

Star Special

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NATIONAL DAY 2023

Stripes of unity

By supporting one another, Malaysians overcame obstacles and uplifted the country. This National Day, let's cherish our collective strides that have helped shape a stronger, more vibrant Malaysia.



Illustration by Hassan Bahri

Making waves in Land below the Wind

After putting a college in Sabah on the map, this educator has now set his sights on enabling the local community.

By ROWENA CHUA
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ONE step at a time – that has been Dr Mohd Sirhajwan Idek's approach to empowering his students in English language learning, and innovation and entrepreneurship ever since he started his teaching career at Keningau Vocational College (KVC), Sabah, in 2012.

Over the years, the multi-award-winning English language teacher has gone on to empower his fellow teachers through continuing professional development in his aim to ensure they "live up to their full potential".

Having played a vital role in bringing the college from the interior region of Sabah to the global stage through the participation of his students and peers in various international events besides his own, he now plans to mobilise them to reach out to the community in Sabah to help carry out their innovation and social projects, and enhance their livelihoods.

Named the National Charismatic Youth Icon by the Youth and Sports Ministry last year, Mohd Sirhajwan said his team has acquired basic skills in ideation and entrepreneurship, and emerging technologies such as three-dimensional printing and drone piloting.

"Due to our consistent achievements in innovation competitions, the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry financed the construction of an innovation and design hub at our college, which is well-equipped with tech-based resources.

"This hub, known as 'Ruang Daya Cipta', is meant for the community," he said, adding that he is seeking to maximise his team's bolstered capacity to help the community.

The Sabahan also plans to get his team to collaborate with the community in language education, as well as art projects such as theatre adaptations.

From leading students to stamp their mark in various competitions nationally and internationally to conducting webinars and masterclasses to aid in his colleagues' professional development – even co-founding the "Highly Intellectual Valiant Enthusiasts (Hive)" teacher asso-



Mohd Sirhajwan (centre) in discussion with his students on practical innovations. — MOHD SIRHAJWAN IDEK

ciation – the 36-year-old has made it his life's work to empower his students and fellow teachers so that they can pay it forward by lifting the community.

"There is a need for us to empower each other for the greater good. Only by being the best versions of ourselves can we give our best to others.

"Teachers must acquire fundamental skills that they can transfer to their students and collectively expand the impact of good practices on more students," he said.

Encouraging students to take part in competitions, he added, helps foster their communication, creativity and leadership skills.

He has also taken it upon himself to provide his students, most of whom come from low socio-economic backgrounds, with avenues to champion the causes that they believe in.

"Youth advocacy must be cultivated among the young generation in order to foster proactive and compassionate youth," he said.

Having worked with special needs learners at KVC and seen them win recognition for their artistic works in the form of performance videos, as well as literary and visual pieces, Mohd Sirhajwan firmly believes that they are "just as capable as the rest".

"They just need proper and adequate support to take part in activities. This also requires existing opportunities to be more inclusive by widening the means of participation, such as allowing sign language presentations.

"If we adapt and cater to the different needs of students based on their abilities, we will be able to assist them in discovering and developing their talents and skills in a way that we would not be able to, if we restricted ourselves to just a one-size-fits-all approach," he said.

Mohd Sirhajwan also believes in integrating global citizenship education in his college.

To help teachers and students develop an awareness of global issues and see themselves as part of a global community that can contribute towards alleviating global crises, he has been spearheading an internationalisation effort since last year, which saw exchange classes being conducted with South-East Asian technical and vocational education and training (TVET) schools, and a master-class series being conducted by teachers from other countries.

"This can improve their sociocultural competence in a way that they learn more about other cultures and interact with people from different backgrounds and origins in a respectful manner," he said.

SHINING BEACON

Mohd Sirhajwan has done the nation proud

2022:

Named the National Charismatic Youth Icon by the Youth and Sports Ministry.

2017:

Named the National Teacher Icon by the Education Ministry; won the International Innovation and Entrepreneurship Excellence in Teaching Award in France; won the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) scholarship in the Express Publishing category.

2016:

Won the Macmillan Education Scholarship.

IMPACT

Since 2016:

Mohd Sirhajwan has mentored over 600 students at KVC in pitching projects at conferences and innovation contests. Among their major achievements: winning the Pitchborneo 2022 with a grant worth RM20,000, and winning the first and second positions at the PitchBAH! 2023 with prizes worth RM5,000 and RM3,000, respectively.

Since 2020:

He has mentored special needs learners, 11 of whom had been recognised with the Special Education Network & Inclusion Association (Senia) World Changer Award. One of his students, Brigette Yasin, was the recipient of the Senia Student Award 2022 with a cash prize worth US\$1,500 (RM6,817).

Since late 2020:

He has guided almost 300 students, including special needs learners, in producing artistic works, some of which earned prizes at online art festivals and virtual talent shows.

A Top 50 Global Teacher Prize finalist in 2017, Mohd Sirhajwan urged other educators to take a leaf out of his "one step at a time" approach.

"This is a marathon. You don't need to sprint and pressure or push yourself too hard and become extremely drained. You just need to keep taking one step further at a time because each step will take you closer to your aim," he said.

Mohd Sirhajwan enrolled at the Institute of Teacher Education (IPG) Gaya Campus, Sabah, when he was 18. He pursued a joint degree programme in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at IPG Gaya-Universiti Teknologi Mara in 2011 and a master's degree in research at the same university in 2014.

Dedicated mentor inspires change



Alesyah Asa (left), student
Top 10 finalist of the Global Student Prize 2022

Alesyah led her team to winning a hackathon on information literacy, which was organised by Unesco and Korea's Education Ministry in 2020. They also won a science, technology, engineering, the arts and maths (STEAM) grant from The Awesome Foundation, the United States, in the same year. She was the first student leader of Eureka Hub, a STEM club set up at the college in 2020 that trains students and teachers in programming, 3D printing, robotics, drones and other emerging technologies. Last year, she became the first Malaysian to be shortlisted as one of the Top 10 finalists of the Global Student Prize. She was also the winner of the Education Minister's Gold Award 2022, which is given annually to the best performing and most accomplished vocational college graduate.



Siti Nur Hanisah Omar (left), student
First runner-up at the PitchBAH! 2023

Siti Nur Hanisah and her team earned recognition in the haiku and puppetry categories at art festivals in 2022 and 2023. She also led her team in developing a social project where they converted preloved soft toys and old clothes into puppets, which they used to entertain and educate children. This project won a grant worth RM3,000.



Larry James (second from left), teacher
Recipient of the Education Ministry's Anugerah Dikaulah Bintang 2022

Larry James has been taking part in innovation contests and research conferences as a presenter since 2020. He has received a gold medal for a mobile app that he and his team created. In 2022, he led his team to receiving recognition as the winner of the GoAbroad Innovation Award for their internationalisation project comprising a hybrid cultural camp, and virtual masterclasses.

By REVATHI MURUGAPPAN
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A DOCTOR'S primary role is to treat the sick and save lives.

That was what senior consultant upper gastrointestinal (GI) and general surgeon, Dr Mohammad Shukri Jahit was busy doing at his former workplace in Hospital Sungai Buloh (HSB), Selangor.

Upper GI surgeons treat conditions affecting the oesophagus, stomach, gallbladder, bile ducts and pancreas, including cancer.

So there he was, seeing patients, operating on them, training junior surgeons, doing paperwork, etc.

All was going well until March 8, 2020, when his world turned upside-down.

"It was the wee hours of the night when we were informed we had to decongest our wards and transfer all our post- and pre-surgery patients to other hospitals in the Klang Valley to prepare HSB for Covid-19 cases.

"The news shocked us and no one knew what to do.

"Our patients were severely impacted and I instructed my team to call up different hospitals to check on bed availability," recalls the 54-year-old, who was then the hospital's head of surgery.

Thankfully, Hospital Shah Alam agreed to accept some of the upper GI cases, just before the first movement control order came into force on March 18, 2020.

Dr Mohammad Shukri says: "However, they couldn't accommodate all our surgical patients due to the usual public hospital congestion.

"There were cases of cancer patients who had completed chemotherapy and required surgery, but we didn't know where to send them.

"Sadly, some of them succumbed due to the delay in treatment."

When the patients were relocated, only one surgeon from HSB was allowed to go to Hospital Shah Alam.

"There was a stigma surrounding doctors from HSB – as if we were going to transmit Covid-19 to everyone!

"So, from our team of three surgeons, we sent Dr Sou Jing



We survived: Dr Mohammad Shukri, Dr Tee (left pic, right) and Dr Sou (right pic, right), who is now based in Penang General Hospital, had to literally operate out of another hospital during the pandemic. — Photos: DR MOHAMMAD SHUKRI JAHIT



Surgery during the pandemic

With surgery taking a backseat during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was hard-going for this surgeon and his team to care for their patients.

Kim – who was our specialist trainee in upper GI surgery – to be stationed at Shah Alam to take care of HSB patients," he says.

Improvising workarounds

Dr Mohammad Shukri and his other consultant, Dr Tee Sze Chee, continued to manage HSB's outpatient surgical clinic, and if patients required urgent admission, they were sent to Hospital Shah Alam.

Since most of the facilities in HSB were being used as makeshift Covid-19 wards, the surgeons could not perform any endoscopies or take any tissue samples, which is crucial in upper GI cases.

"It was not easy to arrange endoscopies in Shah Alam as we were considered outsiders, plus it was also difficult to access their computer system," shares Dr Mohammad Shukri.

"Worse still, their staff was not used to managing upper GI cases, so Dr Sou had a tough time in an emergency.

"The majority of our patients was high risk and required to be in the intensive care unit (ICU)." A patient might start bleeding in the middle of the night and Dr Sou would have to stumble through police road blocks to get to the hospital.

Since he was on call daily, the subspecialty trainee often stayed in the hospital and only returned home every two or three days.

The trio resorted to virtual meetings to discuss cases.

After many rounds of discussion with Hospital Shah Alam, Dr Mohammad Shukri and his team were given one slot a week to perform surgery.

Alas, there were no instruments appropriate to conduct upper GI surgeries.

"The problem was our instruments such as sutures, operating gadgets and other consumables, were not available there, so we had to transport these on a weekly basis, and after the surgery, bring them back to HSB," he says.

All the postponed cases were always on his mind and the team made constant phone calls to keep track of these patients.

"We were one of the few upper GI centres (in Malaysia) and patients came from all over the country to seek treatment.

"But in 2020, some of them could not even come out of their village because they couldn't get past police blocks.

"They didn't have email either.

"This is where we had to think creatively and told them to write their clinic dates in their appointment cards.

"We also tried to arrange for ambulances to pick up critical patients," he adds.

A sudden transfer

This went on until July 2020 when Dr Mohammad Shukri received notice that he would be transferred to the National Cancer Institute (also known by its Malay acronym IKN) in Putrajaya to set up the upper GI surgical unit there.

He was surprised, and his team, unhappy.

He shares: "I had to meet the then Health director-general Tan Sri Noor Hisham Abdullah to clear the issue on whether it was a single person or team transfer.

"I told him when I set up the unit in HSB in 2008, I was still young, but I didn't have the energy any more.

"He then gave me the guarantee that the whole team would be transferred, but I had to go first to see what was needed."

Thus, in August 2020, Dr Mohammad Shukri moved over to IKN, where more "shocks" awaited.

"So now I was seeing new cases in IKN, Dr Tee was redirecting patients to Shah Alam, and Dr Sou was trying to get them to IKN – imagine the chaos!

"The major stumbling block in IKN was the wards as we had to share them.

"Our patients require round-the-clock care, especially when it comes to feeding and nutrition, but the nurses and medical officers didn't know how to care for them.

"Also, there was a bit of resistance because we were a new unit," he recalls.

After an upper GI surgery, most patients cannot eat normally, and depend on parenteral nutrition, i.e. intravenous (IV) feeding, where the entire digestive system is bypassed.

Dr Mohammad Shukri says: "When you don't know how to feed them, the infection rate goes up – it was complete havoc.

"My requests for funds were turned down as everything was being channelled to Covid-19, so I had to pinch from other departments.

"We also had complications because some of the medical devices had been used till exhaustion and couldn't be used any more ... every day was a new battle, but I never gave up."

Day in and day out, he was retraining the IKN healthcare professionals, writing proposals, calling the ministry for emergency funds for endoscopy services, and asking when his team would be transferred over.

He was questioned, yelled at – and felt dejected.

He had to give himself and his team daily pep talks.

Thankfully, Dr Mohammad Shukri didn't need to think about family matters as being single has enabled him to totally dedicate himself to work.

But he still had sleepless nights, not knowing what was going to happen the next day and whether his patients would survive.

Slowly, the funds trickled in, and by December 2020, his team had transferred over to IKN.

"Looking back, I don't know how I overcame all this, but now, we are even stronger and bigger.

"Upper GI services have completely transferred to IKN, while HSB only manages general surgery," says the surgeon who leads the national upper GI training programme.

Two years on, Dr Mohammad Shukri's department now comprises three consultants and four subspecialty trainees who are on rotation.

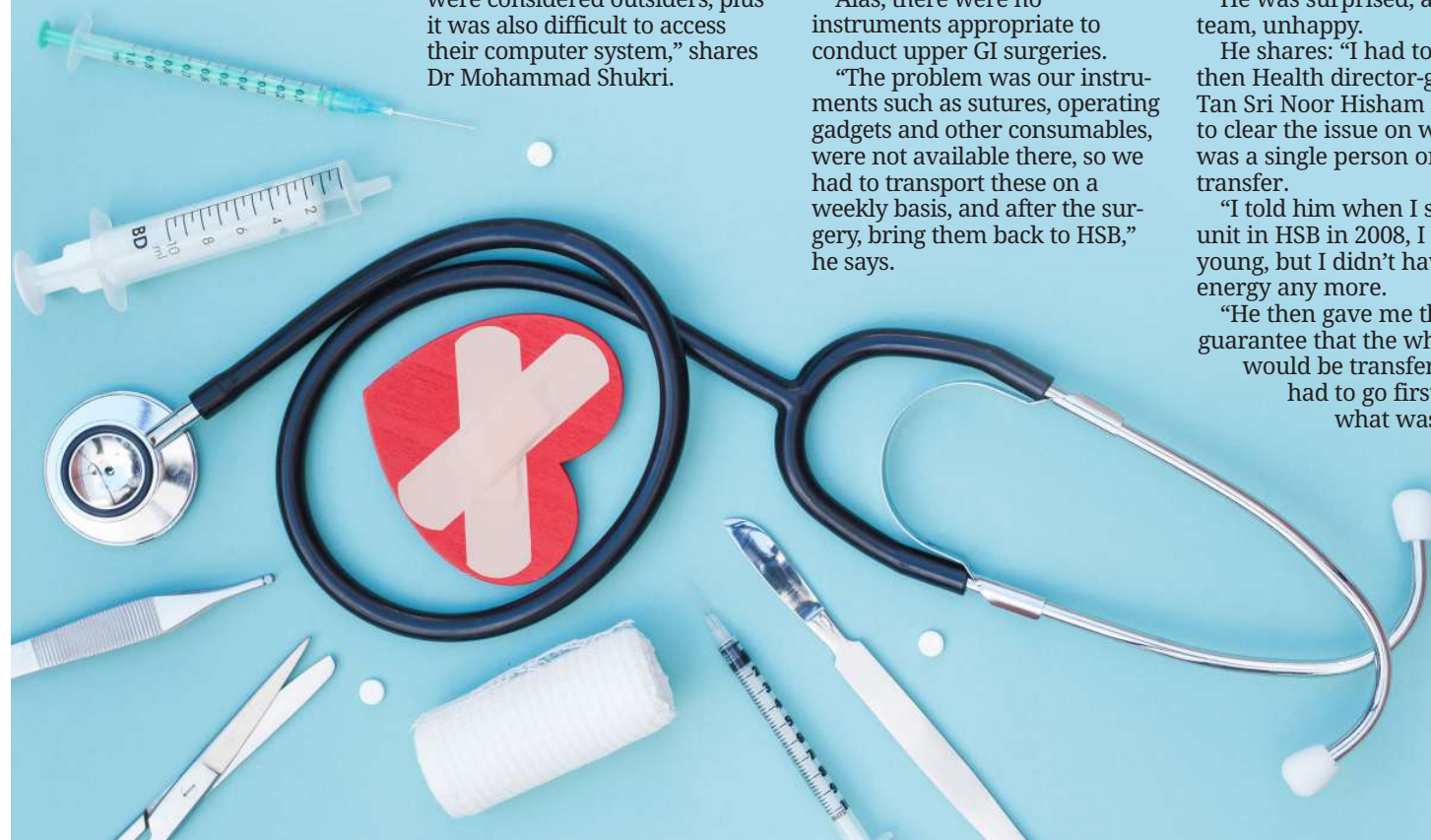
They also manage bariatric surgery and advise patients on making lifestyle changes and doing exercises.

He says: "Our bariatric cases are expanding, and because we don't have enough physiotherapists, all our specialists, including the consultants, have to coach patients."

In his leisure time, the affable doctor spends time working out with his patients to keep them motivated.

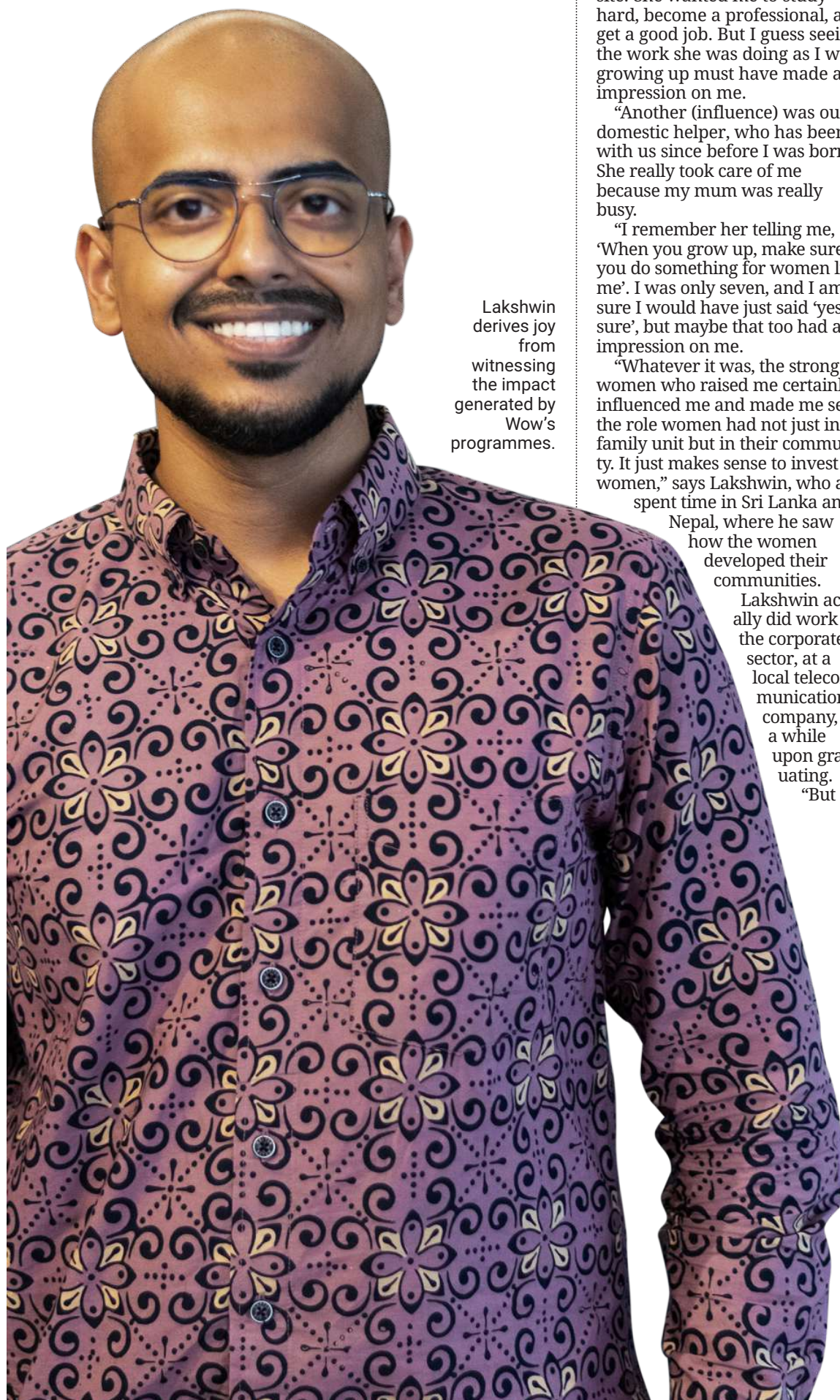
"What else is there in life but to serve humanity?"

"I just enjoy it."



Empowering women, elevating communities

Opting out of a corporate career, Lakshwin Murugan champions social impact projects that uplift Malaysian women and communities.



Lakshwin derives joy from witnessing the impact generated by Wow's programmes.

By S. INDRAMALAR
lifestyle@thestar.com.my

LAKSHWIN Murugan reckons it was “the strong women” who raised him that led to his choice of vocation.

Lakshwin is the chief executive officer of Women of Will (Wow), a non-governmental organisation that aims to improve the lives of marginalised and disadvantaged communities by empowering their women.

“I didn’t grow up thinking that I would be a part of an NGO, even though my mother was always busy doing social impact work from as far back as I can remember,” he says.

His mum, Dr Selvamalar Ayadurai, founded Tech Outreach Malaysia, an NGO working with marginalised groups not just in Malaysia but in countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal.

“In fact, it was quite the opposite. She wanted me to study hard, become a professional, and get a good job. But I guess seeing the work she was doing as I was growing up must have made an impression on me.

“Another (influence) was our domestic helper, who has been with us since before I was born. She really took care of me because my mum was really busy.

“I remember her telling me, ‘When you grow up, make sure you do something for women like me’. I was only seven, and I am sure I would have just said ‘yes, sure’, but maybe that too had an impression on me.

“Whatever it was, the strong women who raised me certainly influenced me and made me see the role women had not just in a family unit but in their community. It just makes sense to invest in women,” says Lakshwin, who also spent time in Sri Lanka and Nepal, where he saw how the women developed their communities.

Lakshwin actually did work in the corporate sector, at a local telecommunications company, for a while upon graduating.

“But I



Lakshwin (front) with some of the farmers in Sabah who are developing their organic farms with crops like ginger. — Photos: Wow

It has been extremely challenging, mostly because there is little support and funding for us to invest in resources.

Lakshwin Murugan

felt something was missing. There was this nagging feeling, like a ticker in me, that kept track of what I was doing and made me realise that I wanted to do something that would be of benefit to others,” says the 30-year-old from Petaling Jaya. “So six months into my job, I decided to leave and join Tech Outreach.”

Train, coach, enable

In 2015, Lakshwin and a few other members of Tech Outreach decided to form Wow, a separate NGO that would focus solely on projects involving women in Malaysia.

Headed by Datin Goh Suet Lan, their intent was clear: Help marginalised women start and run successful and sustainable enterprises to achieve financial independence.

“That was back in 2015, and I have been with Wow for eight years now. It has been extremely challenging, mostly because there is little support and funding for us to invest in resources.

“However, it is also extremely rewarding when we see the transformation taking place in the lives of women, their families, and communities.

“When they first come into the programme, the women have very little confidence and are looking for help with their businesses.

“And to see them now, not only running their businesses successfully but also helping others and leading their communities ... it makes all our effort worth the while,” says Lakshwin.

Wow, he explains, runs community development programmes for women. The goal is to empow-

er the women and, by extension, their families and communities.

“We work specifically with the PPR (People’s Housing Project) communities in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, although we recently expanded to Kedah and have started an organic farming programme in Sabah too.

“We develop strong relationships with the leaders of the communities and identify women who run small businesses that support their household incomes.

“These are households that earn RM2,500 and below – what we call the B10 in Malaysia.

“And the way we support them is by giving them training, coaching, and capital. We give them the skills and resources they need to grow their business and to ensure it is profitable and sustainable,” he shares.

Following a model of the micro-credit loan system of the Grameen Bank, the programme gives the women RM1,000 to build their businesses: RM600 is a grant, and the remaining RM400 is an interest-free loan that they have to pay back.

“We are working with women who have many challenges, and we know they can’t repay the entire amount. But we also don’t want to encourage a handout mentality.

“The RM400 doesn’t come back to us but goes into a community fund for future programmes for the community,” says Lakshwin.

The women are also given financial literacy training so that they will be able to not just save but also sustain and grow their businesses.

“Financial literacy is a huge component of the programme. The women learn about profit and loss statements, balance sheets, and why they need to separate their family account from their business account.

“They also learn legal requirements in Malaysia and so on,” he says.

Apart from the skills training the women go through, there is also a coaching programme to mentor the women as they start to grow their businesses.

“They have about 12 sessions of coaching where they are shown how to apply the skills they learn to their business.

“We introduced this because we realised early on in the programme that they would need support along the way,” he says.



Happy National Day

May we embrace the spirit of unity and sustainability
From Aramco Malaysia.

malaysia.aramco.com

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Changemakers in the community

To ensure sustainability, Wow also identifies leaders among the women and develops their potential further.

“We identify 5% to 10% of them who are natural leaders and support them with leadership skills so that they become skilled changemakers in their communities.

“We realised that in order for these entrepreneurs to be successful, they needed a support system, and the best support system is other women within their community.

“Many of these changemakers are already playing the role of leaders; they just need the skills to help them become better leaders.

“This is where we can help ... by training them, building their confidence, and giving them funding to run more programmes,” he says, adding that in some areas, the leaders have set up sewing centres, community kitchens, IT centres, and youth centres in their communities.

One such leader is Norliza Borhari, 56, who joined Wow’s programme about six years ago. She had a small business selling strawberry plant saplings.

“The programme has been really beneficial not just to the women but also for our community.

“During the pandemic, we reached out to Wow with the challenges we were facing, and

From strength to strength

It is extremely rewarding when we see the transformation taking place in the lives of women, their families, and communities.

Lakshwin Murugan

they helped us so much.

“We have learned a lot, and I am now also growing leeks in our mini garden and selling saplings.

“We don’t have much space here at the PPR, but I’ve learned to make the best of what I have,” says Norliza.

“I am also quite busy because, as the leader here, the women come to me for all sorts of issues they face, be it with their business, providing welfare assistance, or any other support.”

The organisation constantly measures its impact to ensure that it is “on the right track”.

Lakshwin says Wow uses the United Nations SDGs (sustainable

development goals) to gauge its progress, with a focus on: no poverty (one), gender equality (five), decent work and economic growth (eight), and sustainable cities and communities (11).

“We have a very rigorous impact measurement mechanism that starts with a 65-point survey questionnaire about their business, family, etc, which we do at the start of the programme and then 18 months later (which is typically the duration of each programme).

“We also measure the income and savings of each participant on a monthly basis throughout the 18-month engagement, as well as their knowledge pre- and post-programme,” he says, adding that focus group interviews are also conducted for more qualitative data.

The impact has been good so far. Some 96% of the women have managed to make their businesses sustainable and profitable, with an increase in income between 30% and 88% (with an average of 50% to 60%).

“This is good because about a third of our participants have moved to the M40 (income above RM5,000) category, which means that their families also benefit, which is one of our

main objectives,” he says, adding that Wow has worked with about 10,000 women in various communities to date.

Lakshwin reckons he’s made the right career choice, and his hope – aside from getting more funding for Wow – is that Malaysians rally together for communities in need, not just when times are tough.

“I think we all have a role to play and a responsibility to make our society and country a better place. That means taking the effort to understand what’s going on in our society and country, empathising with other segments of society, and being responsible in our actions and even the words we use. Be understanding, be patient, and be more caring.

“This is something Malaysians are great at because look how we helped each other during Covid-19 and the floods. We must do this all the time,” he says.

For now, Wow intends to continuously fine-tune its model to ensure that it stays relevant and impactful.

“We must make sure we are always doing the ‘right’ work. Of course, we also hope to find long-term funding so we can plan ahead and really invest in long-term programmes for more communities across the country,” he says, adding that the goal is to build a better Malaysia for all.



Norliza in her little, lush garden at her PPR in Kuala Lumpur.
— NORLIZA BORHARI



Happy National Day 2023

Let's commit to protecting the environment for our beloved nation



The Board of Directors, Management and Staff of
Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad
Wish All Malaysians

SELAMAT HARI MERDEKA KE-66



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**MALAYSIA
MADANI**
TEKAD PERPADUAN PENUHI HARAPAN

A friend in need is a friend indeed

During the challenging pandemic years, many Malaysians found themselves reaching out for a helping hand as they faced one adversity after the other. Happily, their fellow Malaysians were ready to lend their assistance, touching their hearts deeply and creating a lasting impact. This Merdeka, Malaysians highlight and honour the beacons of hope that made an unforgettable difference in their lives with their good deeds.

I AM an entrepreneur running a furniture business. Back in 2020-2021, we weren't allowed to operate as my business was categorised as a non-essential sector. It hit me terribly hard - all of my savings were used and I was left with no liquidity to sustain my business and living expenses.

As I was desperately in need of cash, the only thing I could think to do was to let go of my car. The challenge was that few would buy a car during the peak of the pandemic because of strict movement restrictions.

While locked at home one night, I reached out to a car enthusiast friend and asked if he could urgently sell my car through his network.

At first, he wasn't sure if there would even be a buyer. I lost hope.

But several days later, he called me saying he had found a buyer - it was a big relief for me.

During the handover of the car and documentation, I found out that the buyer was actually his father. Maybe my friend didn't want me to feel bad, since he did not tell me about this.

I couldn't hold back my tears when his father willingly and readily bought my car not because he needed it, but in a gesture of support to ensure I could keep going through that difficult time.

My friend's father literally saved a company from going bankrupt. For me, this is a true reflection of the hashtag #KitaJagaKita.

To Uncle Jamil Rashidi and my friend (you know who you are), I wish to take this opportunity to shout out my sincere appreciation. Thank you for helping me out. My company is still running because of both of you. Indeed, you guys have beautiful souls for helping out your fellow Malaysians.

- Amir Zain, 36
Kajang, Selangor



MY HUSBAND and I would like to express our thanks to Mr and Mrs Lim for their kind help in taking care of our son during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The two of us are based in Vietnam for work and our eldest returned to Malaysia to attend university in 2019.

After the pandemic struck, we were unable to make our regular trips back to Malaysia but the Lim family was kind enough to look out and care for him as if he was their own child. Not only did they invite him over for meals regularly and drive him around when his car broke down, but they also took him in for a few months as he experienced some complications while renewing his university dorm rental. Thanks to the Lim family's kindness, my husband and I could have peace of mind despite being separated from our son during the pandemic. Thank you.

- Joyce Yee Sook Kam, 48
Hanoi, Vietnam



A THANK you note to Mr and Mrs Arasu-Veni and family in Kampar.

The Covid-19 pandemic caught many by surprise, especially when our country was put under a movement control order (MCO).

My elderly parents were adversely affected by this restriction as they are based in Kampar, Perak, while my three siblings are located in Selangor and I am based in Penang.

Words alone can never be sufficient to describe the gratitude and appreciation I have for my parents' neighbours, Mr and Mrs Arasu-Veni and their children, who went out of their way to support and help my parents in any way they could.

Mr and Mrs Arasu would check on my parents daily to ensure that they had enough food supplies, medicines and other necessary items. They would either buy the supplies for my parents or take my mother to the market every week to do the marketing.

Mr Arasu also collected my parents' regular medical supplies from the clinic and even took time off from work to ferry my parents for doctors' appointments safely.

They were aware that four of us (siblings) were unable to travel interstate during the MCO to take care of our parents' needs and they took the initiative to take care of our parents just as they would care for their own parents.

Their teenage children would often accompany my parents and talk to them so that they did not feel lonely.

They even went to the extent of throwing a surprise birthday party celebration at midnight on my father's birthday and they shared the pictures with all of us!

I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to Mr and Mrs Arasu-Veni and family for all that they had done for my parents during the pandemic and even until now.

Mr and Mrs Arasu-Veni, all your good deeds, love and support towards my parents will always be in my mind and heart and I wish only the best for your future.

- Parames Pooranalingam,
Penang

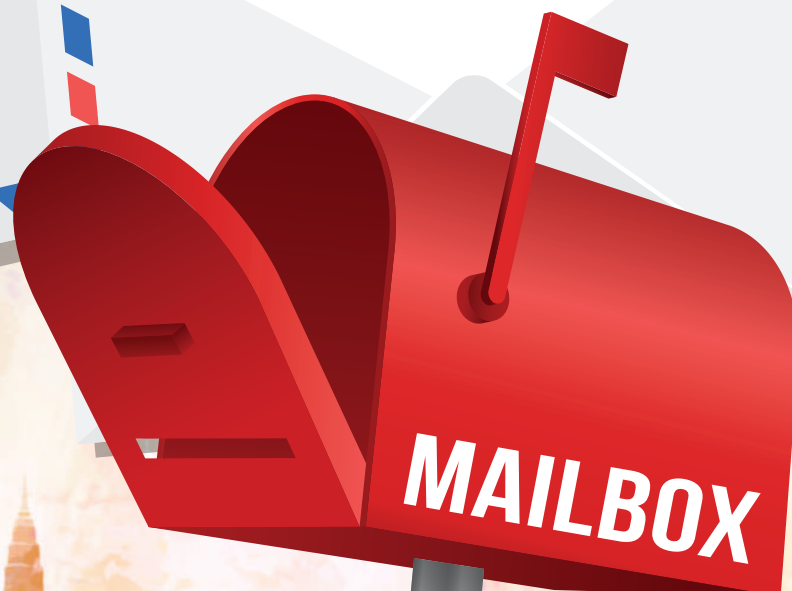
MY Mum works in a small pharmacy in Kulim, Kedah. One day, an old man walked into the pharmacy and asked about adult diapers for his wife.

My mum tried to help him find the best option, but when she told him about the price, his face fell, saying it was the middle of the month and he did not have much money. Without hesitation, my mum told him to pay with whatever he had, and to settle the remaining balance at a later date.

Two weeks later, the uncle dropped by with his son. They thanked my mother, appreciating the solution provided two weeks prior and said they would always support the business.

To me, this is Malaysians helping one another in times of need.

- Shah NR, 36
Kajang, Selangor





Growth is only sustainable when we grow together

Our growth as a builder is intertwined with the growth of our nation. Your dreams for a better future have driven us to shape Malaysia's construction industry with responsible, sustainable practices; and that has enabled us to build and connect communities in Malaysia, propelling our nation's progress.

On this memorable occasion, we want to celebrate you, our fellow Malaysians, for driving us to be future-forward with greater good in mind.

Selamat Hari Kebangsaan from all of us at IJM.



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Paving the way

Azizulhasni Awang pedals his way into the hearts of aspiring athletes with his towering feats.

By LIM TEIK HUAT
starspt@thestar.com.my

FIGHTING the sport's heavyweights must have looked like the easy part for Malaysia's Pocket Rocketman.

Azizulhasni Awang has certainly made a career of pushing the boundaries in his pursuit of cycling excellence for the last 15 years.

He once finished a race in Manchester with an eight-inch splinter impaled through his leg in a bid for a podium spot at the Track World Cup.

The two Olympic medals he won in his pet keirin event (bronze in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and silver in Tokyo in 2021) are testament to his sheer mental strength and determination to succeed despite being at a physical disadvantage competing against physically bigger and taller opponents.

Standing at 1.66m, Azizul is one of the shortest track cyclists on the world stage, but he has never let this stop him from achieving greatness in his sport.

Azizul achieved an extraordinary feat at the Asian Track Cycling Championships held at the National Velodrome in Nilai in June when he secured the individual sprint and keirin double.

His collection of Asian championship gold medals stands at 12, unmatched by anyone else on the continent.

And this was achieved after coming out of open heart surgery. There was the big scare he gave the nation in April of last year when he had to go through open heart surgery to correct a natural birth anomaly and then slowly pick up the pieces through rehabilitation to recover his fitness and strength.

Azizul, now 35, may be in the last legs of his illustrious career, but he is determined to keep going to secure the elusive Olympic gold medal Malaysia is still waiting for.

Malaysia has been participating in the Olympics since the 1956 Games in Melbourne but has yet to win a medal in any sport.

Like Dungun-born Azizul, up-and-coming motor racing talent Hakim Danish also comes from Terengganu and is a big fan of the cyclist.

Hakim has been making waves in motorcycle racing since first making himself noticed by winning the first SIC MiniGP championship title in 2020.

The talented boy, who has won podium finishes in Europe and Asia despite his inexperience, is just 16 and probably the best prospect Malaysia has of making it to the MotoGP world championship in the future.

And for Hakim, the way to go is to emulate the working ethics and resilient character of Azizul.

He is a very disciplined athlete, and mentally he is so strong. He respects the opposition but does not fear them, and this is what I try to emulate as a motorsport racer.

Hakim Danish

"I've never had the chance to meet Azizul as he is usually training overseas, but I've followed him on social media and also in newspapers.

"He is the most famous sportsman Terengganu has produced, and I am proud as we come from the same state.

"Terengganu has produced many good sports athletes, and I think the inspiration for sporting success is also because of Azizul and what he fought for.

"He is a very disciplined athlete, and

mentally he is so strong. He respects the opposition but does not fear them, and this is what I try to emulate as a motorsport racer.

"I also have another idol and mentor in former world championship rider Zulfahmi Khairuddin, so we stick to a regimented training programme, try to have plenty of rest, and also not forget my studies, although I am training overseas.

"I hope I can be the best and achieve big things in motorsport just like what Azizul has done for cycling," said Hakim, who is currently competing in the European Talent Cup and Red Bull Rookies Cup in Europe.

National table tennis player Alice Chang Li Sian bagged silver in the team event at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games last year and is also a fan of Azizul and what he stands for in Malaysian sports.

The 21-year-old lauded Azizul's attitude, commitment, perseverance, and determination to succeed at the highest level.

"These characteristics have always been an inspiration for me in my sports career.

"For me, Azizul is a great and mighty athlete. He has won many medals for Malaysia in the Olympics and World Championships, so he has always served as a role model for us to learn from.

"Azizul went through surgery in April last year, but he was able to win two gold medals in the Asian Track Cycling Championships in June.

"It is clear how much hard work and hardship he has put in to stand on the

Hakim, Ameeshenraj, and Chang (1-3) draw inspiration from Azizul's unwavering sports ethic and resilient spirit.

Despite undergoing heart surgery, Azizul continued to compete at a professional level.

His remarkable achievement of securing 12 Asian Championship gold medals remains unparalleled on the continent.

— Photos: Filepic

highest podium again.

"I had the experience of going through the recovery road, so I know that we must not give up after sustaining the injury and that we need to actively undergo rehabilitation in order to return to our pre-injury state.

"The effort behind him must be many, many times greater than ordinary people's, so his spirit is worthy of the admiration of all our countrymen, and it is also what we as athletes must emulate and learn from him," said Chang, who comes from Sarawak.

Promising squash talent C. Ameeshenraj became an immediate fan of Azizul after watching him race once in the United Kingdom.

"It was a proud moment when he was introduced as a Malaysian. I train in the UK, and as a sportsman trying to break into the top level, your mentality certainly matters, as does how strong you are to cope with the challenges and struggles that will come.

"For someone who has come back from heart surgery and is still performing, Azizul is certainly a rare talent for Malaysia.

"It's nothing short of remarkable what he has done, as that fear of something happening after surgery is always there, but he can overcome all this and is competing again.

"He has that burning passion to want to win and doesn't let the issues weigh him down. It inspires me in my squash career, and I think if you put your mind to it, you shouldn't let anything stop you.

"Another thing is that he does not feel inferior as a cyclist competing against bigger-sized opposition. He has broken that barrier and done so well in track cycling.

"As an Asian, I am based in the UK myself, and everyone is twice as big as me, so the fact that Azizul doesn't let that weigh him down is also a big inspiration to me," said the 19-year-old Ameeshenraj, who currently trains in Bristol together with national No. 1 Ng Eain Yow under coach Hadrian Stiff since last year.



MY MALAYSIA MOMENTS

This is my Malaysia...Negeraku. My home.
Blessed with diversity and full of promise.
66 years of progress, making our mark and
finding our happy.

Building a future of hope for generations
to come. Filled with memories etched in
our hearts.

Wishing all Malaysians a proud and
happy National Day.

find your
happy

uemsunrise.com



Journey to Merdeka

Malaysia is one of the few countries that has managed to secure independence without bloodshed. Led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, widely known as the Father of Independence, the journey to Merdeka was, regardless, long and hard-fought. Do you still recall the milestones that led to our independence? Here's a refresher.

July 27, 1955

Malayan General Election

> The Federation of Malaya held its only pre-independence election to the Federal Legislative Council, which resulted in a decisive win for the Alliance Party, comprising the United Malays National Organisation (Umno), the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC).

> Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, President of Umno, became Chief Minister of the Federation and later met Alan Lennox-Boyd, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. It was agreed that talks would be held in London to discuss the drafting of a constitution in January the following year.

Jan 18, 1956

Merdeka mission

> The constitutional conference began in London, attended by a delegation from the Federation of Malaya. The delegation consisted of four representatives of the Malay Rulers, as well as Tunku Abdul Rahman and three ministers from his cabinet.

> The conference proposed the appointment of an independent commission to draft a constitution for a fully self-governing and independent Federation of Malaya. This proposal was accepted by Queen Elizabeth II and the Malay Rulers.

Feb 8, 1956

Treaty of London 1956

> At the end of the constitutional conference, the Treaty of London 1956 was signed to kickstart the process for an independent Federation of Malaya.

Feb 20, 1956

Mission success

> After returning from London, Tunku Abdul Rahman made a brief speech in Melaka, announcing that the Federation would become independent on Aug 31, 1957 to shouts of "Merdeka!"

March 1956

Reid Commission

> The constitutional commission, known as the Reid Commission, was formed. It was headed by Lord William Reid, judge of the

Court of Appeal of England/Reid Commission and included constitutional experts from England, Australia, India and Pakistan.

> Members of the Commission travelled to every state in the Federation and received memoranda from a number of individuals and organisations, such as the Alliance and the Conference of Rulers.

Feb 21, 1957

Submission of draft

> The Reid Commission submitted its working draft to a Working Committee, which included four representatives from the Malay Rulers, another four from the Alliance government and the British High Commissioner, Donald MacGillivray.

July 31, 1957

Federation of Malaya Independence Act 1957

> The Federation of Malaya Independence Act 1957 was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom and came into effect on this date.

> The Act made provisions for the Federation of Malaya (formerly the Protected States of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor and Terengganu) and the Settlements of Penang and Malacca to become an independent sovereign country and join the Commonwealth of Nations on Aug 31, 1957.

Aug 15, 1957

Federal Constitution Ordinance 1957

> The constitution draft was presented and debated by the Federal Legislative Council before it was passed on this date.

Aug 27, 1957

Malayan Constitution

> The Constitution of the Federation of Malaya took effect for the first time.

> As the supreme law of the land, it established the Federation as a constitutional monarchy, with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as the Head of State in a largely ceremonial role.

> It established three branches of the government: the legislative branch (at the time the Federal Legislative Council, until the 1959 general election); the executive branch, led by the prime minister and cabinet ministers; and the judicial branch, headed by the Federal Court.

Aug 30, 1957

Minutes to midnight

> On the night of Aug 30, crowds of excited citizens gathered at the Royal Selangor Club field in Kuala Lumpur to witness the historic handover of power from the British.

> At 11.58pm, two minutes of darkness were observed, and at the stroke of midnight, the lights were turned back on.

> The Union Jack was lowered and replaced by the new flag of the

"Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka, Merdeka!"

independent Federation of Malaya, accompanied by its national anthem, *Negaraku*. This was followed by chants of "Merdeka!" by the crowd.

> Prime minister-designate Tunku Abdul Rahman later hailed the ceremony as "the greatest moment in the life of the Malayan people."

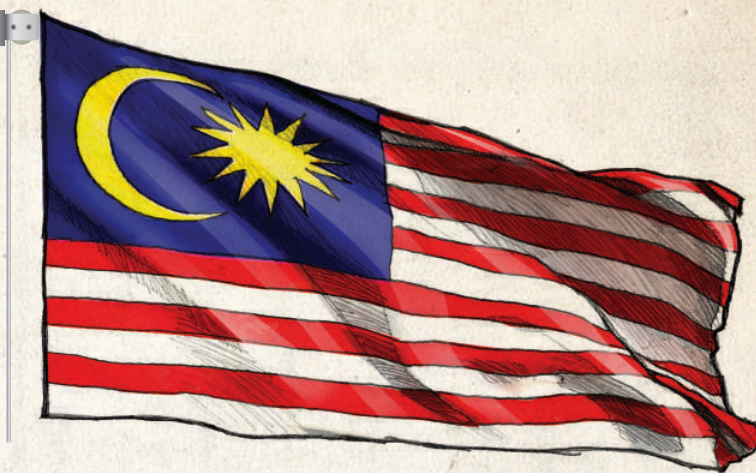
Aug 31, 1957

The birth of a nation

> At the newly completed Merdeka Stadium, more than 20,000 people were present for the official ceremony declaring the Federation's independence.

> Queen Elizabeth II's representative, the Duke of Gloucester, presented Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman with the Declaration of Independence, which Tunku read out loud, concluding with seven shouts of "Merdeka!"

> The ceremony continued with the raising of the national flag of Malaya, accompanied by the national anthem, and a 21-gun salute.



Jalur Gemilang

Malaysia's national flag, named "Jalur Gemilang" (Stripes of Glory), is made up of 14 alternating red and white stripes and a blue rectangle in the upper left corner, bearing a crescent and a 14-point star known as the Bintang Persekutuan (Federal Star), representing the country's states and federal territories.

Meaning of Jalur Gemilang

The Jalur Gemilang has a combination of four colours: blue, yellow, red and white. The design of the flag is symbolic of the country's states and federal territories. The 14 points on the star represent unity, while the crescent refers to Islam as Malaysia's official religion. Yellow stands for the royal colour of the Malay Rulers. Meanwhile, the dark blue canton on the top left corner symbolises harmony and togetherness. Lastly, the alternating horizontal stripes of white and red mean purity and courage.

Flag history

The current Malaysian flag is based on the flag of the Federation of Malaya. In 1949, a year after the Federation was set up, the Federal Legislative Council announced a contest to design a new national flag. The competition garnered 373 entries, of which three designs were shortlisted and put forward to the public in a poll.

The first flag had a ring of 11 white stars on a blue background, with two red Malay keris (daggers) in the middle. The second was similar, but with the white stars forming a constellation in the shape of a six-pointed star around the keris. The third had 11 blue and white stripes and a red field in the top-left corner with a white crescent and five-pointed star on it. This design was chosen as the winner.

After the winning design was chosen, the Federal Legislative Council decided to make a few changes. Datuk Onn Jaafar, a legislator in the Council, suggested that the red and blue colours be swapped, the crescent and star to be changed from white to yellow, and six more points were to be added to the star to make 11, the number of states in the Federation.

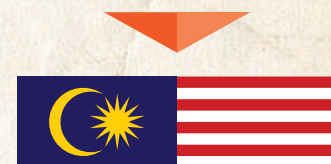
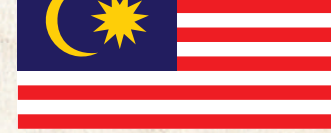
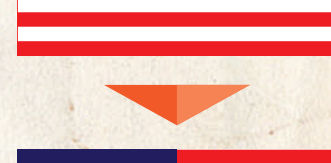
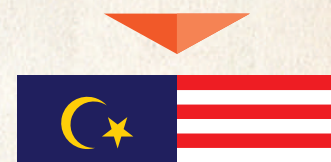
The final version of the Malayan flag was approved by King George VI on May 19, 1950, and would continue to be used until 1963. After the formation of Malaysia, the flag was modified to reflect the addition of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore – three stripes were added, as well as three points on the star.

When Kuala Lumpur was designated a Federal Territory on Feb 1, 1974, the stripe and point in the star that had represented Singapore prior to its expulsion from the Federation were appropriated to represent the Federal Territories.

The designer

Mohamed Hamzah was the Malaysian architect who designed the national flag. The 29-year-old, who was working for the Public Works Department, hailed from Johor Baru. He entered the national flag design competition with two designs. One of the designs made it to the final and was said to be influenced by the Johor state flag.

The design underwent many changes before it became the country's official flag today.



Negaraku

Negaraku
Tanah tumpahnya darahku
Rakyat hidup bersatu dan maju
Rahmat bahagia Tuhan kurniakan
Raja kita selamat bertakhta
Rahmat bahagia Tuhan kurniakan
Raja kita selamat bertakhta

The lyrics were prepared by a committee led by Tunku Abdul Rahman, with the consent of the Malay Rulers.



The national anthem was composed when the country was preparing to celebrate its Independence Day in 1957



A song composition contest for a national anthem was held in February 1957



Tunku Abdul Rahman and the Special Committee of the National Anthem rejected the four shortlisted songs



Tunku Abdul Rahman recommended the state anthem of Perak, *Allah Lanjutkan Usia Sultan* as the basis for *Negaraku*

Negaraku score song prepared by:

Alfonso Soliano
(Radio Malaya Orchestra leader)

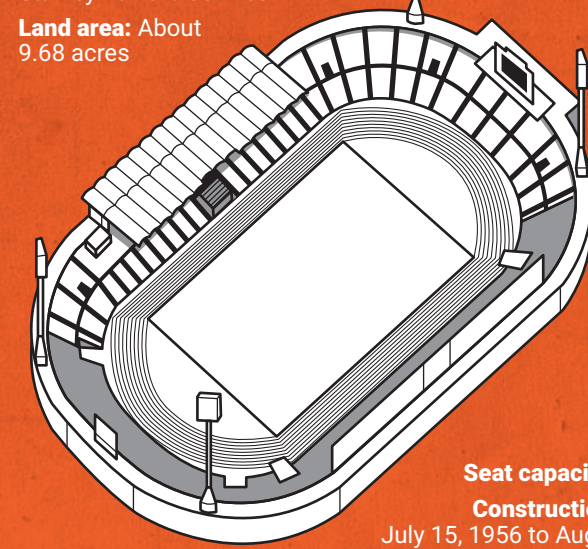
D.S.P Croff
(Federation Police Band music director)

Capt. Lenthall
(Malay Army music director)

A.T Read
(Radio Broadcasting director)

Stadium Merdeka

Architect: Tan Sri Stanley Edward Jewkes
Land area: About 9.68 acres



Budget: RM2.3mil
Seat capacity: 22,000
Construction period: July 15, 1956 to Aug 21, 1957

■ The stadium was built for the declaration of independence, which took place in 1957 by the country's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman.

■ It was also the first place where the Malaysian flag was hoisted.

■ The sports ground was once an important venue for sports and major celebrations. In 1996, the King of Pop, Michael Jackson held a concert at the stadium.

■ Two decades before Michael Jackson's performance, legendary boxer Muhammad Ali

fought valiantly against British boxer Joe Bugner in 1975 at the stadium.

■ Stadium Merdeka will be hosting the 42nd Pestabola Merdeka, a friendly football tournament, this year.

■ The stadium was declared a national heritage building in 2003. This put a stop to its redevelopment plan that began in the 1990s.

■ With a capacity to hold more than 20,000 spectators, the iconic stadium underwent renovation in 2007, to commemorate Malaysia's 50th anniversary.

By GISELE SOO

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TOUR guides in Malaysia are determined to make a comeback in the tourism industry after the pandemic halt. They have equipped themselves with more skills to provide even better experiences for visitors.

Since the pandemic, tour guides in Malaysia – and in some ways, globally – have had to rethink their career choices, with many of them reluctant to carry on their trade. Some, however, have stuck to their guns, choosing to see the brighter side of things, and constantly looking for ways to improve their skills, says Malaysian Tourist Guides Council president Jimmy Leong.

“It has certainly created a dent, causing people to lose confidence and move away (from the industry). They are hesitant because it’s no longer a sustainable career for them,” he says in an exclusive interview.

According to seasoned tour guide Jane Rai, guides must remember the reason why they decided to join the industry in the first place, to be able to keep pushing on.

“Besides the will to stay focused and navigate your way through your profession, your attitude and personality also determine your interest in this industry,” she says.

Leong adds that there are many local tour guides who have been diligently upskilling themselves to remain relevant in the competition.

“A lot of them are still constantly finding ways to stay on top of their game, and ensure they offer tourist great experiences while visiting a destination.”

“And to make sure tour guide remains an ‘in-demand’ profession, tourism-related education must be given priority (in hospitality schools),” Leong says.

For instance, Rai, 64, who has been in the industry for the past three decades, took the opportunity to learn new technology, so that she could continue to share her love of Malaysian heritage and history, by using digital platforms.

She started the Free Walk Kuala Lumpur Unscripted (FWKL) walking tours three years ago. FWKL has a series of walking tours, and she works with like-minded tour guides who share her passion and vision, to curate interesting trails for tourists.

During the many movement control order phases, when travel bans were still in place, she conducted virtual tours of KL.

“I heeded the advice of people around me and digitised my walks. It was tough telling people that they can see and visit cities from home as many did not understand what it was or how it worked.

“But it was a welcome alternative as the stories allowed people to ‘travel’ virtually,” she explains, adding that she realised very quickly during the pandemic the importance of good storytelling and the impact of digitalisation.

Adapting to changes

Things may have been bleak, but many tour guides and other workers in the tourism industry persevered. This landscape is



One of the best ways to learn about KL's past is to join a walking tour. — Photos: GISELE SOO/The Star

Staying on top of the game

While some tour guides in Malaysia have moved on from the industry since the pandemic, there are still many who are constantly improving their skills and knowledge to provide better travel experiences to tourists.



Leong has been in the tourism industry for about 50 years now. — JIMMY LEONG

rapidly changing, even more so today. The job spectrum of a tourist guide is wide, and it's often more than just telling stories. One also needs to be able to adapt to changes.

Rai says tourists today are looking for different experiences and have higher expectations.

Rai, who specialises in cultural and heritage tours, says her duty is to deliver what the people want by understanding their needs.

“While a well-curated tour makes a lot of difference, you must also always be in the know. Being sensitive to their (tourists’) needs is vital too, how you articulate the story contributes to the experience,” she says.

But these are the things that can be acquired only through training and experience.

Rai shares that there are people who call themselves “guides” but are not certified, accredited



Rai curates the cultural walks together with a few other experienced local guides.

or professionally trained, which means they may lack some basic skills including how to identify reliable sources.

“This can potentially create a string of problems such as misinterpretation of information. Tourists might be led to believe a false narrative of events,” Rai says. “But I will continue to better myself and stay true to my values.”

In order to maintain a good pool of professional tourist guides, Leong says that the government should enforce a strict baseline to regulate the quality and reputation of the sector.

The applicants have to be able to read, write and speak, as well

as pass the training course.

“Currently we have licensed guides who have poor language skills as they cannot even read or write,” he reveals.

Right mindset

While tourism recovery is currently happening, it isn't at a desired pace, says Leong. In fact, it has been slower than expected.

“We haven't seen any significant increase in the demand for tour guides as well,” he says.

Leong has been training, establishing modules and policies, as well as providing consultations and niche guiding

for many years.

He is also a Unesco Specialist Cultural Heritage Guides trainer.

According to him, local industry players are facing tighter competition, especially in the Asean region, which could have contributed to the slow recovery speed.

“Many countries have been aggressively promoting their tourism products to attract visitors to their shores. We too have to do the same,” says Leong.

Besides that, there also isn't enough effort from the government in promoting the proper use of licensed tourist vehicles.

Tour guides have to adopt the right mindset – licensed tourist vehicles do not function the same as non-tourist vehicles.

“More often than not, many of them who operate a tourist vehicle tend to think that they are merely providing logistic services when, in truth, their role is so much more than just driving people around – they have a part to play,” Leong explains.

Tour guide services in the past were mainly used by foreign visitors but this must change. “It's high time we shifted our focus, as it is impossible to fully experience the beauty of a destination without a guide,” he says.

He suggests that stakeholders encourage domestic travellers to utilise guides during their holidays, especially when visiting a new place, even if it's just a weekend getaway.

“This is so that they get to enjoy and truly immerse themselves in the local culture,” Leong concludes.



Determination in Unity, Fulfilling Hope

Through rivers and mountains, we will climb. Through good and bad, we shall persevere.
Even though the journey is fraught with challenges, we remain steadfast in our loyalty together.
As the nation celebrates 66 years of independence, we continue to pledge a future founded on the Rukun Negara.
With determination in unity as Malaysians, we shall fulfil our hope in this land of ours called Malaysia.



Happy 66th Independence Day, Malaysia,
Tanah Tumpah Darahku!

By C.S. NATHAN
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

IF there is one thing that unites Malaysians besides our love for food, it is our willingness to go the extra mile to help others – even our furry friends – during times of need.

It was with this knowledge that Jeskiran Kaur Bhatt and her team at Seremban-based animal shelter Furrykids Safehaven embarked on a courageous rescue mission to save animals in distress when floods hit Taman Sri Muda in Shah Alam, Selangor, in December 2021.

Confident that their fellow Malaysians would rally behind them, the team led by shelter president Jeskiran and co-founder Liza Sharif headed to Taman Sri Muda to rescue the animals.

Within 24 hours of posting an SOS on social media, the NGO received an outpouring of support from generous Malaysians, without which their mission would have been impossible.

They were also granted access to the flood-hit area by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM).

“As soon as we posted the shoutout for help, people began reaching out to us to contribute in kind, cash and their time to help our cause.

“We received collars, leashes, kibble, and canned pet food, which we handed out to pet owners in Taman Sri Muda. We were even loaned a boat to help us get to the animals,” said Jeskiran.

Owing to their quick action, the team managed to get 70 dogs to safety. They were also joined by independent rescuers and feeders – some of them Muslim – who aided in their efforts and helped save cats too.

The dogs, strays, and pets were transported to the shelter in Kuala Sawah near Seremban for treatment and rehabilitation.

The rescue was a poignant one for the shelter team. In November 2020, a year prior, Furrykids Safehaven lost 84 dogs in its care when flash floods struck its former premises in Mambau.

At the time, the country was in the midst of the recovery movement control order (MCO).

“The water rose so rapidly that morning that the caged dogs, mostly puppies, could not be rescued on time.

“We lost 54 dogs that morning, and sadly, another 30 succumbed to complications later,” said Jeskiran.

The tragedy prompted Jeskiran, who had started as an independent rescuer, to become more involved in the shelter’s activities.

While volunteering, she has witnessed the kindness of strangers and the Malaysian spirit of togetherness on countless occasions, particularly in times of trouble.

“No matter our differences in opinion, we are always ready to lend a helping hand. That is the beauty of Malaysians,” she said.



Independent rescuers and feeders aided in the efforts and helped save cats too. — Photos: Furrykids Safehaven

Jeskiran with three cute puppies. The animal shelter houses more than 2,000 rescued strays.



As soon as we posted the shoutout for help, people began reaching out to us to contribute in kind, cash and their time to help our cause.

Jeskiran Kaur Bhatt



Heartwarming Help

Malaysians exhibit extraordinary compassion in moments of crisis, extending their support even to animals in need of rescue.

The devastating incident in Seremban also brought animal lovers of different races and faiths together in their common goal to help the shelter get back on its feet.

Because the tragedy happened amid the pandemic when the world was still reeling from the effects of Covid-19,

efforts to salvage the flood-affected shelter and its furkids proved an immense challenge.

But Jeskiran, Liza, and other volunteers – shelter members and non-members – dug in their heels and refused to give up on their four-legged friends.

“Like everybody else, we faced personal struggles during the pandemic.

“But there was no way we could throw in the towel when we had a responsibility to the animals – we had to be the voice for the voiceless,” she said.

Today, Furrykids Safehaven is home to over 2,000 dogs. The shelter’s new 2.7-hectare plot includes boarding and quarantine kennels, a

roaming area, an office, a kitchen, a shed, and workers’ quarters.

Jeskiran said many animal lovers, including Muslim volunteers, assisted with relocating the dogs to the new shelter on Jan 1, 2021.

Furrykids Safehaven also counts a Ustad among its members.

“We are very fortunate to have the Ustad as a member. He fights for animal rights and helps spread awareness about the mistreatment and abuse of dogs,” she said.

Three years post-pandemic, it might be business as usual for most people.

But Jeskiran said the Furrykids Safehaven team has had much more to contend with since the pandemic.

“The lockdown was challenging, but we have had to deal with more dogs being dumped post-pandemic.

“And because many people have been financially affected by the pandemic, we don’t receive as many donations as we did before,” she said.

While some people genuinely cannot afford to lend a helping hand to stray animals in distress, many of us are guilty of looking the other way.

Shelter volunteers do not have the same luxury.

Jeskiran, who has four dogs of her own – all rescues – continues to foster puppies in her own home, with plenty of help from her 12-year-old son Jaiveer Singh, fondly known as Captain Puppy.

Similarly, publicity-shy Liza looks after 20 dogs, three cats, and two chickens at her home.

Volunteers know full well that rescuing animals can be a never-ending cycle. It takes resilience and deep compassion for animals to keep pushing on, day after day.

Monthly expenses at Furrykids Safehaven range between RM90,000 and RM120,000, including salaries for 11 shelter workers and dog food.

“We welcome donations in cash or kind and encourage people to volunteer their time to play with our animals.

“The dogs deserve love and attention, just like us,” she said, adding that the joy of saving a life outweighed the heartbreaking moments.

Furrykids Safehaven was established in 2017 by a group of animal lovers who saved 70 dogs from being euthanised at a Kuala Lumpur pound.

The rescued animals were transferred to Seremban after an animal lover offered a plot of land to house them.



MALAYSIA MADANI



As we commemorate this season of Merdeka,
let its spirit ignite our shared journey towards unity.
Selamat Hari Merdeka.

BAut 
BERMAZ AUTO BERHAD



Making dreams a reality

How a young filmmaker found his calling with the help of friends along the way.

By WANI MUTHIAH
wani@thestar.com.my

G. SANADT Kumar loved watching movies from the time he was a toddler.

His mother Rani Arumugam, who owns and runs a tuition centre with her husband S. Ganesan, recalls how the little boy would spend hours enthralled by the movies and documentaries he watched.

Unlike most parents, Rani did not stop Sanadt or limit his hours watching television.

"I just allowed Sanadt to do whatever he wanted to do and did not prevent him from spending a lot of time watching movies and documentaries.

"As he grew older, he would interpret and review the movies he had watched, and it would always be different from what we thought the movie was about," said Rani, adding it was then that she noticed Sanadt's knack for storytelling.

Strongly believing that children should be the ones discovering their own potential, she allowed him to continue his fascination with movies and documentaries.

Rani's parenting style was not in vain.

Today, at 23, Sanadt is not only accomplished but is also achieving his dreams of becoming a filmmaker.

He has made a series of documentaries which have received rave reviews and won him numerous awards.

Sanadt also set up a company with three like-minded friends when he was 15.

Currently, the social enterprise called Ascendance has helped over 58,000 students in over 28 countries by conducting goal-setting programmes and providing them the resources and platform to pursue their passion and dreams.

Sanadt said how the turning point in his life was his "failure" as a child to participate in the many of the things and activities children his age usually did.

"I could not play sports and I was not one for reading books. I was also not involved in extracurricular activities in school and was not a member of any club or society. I did not fit in," said Sanadt, who was a straight-A student.

Because of this, added Sanadt, he was sometimes bullied by other students during his primary and lower secondary years, which resulted in him being a loner without friends.

That was until he met Mathura Kannan as well as sisters Harsha and Heerraa Ravindran, who eventually became his Ascendance co-founders, at a training programme attended by their parents.

The programmes were conducted by social enterprise ET Ideas which helps individuals identify their potential and formulate businesses.

"We used to tag along with our parents as there was no one to take care of us while they were away attending the programme," said Sanadt, adding that all four had many things in common including not being able to fit into conventional roles while growing up.

Since they were spending so much time at the ET Ideas programmes, the friends started attending goal-setting training conducted by the organisation's



The young filmmaker's documentary on chess master Genkeswaran (pic) won the Best Inspirational Film at the Los Angeles Film Awards.

founder Elango Thiyaagu.

Elango recalls how Sanadt told him that he liked movies and wanted to pursue movie-making as his career.

"I taught Sanadt about goal-setting as well as working hard while pursuing what his heart tells him to do," recalled Elango.

And follow his heart, he did.

Wanting to tell real stories about real people and how they had beaten the odds and reached for the stars despite the many obstacles before them, Sanadt created a storytelling platform dubbed Wanted: Shades Of Life.

"I decided to make documentaries of real people telling real stories as I felt this was the best way to send a message across," said Sanadt.

He has so far created and directed three documentaries under the Wanted: Shades Of Life platform, with the debut featuring his friend and Ascendance co-founder Mathura talking about her efforts and aspiration to uplift her peers.

The second episode is on Agnesmary Selvaraj, who had taken a decade's break from Bharatanatyam, only to eventually rediscover and rekindle her passion for the dance form which propelled her to open a dance school.

Sanadt's documentary on Agnesmary won him a silver in the Best Feature Documentary category at the Tokyo Film Awards in 2021.

His biggest coup was the third episode which revolved around chess master Genkeswaran Munian, who had risen from the ashes, after leading a life mired in crime and despondency.

(From left) Sanadt with his Ascendance co-founders Heerraa, Mathura and Harsha.

As I could not play sports and I was not one for reading books. I was also not involved in extracurricular activities in school and was not a member of any club or society. I did not fit in.

Sanadt

Sanadt will be completing his Diploma in Film Production at the Toronto Film School via its long-distance programme soon. — Photos: Handout



Sanadt's documentaries have won him several awards in the international arena. — SHAARI CHEMAT/The Star

Genkeswaran pursued his passion for chess and this led him to winning a bronze medal for Malaysia at the Myanmar Sea Games in 2013.

He now runs a chess academy and trains youngsters to master the game.

The documentary on Genkeswaran bagged Sanadt several awards, such as the Best Inspirational Film at the Los Angeles Film Awards, Best Documentary at the FilmCon Awards in 2022 as well as Best Documentary Feature and Best Indie Feature at Festigious International Film Festival early this year.

According to Sanadt, who will be completing his Diploma in Film Production at the Toronto Film School via its long-distance programme soon, he was six years old when he first met Genkeswaran and started taking chess lessons from him.

"Many years later, after I started pursuing filmmaking, it meant so much to me to make a film about someone who has impacted me greatly. The biggest motivation was how his story resonated with the audience," said Sanadt, who aspires to pursue a tertiary programme in creative arts after completing his diploma programme.

In addition to his achievements, Sanadt is also well-mannered as well as humble and this has compelled many to help him achieve his dreams.

One such person is Elango's best friend Gerard Thomas, co-owner and director of Keris Media Networks which is in the business of producing, procuring, marketing and distributing content for the broadcast media.

"He is still inexperienced and impressionable and we are guiding him on how to meander through the content production and broadcast industry which can be difficult and manipulative if you do not know the ropes," said Gerard of Sanadt.

He added he was also guiding Sanadt on how to write proposals and market his products to broadcast service providers.

On his impression on Sanadt, Gerard said: "He is considered a prodigy in Elango's development programme for youths.

"Sanadt is a good storyteller though still a little raw but he has the vision, initiative and drive to pursue his dreams of becoming a movie maker to be reckoned with."





From



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Cultivating seeds of resilience



The thriving urban edible garden at YWCA Kuala Lumpur that Eats, Shoots and Roots helped set up five years ago. — Eats, Shoots and Roots

Malaysian social enterprises do their part to enhance food access, income generation and quality of life while boosting the country's economy and protecting the environment.

By **WONG LI ZA**
lifestyle@thestar.com.my

WHEN Covid-19 hit, among the questions raised, besides the obvious health and safety issues, were food security and accessibility.

With the lockdowns and more time on their hands, many people turned to their garden or balcony space for a sense of calm and also for a practical reason: to grow edible plants.

"Due to the pandemic, there was a spike in interest in people wanting to grow their own food, especially with the various issues of food delivery, transportation, and produce wastage.

"So food security was a very big issue, and having access to local, diverse, and wholesome food was a concern," said Beatrice Yong, strategy director of Eats, Shoots and Roots (ESR).

Now, however, she has noticed that such interest has slowed down, but what is interesting is the increase in corporate sector commitments.

"The discussion has turned more into wellness and sustainability, and corporations are trying to create more food gardens for their employees," said Yong.

ESR, a triple award-winning social enterprise established in 2012, was founded with the main purpose of empowering urban folks with skills and tools to grow their own food and reconnect with nature.

To date, it has helped to build 100 edible gardens and aided in the planting of over 28,990 seedlings, working with individual urban dwellers, NGOs, various institutions, and the private sector.

Yong said their projects have a greater impact when there are long-term partnerships, such as the one they have with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

"We have been working with the YWCA for over five years, and we helped them set up an urban farm right in the middle of the city.

"We have seen that space grow over the years, and we feel that's one of our

biggest achievements. When we have longer-term partnerships, we can see the changes, as gardening is not a short-term thing," she emphasised.

ESR also partners with a Montessori pre-school in Bukit Damansara, Kuala Lumpur, where it holds gardening classes every week and conducts school holiday programmes as a way of instilling a love for nature, the environment, and growing their own food in young children.

Among ESR's key programmes are the No-Dig Raised Gardens and Wanted Waste projects.

"The No-Dig Raised Gardens initiative is about not disrupting the existing soil and ecosystems, but rather adding nutrients to the soil and using raised edges (with bricks, wood, or galvanised steel) and planters to plant on top of the soil," explained Yong.

"The Wanted Waste project is like an extension of the above, where we turn food and plastic waste into usable solutions."

Yong said they are also working on creating simple, yet aesthetically pleasing, composting bins that people can put in their homes.

"If you have a garden, it's easier to compost, but if you do not have land or soil at your home, you may need a different waste management solution.

"We are looking to work with plastic manufacturers to turn people's plastic waste into these bins and encourage people to compost more," she said.

Yong added that gardens actually demonstrate all the ecosystems that sustain us, be they water, soil, or biodiversity.

"We can learn all that from the garden, so we hope that subtly, we can help people connect the dots, raise awareness about ecological and social issues, and teach people about local and seasonal foods.

"We try to build resilience through the garden, teaching people about growing from seed, how to make good soil, or how to turn waste into something valuable," she added.

The NGO's work does not come without challenges.

"Urban farming, while sounding exciting, is definitely not as sexy as other (ventures) because it's a lot of hard work and comes with a set of expectations.

"People want their (edible) gardens to look a certain way and not be messy, but it takes a lot of effort, love, and care for them to bear fruit, be consistent, and yet also look good," said Yong.

Over the years, she said that there has definitely been a growing interest in people wanting to consume the vegetables that they grow themselves.

"But I think the reality is that gardening requires space and is time-consuming, and not many households can afford to spare that.

"Nonetheless, we would like to encourage more Malaysians to compost, eat more local produce, and support their local farmers," she said.

ESR also aims to find more project partners for long-term projects.

"We also hope to play a role in incorporating more awareness and education within the school syllabus and also start more community gardens in schools," she said.

Rooted in purpose

A strong advocate of food access and sustainability is PWD Smart FarmAbility (PWDSF), founded by agriculturist and paraplegic Dr Billy Tang Chee Seng.

The multiple-award-winning social enterprise was set up to empower underprivileged communities through regenerative agriculture principles by making nutritious food and food-growing skills accessible to them.

This is achieved through key projects like the organic regenerative vegetable terrarium project (Hope Box) and the organic tilapia fish and nutrient-dense vegetable aquaponics satellite farm systems.

From March 2021 to March 2023, over 7.5 tonnes of fresh vegetables were harvested and consumed from the terrariums, including 665kg of organic

red tilapia and 7.56 tonnes of fresh vegetables harvested from 20 satellite farms.

Additionally, PWDSF's Tilapia Global FITS joint venture project, which converts protein-rich fish into ice cream and biscuits, aims to improve the country's food security as well as reduce stunting and obesity in children.

In 2016, Daerrys Tilapia Ice Cream and Cookies received the SIAL Innovation Gold Award. In 2022, the product won the ETCOR Outstanding Research Management and Innovation (Higher Education) Award.

"The key to empowering the most vulnerable households lies in decentralising food systems through regenerative agriculture. It's not only about farming; it's about providing nourishing food and making underserved communities resilient. In this context, sustainability equals survival," said Tang.

"We're steadfast in our commitment to the #ScalingUpNutrition Movement, aiming to empower marginalised groups by eliminating hunger, enhancing nutrition, and revolutionising agricultural practices," he added.

"Globally, farmers are adopting regenerative practices in agrifood start-ups or large-scale farms. Regenerative approaches promote robust soils, improved water absorption, and reduced erosion, sustaining yields and lowering production costs," said Tang, adding that they also aim to establish Malaysia's inaugural farm school, offering comprehensive ethical food production courses.

"Let's invest in people and nature. Let's explore avenues to support local initiatives for nature-based solutions, conservation, and ecosystem revitalisation through suitable financing methods and incentives.

"We call upon financiers, business visionaries, policymakers, and scientists to collaborate in discovering how we can nourish, heal, and nurture our communities, all while safeguarding and renewing nature and boosting our economies," he said.

TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY OF MALAYSIAN VISION VALLEY 2.0 (MVV2.0)

THE AMBITIOUS Malaysian Vision Valley 2.0 (MVV2.0) development is set to catapult Negri Sembilan into one of the country's more progressive states following the recent launching of catalyst projects which saw the signing of agreements and collaborations worth an estimated RM15.6bil.

The MVV2.0, designed to drive the development of the state as part of Greater Kuala Lumpur, was mooted in 2015 but the plan was restructured and rebranded three years later with the aim to position Negri Sembilan as a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable state by the year 2045.

Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun said the MVV2.0 will involve the development of an area of nearly 153,411ha and serve as a platform to demonstrate the commitment for the development initiatives in this state. "The development of MVV2.0 is an initiative by the state government with support from the federal government to boost the state's economy.

"The development is spearheaded by the NS Corporation together with other departments and agencies and shall contribute significantly to the state by attracting foreign and domestic direct investments, which ultimately create job and business opportunities," he said.

The MVV2.0, a state-led private sector driven development which spans across the districts of Seremban and Port Dickson, has now become one of the country's important economic corridors.

Aminuddin said in 2018, the Comprehensive Development (CDP) Plan for MVV 2.0 was also launched, a document which translates the overall development strategy, identifies catalytic projects, addresses environmental aspirations including economic and social benefits.

The CDP, Aminuddin said, served as a reference and is periodically updated to ensure that the development in MVV 2.0 area is carried out systematically, inclusively, and beneficial to all parties involved.

The MVV2.0 development is expected to have a significant impact on the national economy as it is expected to contribute as much as 15% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2045.

Aminuddin said since the launch of MVV 2.0 in 2018, the state has witnessed significant growth in Seremban and Port Dickson such as land transactions as well as potential investors.

"The state government practices an open policy in welcoming investors, especially in high-tech industries. "This policy will help attract more investors, both domestic and international, to invest here considering the opening of new industrial areas in MVV 2.0 is vital to meet the demands and needs of industries," he said.

Aminuddin said the state government's policies had also allowed it to secure investments totalling RM8.9bil in 2022 which was the highest ever recorded by the state. In 2021, the state received investments totalling some RM5.8bil.

This feat, he said, was a manifestation of efficient governance and the receptive approach adopted by his administration in various aspects.

The MVV2.0, he said, will consist of six development parcels.

Parcel A, covering an area of 2,838 acres, is planned as a high-tech industrial area known as NS High Tech Industrial Park.

This development commenced on Parcel Hamilton in 2021 and is currently undergoing land preparation works. Parcel B spanning across 8,796 acres is planned as a Smart County development designed to among others accommodate a smart city center and a new central business district in Seremban, encompassing residential and commercial areas, light and medium industries with a focus on halal production, particularly in food and beverage (F&B), pharmaceuticals, cosmetics industries, as well as medical and education hubs.

The Smart County will be supported by technological advancement in line with the development of Artificial Intelligence to enhance the quality of life, economic growth, environmental efficiency and secure urban management.

It will play a crucial role in supporting the overall development of MVV 2.0, as well as increasing the local population and attracting skilled workforce to reside in the area.

The development will also benefit from easier accessibility to Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) through new road connections and planned rail routes.

For the first phase, the state government will focus on residential development, including affordable housing type A priced at RM80,000 and below, with a size of 20' x 60' square feet, comprising three bedrooms and two bathrooms.

It hopes to build an estimated 9,188 units of affordable housing in the parcel.

As for the development of Parcel B in Labu, the state government through NS Corporation has also acquired land worth some RM450 million in September last year.

Parcel B will also house the T625 Gokbey model helicopter assembly facility which is a light transport/ utility helicopter with twin engines developed by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI).

Efforts are also being made to attract TAI's strategic supply chain such as Havelsan, Aselsan and Tusas Engine Industries.

Parcel C spanning 15,373 acres, known as NS Aerospace Valley (NSAV) is planned to be a dynamic and integrated aerospace industrial hub in Malaysia and the Asian region.

The key components in this area will include aerospace, oil & gas, electric vehicle (EV) and logistics hub.

The development plan of NSAV aims to meet the demands of existing industry players as well as new industry players in line with the development of the aerospace industry.



Negri Sembilan Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Aminuddin Harun and state secretary Datuk Mohd Zafrî Ibrahim flying the miniature Jalur Gemilang at the launch of the state-level Merdeka Day celebration

The state government has to date received many requests from aerospace industry players, both domestic and international, to invest in this area.

Parcel D, known as the Integrated Maritime Hub and Coastal Corridor, will encompass the entire state waters within a 3-nautical-mile and planned to develop the maritime industry in Port Dickson.

Plans are also underway to develop an Industrial Port to support the development in NSAV and to complement Port Klang.

In Parcel E, there will be an "Unmanned Vehicle Valley" (UVV) covering an area of 4,500 acres encompassing four sectors: UAV - "Unmanned Aerial Vehicle", UGV - "Unmanned Ground Vehicle", USV - "Unmanned Surface Vehicle" and UUV - "Unmanned Underwater Vehicle".

Meanwhile, Parcel F, known as NS Semiconductor Valley, located near the Tuanku Jaafar Industrial Park, is currently in the planning phase to be developed as a semiconductor industry hub.

The state government has since received two proposals for the semiconductor industry developments worth RM35 billion.

"Currently, Samsung SDI Energy Malaysia Sdn. Bhd. who have invested RM6 billion constructing an electric vehicle battery plant in Parcel F near the Tuanku Ja'afar Industrial Park," he said.

The state government has also received a RM450mil investment from Dutch Lady Milk Industries Bhd for a new plant on a 13ha site in Bandar Baru Enstek.

"In addition, there are two new investments in Bandar Enstek, namely Mahsuri Food Sdn Bhd and Macfood Services (M) Sdn Bhd and both are expected to be in operation by the end of this year.

"Furthermore, Ajinomoto Malaysia Bhd had recently opened a factory after its launching ceremony last December," he said, adding that collectively, these projects would offer over 1,000 high-skilled jobs within the area.

Aminuddin said the state has since entered into several agreements and collaborations in the MVV2.0 area.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) has been signed with the National Aerospace Industry Corporation Malaysia (NAICO Malaysia) for the development of an aerospace ecosystem in NS Aerospace Valley (NSAV) and "Unmanned Vehicle Valley" (UVV).

Similarly, he said a MoU has also been inked with the China National Aerotechnology International Engineering Corporation (AVIC-ENG) for the development of real estate and infrastructure in the NSAV area with a total investment of RM5.81 billion.

"We have a joint venture with MCHB Development (NS) Sdn Bhd for the mixed development in Plot C, Parcel B with a total investment of RM7 billion as well as another one with MIE Industrial Sdn Bhd for the development of the Industrial Terminal facility known as NS Maritime Gateway with a total investment of RM1.2 billion," he said.

Aminuddin said another joint venture was with Labu Tech Park Sdn Bhd for the infrastructure development of NS Smart Park Industrial area in Plot C, Parcel B with a total investment of RM700 million.

"Then there is another cooperation with NS Semiconductor Valley Sdn Bhd for the development of semiconductor industry area in Parcel F with a total investment of RM420 million.

"The development of NSC Jetty with Seremban Engineering Bhd worth RM400mil has also been signed," he said.

He said these ventures proved the capability and potential of Negri Sembilan as the preferred investment destination for local and foreign investors, what more with its strategic location near the country's main entry points such as the KL International Airport and Port Klang

"I believe, through the development of MVV2.0, more opportunities shall arise for the state's economic growth and this development plan will continue to be on the right track, capable of being realised by 2045 with the involvement and commitment from all parties," he said.

He said the state's gross domestic product for 2022 increased to RM50.8bil against RM47.8bil the previous year.

"We also registered a higher growth of 6.4% for the year against 3.1% in 2021.

government are also to be carried out in the state this year.

The Health Ministry, for example, has approved RM68.6mil which includes for the construction of the Malaysian Institute of Infectious Diseases.

Aminuddin said the state government has also set aside RM955,000 to improve basic facilities and infrastructure at industrial areas.

These include putting up proper signage and lighting systems in the Mahsan Industrial Area in Jempol, Parit Tinggi Industrial Area in Kuala Pilah and Kuala Gemas Industrial Area in Tampin.

And to further promote tourism and tourism related products, a sum of RM5.1mil has been allocated.

For food security, his administration has approved RM11.3mil to the Department of Agriculture and RM4.5mil for the Veterinary Services Department.

"More efforts are being made to produce more fruits, vegetables, rice and other foodstuffs such as mushrooms, herbs and spices.

"These include spendings for agricultural development activities, pre-harvest and post-harvest technology and product promotion activities," he said.

Aminuddin said although the state has received RM30.7mil for several projects from the Works Ministry as of May this year, the state has also set aside RM10.2mil to upgrade state roads, build new bridges and make dangerous intersections safer.

Among the projects implemented under state allocations are upgrading the Jalan Juasseh-Jemapoh to Jalan Kuala Pilah-Batu Kikir intersection and building a new road from Jalan Labu to the affordable housing project in Kirby Farm, Labu.

The allocations from the federal government will be used to rebuild a bridge along Jalan Kuala Pilah-Tampin, build a new stretch from Nilai-Labu-Bandar Enstek and build new and upgrade roads from Sg Sebalang to Bahau.

His administration also approved RM11.9mil to the Drainage and Irrigation Department this year which was over and above the RM17.9mil given by the federal authorities.

The funds would be among others used for the construction of infrastructure for the conservation of rivers, ponds, reservoirs, rice irrigation schemes, flood mitigation and warning systems.

"It is intended to reduce the risk of flooding, overcome the problem of river bank erosion, launch the flow of river water, increase the yield of rice crops and farmers' income, creating awareness on the importance of conserving our rivers," he added.

"The services sector contributed 51.5% while the manufacturing sector contributed 38.1% to the state economy with the agriculture and construction sectors having a share of 6.5% and 2.8% respectively," he said.

Aminuddin said in the first quarter of 2023, Negri Sembilan received investments totalling RM932.6mil.

"Development in Negri Sembilan now focuses on efforts to realise the 12th Malaysia Plan 2021 to 2025, guided by the Malaysia Madani concept in terms of thinking, spirituality and in terms of facilities and infrastructure.

"The state government's efforts and planning have also been streamlined based on the Negri Sembilan Development Plan or RPNS 2021 to 2025 which is a state planning document on our determination and commitment in providing the foundation for reform and transformation in Negri Sembilan through economic empowerment, social engineering and environmental sustainability," he said.

This RPNS 2021 - 2025 focuses on efforts to regenerate the economy, strengthen security, well-being and inclusivity and boost sustainability.

He said several projects funded by the federal



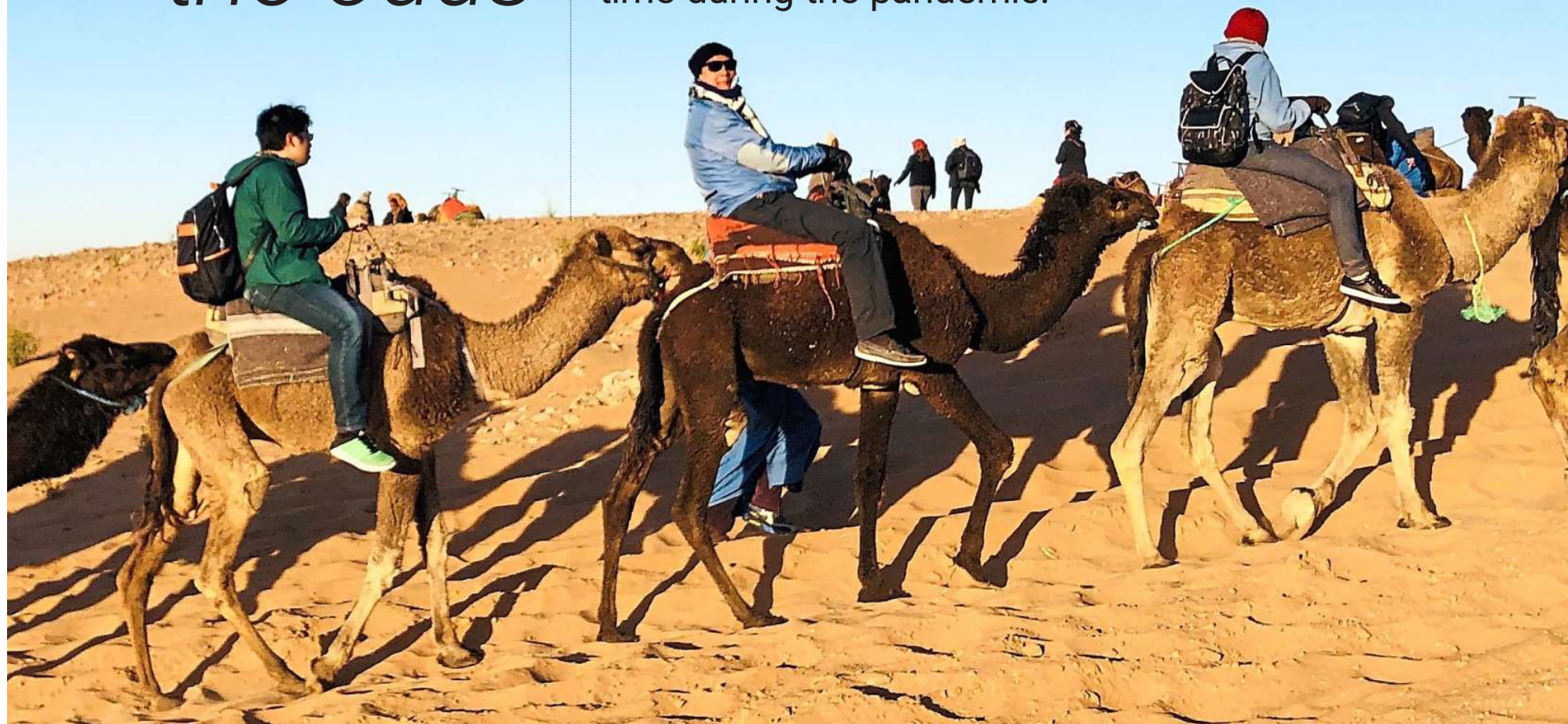
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The State Government and People of
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Beating the odds

Datuk Dr Tan Chee Khuan fought cancer and wrote an autobiography at the same time during the pandemic.



Dr Tan (centre) riding camels in the desert of Morocco in 2018.

By JEREMY TAN
north@thestar.com.my

THE pandemic years were hard on everyone, particularly those who had to simultaneously contend with other serious health issues.

But rather than let life's challenges weigh them down, many took it in their stride and beat the odds.

Some even chalked up notable accomplishments in the process.

Penang-based psychiatrist, writer, publisher, artist and gallery owner Datuk Dr Tan Chee Khuan is a great example, writing and publishing his autobiography while battling prostate cancer.

He was diagnosed in mid-2020, not long after Covid-19 hit Malaysia, and quickly underwent robotic radical prostatectomy.

While resting and recuperating at home, inspiration struck.

"It was approaching the 20th anniversary of my beloved wife's passing in 2001. I felt that writing my autobiography would be a good way of honouring her memory.

"I previously penned many articles on my travels and psychiatry practice in magazines, so it was only a matter of compiling everything and adding new information," the 75-year old shared.

He had always been a prolific writer, having authored some 60 books on art.

His 2014 hardcover, *Eight Pioneers Of Malaysian Art*, is regarded as the definitive tome on the subject.

It took him only a year to complete the autobiography, which he titled *My Life As A Psychiatrist And Gallerist*.

But there was some bad news

in between.

"Unfortunately, the cancer recurred in April 2021. It had metastasised to two lymph nodes so I needed a second operation to remove them.

"Datuk Dr Yip Kok Thye handled the procedure superbly and there wasn't much adverse effect. Having prostate cancer didn't really upset me as it is the most common cancer among men.

"I'm pleased to say I'm now in remission and feeling fit and healthy," said Dr Tan, who now goes for regular walks with daughter Ee Lene at local gardens and enjoys spotting wildlife like the dusky leaf monkey and the rare colugo or gliding lemur.

He published the autobiography in September 2021 but held off launching it until March 2023 to coincide with his solo charity art exhibition, which was held at The Art Gallery Penang which he founded in 1989 and is located in Bellisa Row, Pulau Tikus.

The show featured 35 paintings done between 2007 and 2016.

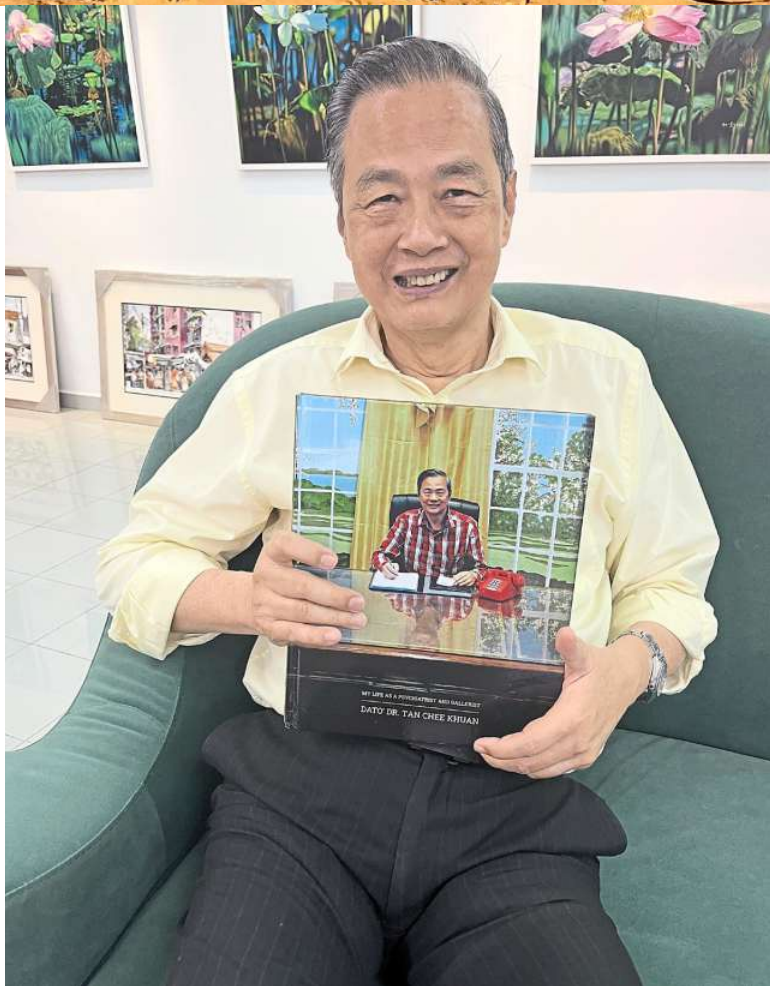
Colour blindness

Dr Tan is a self-taught artist.

From a young age, he was often criticised for painting human beings in shades of green, which teachers and friends described as Martians.

"I was puzzled as the colour seemed correct to me. Only later in Form 6, after eye testing, did I discover that I was red-green colour-deficient," he said.

Born in Muar, Johor, he attended the Government English Prep School (GEPS) until it closed post-independence, after which he studied at Ismail School Muar and then Muar High School.



Dr Tan is a prolific writer, having written some 60 books. He wrote his autobiography *My Life As A Psychiatrist And Gallerist* during the pandemic. — Photos: DATUK DR TAN CHEE KHUAN

His colour blindness posed some difficulty in chemistry classes when he needed to titrate chemicals and monitor colour changes, but luckily he had supportive classmates who helped.

He got a scholarship to study medicine at Universiti Malaya and graduated in 1973. After that, he returned to do his Masters in psychological medicine and graduated in 1978.

He moved to Penang in 1983 to take up a position as a psychia-

trist at Lam Wah Ee Hospital.

Work made him too busy to paint, but he became an avid art collector.

After being introduced to local artists like the late great Yong Mun Sen, Dr Tan bought many of their works.

Over the years, he would amass several hundred pieces.

He was not content just owning pieces but also wanted to know more about the talents who made them.

With not much information readily available, Dr Tan did his own research and started writing books, becoming an art historian in the process.

He had a stint as the Penang State Art Gallery's deputy chairman and in 2020 donated some 330 pieces from his personal collection to the gallery's permanent collection.

It was only in 2006 that Dr Tan decided to overcome his fear of painting in colour.

He did *Wine, Woman And Song* with leftover oil paints and later used an image of it on a greeting card.

He received favourable feedback, painted more and has not stopped since.

"Art brings me peace of mind and joy after a hard day at work. My clinic is also filled with art, and between seeing patients, I rest my eyes by focusing on the artworks around.

"I came from a poor background and had a tough childhood. But I've led a fulfilling life since," Dr Tan said, pointing to his travels as another source of happiness.

This makes up one half of his autobiography, with the other covering his professional life.

He has been to all six continents, with destinations as diverse and exotic as Alaska, the Maldives, the Galapagos Islands, Hawaii, Ecuador, Los Angeles, Miami, Washington DC and the Caribbean.

"Of all, the Galapagos stood out the most because of the unusual animals which are found nowhere else thanks to millions of years of isolated evolution.

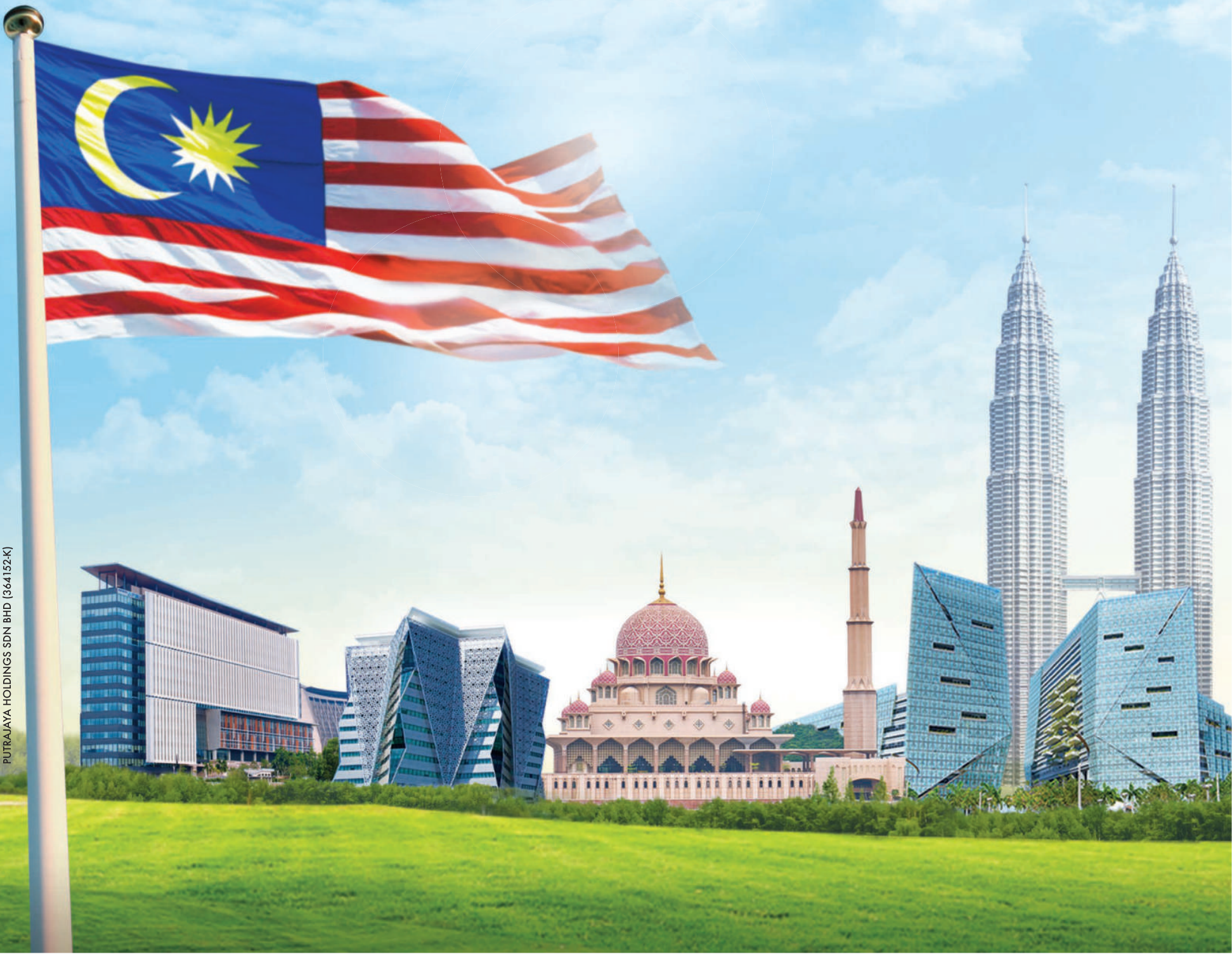
"It was one of the most exciting adventures of my life," added Dr Tan, who intends to continue living life to its fullest.



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