

JUNE 2012 Volume 7 No.2

THE LEADER

ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

A Delectable
Potpourri



ISSN 1675 - 0063



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Guest Contributors



Mohamed Talhah Idrus is a retired lecturer and Deputy President of Persatuan Alumni USM (PAUSM).

Liew Yean Woh is a retired trader residing in Selangor.

For those who are interested to contribute articles to The Leader, please refer to <http://alo.usm.my/> for a writer's guidelines.

Cover artwork by Alec Chin. Photograph by Yong Check Yoon. **The Leader** is like the **ais kacang** whose flavour comes with a good mix of condiments/ingredients and in small digestible portions.

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Editorial

In *The Leader*, we fervently believe that a winner is not only the person who breaks the finish-line tape but also those who are able to quickly recover from a stumble and continue running to the finish. This is particularly true when the going gets tough. Therefore, *The Leader* will trudge on as failure is not an option.

The current editorial team wishes to thank Mohamed Talhah Idrus, Datin Sharifah Munirah Syed Mohamed, Dr Hamima Dona, Saw Cheang Kee, Jonathan Chen and Rusli Jamaluddin for their dedication that kept *The Leader* going over the years. It is not easy because, as with a candle, it is easy to light it but difficult to keep it burning. Anyway, they did it and for that, kudos!

We also wish to welcome Izam Fairus Kamaruddin and Tan Ewe Hoe aboard the editorial team.

The theme for this issue is 'potpourri', represented by a bowl of *ais kacang* as on the cover. Pondering on it, the *ais kacang* has an odd mix of condiments with shaved ice yet is a delectable dessert that teases the taste buds. The editorial team was and is indeed like the humble *ais kacang* because each member has his or her own talents, character and temperament but when these were put together, their output gave the magazine its distinctive 'flavour'. We want to continue this legacy. To fulfill this quest, we need your feedback in terms of short notes (for *What Say We...*) or, better still, write ups about your days in USM.

You are our important stakeholder and this magazine is meant for your reading pleasure. For this reason, we want to know what you want to read about, your experiences, your concerns, and your dreams. Write to us at alo@usm.my.

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A 'cosmos' of atoms and molecules exists far beyond what the eye can see. Instead of peering into the infinite vastness of space for distant galaxies and black holes, Penang-born Prof Fun Hoong Kun is keener to explore what are within substances, interpreting the 3D structure of molecules from x-ray diffracting from them.

Yong Cheek Yoon

Photographs courtesy of
Fun Hoong Kun

SEARCHING THE INNER SPACE

"My work included looking at 3D crystal structures of organic molecules found in natural products - what they look like and how they interact," he said.

Fun joined USM in 1974 soon after his return with a PhD in experimental Solid State Physics from Purdue University. Since then he studied x-ray crystallography on his own and eventually set up the X-ray Crystallography Unit at the School of Physics, USM, in 1987.

He explained that even when we look at a three-dimensional structure of a molecule, the way the atoms within the molecule are positioned - left or right handed - is very important because the enantiomorph (or 'enantiomer' as chemistry students may recall) can have totally different properties.

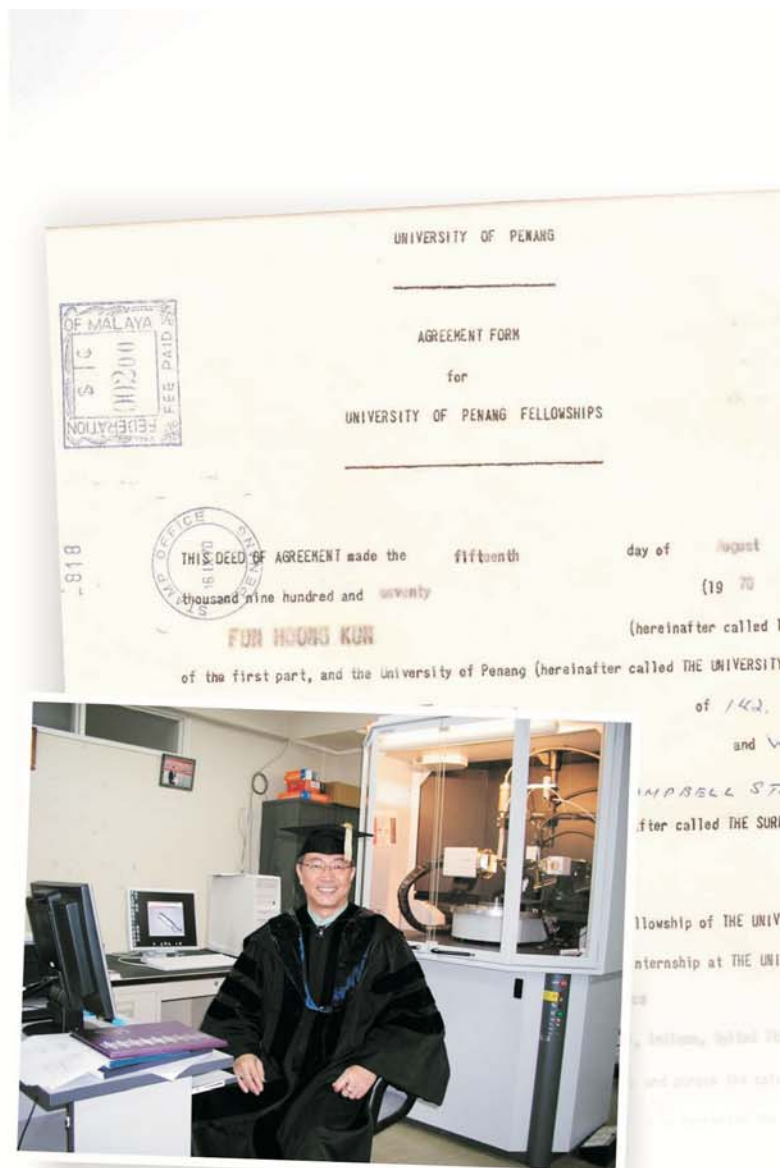
Special Feature

Searching the Inner Space

Let us take both our hands as an example. They are mirror images of one another but no matter how hard we try to superimpose the hands by laying one on top of the other with the palms facing in the same direction, we can never be able to do it because the left and the right hands are 'enantiomers'.

"In the 1970s, thalidomide was developed basing on natural products to cure morning sickness drug," he said. "However, the synthesised drug comprises two different isomers and that was the cause of severe birth defects."

It was estimated that more than 10,000 children were born with deformities in 46 countries as a result of thalidomide use. Consequently, many questions have been raised about the synthesis of compounds that are found in nature. That is where Fun's interest lies: the solving of the three-dimensional structures of small molecules; looking for molecules of interest that may have potential applications in medicine as well as possessing non-linear optical and fluorescent properties.



(From top) Fun was offered the Academic Staff Training Scheme (ASTS) Fellowship of the 'University of Penang', as USM was then known, making him the first recipient of ASTS Fellowship, 1970; Wearing his Purdue PhD gown in the x-ray laboratory, School of Physics, 2009

His area of research is broad, covering a range of x-ray crystallographic investigations, including those of high T-superconductors which are materials that have the ability to carry electricity without resistance at a temperature of up to 138 Kelvin.

Currently his research group is particularly interested in finding useful natural product compounds that can be used as medicine and supramolecular networks in organic/metal organic crystals. Much x-ray structural research is done in the USM laboratory with the collaboration with researchers from mainly China, Taiwan, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Japan and Saudi Arabia. This research group, under Fun's supervision, has managed to solve a few thousand organic, metal-organic and inorganic structures.



With Prof Abdul Latif Ahmad (the Research Dean of Fundamental Science Platform), after receiving their 7th Rotary Research Gold Medal Awards in April 2012

Searching the Inner Space

One of his group's breakthroughs was the discovery of the temperature-dependent reversible ferroelastic phase transition which was eventually named FAST, an acronym for Fun Anwar Suchada Transition, in 2001. Since then, the group has since found many more examples of FAST and they have explored the behavior mechanism of this phase transition process.

Until this year, Fun has published more than 2,270 Science-Citation-Indexed (SCI) papers. SCI is a Thomson-Reuters database that allows a researcher to identify which articles that have cited any particular earlier article, those that have cited articles of any particular author, or which articles that have been cited most frequently in notable and significant journals. His research articles have often been cited by others to earn him the h-index of 38. The h-index, the abbreviation of Hirsch index, is a measurement of both



Being conferred Emeritus Professor by USM Chancellor, H.R.H. Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail during the recent convocation

the productivity and impact of the published work of a scientist or scholar.


A study commissioned by the Malaysian Science and Technology Information Centre (MASTIC) identified him as the "top and most productive scientist in the country" between the years 1955 and 2002. He has also been identified as such in Organization of Islamic Conference's Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation secretariat in November 2005 publication.



Conducting a seminar to The College of Pharmacy, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, as a Visiting Professor, Dec 2011/Jan 2012



"I have my research papers indexed in Thomas Reuters Web of Science and track my citation counts with Web of Science and ResearchID because they give me transparency with papers and publications we are interested in," he said.

In recognition of his work and achievements in the field of Physics, USM conferred the title of Emeritus Professor during the recent 45th Convocation. 

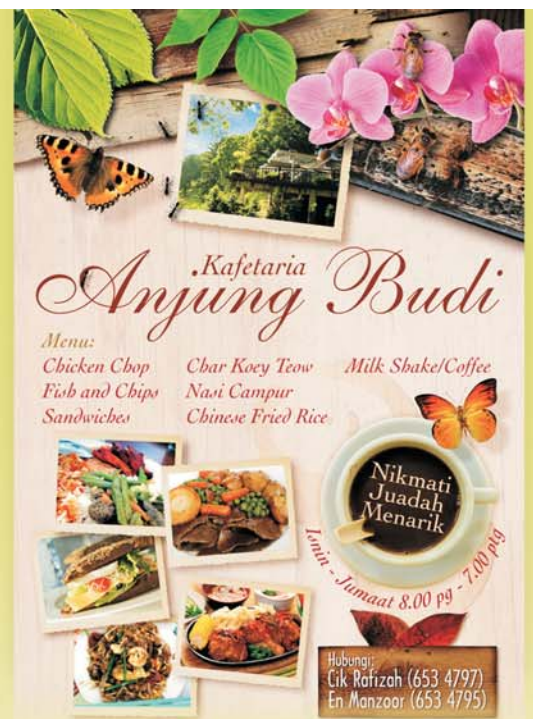
Yong Check Yoon is currently an editor in Pejabat Pempajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. He can be reached at check_yoon@yahoo.com.

@Anjung Budi

Extended Hours

If you want to beat the stressful traffic jam immediately after office hours or perhaps decide to buy some food home for dinner, you may want to visit Anjung Budi.

The cafeteria's operating hours have been extended until 7 pm to cater to your needs. Customers are entitled to 10% discount on selected menu or package after 5 pm.



Launching of Switch™

Switch™, an Apple Premium Reseller, officially launched its store in USM on 1 March with more than a hundred guests in attendance. The guests were introduced to Apple products through Powerpoint presentations. The guests later adjourned for a buffet.

PAUSM's Annual General Meeting

The 16th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Persatuan Alumni Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM Alumni Association) was held on 3 March with 40 members attending. The main agenda was to discuss the constitution besides presenting matters arising to its members.



Being a *Orang Kelainan Upaya* (OKU) or Persons with Different Abilities, no one had expected Dr Mohamad Muzammil Mohamad Noor to emerge as a Doctor of Philosophy. In fact, his teachers in schools did not pin their hopes on him, let alone his circle of friends. However, it was his parents Mohamad Noor Abu Bakar and Hajah Salmah Ismail who encouraged him to strive in the face of adversities. They had hoped to see him achieve his dream even though they were in their twilight years.



Family joyous moment during Universiti Malaya Convocation Ceremony



Mother, Salmah Ismail, cradling him at Kg Batu 2, Tandop, Alor Setar in 1972



With father Mohamad Noor Abu Bakar at Telaga Hang Tuah, Melaka, 1990s



Muzammil with his toy car, a gift from his father

Muzammil, 40, is a person of determination who strived and worked hard to achieve his childhood dream, refusing to let a late start in schooling than normal children be his stumbling block. He was not able to walk and play like other children. When Muzammil was young, he often asked his father and mother as to why he could not walk like others but his father always comforted him, asking him not to despair, pray and ask God to change his fate.

"My father knew that I am disappointed with my disability, particularly when I often asked him why I could not climb a tree like other children," said Muzammil. "He asked me to pray to God to help change my destiny so that I can walk like other people. It is that confidence that ensured my success today."

Muzammil, the youngest of eight siblings, recalled that his father would buy for him toy cars from his friends so that he would not be lonely and feeling frustrated with his disability.

Muzammil, now a senior lecturer at the School of Distance Education in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), earned his doctorate from the University of Malaya in the History of Thought. Prior to that, he completed his graduate studies at USM with his thesis *The Struggle of Malay Teachers in Politics in Kedah (1940-1960)* as a contribution to the state of his birth.

A former student of Sekolah Rendah Dato Wan Mohamad Saman Tandop, Kedah, and later Sekolah Tunku Abdul Rahman (STAR) Mergong, Muzammil started with a difficult childhood.

"My father who worked in the Department of Agriculture was transferred to Sik, Kedah, a rural area that does not have the appropriate school for OKU people," Muzammil said. "He asked for transfer to Alor Setar so that I can start schooling from Standard Three and the school allowed me to revise the syllabuses of Standards One and Two in the morning to enable me to catch up what I have missed during the first two years."

hurtful words, and this went on until I reached secondary school," said Muzammil.

The first time when he was in secondary school, teachers and friends had to carry him to the top floor and that forced his father to find another school that was more suitable even though farther away from home as he said, "I only want to see you to continue to study and achieve success like everyone else."



Muzammil (front) with classmates in Upper Six 1, 1991

A Spark of Inspiration

Tan Ewe Hoe
B. Sc. '93

Photographs courtesy of
Mohamad Muzammil Mohamad Noor (B. A. '00)

His father bought a wheelchair for RM500 which was rather expensive at that time to ensure that Muzammil can attend school like other children.

"My father requested my siblings to pay more attention to me because he said I am special and that I need attention and encouragement. He even hired someone to look after my needs and my mother walked about 2 km daily to check on me when I was in school," said Muzammil.

"I am very grateful to Cikgu Rokiah Mehat, my first teacher who taught me the alphabets when some of the teachers were pessimistic of me as I was not a bright student in school. Instead of receiving encouragement, friends who were dispiriting, hid my books, pushed my wheelchair to the drain and uttered

Muzammil excelled in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) but his application to a university in the Klang Valley was rejected. He then applied for off-campus study in USM with the initial assumption that USM only offered science courses. His first application was rejected because among the conditions was that the candidate has to have working experience. His second application was accepted after inserting into the application form that he was working as a tutor to earn some pocket money.

Just as the offer letter came notifying that he had been offered a place in USM in 1996, he was shocked by the death of his father who was the pillar of strength over the years. His father was a source of inspiration and strength until cancer silently killed him. Muzammil

A Spark of Inspiration

was disappointed and almost gave up his academic pursuits but his mother coaxed him to fulfill his father's wishes.

His mother and two elder brothers accompanied him to USM on registration day and they realised that the design of the campus dormitory posed daily challenges because many of its features were not OKU-friendly. Muzammil changed hostel three times in a day and finally with the help of his friends, he was able to adapt to the place until graduation.

Once he fell off from the wheelchair on his way to lecture and the last advice his father gave resonated in his mind, "Pick yourself up whenever you fall."

Times were truly challenging and during his final year exams, his mother who took over the role of his late father to provide constant encouragement, passed away.

"I fainted and when I recovered I realized that the body of my mother was in my presence until she was buried," said Muzammil. "I have given up hope to the stage whereby I decided to stop my studies but my eldest sister and brother advised me, telling me to continue to study if I want to make our parents proud."

Muzammil was lucky to receive funding from the Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (BAKTI) for his first degree and again at postgraduate level, while USM funded on his doctorate studies. He was considered as an icon for the special people to emulate.

OKU perlu ikon - Bakti



Rosmah Mansor bersama anggota Bakti beramah mesra dengan Mohammad Muzamil Mohammad Noor di Kuala Lumpur, semalam.

KUALA LUMPUR 13 Feb. - Badan Amal dan Kebajikan Tenaga Isteri-Isteri Menteri dan Timbalan Menteri (Bakti) mahu menjadikan Pensyarah Sejarah Pemikiran Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Dr. Mohammad Muzamil Mohammad Noor sebagai ikon kepada orang kurang upaya (OKU) di negara ini.

Yang Dipertua Bakti, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor kagum dengan usaha gigih pensyarah tersebut yang merupakan satu-satunya bekas pelajar tajaan badan itu berjaya melanjutkan pelajaran hingga ke peringkat Doktor Falsafah (PhD).

Rosmah yang juga Isteri Perdana Menteri berkata, sebelum ini, Bakti banyak menyumbang pelajaran namun hampir semua mereka berhenti menduduki mandapati (tahap Sijaya Muda).

Became an icon for **OKU**
(Source: www.utusan.com.my)



Preparing for STPM examination at home, 1991



Muzammil (front, left) in Form One in STAR, **Perdagangan 1**, 1985

A Spark of Inspiration



In his office



At one of his lectures



Passing his driving test with flying colours

With students at the Mekong River, Thailand



"I was fortunate to be aided by BAKTI because my father's pension was barely enough to feed the family but God has given me all assistance through various forms that lessened my painful experience as a OKU pursuing studies at the university and at work place," he said.

Muzammil is also happy that during his campus days, he had written many letters to the University administrators requesting them to pay attention to the needs of OKU. It strikes him that many facilities are available today and these include a special hostel for Persons with Different Abilities (OKU) to give the perception of different abilities among this special group instead of focusing on their weaknesses.

"I dedicate this success to my father who had been tireless in giving encouragement and my mother who had always been patient especially after my father's death. She ensured that I achieved a doctorate degree to teach, as well as the members of my family who

have given me support and prayers all these years," said Muzammil who also dedicated his success to all parents with OKU children because it is hard to take care of them as it requires extraordinary strength and patience.

"We need to educate ourselves and cannot expect others to feed us. In fact we should get out of the cocoon of feeling insecure and be grateful with what we have. I am very grateful with what God has given me as, without this disability, I may not have the drive to make me what I am today," he said.

"I hope that all will support and continue to give attention to those who are less able because they can be successful if given proper encouragement and opportunity," Muzammil added. He has an ambition to become a lecturer of caliber and a well-known and respected researcher to help the society and the country. 🇲🇾

This article was originally written by Mohamad Abdullah (B. A. '87) in Bahasa Melayu.

A Man with Many Hats

Alec Chin
B. Comm. '02

Photographs courtesy
of Gary Chong

M eet Gary Chong Khin Jin. A postgraduate, tutor, film/tv commercial director, song composer, jingle producer...the list can go on and on. But one thing is for sure, Gary is slowly stamping his mark on the local and regional broadcast media, grabbing close to 14 awards and clinching jobs for international corporations; Ferrari and Naza World Sdn Bhd, to name a few.

Spotting a trademark straw hat, Gary shared with *The Leader* the euphoria of his efforts being recognised. When asked to name the best award that he had been bestowed, Gary answered with a boyish smile, "The most significant award was the USM Book Prize during my convocation in 2010."

Why?

"I felt my years of hard work and slogging finally paid off. The Book Prize served as a launching pad for many great things to come." Gary elaborated further, "The gained recognitions, self-confidence build over time, motivated me to give my sponsors and clients a finished product that often surpassed their expectations, eventually positioned me closer to the who's who in the field of broadcast media."

On the secret of maintaining a balancing act between life as a postgraduate student, a tutor and an entrepreneur/film director, Gary offered a very insightful perspective, at least for me.



From top: Gary (fourth from left) was chosen as the grand prize winner of a national intervarsity short film competition, comprising 62 entries from 31 universities; conducting a tutorial on video production

A Man with Many Hats

Filming the adrenalin-pumping Ferrari 458 Challenge - Naza Racing Team in 2011
(Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v>)



"Pursuing postgraduate studies and producing commissioned jobs at the same time..." Gary paused for a while, obviously toying for the correct word, "...is a symbiotic relationship, both complementing each other." Sensed that I could not figure out what he really meant, Gary composed and tried not to be so philosophical.

"The knowledge gained in postgraduate studies enriched my presentations to the potential clients or sponsors, giving them a fresh perspective, methods on how best to utilise the different media in conveying highly memorable messages to the targeted audience. Vice versa, the effects and feedback from the completed jobs provides the best proof for the theoretical frameworks in my academic research."

"For the recently completed F1 video production (commissioned by Naza World), the idea of integrated media approach made my proposal stood out among the other contenders, eventually won me the job."

Fresh from being offered a fully-sponsored PhD study programme by his alma mater, the School of Communication, Gary casted new lights on the uniqueness of USM's postgraduate programme with heavy emphasis in theoretical foundations.

"Strength in theoretical foundations make you stay focus in the media clutter, only with full understanding of the potential and functions of different media, coupled with extensive knowledge in marketing and the emerging new online or social media, only can one present a practical solution to the clients on how best to utilise the various resources in achieving the desired results."

"USM provides a pool of rich resources in data, statistics and fresh ideas in various disciplines. The wealth of knowledge helped me tremendously in crafting and fabricating a powerful presentation."

Come to the simple question of 'why are you creative?', again, Gary surprised me with another thoughtful answer.

"First try to be as knowledgeable as you can truly be in your field of expertise, then think and act beyond the self-perceived boundaries. In another word, before you are able to 'think-out-of-the-box', think within the box. Again, my concept of strengthening the theoretical foundation kicks in."

Gary continued, "Creativity comes naturally when you understand your subject matter and tools/methodologies thoroughly, just like opportunity, it knocks only on the doors of the well prepared."



Shooting a video professionally using a jib arm rig

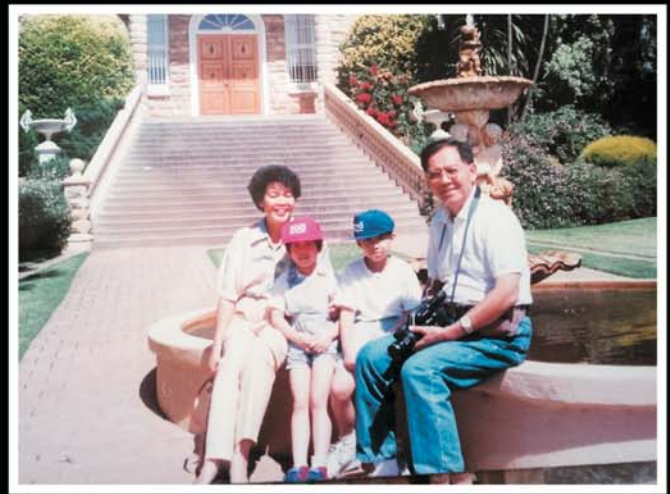
A Man with Many Hats

Intending to keep our conversation a little more relax, I moved the subject to Gary's background and posed a question on 'what brought you here?' Gary conjured up a scene of his childhood in hometown Ipoh.

"Since the age of seven, I have always accompanied my dad, also a movie buff, to Rex cinema on every Tuesday night without fail, when they launched new movies or premier shows. Seated on padded wooden chair in the dark theatre, I absorbed every single details of the movie like a sponge; the sensible storylines, colourful characters, beautiful scenes, unforgettable punch lines and of course, the unpredictable endings."

"For me, the most powerful person is none other than the film director. Not only he or she had created a pseudo world which is too convincingly real, but had managed to churn out millions of fantasies in me. From that particular moment, I knew I wanted to be a film director."

Conducting an acting workshop for a commercial



Gary was exposed to filmmaking at an early age through his father's passion in homemade videos

Fast forward to today, I would believe Gary had achieved part of his goals, although the question of 'living his dreams' were unasked. On the question of 'how do you market yourself?' Gary started talking about new media, the emergence of social media in cyber space.

"As you know, film industries are extremely competitive and it's not easy to get your works noticed by the big boys. Social media gave me, and I believe other new filmmakers as well, an avenue to showcase our works, upon noticing multiple downloadings and 'hits' of your works in the cyber space, you know you are getting somewhere, the pinnacle is, receiving prospective calls from the big corporations, everything would be falling into place by then, ha ha!" Gary laughed out loud, another way to imply the feeling of 'hitting the jackpot!'

Any golden words to share? Gary did not answer precisely but conclude our conversation with his experiences on the downside, "Other than hard work and passion, one has to have the courage of accepting criticism and admitting mistakes, take it as a lesson...an encouragement to do better, to move further."

Gary's favourite straw hat image is misleading because he is obviously wearing more than one hat when he plunged into building his multifaceted career. **L**



Briefing the talents of various nationalities before a shoot

Alec Chin is a designer in Timur Communication. He can be reached at alec@timurcomm.com.



finding adjustment

Text and photographs by
Yong Cheek Yoon

Among the risks a student is taking are having to fly thousands of kilometres to a destination which he had read about on the internet and the potential of being exposed to culture shock during his stay there. Three students - Cho Eun Hee, Yang Yang, and Ma Yu Ping - were interviewed by *The Leader* recently to know how they got together in USM and how they fared.

Yang is from Xinjiang, an autonomous region sprawled across the northwestern part of China. He was introduced to USM by an agency that he found online.

"The agency made all the arrangements for his admission here," he said. "But until my arrival, I knew very little about Penang and didn't expect it to have a tropical climate."



Yang Yang

Fine Adjustment

Knowing little about Penang did not stop him from venturing out more than 4,000 km away from home to take an Intensive English Programme (IEP) conducted by School of Languages, Literacies and Translation (SOLLAT) in USM. Thereafter, he will be pursuing his major in management.

"We were shown around the university during the orientation week and that tour-cum-briefing armed us with the necessary information to move around," he said.

Yang added that during his stay here since July 2011, he has not encountered much problem because "it was easy to get help from friends when I need them." He has made friends from various countries on campus and found that the spirit of camaraderie is very much pervasive. However, he is still trying to get used to the spicy local food.



International food fairs are often organised to build rapport among foreign and local students.

He revealed that there were occasions when his friends would hold small gatherings and invited him to join them. These are opportunities when students like Yang get together to establish a close rapport that can last through their lives as Cho Eun Hee might similarly experience.

Cho has been sent to USM by Kyoung-Gi University in Seoul, South Korea, to take up the six-month IEP before starting her course there. She will be completing her IEP in June. As with many of the students, Queensbay Mall is a popular place for them to hang out and Gurney Plaza, being the next in the list.

"Queensbay Mall is much nearer to USM and thus more convenient," Cho said, adding that it is also a convenient place to have meals.



Cho Eun Hee

Campus Life

Fine Adjustment

As a Christian, she would be picked up by her friends on weekends to attend church services. They would go in a car and sometimes adjourn to Gurney Plaza.

"I have made many friends from campus as well as those from the church over the past months," Cho said.

She has no problem with Malaysian food except that "there are times when I miss Korean food". Her consolation is that Penang, being a cosmopolitan city, also has affordable Korean restaurants. She would eat together with her campus friends or when opportunity permits, with the other two Korean students also studying in USM.

Ma arrived from Yunnan, a province in southwestern China, last October after getting a place in USM through an agency.

"I do not know about Penang and what to expect, however, my parents have no objection to me travelling here to study," said the girl who will be taking up management courses. "My father thinks that Malaysia is a good place to study."



Ma Yu Ping

With that confidence given to her, she has much settled in, finding life in USM pleasant and has a small group of friends.

"I would follow my roommates when they go shopping," she explained about how she obtains her provisions. "We usually go to Queensbay Mall because it is nearer and convenient to have meals there."

Ma, however, lamented that the food is "quite different from those back home", finding them rather spicy. She took a few months to get used to the food.

It is a refreshing to see how a multinational community integrates when students arrived in USM from all over, barely knowing what to expect in an entirely foreign environment. Being together, they learn to adopt and adapt, helping each other along the way and in that process may forge friendship for life. 🇲🇾



Students take a break to have meals with friends when opportunity permits

Yong Check Yoon is currently an editor in Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. He can be reached at check_yoon@yahoo.com.



ABIDAH ILYAS



AHMAD TERMIZI
SALLEH



AHMAD YUSAINI @
AHMAD NORDIN AMIR



ANG KEAT LEONG



AZLINA NAYAN



BAVANARAJ
RETNARAJ



EYU CHAI HU



HAMIDAH HASSAN



HARLINA AHMAD



K VASANTHIMALAR
KANDASAMY



KHALIDAH AMBIAH



KOH PECK TIAN



LEOW YOKE MING



LONG CHENG YEE



MOHD ROMZAN
MISKON



MOHD ZAMRI GHAZALI



MUSLISHAM OMAR @
MUSTAPHA



MUSTAFA
KAMALUDIN



NAJMAH HAYATI
HOMAM



NOR SUHAILA
KAMARUDIN SOHAIMI



NORASHID AZIZ



NORLILA ABDUL LATIFF



OOI TEONG LIANG



RASYIMAWATI
MAT RASHID



ROHANA SALLEH



SAM TORNG



SARAVANAN
GOPAL



SHAIFUL RIZAM
WAHID



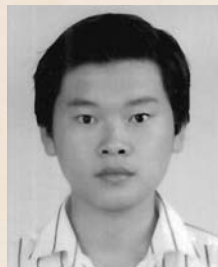
SUZYLAWATI ISMAIL



TAN YEE LENG



TEH SIEW PHENG



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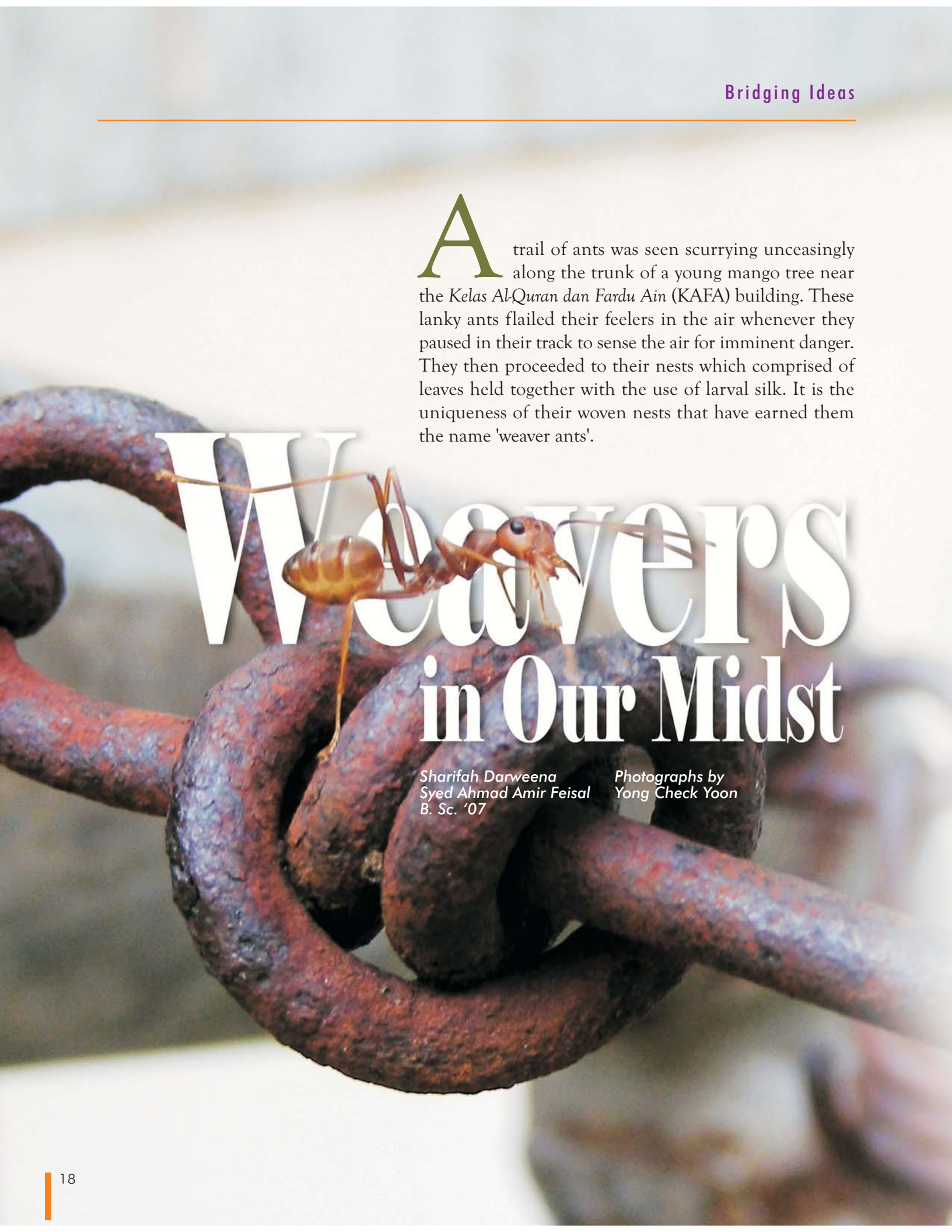
ZELAHA IBRAHIM



ZULFADHLY ZARDI

A trail of ants was seen scurrying unceasingly along the trunk of a young mango tree near the *Kelas Al-Quran dan Fardu Ain (KAFA)* building. These lanky ants flailed their feelers in the air whenever they paused in their track to sense the air for imminent danger. They then proceeded to their nests which comprised of leaves held together with the use of larval silk. It is the uniqueness of their woven nests that have earned them the name 'weaver ants'.

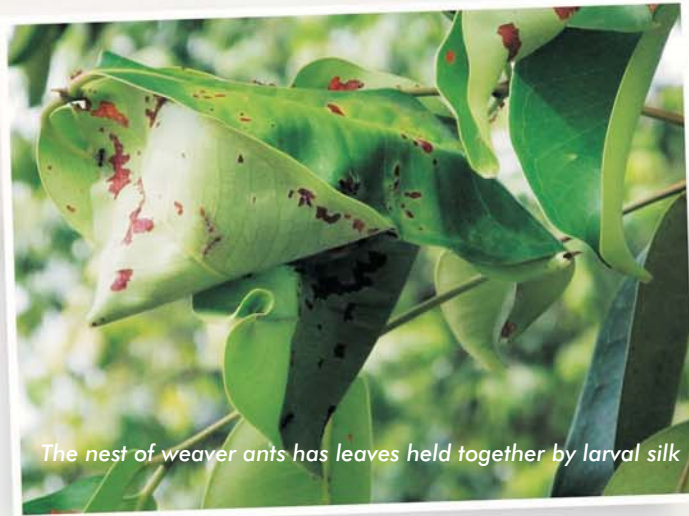
Weavers in Our Midst



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

Photographs by
Yong Check Yoon

Weavers In Our Midst



The nest of weaver ants has leaves held together by larval silk

The weaver ant-infested mango tree in the compound of KAFA building

Marcela Pimid and her three-member team comprising Prof Abu Hassan Ahmad, Nurita Abu Tahir and Dr Kumara Thevan took three months to conduct a study on weaver ants. The study, which started in February 2011, involved members from the School of Biological Sciences, USM, with the exception of Kumara, who is from the Department of Forensic Medicine at the Penang Hospital. The findings of this study were published in a recent issue of the Sociobiology journal.

The study revealed that weaver ants have a distinct caste system, with the number of individuals in each caste contributing to the success of the colony. Despite numerous studies that have been conducted on these ants, whose 'empire' spread from India to Queensland in Australia and to the Solomon Islands, little is known about the composition of the colony and their caste

system. This was what the team wanted to find out, which they did by snipping off the nests from the trees at the KAFA building and at the School of Industrial Technology (TI). This was done before noon when the ants were least active. The fallings nests were then caught in pails with cotton wools soaked with chloroform.

"After ensuring that the ants were dead, a count on each of the colonies was done. The size of each caste and other details were also noted," Marcela told *The Leader*. "We found that a nest generally has a wingless queen, winged male and female ants, non-reproductive female workers of two distinct forms, eggs, larvae and pupae."



Joint effort...Carrying a dead orange wasp moth to their nest

Marcela Pimid






Weaver ants do not have stings but they would bite then spray formic acid at the wound to cause pain

Worker weaver ants have an almost transparent abdominal segment, long legs and feelers.

The team was not surprised when they found a wingless queen at the colony near the KAFA building, as this was established much earlier than the one at TI. We were also told about the fascinating life cycle of ants, including weaver ants. When conditions are right, winged virgin queens and male ants will take to the air in what is known as a nuptial flight. After the queen is inseminated by a male ant during the flight, the queen will shed her wings and proceed to construct her first nest cell. According to a study by Ellen A. Schluns of James Cöok University, Australia, some of the queens can mate up to five times during the flight! It is at this nest cell that the first brood of workers is reared. They would soon take on the tasks of foraging and brood care. Once relieved of her initial job of rearing the first brood, the queen would confine herself to her egg-laying role.

"Within the workers' caste, there are the major workers who have to do all the foraging, defend the colony, care for the queen and assist in the care of the brood. The minor workers, meanwhile, remain mostly inside the leaf nests and nurse the brood," she explained. "Therefore, we can observe that job allocation to the various castes in the colony is well-defined to create an efficient society. Weaver ants can produce a large number of larvae and pupae that will eventually become new virgin queens when they become sexually mature adults after undergoing metamorphosis. A new life cycle then begins."

The team found that the weaver ants started building new nests within two weeks after their nests were taken. These new nests were located near to those removed for the study. Ants are known for their tenacity to survive adverse situations for the last 130 million years. 

Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal is currently the Assistant Registrar at the Pejabat Pempajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. She can be contacted at darr_wynn@yahoo.com

Comments on the article Pinang Pulang ke Tampuk
(Vol. 7 No. 1)

Salam.

I've received the recent *Leader* magazine and I'm very happy (as I'm sure my Mum and sisters are) to find the article that you wrote about *Arwah Abah*.

It is certainly heartwarming to read through the article and reminisce the days at USM when *Abah* was the VC.

Tahiruddin Tun Hamdan
B. Eng. '90

I read your article on *Abah*. Thank you for writing such a beautiful piece. It is very meaningful to the family.

Siti Khadijah Tun Hamdan
M. Med. '96

I was touched by your article on our late second Vice-Chancellor. It was a simple but effective article in portraying him as he was. There were tears in my eyes after reading the article.

Noraini Rashid
B.A. '73

Majalah yang menarik dan mampu memupuk semangat untuk kembali ke USM. Majalah ini juga memudahkan saya berkongsi pengalaman dengan para pelajar saya mengenai USM. Terima kasih kerana mengingati saya dan menghantar majalah ini secara online.

Nulwahida Abdul Halim
B. A. '07

Saya rasa elok memperbanyakkan penulisan dalam bahasa Melayu supaya ramai lagi alumni dapat menikmati cerita-cerita menarik di USM dalam bahasa kebangsaan kita. Secara keseluruhannya, saya berasa amat bangga akan majalah alumni ini. Majalah ini sedikit sebanyak mendekatkan diri saya dengan USM yang telah lama saya tinggalkan. Melalui majalah ini juga, saya dapat mengetahui perkembangan USM dan para alumni yang lain. Saya juga dapat melihat gambar rakan-rakan saya dalam ruangan *Keeping Track*. Terima kasih kerana menghubungkan kami dengan USM.

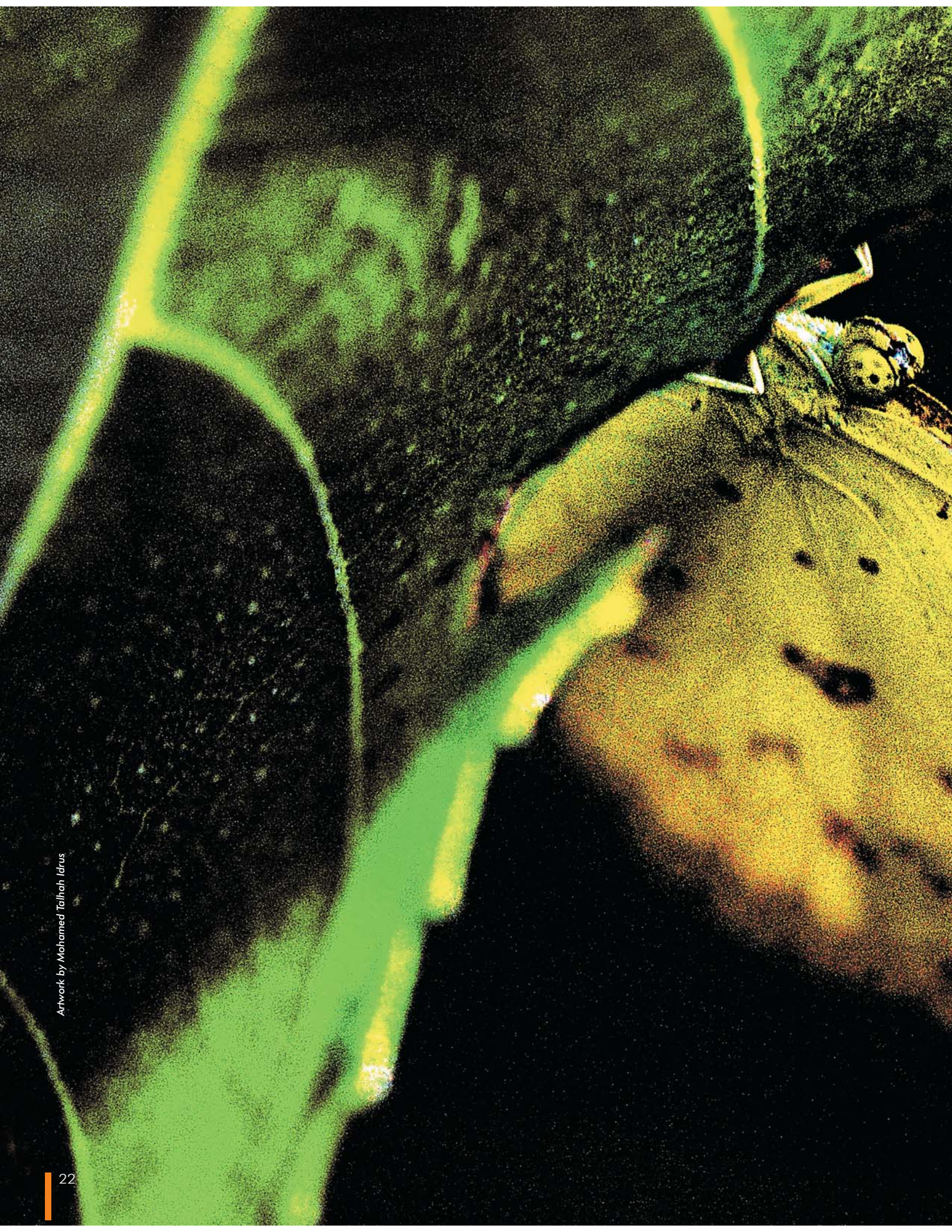
Rafiah Jimin
B. A. '06

Saya berasa gembira kerana pihak Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni telah berusaha untuk menghubungi para alumninya melalui pelbagai cara. Saya berasa tidak sabar untuk berada dalam ruangan *Keeping Track* pada masa akan datang. Saya berharap agar pihak alumni akan berupaya menyalurkan perkembangan terkini melalui majalah ini.

Choo Sean Kee
B. Sc. '06

I am proud to receive the magazine and get connected with the university. My fondest memory in USM was when I met my wife. We have a daughter now and I am sure this magazines can inspire her to pursue her study in USM.

Chan Kam Wah
B. App. Sc. '06



Artwork by Mohamed Talhah Idrus

The Other Residents



floating Charmers

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

"A butterfly can flutter its wings over a flower in
China and cause a hurricane in the Caribbean"

- Robert Redford, "Havana" (movie, 1990)

The Other Residents

Floating Charmers

I am definitely not good at identifying butterfly species but that had never stopped me from photographing these floating gems.

The first person who referred to them as 'butterflies' must have associated them with the softness and tenderness of butter floating in the air. The name is most apt in capturing the essence of these delicate flying beauties deservedly remained.



Some of the species which can occasionally be seen in Minden



One example is the legendary Muhammad Ali's reference to his skipping and boxing jigs as 'float like a butterfly'. Another is Edward Lorenz's 'butterfly effect', which must be one of the most nature related terminologies that has become common parlance.

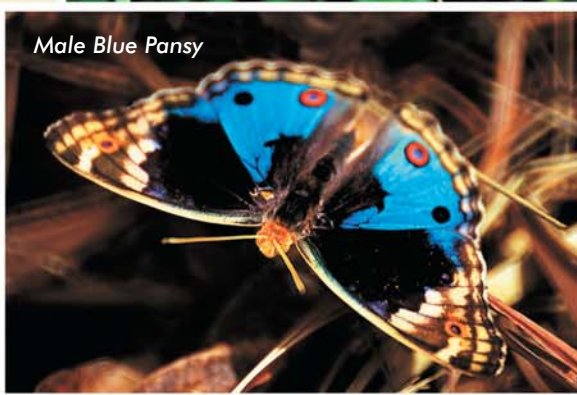
A butterfly is captivatingly pretty and perfectly harmless with their 'painted wings' as compared to innocent looking ants or bees. They are lovely in flight as well as at rest. The lifecycle of the wriggly caterpillars that metamorphosed from egg to caterpillar, pupa, before emerging as an adult butterfly is fascinating as well. It is a complete transformation.

The early stage of a butterfly, the caterpillar

Floating Charmers



Female Blue Pansy



Male Blue Pansy



Common Sailor



Common Jezebel

Despite the difficulty in differentiating certain species, they are probably the most photogenic with their shapes, colours and morphology among the little creatures in God's green acres. They can be found in almost every part of the habitable earth, as if their role was to give a touch of colour to human settlements.

The USM Minden campus is no exception. I have captured more than 50 species in photographs. Although exact identifications can be tricky, this collection still reflect an impressive campus heritage amid the confusing array of buildings, traffic and other human activities.

Species like the Blue Pansies and the Common Four-Rings are abundantly found throughout campus while the Plain Tiger, Common Sailor and Common Jezebel are often spotted too. Besides these, various types of skipper butterflies and maidenhead moths have also made their homes here.



Plain Tigers

Floating Charmers

Reserving patches of flowering shrubs and bushes is an easy way of retaining butterflies in their natural environment



A tiny butterfly...the handmaiden



Skipper butterflies earned their name from the way they fly; rather than the usual graceful fluttering, they have the distinguishable quick darting flight habits.

With such a wealth of ready and lively 'decorations', it would be a shame to allow physical development in the campuses and cities to go on without attempts to sustain the species' population. Though butterfly parks are helpful, USM campuses can be exemplary by simple considerations of retaining certain patches in the campuses for butterfly habitats. Moreover, when 'landscaping projects' are done, some small 'butterfly patches' should be designed with plenty of information to increase environmental awareness among campus residents.

USM human residents are fortunate that some of the remaining flora in the campuses bear flowers that attract butterflies. As such, despite the neglect to consciously accommodate them, these beauties continue to flutter in our midst. Hopefully, the never ending knocking and bulldozing will not cause them to flutter completely into oblivion. 🦋

Mohamed Talhah Idrus can be reached at tolamaha@yahoo.com

Freshie's Nightmare in Daylight

Liew Yean Woh *Photographs courtesy of*
B. A. '75 *Public Relations Office, USM*



Registering for courses



USM hockey team in action in one of the inter-varsity tournaments



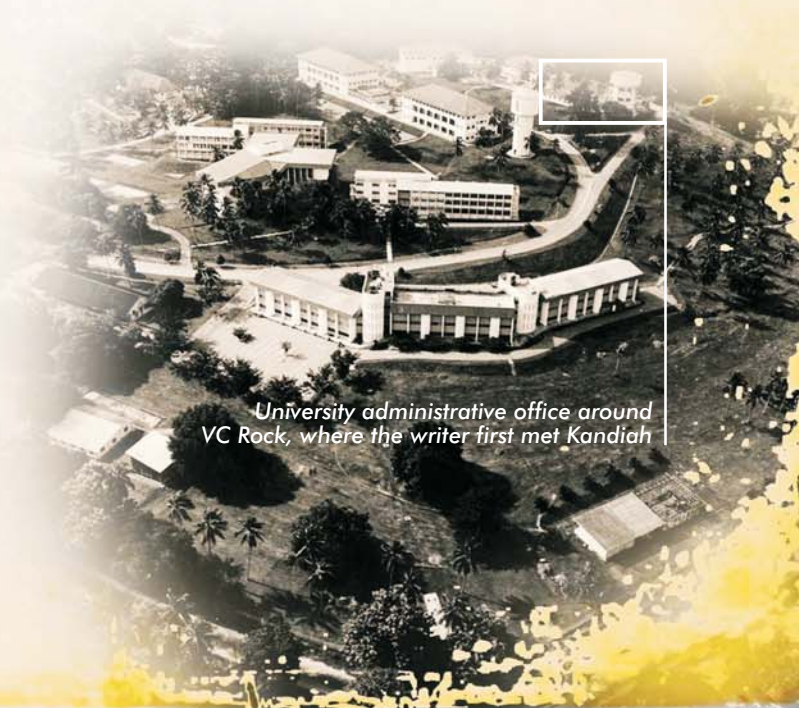
Main entrance in the early '70s

The very thought of joining USM in the early '70s had me awed. It was new and was the second public university in the country. Unlike the University of Malaya which was established in 1949, USM was then an unproven university, without a track record.

There, I had my first rendezvous near the Vice-Chancellor's (VC) Rock and the person I had to meet was Kandiah Palaniyandi. He has the reputation of "whatever he says goes" and since I wanted to continue my University of Malaya science degree course, my brother's friend brought me to meet him near the VC Rock.

"No way! USM has a different syllabus and it is following the American system." Kandiah told us straight-faced.

That brief meeting decided my destiny as a journalist.



University administrative office around VC Rock, where the writer first met Kandiah

Freshie's Nightmare in Daylight

I remember our first day, having to line up to register our attendance in one of the halls near the old Gurkha swimming pool. When that was completed, we received our door gifts comprising a scarf and a box file.

That particular day in USM also posed some mysteries to me, like a honeymoon couple who, after the celebrations, stumbled into the uncertainties ahead. In the days just before entering through USM's gates, I already generated a long list of places I wished to see, like the living quarters of the Gurkhas, the shooting range, the bomb shelters, or rather the whole area on the very first day.

But alas it was not possible, for the first day in USM Campus was a living hell! 'King' raggers seemed to be stationed in every nook and corner. They were at places where we least expected to see them. When spotted by these seniors, we were expected to do things at their whims and fancies i crazy things without violence. That was ragging then.



Book sale in concourse area, DTSP



On-air in Radio Mahasiswa studio

Freshies checking in during orientation week...note the standard-issued scarfs and bags

Immediately after each lecture, we, as NHOs (non-hostellers), would rush off as fast as possible, down the Minden steep road leading out of the main gate to the comfort of our rented rooms in the neighbouring Minden Heights. We were trying our best to avoid some of the seniors like burly Rajan Moses and Mat Nor.

For naive freshies like us, it was a frightening experience with wolfish seniors waiting to pounce on us.

We disguised ourselves like seniors; putting on a straight face, trying hard not to show any signs that we were freshies. I was lucky. Being a NHO, I kept all my freshie souvenirs in my rented room during the first break from lecture on the first day. Thus there was nothing on me, including the scarf that could hint that I was a freshie by the seniors.



The earliest swimming pool on campus



Fu Manchu cafeteria, one of the favourite hang-out spots

Lectures also started on the first day at the Globe Theatre where many great movies had been screened to the Gurkhas before deploying them to the battlefields. Movies such as *Born Free*, *To Sir With Love* and *Gone With The Wind* were screened at the air-conditioned theater and watching movies were a luxury then. Globe Theatre, built by the British, was turned into the first lecture theatre in 1971. It was later demolished for a car park near the present Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra.

One of our favourite haunts was the Fu Manchu cafeteria (the current location of the Institute of Postgraduate Studies) where we had our meals listening to loud oldies from the vintage jukebox. The other was the Gurkha swimming pool behind the first cafeteria where each entry cost 20 sen.

USM then has some unforgettable lecturers like Dr Chandra Mustafa, one Mrs Loke, and Dr John A. Lent who nurtured and moulded us young people to be what we are today i for that we are grateful. 🇲🇾

Liew Yean Woh can be reached at liewyw@yahoo.com

TRAILER



Objectives:

- To gather the alumni and associates once a month at Anjung Budi
- A break and refreshment before going home, beating the 5 p.m. traffic jam around the gates and on the road
- For a chit - chat with invited guests on health, entertainment, or even work experience.

Beat the 5 pm jam!

Dear Alumni and Associates,
You're invited to our **Santai at Anjung Budi** to meet up with friends over a cuppa.
Do not miss your chance catching up with them while enjoying a cup of **FREE** Teh Tarik after office hours while awaiting traffic to clear up!

Join Us Today @ Anjung Budi!!!

Date : every first Thursday of the month
Time : 4.30 pm - 6.00 pm (FREE Teh Tarik will only be available from 5.10 - 6.00 pm)

September Convocation

USM will be holding its 46th Convocation at the Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra from 19 to 23 September.

connecting and sharing

Nor Rafizah Md Zain Alec Chin
B. Comm. '92

Photographs by Alec Chin

Scene: Lobby, Anjung Budi

Date: 19 April 2012

Time: 12.30 pm

The urge of clicking and connecting online has changed the ways we communicate with friends, siblings, relatives, customers and even our loved ones. The social networking service, 'Facebook' (FB), in particular, has offered a perfect avenue to satisfy the need to constantly stay connected. To know more on 'how' and 'why' the younger generation utilises FB, the writers mingled with a group of final-year students undergoing English for the Professional Programme. Instead of the usual predictable answers, we ended up being enlightened by many insightful thoughts on both the good and bad impact of this social media site.

Over Teh Tarik

Connecting and Sharing

Siti Sarah Asshka: Other than socialising with friends and coursemates, I use FB to catch up with matters related to my studies and communicate with the lecturers. No doubt, the social media brings tons of goodness, especially to an active user like me, but without self-control, it could eventually become an addiction.

Mohamad Firdaus Majid: I log in to FB almost every single day; to share information, opinions, photos or simply to chat with my friends on current issues. Social media empowers us to explore issues that are usually not covered in the main stream media, it opens up my eyes!

At the same time, we have to be responsible and accountable for whatever information that we placed in the content, the result can be disastrous if the data ended up in the wrong hands.



“...we have to be responsible and accountable for whatever information that we placed in the content, the result can be disastrous if the data ended up in the wrong hands.”

- Firdaus



Afifi Shuhairi: Mind you, I don't have an FB account and I don't think I will ever get one in the near future. Don't you think it's strenuous to force yourself to log in to FB all the time? Furthermore, by sharing information with others, you are indirectly exposing your personal data and who knows what will happen if your profile is misused by certain irresponsible parties.

About the 'addiction' mentioned by Siti Sarah, it is a serious social issue. The so-called 'FB addicts' are glued to the computer screen just to satisfy their hunger of staying connected. When things are conducted virtually without the need for physical interactions, the society will collapse.



Norizan



Nursyifa



Siti Farah

Norizan Din: I have to admit that I checked my FB account pretty often. Other than sharing information, I noticed that there is a growing trend of expanding business network on FB. Whatever information (about product features) available on FB are truthful and convincing, due to the fact that all your 'friends' are permitted entry upon your agreement. Good for those aspiring self-made entrepreneurs, your business can start right here.

On the other hand, I can visualise the so-called 'collapsed' society mentioned by Afifi. The least we can do now is start educating the children, so for all parents out there, start enforcing stiffer house rules and the most important of all, let your children understand the good and bad of FB before they are even allowed to touch the keyboard.

Nursyifa Rashid: I agree. Religious teaching is another crucial way to instil good values among the kids. For me, FB is too powerful to be ignored. I rely on FB for new information, updates about friends and current hot issues, I chip in my opinions from time to time, just for the sake of being heard and seen.

Siti Farah Wahida Ismail: Yes, I see some of my friends posting photographs taken during their trips, they are actually quite good for beginner or amateur level. I guess another good thing about FB is that it offers a free platform for those who like to show off their talents, be it a self-made music video, a poem, a drawing, or anything that you may think of...

As for the concern of copyright issues, I guess once you have decided to post your masterpiece online, you have to bear the eventualities of your works being copied or infringed. After all, you can 'limit' your works or profiles to be viewed only by the selected audience. By doing so, it may cut down the abuses.

Like it or not, social media have successfully 'intruded' in our daily life, clicking and connecting have slowly become a 'must do' chore which are no longer confine only to the internet savvy. FB is here to stay, and it is growing bigger each day with additions of new 'app' (applications) to entice billions to log in. So, before attempting to move the cursor to the 'f' icon on the screen, give a thought to the comments and take heed of the advices by our interviewees. Happy clicking. 📱

Nor Rafizah Md Zain is currently the Assistant Registrar at the Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. She can be contacted at nor_rafizah@usm.my. Alec Chin is a designer in Timur Communication. He can be reached at alec@timurcomm.com.



Balik Kampung

Text and photographs by
Yong Check Yoon

Long before there was Komtar or Sungai Nibong bus terminal, outstation students who had arrived at Butterworth by train or bus had to cross over to Penang Island by ferry, take a then-City Council Bus to Penang Road, board a Yellow Bus at Prangin Road that goes to Balik Pulau (perhaps every 40 minutes or so) or Relau, stopping by the nearest bus stop. One had to be vigilant while crossing the road to USM because there were few but fast vehicles, beating the '80 miles per hour' speed limit. To *balik kampung* (returning to one's home), it was just a reverse of the process. 'Tedious' is the word to describe it.

There was no express bus service to Penang Island during the early years. The North Malaya express bus service between Kuala Lumpur and Butterworth was inaugurated on 12 April 1959, extending its service from Singapore. The fare from Kuala Lumpur to Butterworth was \$12 (the 'Ringgit' was known as the 'Malaysian Dollar' and 'sen' was called 'cent' until 1992); Kuala Lumpur to Ipoh, \$9; and Ipoh to Butterworth, \$5. It was in early 1975 that MARA Express Bus started a service between Johor Bahru and Butterworth.



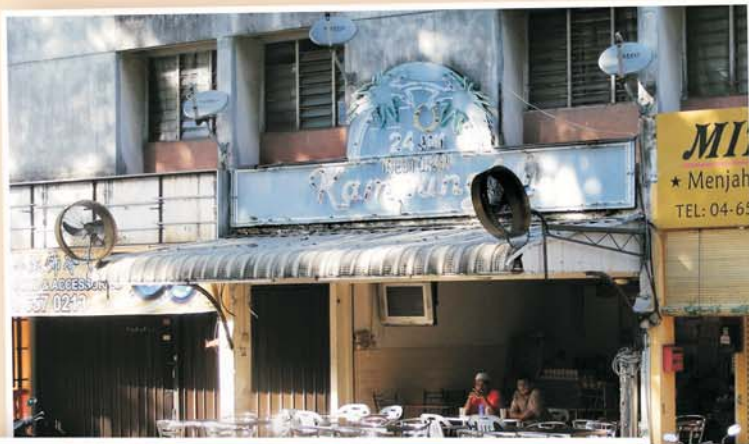
View from the ferry approaching Penang in early '80s when Bangunan Dewan Perniagaan dan Perusahaan Melayu was under construction

Balik Kampung

Besides the Malayan Teachers' Training College (MTC), village houses with attap roofs, the masjid, the Batu Uban army camp, the Penang Sports Council, and whatever there was in Minden, the stretch of road was interspersed with large tracts of fruit and coconut plantations.

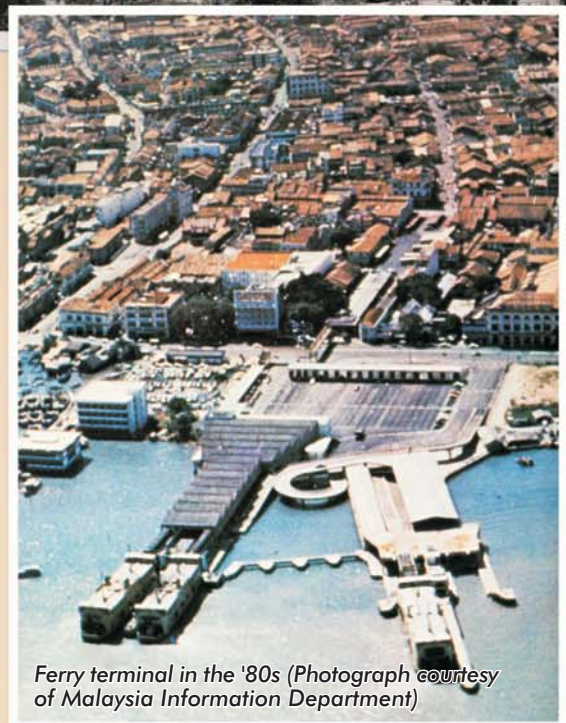
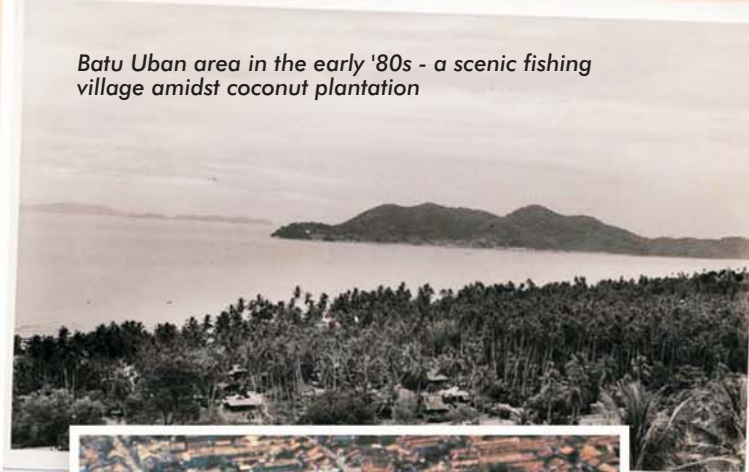
Until the early 2000s, the Kampungku restaurant, located on the ground floor of the Sungai Glugor cooperative flat along Glugor Road (now Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah), was the place for express bus passengers either to board or disembark. The restaurant operated 24-hours daily and was a busy one as well. Express bus tickets were sold from a small table in front of the restaurant which also served as an information counter.

Kampungku restaurant now, a far cry from its heyday as the hub for express buses in the '80s and '90s



Express buses picking up passengers in Komtar area

Batu Uban area in the early '80s - a scenic fishing village amidst coconut plantation



Ferry terminal in the '80s (Photograph courtesy of Malaysia Information Department)

Kampungku was a favourite place for outstation students and staff because it was the nearest place to USM. It was most convenient to them as they do not have to worry about the hassle to change buses to get across to Butterworth. Other popular places where express buses used to pick up passengers were at Garden Inn Hotel (Anson Road) and Komtar. Travelling was even easier when the Penang Bridge was opened to traffic after 14 September 1985 and these buses were able to travel direct to Penang.

Balik Kampung

KETIBAAN
ARRIVAL PLATFORM
1,2,3



Sungai Nibong Express Bus Terminal

A trip to Kuala Lumpur took about 10 hours because the North-South Expressway that helped to slash travelling time by half only took shape in late 1980s. In the meantime, travelling by trunk roads meant having to pass through towns and stopping by certain coffeshops such as the popular one in Simpang Ampat, a small town in Seberang Perai Selatan.

Every *balik kampung* trip is filled with anticipation because for one to write home, even within Malaysia, would take at least a couple of days to reach its destination and another couple of days for the reply, if the response was immediate. Calling home (if the home has a telephone) requires a working public telephone because these telephones were often subjected to vandalism and also the cost of making trunk calls was a factor to consider.

The cost of making trunk calls varied from 10 cents per four seconds to Singapore to 10 cents per one minute to Sungai Petani. In other words, if you make a five-minute call to Sungai Petani, it would cost you 50 cents. However, it is a flat rate of 10 cents if you make local calls. Fifty cents was able to buy you at least a bowl of noodles and it is therefore considered expensive at that point in time.

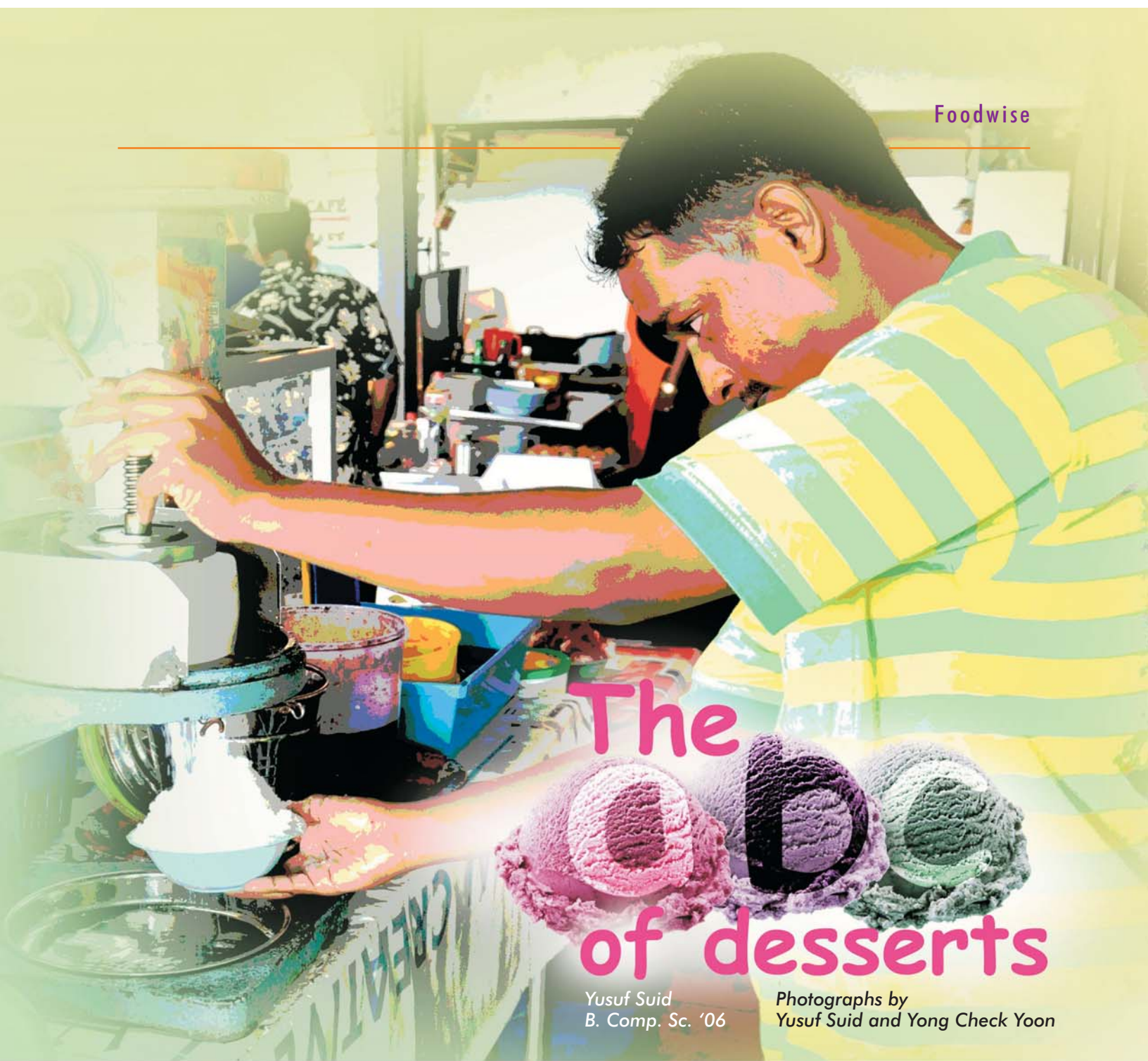
Even on ordinary weekends or short holidays that do not facilitate a meaningful *balik kampung*, communication is now much affordable. Thanks to programmes such as Skype or Yahoo! Messenger that enable people to communicate with live video streaming.

In 1985, an express bus terminal, next to the annual Pesta site at Sungai Nibong, was put into service and express buses were encouraged to use the Sungai Nibong bus terminal. The reason was because these huge vehicles caused traffic congestion when they parked by the side of the road to pick up passengers.

Students from East Malaysia often get stuck, unable to *balik kampung* that often because of high airfares. However, it was the low-cost airlines that helped to change the frequency of *balik kampung* as air travel became more affordable.

For most students, there is nothing more heartwarming than to be home with one's family. As an example, what delight it is, having to bear an agonising 10-hour travel by express bus from Penang to Pahang, arriving at an unearthly hour of the morning to see family members waiting to fetch one home. Whatever misgivings one may have is likely to thaw even in the morning chill for these welcoming thoughts tack a meaning to *balik kampung*. **L**

Yong Check Yoon is currently an editor in Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. He can be reached at check_yoon@yahoo.com.



The of desserts

Yusuf Suid
B. Comp. Sc. '06

Photographs by
Yusuf Suid and Yong Check Yoon



A serving of *ais kacang* from Kek Seng

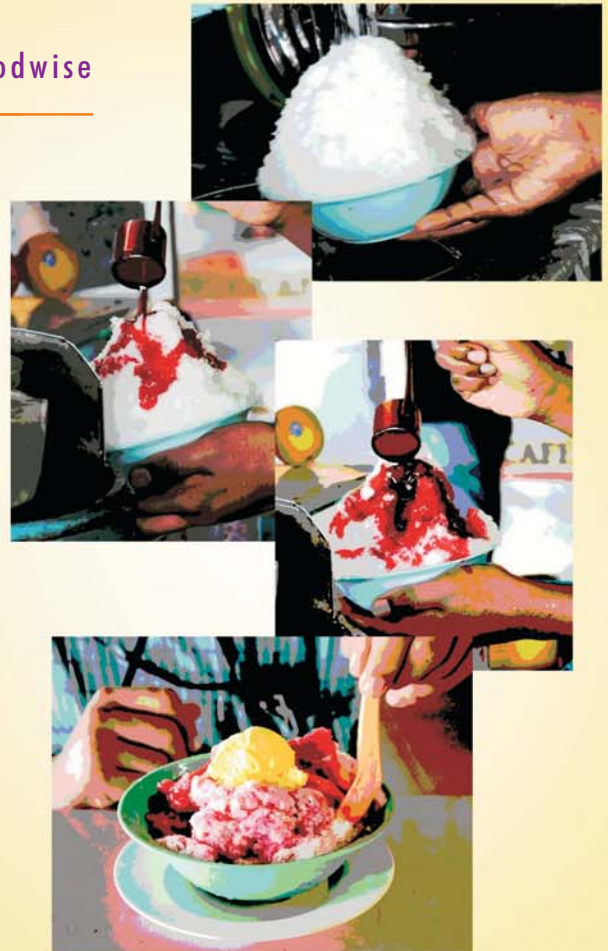
ABC is the abbreviation for *Air Batu Campur* (literally 'mixed ice'), which Malaysians easily associate with *ais kacang*. While one can find many different variations of this much-loved dessert today, nothing beats the decade-old simple concoction of boiled kidney beans, *buah nipah* (palm nuts) and *cincau* (grass jelly) atop a heap of shaved ice drenched with red syrup and evaporated milk. It was only much later that jelly cubes, creamed corn, crushed groundnuts, dried shredded nutmeg, *cendol* (green worm-like rice flour-based jelly) and other condiments found their way into this all-time favourite.

One of the remaining traditional *ais kacang* stalls in Penang is located by the roadside in Pulau Tikus town. The *ais kacang* prepared there have remained unchanged throughout the passage of time, as are those offered at Kek Seng Coffee Shop along Jalan Penang. *Ais kacang* with dollops of durian ice-cream is Kek Seng's signature dessert. Kek Seng was probably the first in Penang to offer home-made durian ice-cream, even when durian was out of season.

Ais kacang is easily available at many food and beverage outlets. Those who love the popular Jalan Edgecumbe mee goreng (fried noodles) can enjoy a thirst-quenching *ais kacang* from the Persiaran Gurney hawker complex. The *ais kacang* would definitely be able to provide that much-needed relief from the spicy mee goreng.


This dessert can also be found in Singapore, Brunei and other countries although there may be variations in terms of its ingredients and its name. The Filipinos call it *halo-halo*; the Japanese, *kakigori*; and the Taiwanese, *baobing*. *Cendol* in coconut milk and *gula Melaka* syrup has also been categorised as *ais kacang* in some countries because of the common ingredients - glutinous rice, red beans, kidney beans, creamed corn and even *cincau*. Although the distinction between *ais kacang* and *cendol* is sometimes blurred, to many Malaysians, *cendol* is a local delicacy that only includes the *cendol* jelly, coconut milk and *gula Melaka* syrup, with perhaps the addition of a scoop of steamed glutinous rice.

A traditional hand-cranked ice shaver



From plain shaved ice to a bowl of goodness

It is claimed that *ais kacang* is a Japanese invention, originating from Kyoto about a thousand years ago. The name *kakigori* means 'shaved ice', and the icy treat, which was most popular during the hot summer months, was then merely a simple composition of shaved ice topped with syrup. It was, nevertheless, grand enough for the imperial court. It was not until 1869 that the modern and more sophisticated *kakigori* appeared. Its popularity soared with the appearance of the hand-cranked ice-shaver, a Japanese invention.

Although there may be distinct variations in the condiments used in this icy treat or the names used to refer to it, to Malaysians, it is known simply as *ais kacang*, or ABC, a name which is a testament to the inventiveness of entrepreneurs in rebranding such a humble dessert. 

Yusuf Suid is currently the IT officer at the Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. He can be contacted at yusufsuid@gmail.com

Scenic Journeys by Swiss Rails

Chan Suan Choo Photographs by
Vivien Tan

A red ribbon streaks across the snow-capped mountain, a sight to behold as you watch the brightly coloured train against the stark whiteness. But what better way to see the best of the Swiss Alps than to get onboard the trains and to experience the journey through the valleys and peaks of this gargantuan mountain range.

Rail travel is both important and popular in Switzerland, as seen from the numerous trains, platforms and tracks leading to and from the railway stations in its major cities. Fast, efficient trains also take you across the borders which connect to other railway lines throughout the Continental Europe and even to Great Britain via the Chunnel. But what the railways have to offer are also the comfortable scenic coaches to make your trans-Swiss travel more picturesque. When I was touring Europe recently, I had the opportunity to travel through parts of these spectacular landscapes by these trains.

Bernina Express

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, this century-old Bernina Line forms one-half of the *Rhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina Landscapes*. The 61 km railway line boasts of engineering wizardry to cross the high-altitude terrain of this southern Swiss landscape, offering views of lakes, mountain peaks and glaciers. I began the train ride from St. Moritz, the playground of the rich and famous. Firstly, a quick walkabout along the narrow streets, sidestepping around people carrying skis, followed by a delicious lunch of barley soup and some hopeful celebrity-spotting. The latter being unsuccessful, for this ski resort did not exactly brim with famous people so late in the winter season.



The Bernina Express at the Pontresina Station

View of the train as it bends along the tracks

Piz Bernina is the highest peak of the Eastern Alps and the highest point of the Bernina Range



As I travelled with a tour group, we were given a coach to ourselves. Promptly, according to Swiss time, the train left the station to begin its journey southward. Meandering its way through the valley floor, the train slowly ascended up the mountain to its highest elevation of 2,253 metres at Ospizio Bernina. There, we were greeted with a breathtaking view of Lago Bianco. Literally meaning 'White Lake', the backdrop of this snow-covered lake is the Piz Bernina (4,049 m), the highest mountain of the Eastern Alps. I am sure the view is equally impressive in spring when the lake is filled with icy blue glacier waters and surrounded by colourful wild flora.



'White Lake' or Lago Bianco, covered with snow

The conifers dusted with snow amid the white covered slopes



The journey continued along its serpentine tracks, which afforded the views of either ends of the train as it curved and crossed the many viaducts (52 in total) or ducked into tunnels and avalanche galleries (man-made structures that allow avalanches to fall over without obstructing the tracks). It began to rain but slowly turned into snow, much to the delight of the few of us (Malaysians, needless to say) and the amusement of others (rest of the world) at seeing us react to it. Snow drifted in through the large opened windows and we even got off the train when it made a quick stop at one of the stations. Here, we took pictures standing (or playing) under the light snow fall, while keeping a watchful eye at the train conductor, in case he boarded the train without us.

Our train ride along this spectacular landscape came to an end when we got off at the picturesque Poschiavo, just before the train moved on to a little beyond the border to the Italian town of Tirano, where the line ends.

Wander Bug

Scenic Journeys by Swiss Rails

Glacier Express

The next morning started a little later than usual as the train only departed at 11.15 am. Our luggage had been driven away earlier as it would take the tour bus longer to cover the same route by road. So after breakfast we check out the medieval town square of Chur before meeting up with the rest back at the hotel and walking to its railway station, which dated back to 1850.

While the full seven-hour trip of the Glacier Express runs from either Davos or St. Moritz to Zermatt (or in reverse), we took a shorter portion of the trip from Chur to Brig. The windows of its panorama wagons were not only large but curved overhead to allow a better view of the outside. The four-seat compartments with facing seats enabled better interaction with fellow travelers and the foldable table in the middle served well when dining on the optional meal of either a three-course lunch which I had or the lighter meal of the *plat du jour* (today's special).

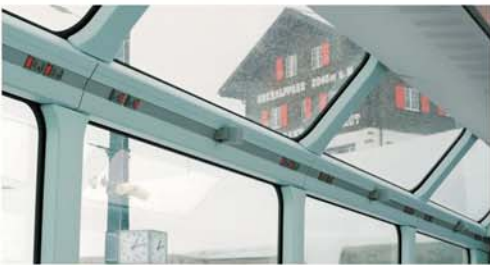


Medieval town of Chur



The express train crossing over a century-old stone arched bridge

The panoramic windows of the Glacier Express offer excellent views of the surroundings as seen here at the Oberalp Pass station



One of the many small communities in clusters along the valleys

In the beginning of the journey, the train ran along the canyon, visibly parallel to the Vorderrhein, crisscrossing numerous bridges over the river. Headphones were handed out so that you could listen to the commentaries, available in several languages, as the train took us past small towns and important sites. As the coaches slowly ascended the valley, we saw many communities built around quaint churches with high steeples. The conifers were dusted with snow and the ground was a blanket of white. As we approach the Oberalp Pass at 2,033 metres, the snow-covered mountains loom overhead and the pristine white slopes were scarred with ski lifts. Look more intensely and you could just make out the tiny, colourful specks of skiers zipping down the slopes.

Ski lifts in operation continued to be seen as we journeyed through towns like Andermatt and Oberwald, which are lowly populated the rest of the year but swarming with skiers in the winter. The train stopped at Brig, where we got off, before continuing its journey to the ski resort of Zermatt. Our bus driver had already arrived and was waiting to pick us up, to continue our tour of this mountainous country. 🇨🇭

Chan Suan Choo is currently an editor with *The Leader*. She can be reached at matlock@streamyx.com

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Kasanova

Kasanova, a semi-musical theatre production, received an overwhelming response from the campus community as well as the public during the three days of performances at the Auditorium Dewan Budaya. The performance was largely the efforts of the School of the Arts.

L.O.V.E. Pervades Campus

Three schools from Penang took part in Lifting Others through Voluntary Engagement (L.O.V.E.) programme on 2 May which provided students opportunities to be volunteers on engagement basis in USM. Twenty-five non-governmental organisations from all over the country were involved in campus activities that benefited the society.



Smooth Sale-ing

More than 500 USM engineering students tried their luck in entrepreneurship when they took part in the recent Entrepreneurship Expo at the Engineering Campus, Nibong Tebal. There were more than 20 stalls selling various types of products and food, patronised by a steady stream of visitors throughout the day.

Delving Into The Past

The Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM), X-Ray Diffraction (XRD) and X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) were the latest equipment acquired for USM Centre for Global Archaeological Research (PPAG). The equipment, costing RM4.2 million, to render research more efficient was announced during the launching of USM Laboratory and Archaeology Gallery in early April, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of its archaeological research.



Carbon Nanotubes

USM researchers have discovered a new method called Continuous Production Method of Carbon Nanotubes Using Rotation Reactor to produce carbon nanotubes. This method is the first in Southeast Asia and is able to produce 1 kg of this material daily; its market value can be as high as RM 2,148 per gramme, depending on its purity.

The 45th Convocation

On 20 April, USM Chancellor, H.R.H. Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Syed Putra Jamalullail graced the 45th USM Convocation Ceremony with a total of 941 graduates. Prof Fun Hoong Kun, USM crystallography expert, and Tan Sri Dato' Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan, a leading pioneer of distance education, were conferred the Emeritus Professor and the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Education respectively. This is the first convocation for Prof Dato' Omar Osman as USM's VC.



Visits by PM and DPM

Prime Minister Dato' Sri Haji Mohammad Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak visited USM on 22 April to meet NGO representatives of Indian and Chinese communities at Dewan Budaya and Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra (DTSP). A few days later, Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin visited USM to meet with the Federal civil servants and student bodies.

Jumble Sale

Bargain hunters made a beeline to the nine-hour Charity Jumble Sale organised by the School of Management at the Dataran Merah next to Dewan Budaya on 30 April. Proceeds from the sale will be donated to rural schools in Perlis, Penang, Selangor and Pahang in the form of musical instruments to instill love for music.



Preparing For The World Outside

A three-day Education and Career Expo (EKSPEN), USM featuring open interviews, a career exhibition and talks. More than 50 companies and agencies participated in the event that was held from 27 to 29 April, attracting mostly final year students.



Vimalambikai Chelvaiyah
B. A. '75
Retired Teacher,
Negeri Sembilan



Prof Mohd Zaidi Mohd Hajazi
B. Sc. '98
Director,
Center of International
and External Studies,
UniSel, Selangor



Azlan Hissham Mohamad Saad
B. Eng. (E.E.) '99
Entrepreneur,
Hissham Engineering
& Services,
Penang



Tan Boon Leng
B. App. Sc. '99
Patent Agent,
Boon IP,
Kuala Lumpur



Amra Othman
B. Sc. '00
Senior Asst Registrar, Division
of Research & Innovation,
USM,
Penang



Engku Ahmad Fahmi Engku Ubaidillah
B. Tech. '03
Researcher,
Advanced Material Research
Centre (AMREC),
SIRIM Bhd, Kedah



Chai Si Yong
B. Sc. HBP '03
Architect,
Chaisyong Architect,
Sarawak



Mohd Mukhwim Maghribi
B. Comm. '03
Senior Asst Registrar,
Registry,
USM,
Penang



Tuan Sharifah Nur Syed Hussain
B. Tech. '03
Production Engineer,
BARD Sdn Bhd,
Kedah



Mohd Fakaruzelhisam Othman
B. Soc. Sc. '04
Hostel Supervisor,
SK Tohoi,
Kelantan



Zamhari Ahmad
B. Mgmt. '04
Asst Registrar,
Sch of Industrial Technology,
USM,
Penang



Mu'azzah Ismail
B. Comm. '06
Asst Registrar,
Office of Vice-Chancellor,
USM,
Penang



Abi Safwan Umarul Mukhtar
B. Eng. (Chemical) '07
Process Engineer,
Malaysia LNG Sdn Bhd,
Sarawak



Ahmad Syukri Jaafar
B. Eng. '08
Defence Writer,
Inai Damai Sdn Bhd,
Kuala Lumpur



Normala Omar
B. A. (Edu) '09
Assistant Registrar,
Division of Student Affairs
and Dev,
USM,
Nibong Tebal



Nurul Izni Ilias
B. Mgmt. '09
Asst Registrar,
Advanced Medical and Dental
Institute,
Bertam



Mustaqin Alpi
B. Eng. (Civil) '09
Engineer,
Penang State Secretariat,
Penang



**Mohd Naquiddin
Mohd Amin**
B. Pharm. '10
Pharmacist,
Klinik Kesihatan,
Ayer Hitam,
Johor



Rosdi Osman
B. Soc. Sc. '10
Executive,
Association of Social Workers,
Selangor



Norizan Baba Rahim
MBA '10
PhD Candidate,
Sch of Management,
USM,
Penang



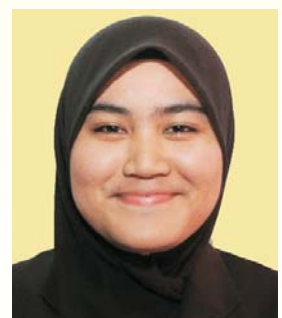
Sivaneswari Muniandy
B. A. '11
English Teacher,
Cambridge Language
Centre,
Johor



Haliza Hata
MBA '11
Asst Account Manager,
Telekom Malaysia Bhd,
Penang



**Abul Kasim
S M J Dulkaman**
B. Eng. '11
Quality Assurance &
Customer Interface Engineer,
Globetronics Sdn Bhd,
Penang



Nadia Ab. Razak
B. Sc. '11
Postgraduate Student,
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THE CHANCELLORY

Chancellory Building as seen from the Transformation' monument roundabout.



DOWN MEMORY LANE



COLUMNIST

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- Segar Dalam Ingatan
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- Hari-hariku di USM
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