed. They yelled and bellowed at juniors to stand straight, march neatly and polish endlessly every piece of their equipment." Now at 82, he gave an intimate ground level account of how the years have passed at Minden Barracks.

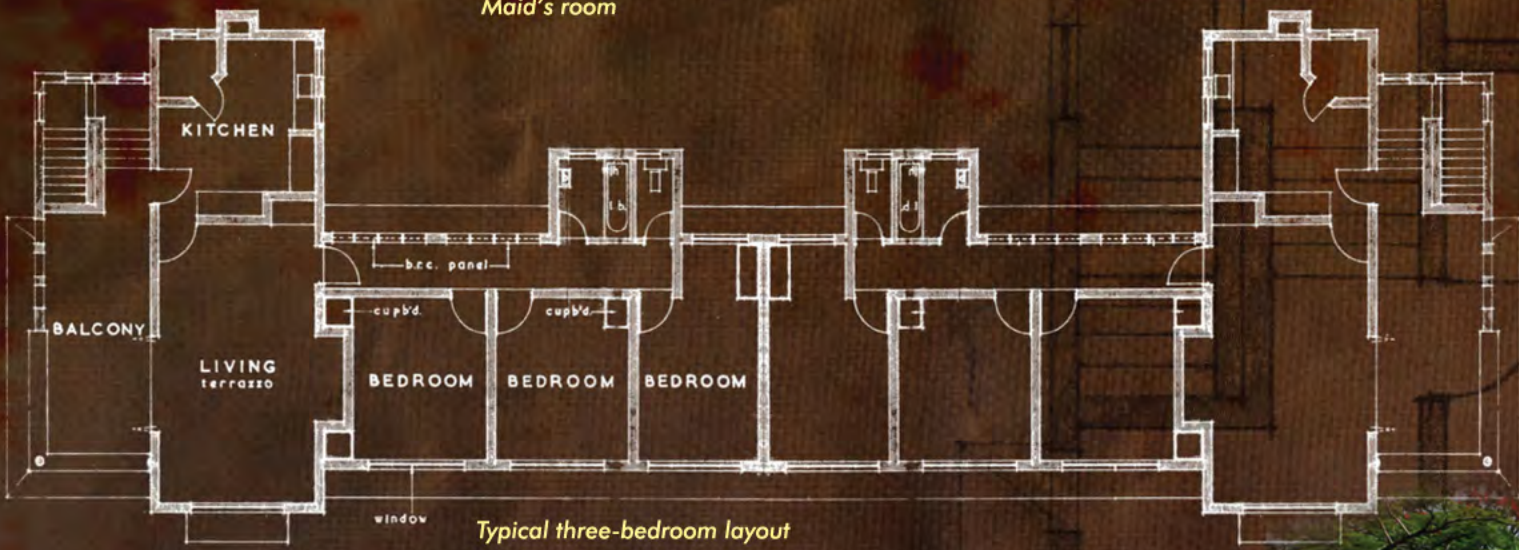
Artwork by Rusli Jamaluddin

The Sergeants' Row

The Sergeants' Row



Maid's room



Typical three-bedroom layout

Blocks 106, 107, 108 and 109 (now buildings C11, C12, C13 and C14) formerly enjoyed a reputation as the transient homes of the British Commonwealth married army sergeants during the Malayan Emergency. In the 50s, the four blocks were enviously dubbed the "Sergeants' Row".

Despite the unenviable remarks about the sergeants' personalities, Sergeants' Row was anything but a bed of roses in its heyday. Nothing conveys a sense of memory more convincingly than the old married quarters that are still in use today. These modest quarters provided 'R&R' (rest and rehabilitation) with an extra bit of class - the services of an *amah* (maid). The *amah* made the best home she could, swept with diligence, cooked with love and nursed with compassion their colonial masters.

The Sergeants' Row brought all the salient features of the twentieth century for livability and paid tribute to the classic simplicity, quiet dignity and economy of quaint army barracks. Reminiscent of this period of design, there are three noteworthy architectural features: the chimney stacks, shuttered wooden windows and a detached *amah's* room. But be not deceived - behind its shuttered windows were many up-to-date and practical features which made it, beyond doubt, as contemporary as any home of today.



The back lane of Sergeants' Row



Block 106



Block 108

Comfortable and compact, the quarters had commodious rooms that were, every inch, practical and economical. The living-cum-dining area was a large L-shaped room, exposed to sunlight throughout the day. The master bedroom boasted twin closets for the "Master" and the "Ma'am". The kitchen was fitted with a cooking range, small but thoroughly effective, which would delight every home-maker. The functionality of the home was complete with a bathroom, conveniently placed, that served all the bedrooms in the quarters.

Sergeants' Row has been much altered since 1971 and over the years, each successive administrator sought to put his particular imprint on the place. Extensive renovations were necessary as the buildings needed more regimented 'boxed-rooms' for the academics.

Physically the buildings have been irreversibly changed - many major architectural features like the old chimneys, shuttered windows and the precious red clay tiles are now gone. In many ways, the four buildings still stand steadfast as a testimony of their bygone days.



Block 107

The old servants' room is now called 'Anjung ISDEV'

The Sergeants' Row

The 'Sergeants' Row' is not always what its name implies for it has its share of unusual attractions too. Perhaps the spirit of the past does keep a silent watch upon those who occupy the old quarters. Many stories have been told about the strange occurrences. Some tales exist in the realm of rumours; others are told as personal experiences but the events remain mysterious.

Drs Affandy Yusoff, Reevani Bustami, Jamilyah Ikhsan and Salfarina Gapor are among those who have claimed to have heard strange noises when no one else was in the building. A door knob that turned on its own or windows that strangely opened and shut by themselves are some of the occurrences. Frequently, sounds of spooky footsteps could be heard in empty rooms and hallways. Inhabitants of the building would get up to see what the disturbance was, only to find nothing. These experiences initially spooked the inhabitants but eventually they became so used to them that they learned to 'co-exist amiably'.

Perhaps there may never be an explanation, but these occurrences lent a touch of mystery to the buildings. They also help to keep the stories of the buildings alive. And, perhaps, that is the way they should remain. **L**



*This corridor has more than its share of mysterious footsteps darting from door to door at dusk*



*Many claimed that scents of perfumes wafted after midnight at these spots*



Rusli Jamaluddin 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)



## REACHING OUT, TOUCHING HEARTS

Asha Suresh Chand  
B. Pharmacy '92



*"The human heart feels things the eyes cannot see, and knows what the mind cannot understand," said Robert Valett.*

That was what happened when direct mail and phonathon appeal for 2009/10 reached out to our alumni, parents and staff. They do not know who the beneficiaries of their generosity are but that did not stop these donations of various amounts from trickling in. Some are thrilled that they are given the opportunity to give back, particularly having survived through hard times themselves to be what they are today.

Finally, when the books were closed for the year, RM81,060 had been collected. Of that amount, Parent's Fund constituted 29%; Alumni Annual Fund, 20%; and Staff Annual Fund, 51%. We are overwhelmed by the generosity.

"If my humble small gift can make a difference to someone else, I will gladly continue giving," said Ibrahim Seman, a parent who described himself as 'not very well to do'. This echoed the sentiments of most donors.

Certainly a big amount will make a bigger difference but even a small one from those who ill afford can still make a more than ripple on the pond of the less fortunate who needs that bit to make a difference in their lives. **L**

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# Effusing **Hope** in Tasik Harapan

Yong Cheek Yoon

Located behind USM mosque are picturesque lakes - Tasik Harapan and Tasik Aman - that occupy a natural depression in the land. Sungai Gambir coursing lazily through the campus, passing between the lakes until heavy rain causes the river to swell. The lakes and their surrounding area will then be inundated with silt-rich water. These features are part of the Universiti's landmarks that provide a home for many aquatic species and these attracted the predatory monitor lizards and birds such as kingfishers to form part of the food chain.

(Photograph by Mohamed Talhah Idrus)

Effusing Hope in Tasik Harapan

The waters of the 0.8 hectare Tasik Harapan is green as algae profligates on the nutrients brought in by the river. It was because of its poor design and a lack of operation and maintenance. Their condition cannot be faulted because the lakes were initially dug for the use as retention ponds since they are sited on a low lying area. This happened long before the term 'ecological sustainability' became a household word.

USM developed a plan to rehabilitate first Tasik Harapan, then the 0.58-hectare Tasik Aman, before embarking on Sungai Gambir this year. Once completed, the surrounding area will be landscaped and biotopes will be introduced. Among the affirmative actions is the introduction of effective microorganisms (EM) into the lake at prescribed intervals to convert decaying organic material.

CIMB Bank has initially sponsored the first phase of the project which includes water sampling from the lake to determine its existing condition, determine the amount of EM to effuse the lake, formulating the EM mixture, and designing the bioreactor.



*In situ* discussion on how the EM solution can be dispensed effectively into the lake



Laboratory technicians sampling water from the lake




Finalising plans of locating the bioreactor and its system of piping to dispense EM solution



Unloading the bioreactor

To facilitate the project, Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni was chosen to be the secretariat of Tasik Harapan. There are the main stakeholders - the Sports Unit, the Development Office, Eco Hub, and EM Technology - who are involved but more importantly, everyone in USM community is equally a stakeholder. Prof Chan Ngai Weng is the project adviser.

About 100 core students from the student representative groups and the School of Technology (majoring in environmental studies) will be using this project as part of their studies. The objective is to train graduate students from different disciplines and to build their knowledge of similar areas of research and development.

*Harapan*, as in the name of the lake being rehabilitated, means 'Hope' in Malay and it is more than a coincidence that USM is starting with it. If successful, this project signifies a new beginning and hope for a more sustainable aquatic environment on the campus. 

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I first met Sherri, short for Sharifah Norhaidah Syed Idros, when we both were walking along the corridor of the Tunku Kursiah College (TKC). A lanky girl of seventeen with flowing long hair, she reminded me of Cher (of Sonny and Cher fame). She was cheerful, happy-go-lucky and soft spoken. I had not known her beyond the fact that she was the first girl in TKC to have acquired the latest Scholl sandals, a hot brand then.

Artwork by Alec Chin



# Bond Unbroken

Rafidah Jalil  
B. Sc. '79

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

When Sherri and I enrolled at USM I got to know her better. She was a straight talker and a very kind person. I remember Sherri stirring Nescafe in her latest mug. The aroma of the coffee was somehow different. I thought to myself, perhaps it was because she always used a new mug.

Once, I had the opportunity to accompany her on the return trip from Kuala Lumpur to USM in her Mini Minor, just the two of us. I could not remember the gist of our conversation throughout the long journey except that it was pleasant.

When a fellow-student, Talhah or "AA", fell head over heels for Sherri, I thought it was a perfect match, like Sonny and Cher or John and Yoko. I remember someone saying that AA heard "bells" every time he was with her. Since then AA and his belle were inseparable.

I got to know Sherri and AA better when he and Bob (who is now my husband) became housemates. Sherri and AA as a couple were very easy-going, casual, carefree and almost "flower-power", hippy-like. The southern-born Johor girl had also acquired the northern state dialect from her association with the Kedah boy.



One of the earliest photographs together in 1977



Sherri was quite jubilant and hopeful after the operation to remove her cancerous lung

### Bond Unbroken

When Bob and I got married and moved to Kuala Lumpur we lost touch with the couple. Someone told us that they had left for the United States of America (USA) to further their studies. Then one day I received a call from Sherri, saying that she had just returned from USA. I invited them to the house at which point she cautioned me that she had changed.

"Don't worry," I responded. "All of us have changed. I have put on weight too".

When AA and Sherri appeared at our door for lunch, it dawned on me that the change was not physical but spiritual. Sherri had donned the *long tudung* or head covering. After that meeting we again disappeared from each other's lives - Sherri, with her academic life at USM and I, with my busy schedule, chasing my dreams.

Over the years we did meet occasionally. It was during my consultancy work in Pulau Pinang a few years ago that I perceived Sherry to be more relaxed than those earlier post-USA days. We had a couple of meals together including an Italian dinner at their ala-Moroccan home. Once again, I could not remember the gist of the conversation. I only recall that it was relaxing and pleasant.



Bob and Rafidah visiting Sherri-AA at their house in 2007



Sherri continued working even while hospitalised, insisting she was only responding to emails when she was actually finalising papers and supervising theses

Some months later, Bob and I were told Sherri was going to have a major operation. We rushed to the Penang General Hospital where the no-nonsense Sherri explained in detail, without any emotion, what she was suffering from and what the doctors were going to do. She appeared so strong.

After the operation I sometimes would call or email her. However, I was aware that Sherri might need some time and privacy to recover from each bout of chemo treatment.

A few more months passed by before I saw Sherri again. I had been told she was very ill. When I reached her bedside, she said, "Don't you want to ask how I am?"

For the first time I was speechless.

Then I responded softly, "What do you want me to ask?"

Sherri replied, "Ask me how I am."

I asked her how she was. She said she found it hard to breathe.

"Is there anything I could do to help?"

Sherri replied, "Du'a that I will have a good ending."



With her family on 'Eid ul-fitr in 2007

### Bond Unbroken

Suddenly I felt I was gasping for oxygen because this was the most intimate conversation I have ever had with this private person. Despite her easy-going ways Sherri was a private person. I realised then that my dear friend was prepared to leave this world. Allah has given her the signs to make the necessary preparations and she had done so. As I took my leave we hugged each other and cried. I remember telling her that her friends loved her and always *du'a* for her.

A week after that Bob and I visited Sherri at the Pantai hospital in Pulau Pinang. She seemed a different Sherri. She was able walk. Her voice was strong. I told friends in Kuala Lumpur that she was well. I refused to believe that her "good" condition might only be fleeting.

I suspected her time was near when I received AA's email, explaining her critical condition: "When I reached the hospital she was still half-conscious and very weak with some of the veins still visible on her face. My son, Abuzar, told me that earlier, when they were in the ambulance, there had been lots more which appeared 'like roots'. The doctors told me they could not do much except render 'symptomatic treatment', such as relieving her of pain and calming her with some drugs and monitoring her blood pressure and pulse. To them, the cause is the blockage in her atrium and the fluid around her heart. The surgeon has already advised against any operation. She's now in CCU".



*Sherri had not wanted to trouble the children who were away from Pulau Pinang to rush to her hospital bedside but AA thought otherwise*



*Her last pair of worn out Scholls remains on the floor of her car's back seat*



*The last photo together in Putrajaya while on a research-cum-alternative treatment trip in Bangi, January 2010*



*Daughters Ummu Hani' (right) and Ummu Zahra' at her grave in Sungai Nibong*

That was Saturday. On Monday night Bob and I made plans to leave for Pulau Pinang the following day at 2 pm. However, we had to hasten our trip because we received news that Sherri had passed away on Tuesday morning. We arrived just as the *jenazah* (body) was ready to be brought to the mosque. We were fervently hoping that we would be in time to perform the *solat jenazah* (final prayer for the departed). Allah granted us that opportunity. Her only son, Abuzar, led the ritual, every mother's wish.

We comforted Abuzar after the funeral, before taking our leave. With tears in his eyes, he said, "*Puas, rasa puas dapat jaga mama.* (Satisfied, I feel satisfied that I was able to care for mama). I'm ok."

Sherri had asked for a good ending which Allah has granted. AA's last email on Sherri read: "May Allah forgive her for her neglectfulness and be pleased with her extreme kindness, generosity and earnestness to meet her Creator." 🕌

It was deep into the night some time in 2005. The seconds of the clock just racing by us without us realising it. What seemed like minutes turned out to be hours and we did not have many hours left before the deadline ended. The atmosphere in the Berita Kampus lab located in building C24 was intense, the silence of the night broken by the sounds of frantic clicks on the mouse accompanied by rapid-fire typing on the keyboard and the constant drone of the printer as the team battled to submit our senior year's final project.



# NICK OF TIME

Jonathan Chen  
B. Comm. '05

### Nick of Time

The team was assigned to produce a lifestyle magazine entitled *La Belle* targeted for youths within the span of about two months. Out of the group of 44 students, I recall my team of eleven being more or less procrastinators, with yours truly being the head procrastinator. We had somehow put off completing the assignment until the eleventh hour - which was most probably what led to the scenario pictured above.

The selection of team members and the election of students into editorial board of *La Belle* was mostly a democratic process. I remember that we unanimously elected Isabelle Francis as the Chief Editor of the magazine. Towards the later part of the assignment, we realised we lacked a suitable cover girl and the team (excluding Isabelle) again unanimously elected her to be featured on the cover for the magazine, a decision which might not have gone down too well in the real world.

My team, along with the other three teams were predominantly Chinese, but this was because out of the whole group of Journalism students there were only nine Malays and only three Indians. However, generally speaking race was not an issue for us. What mattered was that the assignment be done on time and done well.

Naturally, there were those in Team *La Belle* who dragged their feet a little when it came to completing their bit of the magazine, but picked up the pace when they realised the sand in the hourglass was fast running out and their grades were on the line. I probably was one of the feet-draggers as I had vested more interest in USM's Jazz Band rather than in my studies.

Anyway, with the deadline for submission fast looming before us, we devised a strategy to have the production running non-stop. We divided ourselves into smaller teams taking turns to work. So, while one team worked, the other rested. I believe this strategy prevented us from getting burned out that night.

*Group work... Everyone (clockwise from top: Bee Sia, Woon Shang, Chui Cheh, Cindy, Pui Keng and Isabelle) helped to glue the pages before binding them back to back*

*No mistake... Jonathan and Woon Shang doing the final check on the computer before each page was printed out*

The team comprised of myself, Isabelle, Cheong Chui Cheh, Lim Bee Sia, Cindy Choo, Teh Woon Shang, Ow Pui Keng, Yung Pui Leng, Chuah Jia Yi, Salina Zakaria, and Krishna Kumari Rao. I think among the other teams, ours was the most diverse comprising a mix of Kelabit, Chinese, Malay and Indian ethnicities. The initial stages of producing the magazine were a little awkward due to differences in personalities, but as time went by we got used to one another. Perhaps the glue that held us together was the fact that we were all laid back, happy-go-lucky folks who did not take life too seriously.



## Minden Memories

Nick of Time

It was probably about 1am when the actual process of printing and putting the magazine together started. We soon discovered that this process was a slow and painful one as what we had designed on the computer did not quite turn out as expected on the hard copy. Layout schemes, colour schemes and desktop publishing design concepts had to be tweaked countless times before our ideas were realised in print. Our old but faithful printer added to the excruciation by printing page after page at the speed of a tortoise.

That was only the beginning. Somehow, on that night, our printer had lost its ability to print double sided copies, which meant the single sided copies it produced had to be stuck back-to-back in order to produce double sided ones. However, before they were glued together, all the pages had to be cropped manually with a ruler and a blade. Realising this, we quickly formed a production line comprising of quality testers who ensured that there were no errors on the hard copies; cutters who cropped the hard copies; gluers and pasters who stuck double-sided tape tapes on the backs of pages before putting them together; and lastly binders who made sure all the pages were in order before putting them in sequence into the ring binder.

Actually, I'm pretty surprised that no one lost their cool that night despite lacking sufficient rest and having to deal with a cranky printer and a tedious production line. In fact, what I remember was that we were cracking jokes about one another and posing for pictures in between our assigned tasks. Work-wise, no one complained about having to stay up all night. Each page that was printed was pored over and scrutinised by all of us. Ideas were questioned and concerns on the quality of each page were voiced out without fear or favour. Pages with sloppy work were not tolerated, but meticulously perfected to the best of our ability before being put into the ring binder.



To each her chore: (from left) Chui Cheh, Bee Sia and Pui Leng

By the time we wrapped up, it was dawn. Some team members were napping on anything they could lay their heads on, too tired to make it back to their hostels. Those who were awake couldn't believe that the assignment was actually now complete.

Anyhow, for all our collective efforts, Team *La Belle* was overjoyed when we found out we managed to score an "A" for this particular project. Looking back, we had quite a fun time. **L**



Team members with their achievements... (from left) Gan Yen Kuan, Salina and Normawati Muhamad Nor posing with three publications

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Hamima Dona Mustafa  
B.A. '73

Photographs courtesy of  
Noor Salma Noor Lajis

## From Start to End



Noor Salma (left) with some of the earliest  
administrative staff of the School of Social Sciences

In 1974 there was a students' protest on the Minden campus with student due course, a commission of enquiry was set up to investigate the matter. Noor Salma Noor Lajis, then the administrative assistant/stenographer to K. J. Ratnam, the dean of the School of Social Sciences, was asked to serve as a note-taker.

That was one of the recollections related by the already-retired "Mama" as she is known to relatives and close friends. Born in Kelantan, the northeast state of Peninsula Malaysia, in August 1950, where her father was the railway station master of Tumpat, Keretapi Tanah Melayu (Malayan Railway), her teenage years were spent in Province Wellesley (now Seberang Perai), across the island of Pulau Pinang.

Upon completing her secondary school education she took up stenography at the Mara Institute of Technology in Kuala Lumpur. For Mama who hated the idea of working in a big city the establishment of Universiti Pulau Pinang in 1969 was a godsend. After graduation she answered a classified advertisement to be a stenographer. With staff card number, USM (S) 39, she began work at the School of Cultural and Community Studies, which later was renamed the School of Humanities.

### From Start to End

She did not stay long there as she obtained a transfer to the School of Social Sciences which shared the same roof. The dean then was Prof K. J. Ratnam (popularly known as K.J.) who flew in weekly from Singapore, a practice reminiscent of the institution's earlier days.

"Altogether, I served K. J. for 14 years," Mama said, "from 1970 till 1977 when he was with the School of Social Sciences and from 1985 till 1992 when he became the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Development."

One memory stood out during her earliest days with K.J.

"I love flowers and back then they were quite cheap," Mama recalled. "Every week I would get a bunch of fresh blooms to put on the boss' desk as well as on mine."

She was not to forget the day when K.J. started to give her RM10.00 monthly to buy the flowers.

With a broad smile, Noor Salma said, "Perhaps, he felt embarrassed that I was spending my own money on the flowers.

"I liked working with K.J. He was always so cool," continued Mama. "A man of few words, he has never ever raised his voice. He was not fussy and he trusted us to carry out our tasks without interference or supervision. We felt at ease working with him and we were very much appreciated," she continued.



The Vice-Chancellor (second from right) and wife attending Noor Salma's farewell lunch at the end of 2007. On the left is Abdul Rahim Kamel, Noor Salma's husband



Among Noor Salma's personal treasures is the staff card from USM



At the Library Annual Dinner in the late 1970s, Noor Salma (foreground, third from left) and colleagues waiting in anticipation of the next offering on the menu

In 1975 when the Centre for Policy Research was established with K. J. as its first director Mama continued to serve there.

"Then, in 1977 when I was given a promotion I was posted to the library to work under the chief librarian, Mr. Lim Huck Tee."

However, from 1985 until 1995 Noor Salma was back working for K.J. as his secretary when he became the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Development. The office then was on the first floor of the "water tower", next to the present office of Students' Affairs.

"Whenever I think of USM, I recall all the bosses whom I have served. They have been good to me in their own ways."

From 1995 until 2000 Noor Salma served then Vice Chancellor Ishak Tambi Kechik. Her last post before retiring was with the Vice-Chancellor Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, from 2000 till 2007.

## Minden Memories

### From Start to End

"Prof Dzul was the most easy going of the bosses because I had known him and his wife since they were students."

Noor Salma compared the atmosphere when she first joined the university and that of 2007, before she left. "Initially, the campus community was small. The staff members were friendly with the students. No one seemed to be concerned with status and position. Nowadays, administration-wise, to my mind, there seemed to be too much bureaucracy."


Reflecting upon her career which spanned 37 years, Noor Salma said, "I gained many experiences in handling people's demands and temperaments. When people sought my help I had to prioritise certain appointments in order to help those who were really in need."

Noor Salma is married to one of the former graduates of the School of Social Sciences, Abd Rahim Mohamad Kamel, in 1976, when he was working as an

A 1977 studio photograph of Noor Salma and her husband, Abdul Rahim Kamel



administrative officer at the off campus programme under the School of Education. They have two daughters and a son.

Looking back at her 37 years with the University, Noor Salma said, "Of course, I was sad to leave, after being with one organisation throughout my working life and serving only four bosses. I grew old at USM." 

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PERSATUAN ALUMNI USM WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN & SELANGOR

# Sirih Pulang Ke Gagang 2010

**Tarikh:**  
Sabtu, 23hb Oktober 2010

**Tempat:**  
Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, KLCC

**Masa:**  
8.00 Malam



Penganjur Bersama:  
Persatuan Alumni USM, PAUSM  
Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni USM, ALO

"Ants banded together in communities,  
have evolved emotions, discipline and  
intelligence of a high order,"

John Crompton, *Ways of the Ant*, 1988



# Soloists & Socialites

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

*Pucung Keladi* (Night Heron) stalking stealthily for prey in the river running across Minden campus

Soloists and Socialites

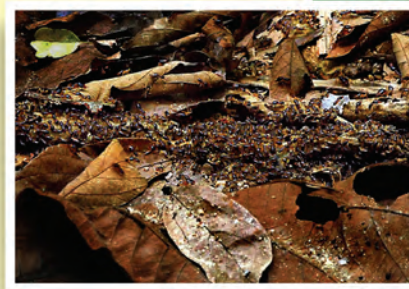
**H**umpback whales, wolves and many primates operate in groups and tend to make collective decisions. Ants, bees, and even fish do the same. Their highly interactive characteristics enable them to form recognisable and distinct societies.

Like human communities these social animals are highly interactive. Communicating in a myriad of ways, they convey messages that bring them together to a food source or a potential roost.

Bees and ants are notoriously cohesive, communicating and 'agreeing' to survive via colonies. Even if a lone bee or ant is found it is never on a selfish endeavour but rather out to perform a specific social function, usually to scout for food, or water or even to find an escape route from predators. These socialites are so human-like in their 'decision-making' and other behavior that they've been contemplated by some scientists as to "have their own cultures".



Worms and **Kongkiak** (large headed ants) are effective group decomposers



On the other extremes there the soloists, species which prefer to roam alone and make unconsulted decisions. The cat family is famous for this. Again the smaller species like some beetles and bugs seem to act on their individual judgement too.

Even then many insects stay together in their early days. Many plant bugs found in USM seem to exhibit these early 'bonding' characteristics after hatching.



Ants are social and highly 'conscientious' animals, like these two **Kerengga** (Red Ants) bringing food to their colony



**Mengkarung** (skink) are effective alone since they constantly need to disappear quickly under dried leaves and rubbles



Tortoises can tolerate company but often sun alone



Large grasshoppers like this one usually forages alone

Soloists and Socialites



Three species, from right **Biri-Birik** (Blue-Tail Bee-Eater), **Takor Tembaga** (Coppersmith Barbet) and **Punai** (Thick-Billed Pigeon) sharing a perch

Both loners and socialites are observed among birds. *Cak* (sparrows and munias) in Minden congregate and share their food together, just as their visiting *Punai* (pigeons) and *Perlings* (starling) counterparts. In fact the *munias* may be the most sociable of all the avians. *Cak Sisik* (Scaly-breasted munia) in USM seem to be happy, at least from the chatter of their pleasant chirps, tolerating the company of *Cak Uban* (White-Headed munias), *Cak Rawa* (Black-headed Munias) and occasionally even some *Cak Raya* (Baja Weaver)!

The *Bangau* (egrets and storks) and *Pucungs* (bitterns and herons) are more inconsistent. Tasik Aman for example house both the *Pucung Keladi* (Little Blue Heron) and the *Pucung Kuak* (night heron). But while the former is usually solitary, the latter is more comfortable in groups. The *Bangau Pacat* (Cattle Egret) for example is a socialite while the *Tampung Baju* (Javand Pond Heron) is a loner.

Even then, these loners can to spring an occasional surprise. Scores of kites and eagles which are most often solitary would without warning flock and hover menacingly over the Minden sky. Before one can figure out the reason for the congregation, they would disperse in separate directions a few minutes later.

Raptors of mixed species would sometime suddenly congregate over the Minden sky before quickly going individual ways



The **Malakerbau** (Mynah) is effective alone and in flock

The **Pucung Kuak** (Night Heron) hunts alone but roosts in company




A male **Burung Sambar Biru** (Thicket's Blue Flycatcher) hunts alone, but a female is often close by



**Punai** like this flock of Thick-Billed Pigeons often tolerate the company of other pigeons as well as many other species

Still some would elude the categorisations of loner or socialite, preferring instead to render truth to the adage 'lovebirds'. In campus, the pigeons are conspicuously loving. Unlike their human counterparts they never seem to quarrel. *Punai Daun* (Green pigeon), *Punai Tanah* (Emerald Dove), *Tekukur* (Ring-Necked Pigeon) and *Merbuk* (Spotted Dove), among others are almost always in pairs, only occasionally seen taking their young out. Otherwise they would feed, rest, and groom in devoted pairs.

Even then some of these lovebirds may deviate from the norm. *Merbah Kapur* (Yellow-vented Bulbul) often feed and fly in pairs. Yet certain times they would come in flocks to take a dust bath or simply to feed.

These few observations cannot help but make one wonder of how all these complex processes of decision making still end in a harmonious world of the other residents. Why do some human choose to go through another complex process of decision-making to attain chaos? 

## The Other Residents

Soloists and Socialites

Many small species like this ant and grasshopper are tolerant of companies

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It happened so fast. Mohd Hashim Daud thought that he would drown as he shouted for help because he was fighting from being dragged under by strong South China Sea waves at the scenic Teluk Cempedak in Kuantan, Pahang, in early 1967. His Chinese colleague at Technical Institute, Kuantan sitting under a tree on the beach, heard his cries and dived in to rescue Hashim. On that day, Hashim survived but his friend did not.



Artwork by Alec Chin

Yong Check Yoon  
Zulkifli Osman

Photographs courtesy of  
Mohd Hashim Daud

Being Civil About It

"Racial harmony transcends Malaysia rhetoric. We were raised in an era where we lived in perfect harmony without being told or taught to do so and in my case, I was rescued by a Chinese," Hashim told *The Leader*. In fact, Hashim had three Chinese housemates then.

"In a controlled environment you can choose who you want to live with but when you are in the world out there, you cannot choose who you want for your roommate or who you want to work with," he said. He added that they were so close that they took turns to carpool whenever they were returning to their respective hometowns.

**"In a controlled environment you can choose who you want to live with but when you are in the world out there, you cannot choose who you want for your roommate or who you want to work with,"**

**- Hashim**

Hashim, a pioneer of the engineering campus and the first Malay technical teacher at the Technical Institutes in the country, was responsible for setting up the School of Civil Engineering at USM's Engineering Campus in 1989.

The 320-acre Engineering Campus in Nibong Tebal that you see today started its journey from the School of Applied Sciences on the USM main campus in 1972. In fact, Hashim received a letter from the then Housing Building and Planning (HBP) Dean Prof Richard T. Shen to join its academic ranks in 1975 but he was not keen then because USM had wanted him to teach building structure in HBP.

"I was also not keen to move to Pulau Pinang (from Perak)," he explained. The proposal thus fizzled out.

Although engineering studies has its roots at the main campus, it was, however, restructured to comprise two main academic streams: Engineering Science and Industrial Technology. In a move to separate these fields of study physically, USM set up a branch campus dedicated to engineering courses at the former Ipoh City Council buildings in Ipoh in 1986. This campus was subsequently moved to Seri Iskandar in 1989.



The Chancellor, Al-Marhum Raja of Perlis Raja Syed Putra ibni Syed Hassan Jamalullail being accompanied by Hashim during a visit to the engineering campus



Former Education Minister Tan Sri Sulaiman Daud briefed by Hashim at an exhibition

"I joined USM on 1 October 1986," Hashim said, adding that it was supposed to have its first intake in 1988 but problems with students and budget delayed admission for another year. Thus, it only took-off in 1989 with just 17 students and today it has an annual intake of about 200 out of the campus student population of 4,000.

Reflecting on his USM career, he said things might have been different had he remained in the Polytechnic institution because he was about to be transferred to the technical division in the Ministry of Education. He told *The Leader* that his weekends and public holidays months were spent doing the groundwork after joining USM, aided by his experience in establishing four local technical institutes and Polytechnics previously. Even then it was a big challenge to set up the School of Civil Engineering because it had to start from scratch.

## Minden Memories

### Being Civil About It

"As an administrator with much to do, I have little time to pursue my PhD," Hashim (then an Assoc Prof) recalled. "I was involved with curriculum development and therefore had the opportunity to visit many Australian and U.K. universities. During the setting up of the campus I requested for a 40-tonne gantry crane and an engineer asked why I needed it, failing to realise that we deal with heavy machinery structural frames for testing."



Former Vice-Chancellor Tan Sri Musa Mohamad flanked by Hashim (left) and Hj. Samsuri (right) during the launching of the Fire Fighting Reserve Unit

In anticipation of the weight of the heavy machinery and structural frames the workshop has to bear, Hashim designed the facility with the floor 1.5-m (5 ft) thick! He gleaned these ideas from several higher education institutes in Australia.

"We set up the campus with advisory assistance from the British Council and the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP)," he explained, adding that he visited Australia almost every year to update himself on new developments and bring back useful innovations.

On human resource, Hashim said that he encouraged staff training as they are represented the assets of USM.

"I send almost everybody as long as there is an opportunity given by the Vice-Chancellor," he said.



Hashim with wife and daughter during the opening ceremony of the Engineering Campus

When the School of Civil Engineering started, he experienced staff shortage and the School scouted for graduates who are interested to pursue their Masters or PhD instead of the conventional method of employment. It was through this means that the School got recruited its postgraduate students and lecturers at the same time.

Hashim said that students used to call him 'Guru Besar' instead of 'Dekan' (Dean) because he treated them like his own children. He counseled and cajoled them to progress academically.

He was always prudent concerning purchases of sundry items or equipment for the School. "I first need to know what is going to be bought at what cost and if we have sufficient money for it," he said. "Ten per cent of the School budget was set aside for contingency purposes."

In 1997, Hashim bade farewell to USM, confident that the School had capable and dedicated staff. After an 'uneasy' three years of being away from the subject close to his heart, Hashim together with another colleague registered a civil engineering consultancy company.

Mohd Hashim Daud is a Managing Director of Civil and Structural Engineering Consultancy company in Ipoh. He can be reached at [perundinghjrs@gmail.com](mailto:perundinghjrs@gmail.com)



AZEMI SABRI



BETTY CHEW  
GEK CHENG



CHAN HOW NEAN



CHAN YEN FUNG



CHANDRASEKARAN  
VEERIAH



HARIZAN  
ABDUL HAMID



HO SIEW CHING



JEEVARETNAM  
MURUGAN



JOSEPHINE  
QUAH SIEW LIN



LEE CHEE FOONG



LEE SOO HOON



LEH SWEE CHENG



LIM DUAN LIB



LIM TIONG MENG



LOKMAN MAHMOOD



MADZNAH HASHIM



MOHD BORHAN  
NATIJO



MOHD SHAH  
ABDULLAH



NAZRI ABDULLAH



NOORKIAH MD ISA



NOR HARMI  
MOHAMAD



NORDIN  
SULAIMAN



NORLIA AHMAD



NURSANI GUNAK



QUAH POH LIN



ROHANI HASHIM



ROKMAA HAJI MAT



ROSLIN OSMAN



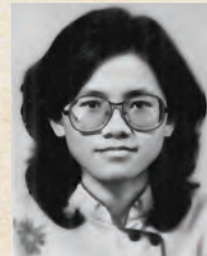
ROSLINA  
ABU BAKAR



SALAMAH  
SULAIMAN



SHELEY TEOH



SITI HADIJAH  
ALWI



SITI SALMAH  
HJ SULAIMAN



TAN CHENG LI



TAN EWE HUA



TAN YOOK CHAN



TEI CHIEW SIAH



THILAGAVATHY  
SELVARAJAH



TOK EK PING



WIDJI UTOMO  
RADJIKIN



WONG KOH CHOO



WONG KOK KIN



WONG SOOK PIN



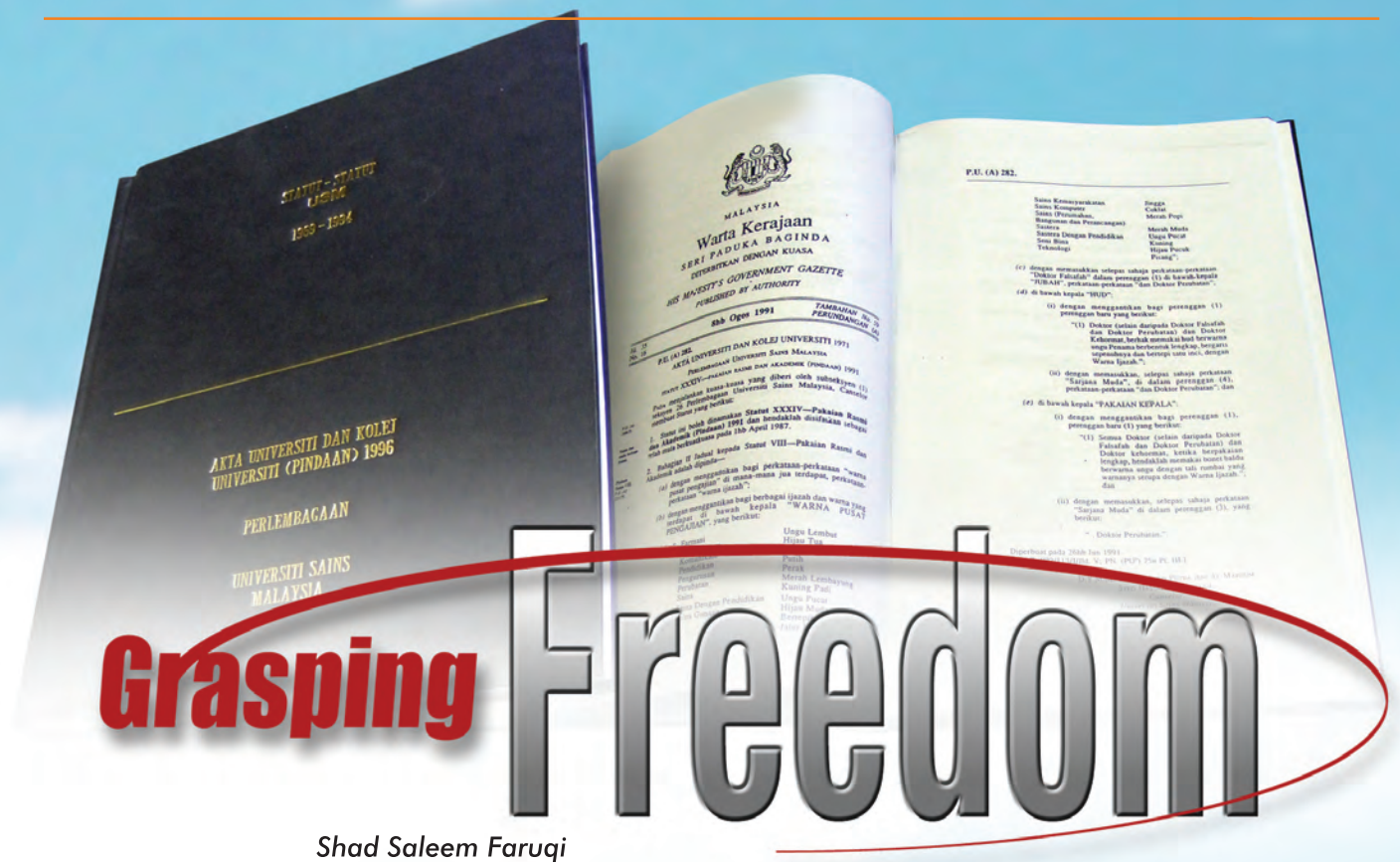
WONG YEUT CHOI



YAACOB  
ABDUL RAHIM



ZAINAB  
MOHAMAD RAZALLI



Shad Saleem Faruqi

Universities are statutory bodies created by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (The King) and governed by laws specially passed to regulate institutions of higher learning. They have a historical tradition predating the bureaucratic machinery that controls them. In the narrow legal sense they have a legal personality of their own and are independent of federal ministries. Their visions and missions may be free of political policies.

A legal framework was established for universities to exist as independent entities, allowing them to show initiative and be enterprising and autonomous. These liberating factors are, of course, balanced by responsibility, answerability and accountability. Between 1957 and 1971, the government permitted universities a fair degree of autonomy even though these institutions of higher learning then, as now, were largely funded by the tax payers. Disruptive student activism in the seventies led to the implementation of bureaucratic controls over university appointments

and the core activities of universities. The instrument for this control was the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 (Act 30) or better known as AUKU (Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti 1971).

Over the past few years, we desired to be the regional hub of education by producing Nobel laureates, emphasising research and innovation, developing links with industries, commercialising our findings and generating more funds.

From this development, there is a growing realisation that universities must be given more leeway to experiment and to innovate. The conferment of a 'research university' and 'Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX)' status, procedures for self accreditation and 'one-line budgets' are steps in that direction. AUKU was amended in 2009 to enlarge the powers of the Universities.

From the legal perspective, all universities have a fair amount of operational independence in areas of education, administration and finance. In this sense, a university is a corporate entity distinct from the government. It has vast powers to make educational decisions, regulate staff and student affairs, commercialise its research findings, enter into contracts and, with the permission of the Minister of Higher Education, undertake commercial and entrepreneurial activities, set up trusts, companies and corporations.

Sadly there is a wide gap between the law in the book and the law in action. All public universities have very little income of their own and, therefore, have to rely mostly on Parliament's 'grants in aid' for operational and development expenses.

As parliamentary allocations come through the Ministries of Higher Education and Finance, senior officers in these Ministries attach many conditions to them although there is no specific law authorising them to do so. Much of the administrative regulation of the universities by the civil service is based on history, custom, extra legal policies and acquiescence. It has no legal basis. As a matter of administrative traditions of a 'bureaucratic state', the Cabinet, the Prime Minister's Department, Public Service Department (JPA), Ministry of Finance, Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), the Home Affairs Ministry and the Ministry of Higher Education issue periodic circulars, directives and instructions to all institutions of higher learning. Universities tamely comply. Bureaucracy triumphs. The law takes a back seat.

Are there ways for us to bridge this gap between theory and reality?

USM can lead in organising seminars and colloquiums for university managers throughout the country to acquaint them of the complex legal position.

Once we have sensitised our university community to the legal problems and possibilities, dialogues can be held between university management and the elites of the civil service to understand each others' views and to examine the law. Perhaps efforts will then materialise to make the imperatives of the law become the aspirations of the university community.

The USM Board should seek the cooperation of all other University Boards to strategise the best ways of securing autonomy and promoting law reform in areas where it is needed. Possibly the Council of Vice-Chancellors could play a similar role of convincing the Minister of Higher Education, the Chief Secretary to the Malaysian Government, the relevant Secretaries-General and Directors General to support our quest. Among our efforts should be to:

- ✓ Restore legal powers that exist under AUKU but have become eclipsed by administrative and extra legal restraints.
- ✓ Promote the view that statutory bodies are semi-autonomous entities, standing in-between government departments and private sector enterprises.
- ✓ Persuade the Minister of Higher Education to enforce post-decisional accountability instead of pre-decisional fetters.

In the long term, a new Universities Act or a new Apex University Act, distilled from the wisdom of similar legislation around the world, could be attempted. USM can lead in this endeavour.

The Attorney General's advice could be sought on whether civil service regulations which are applicable to public services can also be applied to universities.

Obviously the struggle for autonomy will be long and painful as the forces of status quo cannot be expected to give up their de facto powers irrespective of what the law says. Freedom is never given on a platter. It has to be struggled for. In the interest of this country's educational future, what other choice do we have but to struggle, sacrifice, and persist?



# Diplomatic moves



Sopian Ahmad  
B. Soc. Sc. '74

I studied political science at USM. Immediately upon graduation I served the government from 17 April 1974 until 18 December 2008. My postings included London, Tehran, Jakarta, Brussels, Bangkok, Conakry, Islamabad, Jeddah and, lastly, Wellington.

Entering a new country, to live among strangers with different customs and traditions, was always a challenge to me and to my family members. Somehow, the unsophisticated kampong upbringing combined with philosophical orientation acquired through reading while at USM along with my life's journey provided me with the strength and stamina to plough on. There were times when I was so scared, nervous and confused. My mood swayed between dropping everything, packing up to go home to teeming with jubilation, exhilaration and pure joy.

A diplomat's life has political orientations. The nature of his or her work involved conducting and managing foreign relations among nations. Such work inevitably calls for political acumen to appraise power, influence and authority within a country or to send a delegation to a negotiation. Seasoned diplomats observing and analyzing political process and governance in different social systems invariably acquired political disposition. As such those with knowledge of political science stand at a great advantage.



A group shot in Minden campus, 1972. Standing first from right



With my wife at Lake District, UK, 1980.

In 1974, I attended the 24th General Session of the United Nations (UN) in New York. It was a hectic and confusing place packed with conferences and committee meetings almost everyday till late at night. Myriad of issues were taken up for debate and resolutions proposed. That was the year Yasser Arafat came to the United Nations (UN) and delivered his famous speech . . . the olive branch and the gun of a freedom fighter. The elation and euphoria of witnessing history in the making never left my mind. Lectures by Dr Khaw Guat Hoon on International Organizations that covered the UN system, its General Assembly, the Security Council, its main committees and specialized Agencies rushed back fresh to my head. (I went back to the General Assembly sessions in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993 tracking multilateral issues such as the Antarctica, environment, human rights, and many others of interest to Malaysia.)

Mid-1977 I was based in London. James Callaghan of the Labour Party was Prime Minister then. He was struggling to stem the vociferous demands of the trade unions. There was a series of paralyzing labour strikes

in those years known as 'Winter of Discontent'. Callaghan's Government was finally brought down by a vote of no confidence in the House of Common in 1979. It was amazing to witness a fall of a democratic government in modern times. Television showed the former prime minister leaving 10 Downing Street by the back door and the new prime minister waving to the onlookers at the front door.

It takes a politically attuned mind to understand why workers with high salaries in a developed country such as the United Kingdom demonstrated against the government led by the workers' party. A political mind with economic and social studies helps to understand the social strata and class awareness among the British citizens and their struggle for equality, liberty and democratic life. There is a life governed by choices and not conditions and I could see that their government deliberately works to provide those choices. They have a very high degree of political maturity that gave them stability and freedom. I would later witness the same political traits in Belgium and New Zealand.



## Diplomatic Moves



Clad in *Baju Melayu* (the fourth from right) attending a meeting in Iran.

After Callaghan's departure, Margaret Thatcher came to power. She championed individual freedom, smashed the power of the labour unions and privatised national industries. She adopted a strong monetarist policy for Britain and nursed the nation back to economic stability.

An observer could evidently see the main traditional political forces in Britain: the Conservative, Labour, Social Democrat and Liberal parties. To appreciate the full depth of the political life a diplomat needs to be conscious also of the pacifists, clerics, students, Marxist-Leninists, anti-Soviets, lecturers, labour activists, unemployed, punks, gays and ecologists. The newspapers, magazines and television shows were so educational and a great pleasure to follow. I rarely missed Sundays' Speakers' Corner and the hustings prior to general elections.

Both print and electronic hosted in depth debates of issues indicative of trends in political developments. As a student of politics, I could see the maturity of the political leaders, the strength of their state institutions and the workings of the government apparatus in furthering the greatness of a nation. The free exchanges of views, political discussions and debates contributed to the betterment of the general population. Corrupt and arrogant politicians simply could not survive in such a matured industrialised society. The mentality

of a developed nation is embedded in the respect for human rights, fraternity, freedom of expression and freedom of information. Individuals voted on the basis of informed choices and not political propaganda. These

issues were the stuff I learnt as a political science student at USM from Prof K. J. Ratnam, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Dr Collin Abraham and Dr Franklin.

Equipped with an inquisitive mind and a spirit of adventure I took an assignment to the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran after serving four years in London. As I arrived in Tehran the tottering government was in the throes of a revolution. A new set of people were in power. Those who used to wield power under the Shahanshah Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi were living in fear and dismay. At the same time wars were raging between Iran and Iraq, two historically Islamic neighbours. The United Nations, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the superpowers were seized with the conflicts with diplomacy as dead as those in the battle fields.

After living in a secular, parliamentary and democratic society I was then plunged into a society with a completely different political make-up. In the UK I saw the separation of state and religion whereas in Iran men's spiritual welfare ruled supreme. The Shahanshah, used the wealth obtained from oil to transform Iran into a major pro-Western regional power, seen as the puppet of the United States. His regime launched the White Revolution and the Seven Years' Economic Development Plan involving agrarian, education and health reforms and emancipation of women. But it was too fast, too late!

## Diplomatic Moves

On the other hand, Imam Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomein who regarded the Pahlavi Monarchy as a dictatorship working to remove Islam as a political, social and cultural force had been preaching that spirituality must not be divorced from political life and social daily problems. Resolving them was a religious duty. Religious leaders were called to fight against The monarchy collapsed and the Mullah took over.

I remember vividly my journey to Hamedan in North Iran. We stopped at the roadside to buy some apples from a villager. The man used stones to weigh his apples. I asked why stones were used. The man advised us not to worry because he had already tailored the stone as equivalent to the approved weight at a shop nearby. Iran was a land of contradictions. Whilst in a little village a poor man struggled to serve justice by weighing apples using stones, in Tehran the palace of the king of kings was lined in gold! And this happened where Abu Ali Al-Husayn or Avicenna once lived and contributed so much to human civilization. Iran refreshed my memories of lectures by Dr Chandra Muzaffar on "Islamic Political Thoughts" where we discussed the work of Ali Shariati and Ibn Khaldun.

I strived to gain political discernment and a perceptive sense of history to understand Iran by delving into a succession of deliberations and debates with my diplomatic colleagues. We tried to understand the failure of the 'White Revolution,' the causes of the war, the Iran- Arab relationship, the Shatt al-Arab issues, the Kurdish Movement, Iran-Moscow relations, Iran-Pakistan and Afghanistan relations with impacts on its frontiers.

Information was scarce and the scope of determinants which affect these relations were simply mind boggling. Friendship with local population and other diplomats particularly those with books on Iran wars of critical necessity. Luckily for me, one of my office clerks, Afzal, had been entrusted to look after a house left by an expatriate. In the house were books that became my treasure.

Yet life in Tehran was exciting. Almost everyday we kept our ears close to the ground trying to hear where we could get fresh fish, sugar and cooking oil. The black market was thriving. Demonstrations were common, mainly by members of the public shouting "Allahu akhbar, Khomeiny rahbar, Marghbar America!" (Allah is great, Khomeini is the leader, death to America.) I also noted that Marlboro cigarettes and US Dollars were very popular.

Once in a while Iraqi fighter jets breached Tehran airspace. Light was ordered off in the whole city. Men, women and children rushed up to the top of their flat roofs and chanted Allahuakhbar! Allahuakhbar! Strangely we were not scared at that moment. In fact, I felt as if I was living in one of those 1001 night stories!



*Heading a meeting for ASEAN Festival of Song in Brunei Darulssalam in 1986*

My next overseas posting was to Jakarta. I was seconded to the ASEAN Secretariat to be Chief of the Social and Cultural Bureau. There was a fund of about US\$30 Million giving an income of about US\$2 million annually. I was mandated to use about US\$1.8 million per year for about 18 ASEAN projects in the then six ASEAN nations. The initial excavation works in Bujang Valley and the ASEAN Square Sculpture in the Lake Garden Kuala Lumpur were some of those projects assisted by the Fund under my charge in those days.

## Diplomatic Moves

*I can also be a good fisherman as this picture in Guinea shows*



*Trying out a Guinean gear*

At the ASEAN Secretariat I managed multi-lateral issues. It was well known that ASEAN presented wide differences among its members in terms of economic status, territorial and population sizes. By policy and principle ASEAN acted on the basis of consensus. In searching for a consensus the greatest challenge was to safeguard a project or proposal from being watered down to a lowest common level to accommodate members with either lowest interest or capacity to implement. A diplomat in such a position needs to have a deep understanding of political and cultural background of all the players involved. A sharp political acumen is necessary to understand, digest and analyze and find appropriate words to fit into a resolution acceptable to all parties with varying interests.

After serving three years at the ASEAN Secretariat which gave me opportunities to travel to many exotic places in Southeast Asia I came back to Kuala Lumpur and was attached to the Foreign Minister's office for almost four years. Then I left for Brussels, Belgium, where I covered the European Commission and Luxembourg, dealing with environmental and trade issues. The Europeans were very sensitive toward the destruction of tropical rain forest. There were campaigns against usage of timber and oil palm from Malaysia and we had a lot of explaining to do.

In 1997 I was sent to Bangkok to be the representative of Malaysia to the UN Regional office, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). At that time the murmur of financial crisis was emerging.

Thailand's stock index was diving. The government was spending huge amounts of money to defend the Baht but to no avail. As a diplomat caught in the middle of a financial crises I struggled to understand fiscal and monetary policies, interest rates, current account and terms of trade. Changes were so rapid. There was no time to study. We simply have to file in situation reports to Wismaputra. Soon the "tomyam effect" came down to Malaysia.

My short stint in Thailand was followed by my first Ambassadorial post to the Republic of Guinea in West Africa. We landed in Conakry in August, a rainy season. The Chief of Protocol was waiting for me with umbrellas at the base of the plane stairs. We were ushered into the VIP room. Once again I was in a different world. The atmosphere at the airport was chaotic. There was shouting, crying, rushing and waiting. There were beggars of all sorts; men, women, children, able and disabled.

From the airport to the town center we passed dilapidated houses, shacks and huts with roofs kept in place by black rocks and pieces of wood. The traffic was disorderly with cyclists, pedestrians, and traders peddling roasted maize, bananas and mangoes. Images of clogged drains and dirty patches of brown earth, dust, children appeared before my eyes. Poverty and humanity offered new meanings to me. The Republic of Guinea was endowed with rich natural resources of bauxite, gold, diamond and timber but the population was the fifth poorest in the world. Frank Fanon's 'Wretched of the Earth' about colonization materialized as stark realities. Abandoned by the West for standing up against colonization Guinea was subjected to extreme communism by Ahmad Seko Tore. In 1990s it was just learning about market economy.

Malaysia was in Guinea investing in rice plantation, poultry, trading, telecommunication and banking. Some were successful. Many failed.

When I first called on Prime Minister Sidya Toure he was so keen to learn how Malaysia had progressed so well with economic development. I briefed him on our strategy of focusing on education and sending students overseas to learn new technology in developed countries, I also outlined how land ownership in Malaysia was reformed through Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) schemes to help the poor and landless. After about 30 minutes of serious discussion the Prime Minister tapped my left knee and said, "Malaysia took 25 years to develop, Guinea will do in 10." Weeks later I called on Nabiulla, the presidential adviser and among other matters related to him was my discussion with the Prime Minister. Nabiullah, who was in his early 80s softly said, "It was the sign of his youth!"

After Guinea I was sent to Pakistan as the High Commissioner. General Musharraf had just taken power. The presentation of my credentials to the president was steeped with tradition. I was taken by a coach drawn by eight horses to the door of the presidential Palace. After the inspection of the guard of honour there were salutes to the national anthems of both countries.

*I was enjoying fruits in an orchard with a Pakistani businessman*



*Joint Rice project in Pakistan*

Serving in Pakistan was punctuated by stirring and gripping events. Here I have to delve into conflict management to understand how Pakistan and India co-exist as immediate neighbours. Kashmir persisted to be their contentious issue. Both have nuclear warheads. There were times that their armies stood eyeball to eyeball along their common border and we stood ready to evacuate our citizens. While they appeared antagonistic India and Pakistan must have recognised the balance of terror that they were capable of lashing on each other for mutual destruction.

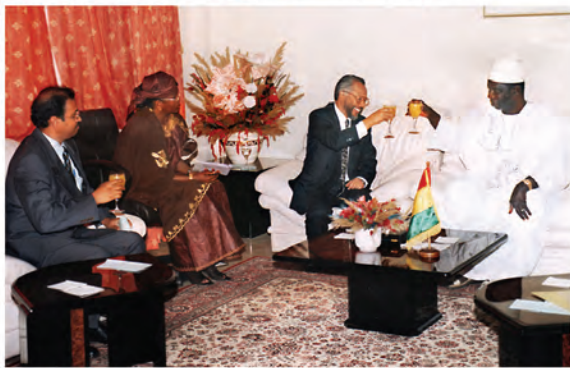
While on the eastern frontier, Pakistan faced India, on its western border Afghanistan was burning. Afghan refugees were pouring into Pakistan. Malaysia collected clothing and money to assist them. My job was to deliver them. With my very able Defense Attache, Lt Colonel Ismail Karim we secured military trucks to take tonnes of donations from Karachi to Chaman, a journey of about 800 km. Oblivious to the danger of banditry and robbers we enjoyed the beautiful countryside landscape and mountainous topography. The precipices along the narrow pebble road in between the gorges were covered with gigantic blocks of boulders which gave an added excitement to the adventure. After a day of arduous journey we handed our donations to the volunteers at their camps in Chaman.

In December 2002 Hamid Karzai was installed as interim president of Pakistan. I was instructed to attend the ceremony. With other diplomats we took one-way tickets into Kabul using the UN service. Upon arrival we rushed to the UN Kabul office to make sure that we could get an immediate trip back to Islamabad. I had to stay overnight. As no hotel room was available I took a chance to knock on the door of the Indonesian Embassy which stood near the ceremonial hall for the presidential installation. The Embassy was closed due to the war. Only a local guard was there as a caretaker. With a few Persian words, remnants from the Tehran days, I managed to gain access to the compound. I called my Bangladeshi colleague to join me since he too had no room to stay. We were allowed to sleep in the store room packed with old mattresses and old utensils. That night we cooked the rice my wife packed for me and ate it with *serunding* (spicy meat floss). For breakfast, the guard kindly slaughtered one of the 20 chickens he kept in the compound.

## Bridging Ideas

### Diplomatic Moves

After Islamabad I was seconded to the OIC Secretariat in Jeddah as the Assistant Secretary General in charge of Science and Technology. Again I have to expand my mental horizon into science and technology in OIC member countries. We addressed issues such as higher education and the availability of scientists and researchers in Muslim countries. From Jeddah I tried to coordinate International Universities under the OIC. There were universities in Dacca, Niger and Uganda under the purview of the OIC. Pakistan hosted COMSTECH or the OIC's standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation for the promotion and cooperation of scientific and technological activities among the member states. I attended meetings of these institutions on behalf of the Secretary General. While serving in Jeddah I had a chance to cover issues such as environmental disaster facing the Aral Sea in Kazakhtan and Uzbekistan. But the OIC Secretariat needed restructuring and reforms. Many member states were not paying their annual contributions.



*Top: Presenting a service award to a former New Zealander employee in Wellington  
Bottom: I have to entertain guests from many countries*



*Trying horse-riding in Malam Jabar highlands, Pakistan*



*With wife and son in Malam Jabar*

After a year in Jeddah I went to serve as the High Commissioner of Malaysia in New Zealand, a vast and beautiful land which is sparsely populated and naturally clean. New Zealand elects its government every three years. It uses a mixed proportional election system, I recall studying at USM. Parliamentarians are voted in from the Constituency List as well as the Party List. There is no by-election whenever there is a vacancy. The party occupying the seat refills it with the most senior member on the Party List. I believe New Zealand's electoral system gives serious priority to the 'representativeness of a government' and hence its legitimacy to govern.

I have tried to describe how my experiences were related to the studies I undertook while being a student at USM almost thirty years ago. I enjoyed my work as there was a fair distribution of exposures to the least developed, developing and the most developed societies in the world. I also had the opportunity to deal with bilateral as well as multilateral issues in my career. But the world has since changed and universities and students today need to adapt to the new world order. 🇵🇰

# A Trip to Sabah

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

Yusuf Suid  
B. Comp. Sc. '06

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

*Mount Kinabalu dwarfs the domain around it*

**M**ost of the 35 participants of the Kota Kinabalu (KK) tour had heard about the famed Kundasang village but few had seen the rustic hamlet. It is a village closest to the daunting Mount Kinabalu which stands 4,095 metres at its pinnacle.

The 4 day/3 night trip was the first organised by Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA) for the alumni and associates, extending to their family members and friends. Norhasniza and her spouse were there on their honeymoon while Abdul Talib from Kuala Lumpur remarked that this is an occasion to be away from handphones.

After a two-hour journey by bus, the participants were awed by fresh fruits and local food that the Nabal Market has to offer. They then proceeded to Kinabalu Park to visit its botanic gardens where many varieties of wild orchids can be found. This is also one of the two places where hikers can ascend Mount Kinabalu which can be seen swathed in clouds.



*An educational tour through the Botanic Gardens*



*A briefing for those interested to scale Mount Kinabalu*

A Trip to Sabah



The Kipungit waterfall

We spent a cold night at Kundasang and the silhouette of Mount Kinabalu stood out against the fading light of the day. We woke up early to seize the opportunity to photograph its peak before 9 am after which it will be enshrouded in clouds. That was when we had the group photograph taken.

From Kundasang we headed back to KK for a city tour, stopping at Menara Yayasan Sabah, the tallest building in Sabah, before adjourning to the Kota Kinabalu City Mosque, Chocolate Boutique and the Filipino Market to buy dried seafood, natural pearls and souvenirs to take home. The PPPA staff members managed to meet Augustine Wong Ming Kong, one of Sabah's active alumni, in the evening.

The next day, we took a 15-minute boat ride to Sapi Island from Tanjung Aru. Standing at the jetty of the island, we can see fishes swimming in the crystal clear waters and the kids fed the fishes that swam up to them. Unfortunately development on that part of the island had destroyed the corals and we have to be contented with the variety of sea sports offered including snorkeling.

As we flew back to West Malaysia, with the memories of Sabah still fresh in our minds, someone asked if more trips were afoot. Well, we certainly have plans and we expect more to join the fun 'family' outing. **L**

Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal is currently the Assistant Registrar at the Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. She can be contacted at [darr\\_wynn@yahoo.com](mailto:darr_wynn@yahoo.com)



An exhilarating canopy walk



Snorkeling cuts across age barrier



A typical scenic jetty in Sabah

From the Park we visited Poring hot spring where the bamboo thriving there has a diameter as large as an adults' head and the water from the sulphurous pools are hot enough to produce hard boil eggs at 90°C. Although the trek leading to the canopy walk was quite challenging, nobody complained because of the fun and excitement. The canopy walk was exhilarating, giving you an aerial view of tree tops at a height of about 10 m above the ground. Our next stop was the scenic Kipungit waterfall which is about 15 minutes walking distance away. A number of us took the opportunity to enjoy free fish spa by immersing our weary feet into the frigid waters of the pool beneath the awesome waterfall for the fish to nibble the dead skin off our feet.

## Next Trip India

**8 Days, 7 Nights in Fascinating India: Delhi/Agra/Jaipur/Srinagar/Gulmarg**

**Limited places available on a first-come, first-served basis to USM alumni and their families only. Registration closing date 30 September. Halal meals. Tour departure on 18 - 25 December.**

For details, contact:

Hj Helmi Hj Daud

H/P: 013-3600639 e-mail: [helmi.daud@magnabridge.com](mailto:helmi.daud@magnabridge.com)

Artwork by Alec Chin

Text and Photographs by  
Chan Suan Choo

# Voices from the Square



The sun was still high when I arrived at the Esplanade on that warm Sunday afternoon that I had chosen to check out the Speakers' Square. The promenade was crowded with people strolling around or sitting on the low wall by the sea, while the field was scattered with families, picnicking and playing games with kites flying overhead. Faint music was playing in the background; it was the *Fête de la Musique*, the annual French music festival celebrated at Fort Cornwallis nearby. Taking full advantage of the shade offered by the surrounding trees, the senior folks appeared to have monopolised the low walls bordering the Millennium Square, contentedly watching the world go by. But the Penang Speakers' Corner, the very spot I came to see, appeared rather empty.



By 7 pm a crowd of 100 people gathered to listen to the speaker

It was 15 minutes to the appointed time. Seeing no sign of impending activity, I felt rather disappointed. Then again I really did not know what to expect of the evening anyway. It was also Father's Day and that many would have had other plans instead of spending the evening talking or listening to other people talk.

Not wanting to give up just yet, I stationed myself quite some distance away but with a clear view of the bright yellow signboard. It was then at about 6 pm. when I noticed a man carrying and depositing a folding table and a plastic bag by the signboard. His second trip produced some more plastic bags, a guitar and even a cake. It then appeared that something was going to happen after all. After he had set up the table, he went around and greeted the familiar faces around him. By then a bigger crowd, myself included, had gathered around the Millennium Square with reporters and photographers from the various local dailies huddled together in one corner.



Andre Loh strumming his guitar to a sing-a-long of 'Green, Green Grass of Home'

As no one appeared to be making a move to speak, I took the opportunity to befriend the gentleman, Andre Loh Yu Hsiang, who was the facilitator for the evening. He told me that on a typical evening there would be about five speakers and could draw a large crowd of 200 people.

At about 6.15 pm, Loh moved the table away from the sun to the shadier Millennium Square itself and began the session by ringing a bell. He then spoke about Dr Martin Luther King Jr, and read an extract from his 'I Have a Dream' speech that the civil rights leader gave in 1963. Loh then shared about his own dream, as a Malaysian and as a father.

Other speakers were slow to respond after Loh had finished. Maybe the mood had yet to set in. Then a regular, Alfred, urged Loh to have a sing-a-long first and volunteered to lead everyone with 'Que Sera Sera'. Memories of scout gatherings flooded my mind as one song led to another before someone finally spoke. A young man shared a Father's Day-themed *sajak*, albeit with political intonations within. The evening even included a quiz, for which prizes of fragrances were given to those with the right answers. At times, serious matters were also brought up.



As it was Father's Day, a special event was planned for the closing of the session after the ringing of the last bell. In the spirit of 1Malaysia, the most senior fathers (or grandfathers) from the various ethnic groups were invited to gather at the table as we all joined Loh in singing the Luther Vandross hit, 'Dance With My Father', from the lyrics provided on the sheets of paper passed around the group. The fathers then posed for photos and cut the cake, which was later shared among all those present.



A speaker expressing a point

As the sun began to fade away, the people dispersed and thus ended another session at the Penang Speaker's Square. **L**

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# A Siti's Tale

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

*"Maghi maghi,  
mughoh-mughoh,  
tigo amah..."*

*(Literally "Come, come, cheap,  
cheap, only one ringgit fifty cents..."  
in the Kelantanese dialect of Malay)*

## Beyond The Gates

### A Siti's Tale

In a bid to attract the attention of shoppers, the women traders relentlessly shouted out their wares and bargains as I walked pass their stalls set on concrete platforms in the centre podium of Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah (Siti Khadijah market), the main market right in the heart of Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

As I strolled through the narrow walkways, the variety of vegetables and fruits on offer, the scent and the overall atmosphere reminded me of those times I spent as young boy in this bustling small town, a place I once called home.

I have fond memories of my short stint at the market helping out in the family's grocery business after the SPM and STPM examinations. The experience I gained in dealing first-hand with the women entrepreneurs in particular was enlightening. At the market, they are not merely entrepreneurs - they actually dominate the place. Husbands are relegated to the role of assistants, running errands and helping out only when needed. It would not be an exaggeration to say that what I went through could have easily come off the pages of *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*.

*A myriad of colours in the market*



*The women folk dominated the market place*

As I stood in the middle of centre podium trying to rekindle those old memories, I suddenly felt out of place, mainly because those faces that I grew up seeing were no longer there. The sellers whom I once dealt with had long gone, and I quite hastily concluded that the task of looking for interviewees was not going to be an easy one. Those who were there seemed more interested in selling their wares rather than making small talk. But luckily for me, a seller started to open up when he heard the unmistakable Kelantanese dialect coming out from my mouth.

*"Balik keghak la kalu boleh, loh ni kelate maju jugok, keda banyak, keto banyak, palo ghetok haggi haggi jam."* She continued. *"Mokcik niago sini setakak nok caghi make boleh lah..."* (Come back more often. Kelantan is more developed now, lots of cars and new shops, the bridge is jammed with traffic everyday. Business is enough to make a living...)



### A Siti's Tale

As I made my way up to the upper floor after the chat, I was hit by the smell of salted fish, dried shrimps, spices and keropok (fish crackers). Again, the old memories came flooding back and I quickly scanned the area for familiar faces. It was again a futile attempt - the stalls I frequented as a child were now manned by the younger set, most likely the children of the old guards that I used to know.

"Caghi gapo be? Maghi mano?" (What are you looking for brother? Where are you from?). Obviously 'inheriting' the business acumen from her parents, a young store owner approached me with packets of instant fish crackers. Sensing that I was there to look for stories, she offered hers.



The **pakcik** who mistook me for a Japanese tourist

"Baghe ni sumo ambik daghi kile, kito jual sajo la. Bisnes sendiri, tok payoh hagak tokeh, betul dok? Dulu mu niago sini koh? Ghama pencen doh..." (All the goods are sourced from factories, we only do the selling. This is my own business; it's better than being employed. You used to trade here? Your friends must have already retired.)

The young woman then obligingly posed for a picture, although she was reluctant to reveal her name. Grateful for the story offered, I bought a few packets of fish crackers as a parting gesture.

Once out of the building, I came across a local 'taxi', the beca (trishaw), which was the main mode of transportation during my childhood days.

I approached one old trishaw driver and was greeted by what others might see as intrusive questioning. "Mu Jepung koh?" (Are you Japanese?). Before I could even answer, he offered some personal family details - "Cicit pokcik baghu gi Jepung ngaji." (My great granddaughter just departed for Japan to further her studies). Realising that I was not one of the tourists who frequented the place, he continued, "Loh ni oghe mudo tok seh ambik teksi, pokcik bawa oghe tuo sajo." (Nowadays the young don't like to take trishaws. I only ferry the elders.)

I was just about to leave the market compound when a woman appeared out of nowhere, precariously balancing a basket on her head. She whizzed past me, and before I knew it, she was already out of sight. I had missed a potentially good frontal shot, a scene that was now likely to be etched only in the mind. A missed opportunity it was, but the market is definitely one place you're not likely to forget once you've been there. Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah, after all, embodies the indefatigable zeal for life and the passion and determination to hold on to values and traditions that have long defined Kelantan and its people. █



A rare scene nowadays

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# Curried Flavour

Zulkfli Osman Yong Check Yoon  
Photographs by Rusli Jamaluddin



Nasir delivering food cooked at his house to the nasi kandar shop



Some love it hot... About 15 types of dishes, mostly spicy ones, are served daily



A staff scooping curry into a plastic bag for a takeaway customer

When his father fell ill, Abd Nasir Razak, a USM employee who was 43 years old then, had to decide whether he should take over the *nasi kandar* business at the Kampung Melayu flats. The two locks of flats were among the earliest to be built together with Rifle Range Flats and People's Court in the 70s.

"It was a difficult decision because I spent 23 years working at the library, museum, School of Biological Sciences, and School of Computer Sciences," he explained. "Finally, I decided to seek optional retirement in 1998".

Nasir's experience working for his father during weekends and public holidays helped him to adapt quickly to the new role of 'working for himself'. With his business acumen and assistance from his family members, he was able to serve between 15 and 20 varieties of dishes to go with steamed rice or roti canai.

The *nasi kandar* shop was established in the 60s, occupying a unit of the shop lot on the groundfloor of the flat. Despite its out-of-the-way location, it attracts a regular clientele.

"My father started with Mee Mamak (yellow noodles fried or served with gravy, also known as mee goreng/mee rebus) for the first five years before focusing on selling *nasi kandar*," Nasir said.

Soon, Nasir expanded his business by taking over the shop lot next door and later established another branch at Desa Mawar food court in Farlim about 500m away.

He starts his business at 6.30 am and often finishes by noon. Then it is time to start preparing to resume business at the Desa Mawar food court from 5 pm to 11 pm. Soon the day comes to a close, Nasir's thoughts turn to the next day and when dawn breaks, he has to ensure that his customers will be served with piping hot food for breakfast. 🍲

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# A TASTE OF MEDICINE

Yong Check Yoon

USM is the first local university to establish an off-shore medical college and run a full medical programme. It is the result of discussions between the Chancellor of Karnatak Lingayat Education (KLE) University and USM Vice-Chancellor Tan Sri Prof Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, consequential to their meeting in Malaysia.

KLE is familiar with Malaysia because Public Service Department (JPA) and The Council of Trust for the Bumiputera (MARA) have sent Malaysian students to its Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College (JNMC) before. KLE was here to discuss with JPA on increasing the number of Malaysian medical students to JNMC located at Belgaum, in Karnataka, India.

“Malaysia wanted JNMC to increase the number of intake but, unfortunately, there is a Indian Medical Council ruling for Indian medical schools to have only 10 percent of foreign students,” USM Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International Affairs) Prof Ahmad Shukri Mustapa Kamal said. “To overcome this problem, it is possible for a Malaysian university to operate a medical school in India basing on Malaysian curriculum.”

Dzul perceived it as a way of expanding USM medical programme with the help of the 47-year-old JNMC which was adjudged in a national survey done in 2007 as one of the top 20 medical schools in India. The medical college will be providing doctors, facilities and lecturers while USM will oversee the programme and implement quality control.



Ahmad Shukri

“Medical students are able to work on cadavers during the US\$100,000 (RM330,000) 5-year programme,” Shukri said.

He pointed out that at this juncture students have to fund their own study as JPA only send students to colleges and universities in their list. The consolation is that students at MARA are awaiting their A-Level results after which some of them would join the other successful applicants for the programme in September. The scholarship problem would be ironed out next year.

With the establishment of this programme, USM has managed to reach beyond the Malaysian shores, creating opportunities for students to study medicine at a medical college that is recognised by the Malaysian Medical Council. The JNMC is also listed in the World Health Organization directory of World Medical Institutions. 🇲🇾

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## The Champs

More than 3,000 staff from 21 public institutions of higher learning attended the 35<sup>th</sup> Inter-Varsity Staff Games (SUKUM) from 16-26 June at USM Penang. There were 324 athletes from the USM contingent. USM and Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) were declared joint champions. The Championship Flag was handed over to Universiti Teknikal Malaysia the host for SUKUM 2011.



## Home Run

A group of 75 pioneering students returned to USM for a one-day reunion organised by Ho Kam Chon (B. Sc. '72) on 12 June. The participants were treated to a fruit fest, before having lunch at Dewan Budaya Banquet Hall. A dinner was held at Cititel which was graced by Puan Sri Winnie Hamzah Sendut, widow of the founding Vice-Chancellor.

## mobilelearning@usm

USM through the School of Distance Education had launched another centre of excellence, known as mobilelearning@usm on 13 July. This is in tandem with USM's mission to enhance the field of higher education by becoming the pioneers of new programmes such as teaching and learning through the use of mobile learning (M-learning) methodology.



## A Helping Hand for OKU

On 19 July, the Women, Family and Community Minister, Dato' Shahrizat Abdul Jalil launched the 'Seminar on Strengthening the Economic Position of People with Special Needs (OKU)'. The pilot project undertaken by the ministry in cooperation with several other parties including USM, was aimed at enhancing the achievements and competency standards of the OKU.

## Public Talk

Professor Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a prominent contemporary Muslim philosopher and thinker from Malaysia, gave a public talk on Higher Education in Islam Dewan Persidangan on 9 August. The talk was chaired by Deputy Higher Education Minister Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah.





### Pimpin Siswa 2010

A total of 952 new students under the 2010/11 intake attended the First Phase of the USM Pimpin Siswa Programme from 9-11 July. Pimpin Siswa is a training module developed by the Student Affairs and Development Division, USM to strengthen the character and values of the students covering both academic and spiritual needs. The students from the Main Campus, Engineering Campus and Health Campus underwent the training programme at selected camps in Perak, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu. Academicians, administrators and student leaders also participated as facilitators to ensure the success of the programme.



### Perodua Eco-Challenge 2010

USM successfully defeated four other teams from different local institutions of higher learning at the Perodua Eco-Challenge on 26 June. The group of students from the School of Mechanical Engineering emerged as winners in the Manual Transmission category after their modified Perodua Viva recorded a distance of 37.2 km on only one litre of petrol at the Melaka International Motorsports Circuit.



### Piramida Sunca

The Global Archaeological Research Centre (PPAG) in USM is assisting the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Bosnian Pyramid of the Sun Foundation to excavate what is believed to be the largest pyramid in the world. 'Piramida Sunca' or 'Pyramid of the Sun' is located at Mount Visocica, north of Sarajevo. According to Assoc Prof Mokhtar Saidin, Director of PPAG USM, the first team from PPAG comprising staff and postgraduate students conducted their research at the site from 10-23 June.

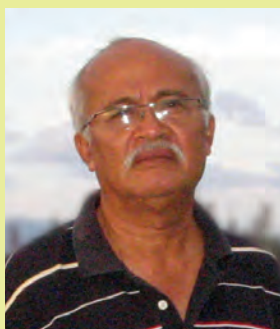


### In the Community Spirit

The School of Electrical and Electronics Engineering and the Centre for Knowledge, Communication and Technology, Engineering Campus donated 110 used computers on 9 July to several selected schools and a mini library under the Lestari Siswa Project introduced by USM.



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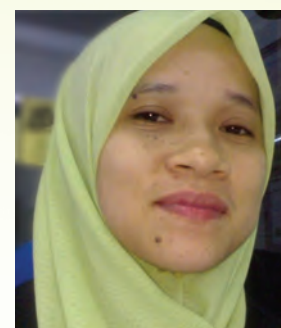
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Seventy-five pioneering students at the one-day reunion organised by the class of '72 and PPPA on 12 June

