

# StarSpecial

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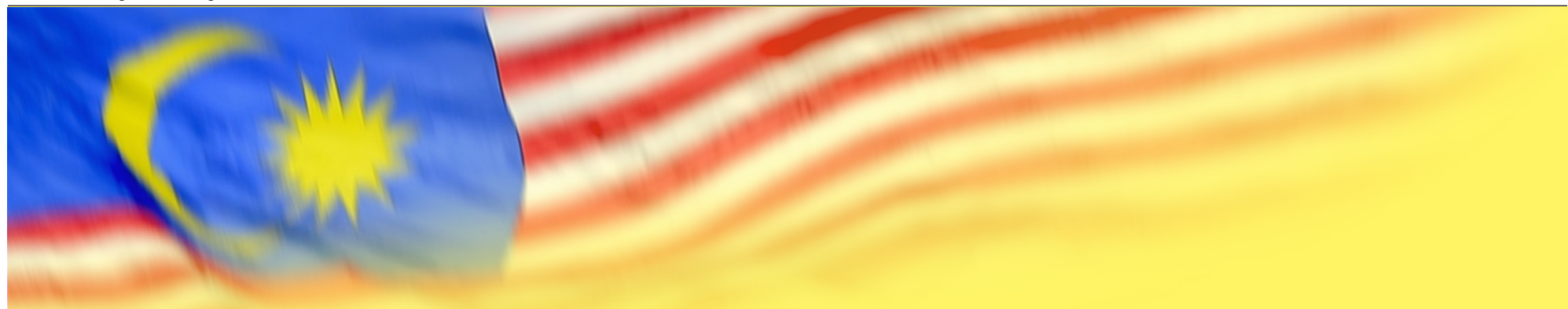
Malaysia Day



## Caring community

Malaysians, no matter their background, coming together to support and strengthen each other amid the Covid-19 pandemic, is truly reflective of the spirit that our founding fathers had in mind when Malaysia was formed on Sept 16, 1963.





By **ESTHER CHANDRAN**  
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## Honouring the spirit of Malaysia

SEPT 16, 1963, was a momentous day in our nation's history when Malaya, North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and Singapore united to form the Federation of Malaysia.

It has been 58 years since that significant occasion.

Although Malaysia's formation had been planned to coincide with National Day on Aug 31, the date was extended by two weeks

to allow for referendums in other areas to be completed.

Even with Singapore's exit from the pact on Aug 9, 1965, these lands – Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak – complete a beautiful, multifaceted picture of people of many cultures, traditions and races, living in harmony

and togetherness.

Malaysia Day has been celebrated as a public holiday since 2010 to foster the Malaysian spirit as well as to remember efforts made by our founding fathers to secure independence from the British.

This togetherness is especially evident now, during the Covid-19

pandemic, with people from all walks of life rising to the occasion to help their fellow man, neighbours in distress, foreigners without means of survival, the jobless and homeless as well as anyone in dire straits.

Today, we honour all those who have stepped forward to do their

part — frontliners, volunteers, non-governmental organisations, businesses and individuals who persevered to make life better for others.

Having compassion for others who are suffering has led many Malaysians to stick together in weathering the pandemic storm.

So today, as we commemorate the day when a colourful, resilient, promising and beautiful nation was born, we stand tall over all we have achieved.

Happy Malaysia Day!

# Keeping hope alive in Kuching

Contributions from locals allow NGO to reach those hard-hit by pandemic



By **SHARON LING**  
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WITH Covid-19 continuing to impact lives and livelihoods, generous people in Kuching, Sarawak, are coming forward to help charitable organisations like Hope Place carry on serving needy families under its care.

One such person is businesswoman Kelly Lau, who has been supporting Hope Place since it started in 2013 by collecting funds from friends to buy food and other needed supplies to be donated to the non-governmental organisation (NGO).

This year, as Hope Place's scope of work has grown to include assisting frontliners and families in quarantine, Lau has tried to channel the supplies more often.

"Normally I would buy supplies once in two months but now I do it every two weeks or once a month," she said.

She usually puts up requests for funds on Facebook before purchasing items needed by Hope Place, such as mineral water and cup noodles for frontliners on duty.

She observed that people were still willing to help at this time, giving amounts that they could afford such as RM20 or RM30.

"I have a group of about 100 people who donate towards buying the supplies. We try to give to everyone in need.

"Every little bit helps and I'm happy to continue doing this because times are really tough for a lot of people now," Lau added.

Single mother Helen Jee, another regular supporter of Hope Place, is continuing her "RM10 project" although donations have declined during the pandemic.

"I gathered a group of friends to contribute RM10 every month to buy adult diapers for Hope Place, as they are usually short of this item.

"I'm trying my best to maintain the supply of diapers. Some people cannot continue contributing but I



Hope Place members delivering food aid to Kampung Bako by boat when the village was placed under the enhanced movement control order. — Photos: ZULAZHAR SHEBLEE/The Star



The Hope Place team sorting out food to be distributed to people in need.

keep trying to raise funds," she said.

Jee now supplies the diapers once every three months instead of monthly like in pre-pandemic times but she is determined to keep her efforts going.

"As a single mother, I have faced hard times and people helped me. So I want to give back by helping others," she said.

For Hope Place founder Kelvin Wan, regular donors like Lau and

Jee are testament to the caring spirit in the Kuching community, especially at this time when more people are in need of aid due to the Covid-19 pandemic and movement restrictions.

"We depend a lot on public donation of food items and other supplies that we give regularly to families in our care.

"Before the pandemic, on average three to five people would come to our office to donate sup-



Wan: When people say thank you, it's an encouragement to us as an NGO to keep bringing hope to them.

plies, but now this has dropped to one or two a week.

"But I'm thankful for our regular donors and everyone who supports us," he said.

Hope Place is currently serving more than 200 needy families in and around Kuching, delivering food and necessities to them every month.

Since the pandemic started, the NGO has been providing one-off assistance to more families, includ-

ing those in quarantine or unable to work during the various movement control orders.

"We are receiving a lot of calls for help.

"This year we have helped more than 500 families who have been affected by the pandemic.

"We give them one-off food supply which can last more than a month, including 10kg of rice and boxes of biscuits and noodles. If they have children below six years old, we also provide milk powder," said Wan.

Hope Place is also helping families under quarantine who have no means to buy food.

"We encountered a very poor family in Kampung Quop whose father and eldest son tested positive for Covid-19 and were sent to hospital, leaving the mother and two young children quarantined at home, so we sent food to them," Wan said, noting that Hope Place had assisted over 100 quarantined families so far.

In addition, the NGO has distributed bottled water, cup noodles, hand sanitiser and face masks to police personnel manning roadblocks and Rela personnel on duty at quarantine centres.

Similarly it supports frontliners on duty in areas placed under the enhanced MCO, by providing bottled water, sanitiser and masks.

For Wan, the additional work Hope Place is doing during the pandemic is part and parcel of its mission to give hope and touch lives.

"I see a lot of need during this time. We have received calls for help with people crying on the line, especially from the elderly who live alone, telling us that they need food.

"People are suffering and don't know how to continue to survive.

"But I also see a lot of caring people in Kuching. People are trying to help and share their resources.

"It may not be much but they are doing what they can."

He said Hope Place would continue to provide help because the need was greater during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"When people say thank you, it's an encouragement to us as an NGO to keep bringing hope to them," he added.



# Sustained help from big-hearted Sabahans

Folk from all walks of life contribute in any way they can

**SABAH**



By **STEPHANIE LEE**  
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MALAYSIANS, regardless of race and religion, have been showing their altruistic side by helping the needy especially now, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Such heartwarming instances can be seen in various states nationwide, including Sabah.

News of government and non-governmental bodies (NGO) organising charity drives and programmes to assist the less fortunate have been widely reported, attesting to the presence of many big-hearted folk out there.

Even individuals affected by the pandemic themselves are putting their problems aside and looking into the needs of others.

Young children, too, are not to be left out as some are eager to help the less fortunate.

Recently, nine-year-old Olivia Kwan from Likas used her birthday *ang pow* money to buy bags of rice for the poor.

Her charitable act benefitted more than 100 families in the city.

"We are Malaysians, we must help one another," she said.

A local fishmonger in Donggongon, Penampang shared three days' worth of fish and seafood to help needy folk during one of the movement control orders.

All the poor needed to do was head to the market to get seafood supply from trader Ritchie Nieh.

Nieh, 28, said he gave to anyone, regardless of race or nationality, and they could take what they required.

Those who did not know how to organise charity drives took to social media to offer food, used clothes and other items on various sites including a group called "Beli Nothing Project" who reached out to people via Facebook.

Likewise, Good Samaritans logged on to their personal social media accounts to assist the public.

They shared posts asking those requiring assistance to drop them a

A happy Samara with the gingerbread biscuits that her mother made for sale. The funds were then donated to the less fortunate.



personal message so arrangements could be made to help them out.

The *Star* witnessed policemen, going from one place to another, carrying food baskets to be handed to those in need.

Kota Kinabalu OCPD Asst Comm Zaidi Abdullah said the food baskets donation was courtesy of a programme by Home Ministry (KDN) as well as a separate initiative by the Sabah cops.

"Ops Bantu is a KDN effort. We identify families that need help and send food baskets to them.

"The police initiative, named Ops Kasih, is where funds are raised among ourselves to buy groceries for people in the Kota Kinabalu area who needed food," he said adding that it was hoped that such programmes would help foster better police-community relations in crime prevention.

ACP Zaidi said the men in blue were keen to provide some form of relief to those experiencing difficulties during the pandemic.

People in need of assistance were also encouraged to speak up on social media platforms, and let others know of their plight so that benevolent individuals could reach out to them.

Those in dire straits learned that they should ask for help if they could not cope, following increased awareness of mental health after several suicide incidents nationwide.

Although there were opportuni-



During the early days of the MCO, villagers at Kampung Pogunon in Penampang shared vegetables with those who could not afford to buy food.

ists and cases of fraud detected online, people were quick to support each other by sharing personal stories on "fake cases" to prevent others from being cheated.

Meanwhile, some Good Samaritans set up food banks at their homes, grocery stores, eateries and even nearby schools to spread goodwill.

A restaurateur near Donggongon organised a charity drive-through for food delivery riders, who were given packets of free fish noodles, to show appreciation for the work they did.

There was also a couple in the Vista Kiranau area, in the Penampang district, whose food bank initiative benefitted hundreds of families.

In some neighbourhoods, resi-



Sabahans joined by other volunteers in Kuala Lumpur packing food baskets for needy Sabah natives living in the city.

the needy.

Animals also got some love as a veterinarian in Cyber City near Kota Kinabalu did his part by giving free pet food, free vaccines and check-ups for animals.

The vet also collaborated with NGOs to spay, neuter and treat wounded strays while helping struggling pet owners deal with their pets.

Dr Randolph Paza said he would try and help as many animals as he could, with or without support from others.

He was, however, thankful for the help from kind-hearted folk, the donations and assistance received in his mission to help stray animals.

"You may hate them but don't hurt them," he advised.

These kind gestures are acts that bring Malaysians together in showcasing unity, harmony and understanding among the people.

In August, Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor expressed his appreciation and gratitude to all those who came forward to help the community in any way they could during the Covid-19 pandemic.

He said many including NGOs, corporate bodies and individuals reached out to the needy, regardless of race and religion.

"This shows that we live in a loving and caring community where we help each other in times of difficulty despite our differences," he was reported as saying.



Policemen in Kota Kinabalu carrying food packages to be given to the less fortunate.



Dr Paza has strays and rescued animals close to his heart.





Orang Asli preparing farm plots at their village in Gua Musang.



Wong with a truck-load of durian harvested by the Orang Asli in Chenderiang.

# Empowering the Orang Asli

NGOs teach community ways to be resilient in facing economic challenges



By IVAN LOH and ILI AQILAH  
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THE Covid-19 pandemic has greatly impacted locals including the natives.

The livelihood of Perak's Orang Asli community has also been affected as they are not able to sell produce from the jungle or farms or even go beyond their village for work because of the various movement control orders implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Some Orang Asli villagers in Chenderiang resorted to making *tempoyak*, a fermented durian condiment, which they sold online.

Malaysian Care executive director Wong Young Soon said some of the Orang Asli who used to sell durian could not do so during the lockdown.

"They have been making *tempoyak* for sometime on a smaller scale, but they have increased production since last year.

"With the surge in cases amid the durian season, many fruits could not be sold and this threw a spanner in the works for them," he said.

"So they decided to make *tempoyak* instead, which can be kept and sold later," he said, adding that the product had been generally well-received.

"When it comes to eating and durian, Malaysians like it," said Wong.

He said the Orang Asli learned to be independent and self-sustaining through the Ladang Care project that was set up by Malaysian Care in 2007.

The Ladang Care project was set up to assist and empower the Orang Asli in Chenderiang to learn



A family receiving food aid from the Orang Asli Development Cooperative.

how to farm through sustainable means.

The programme also encourages Orang Asli folk to be independent and self-sustaining.

Wong said the Orang Asli sold their *tempoyak* product online and on social media platforms.

"As shops could not operate, the community turned to online stores to sell their wares.

"They are quite adept in using the Internet now, especially the young ones," he said.

Wong has also been trying to increase awareness among the Orang Asli community over the past few months on the need to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

"There was a lot of negativity and hesitancy with many villagers refusing to be vaccinated.

"This was due to the rumours on the Internet on deaths related to the vaccine," he said, adding that it was very difficult to convince the Orang Asli to sign up.

Wong said that in the past, whenever health authorities came to the villages to give injections, the Orang Asli would run into the jungle for fear of being jabbed.

"But with the recent surge in Covid-19 cases and seeing people they know get sick or in quarantine, many have registered to be vaccinated," he added.

Perak-based Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam (Kuasa) president Hafizudin Nasarudin said the non-governmental organisation (NGO) had introduced various empowering programmes for the Orang Asli community in Peninsular Malaysia since 2016.

One such initiative, he said, was helping to set up farms to be managed by the community.

"These farms, called Kebun Mandiri Orang Asli, were set up last year at several locations in Gua Musang, Kelantan.

"The project will not only increase the Orang Asli community's food production but also teach them to be resilient."

He said they chose Gua Musang for the programme because the situation there was quite dire.

"At the time, we were told that the villagers barely had any food left and they could not go out.

"We didn't start the programme in Perak because we heard that



Alang Shana, from Chenderiang, removing durian flesh from the seeds to make tempoyak.

many villages in the state were receiving assistance from the Orang Asli Development Department (Jakoa).

"In Kelantan, the situation was slightly more severe as Jakoa was unable to reach some of them," he added.

Jefri, an Orang Asli involved with the farming programme, said it had helped the community learn more about agriculture.

"Before this programme, we tried to plant some vegetables for our own consumption but faced several problems such as pests, and had to deal with elephants destroying our crops.

"After taking part in the programme, we managed to solve about 70% of our crop problems," he said.

Jefri said the families now had their own farming plots where they could harvest their crops for own consumption or sell the produce.

"Right now, we have bananas, papayas, pumpkins, chillies, yam, okra and lemons planted," he said.

Hafizudin said Kuasa had educated Orang Asli communities in Perak, Pahang and Selangor too on

documenting their respective cultures and to carry out forest mapping.

Orang Asli Development Cooperative founder Ramesh Arumugam Chettiar and his team are providing assistance to the Orang Asli in Perak, Pahang and Johor as well.

"We managed to raise the necessary funds to assist the community to buy and send bags of rice and other essential items to those affected.

"Most of the Orang Asli we met lost their income as they worked as fishermen and rubber tappers," he said.

Ramesh said he had contacted Malaysia Fisheries Development Authority chairman Datuk Syed Abu Hussin Hafiz Syed Abdul Fasal to help the Orang Asli by buying the catch from them and selling the produce at the markets.

"In this difficult time, we hope the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority will assist the Orang Asli farmers to distribute their produce to local markets to be sold," he added.





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# Neighbourly love shines through



## NGOs' peer support initiatives benefit B40 group living in low-cost flats

By SHEILA SRI PRIYA  
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THE measure of a community is whether it falls apart or bands together during tough times.

So it is heartening to note that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought out the best in Malaysians.

The sense of camaraderie, care and love is prevalent even among those in the B40 and poorer communities.

At Desa Mentari low-cost flats in Petaling Jaya, for example, two women have been trained by Suriana Welfare Society Malaysia to offer peer support to their neighbours.

In turn, they roped in another 18 women to assist them with support work at the flats, which are home to many in the B40 group.

Both Noraisah Mohamed Yusof, 57, and Norzila Mohd Saat, 49, have been caring for the well-being of others since the Covid-19 situation worsened earlier this year.

"Many are under home quarantine. The residents become depressed when they lose family members to Covid-19.

"People struggle with emotional uncertainties mostly," said Noraisah.

She said a woman in her early 60s at Desa Mentari was recently widowed after her husband died of Covid-19.

She lives alone and has been grappling with depression.

"She would telephone me and cry. She cannot manage her emotions due to loneliness after losing her husband. I provide her with a listening ear.

"She has learned knitting and does that to pass her time. Besides that, we also taught her to play a mind stimulating game using her smartphone.

"When the standard operating procedure is relaxed, we plan to rope her into our social work. Otherwise she spends her time mostly at home," said Noraisah.

Selected residents going through challenges were all added to a WhatsApp group, where they can express their thoughts and feelings and get virtual support from the group. This method has been found to be quite effective.

"Some undergo domestic problems. In most cases when the husband has lost his job, there would be conflict at home between spouses.

"When there is any form of abuse, we try to speak to the family. There was a case where a 19-year-old youth hit his stepmother.

"He learned this behaviour from his father, who also hits his wife.

"We helped the wife lodge a police report.

"Sometimes the victims will stay through the abuse not knowing what to do, or they think it is acceptable," said Noraisah.

Suriana Welfare Society chair-



The central soup kitchen at Desa Mentari by MyPJ prepares food for the needy.



Noraisah (right) speaking to Norzila and another neighbour Mohd Halim Asyraf.

man James Nayagam said Noraisah and Norzila were appointed early this year and given training to help look out for their neighbours' welfare.

The two have since reached out to 200 families in Desa Mentari. "These trained women offer para-counselling and will speak to their neighbours. They then inform us about the residents' needs.

"There are about 50 children and people with disabilities here, who need diapers and sometimes their caretakers too need some form of counselling.

"The two trained women extend their support in any way they can.

"They also have a WhatsApp group for parents facing issues in raising their teenage children," said James.

### Food aid and soup kitchens

Another group of residents, also from Desa Mentari, is leading a

soup kitchen under the guidance of MyPJ, a coalition of residents and non-governmental bodies (NGO) that champion public interest and welfare in Petaling Jaya.

MyPJ chairman Jeffrey Phang said the food aid was mostly distributed to families who were in home quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19 or being close contact.

One section of the group, numbering 10 to 15 people, is involved in the food preparation and cooking process. Another 40 people are tasked with distributing the food to the residents within the flats.

The cooking process starts at about 10am daily with the cutting of vegetables and preparation of other ingredients.

The cooked food is distributed for dinner.

Phang said over 2,000 people benefitted from food aid prepared at the soup kitchen, which was located within the apartment



Phang says the food aid is mainly distributed to families undergoing home quarantine.



Charles says the pandemic has brought out the best of humanity.

blocks' compound.

Desa Mentari has eight blocks and about 500 units in total, housing more than 5,000 residents.

Another group involved in food aid is Institut Onn Jaafar (IOJ) which identifies and distributes food baskets to the poor at people's housing projects (PPR), with help from residents and other NGOs.

IOJ chief executive officer Charles Mohan said the pandemic had changed many aspects of human life but it brought out the best of humanity too.

He said neighbours, despite being poor themselves, were looking out for the welfare of their peers.

"Before the pandemic, we saw more of a divided community at the PPR or in any marginalised neighbourhood.

"Now we see everyone is more united. Sadly, it has to take a pandemic to open the hearts of people to realise that help should be for all regardless of race or any differences among them.

"There were two mosques that asked us for donations of beverages. And they didn't just distribute the aid to those who went to their

mosques, but reached out to others too.

"This is a very good sign of unity," said Charles.

He added that the catchphrase "Kita jaga kita" (we care for one another) was an embodiment of the people's spirit and was evident especially in places where the poor live.

Between February and July, the NGO, which turned seven this year, reached out to over 500 families through its food basket programme. Some 20% of the recipients were refugees and foreign workers.

"In pre-pandemic times, there was not much demand for food baskets.

"But presently, many have lost their source of income and have no jobs," said Charles.

However, he reminded that food baskets were merely a stop-gap measure because ultimately, people needed to work and earn a consistent income.

IOJ has provided food aid to residents at numerous low-cost flats such as PPR Seri Aman, PPR Batu Muda, PPR Desa Petaling and PPR Wangsa Maju in Kuala Lumpur.





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Residents (from left) Zainal Aznam, Leong and Au Yong at the Sunway SPK Damansara community garden. The water used for the vegetable beds is from an overland rainwater harvester system built by Leong.



Choo and his wife Doris spend time working together at the community garden.



Burhanuddin says more people are taking up gardening as a way to pass the time.



Seedlings in hydroponics at KK4 Precinct 14 Community Garden in Putrajaya. Visitors are encouraged to take them home so they can start their own edible garden.



Muhammad Idriz trying his hand at growing his own vegetables at home.

By GRACE CHEN  
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COMMUNITY gardens play a special role in fostering closer ties among residents.

Being able to share the fruits of their labour with other needy residents as well as agricultural knowledge has helped community gardeners foster camaraderie and develop a sense of purpose, which has become especially useful during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

An earthworm farmer by profession, Ting Teck Loong never had much time for ornamental plants until the movement control order kicked in in March 2020 and he had to put all his work projects on hold.

With time on his hands and anxiety of an uncertain future weighing on his mind, the 46-year-old sought solace in his *monstera deliciosa* and *coleus atropurpureus*, the sale of which now provides him with an alternative source of income.

"Eventually I had 5,000 ornamental garden plants. They took up every inch of my home garden, and I had to park my car outside," said the father of one.

The Taman Putra resident's efforts did not go unnoticed.

About two months ago, Ting received a call from Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) councillor Chua Yew Chong to help develop the ornamental plant section at the Teratai Hijau Harmony community garden in Taman Putra, Ampang in Selangor.

It would be a nice addition to the existing vegetable patch for residents as well as a platform to showcase the efficacy of Ting's earthworm castings which he used to fertilise his plants, said Chua.

Not only did Ting successfully fill up several beds with various ornamental plant species, he also helped the community garden chief Choo Yew Kee, 74, and his wife Doris Lee, 70, as well as another resident to set up water sprinklers and storm protection systems for their vegetables using PVC pipe frames and mesh cover.

Like Ting, tending to the Teratai Hijau Harmony community garden has helped Choo and Lee pass time productively during the lockdowns.

"My husband and I have grown even closer working in the garden. Planning for crops has given us a sense of purpose and kept us active," admitted Lee.

"When land-clearing work started in July last year, people said the programme would never get off the ground," said Choo.

A former dumping site for construction debris, the place was riddled with rocks and concrete blocks.

Choo said 16 large bins of construction debris had to be carted away.

Now that the beds are lush with vegetables and ornamental plants, naysayers are beginning to look at the garden differently.

Though it is a non-profit entity, visitors can buy fresh vegetables and plants.

In a month, the 17 beds can generate up to RM2,500 in sales. Together with funds collected by members, the money goes towards sustaining the community garden.

"We don't take money from everyone. We use discretion. Senior citizens and the needy don't have to pay," said Choo.

Aside from Ting, 11 other residents help Choo and Lee with the community garden.

An MPAJ project in the LA 21 programme, the two-year-old community garden has so far received RM20,000 from Chua's yearly budget allocation of RM75,000 for set up, machinery and fertiliser.

Since the first planting of vegetables in July last year, 30 houses in

# Sowing seeds for a bountiful future

## Community gardens helping Malaysians combat isolation blues and save on grocery costs



Ting showing his ornamental plants which he successfully cultivated at the Teratai Hijau Harmony community garden. — Photos: S.S. KANESAN, AZMAN GHANI, LOW LAY PHON/The Star

Taman Putra have received free vegetables from the 0.2ha L-shaped plot surrounding Taman Putra Community Hall throughout the MCO.

### Free seeds and mulberry trees

Over at the Sunway SPK Damansara community garden in Segambut, Kuala Lumpur, free seeds and plant seedlings are being given out to residents to encourage cultivation of edible gardens at home.

Sunway SPK Damansara Residents Association vice-chairman Yuan Loh Soon, 69, said that since the announcement was made over the community's social media group of 200 followers in June, 10 residents have come forward to take up the offer.

"One of our recipients is nine-year-old Muhammad Idriz Ahmad Fairuz, who was given some mustard leaf seeds two weeks ago.

Muhammad Idriz's mother Zarah Mokhlis, 43, had requested the seeds so that he would be kept busy," said Yuan.

When met, the young lad readily admitted that his patience was being tested as the full results would only be apparent in another two weeks, though small sprouts could be seen in his planter boxes.

Provided the seeds do not end up being eaten by birds or the sprouts get washed away during the rainy season, Yuan is confident once Muhammad Idriz can harvest his own vegetables, the enthusiasm will kick in.

A good example can be found in former accountant Howa Oon, 68, and retired civil engineer Leong Meng Chow, 66, both active members of the Sunway SPK Damansara community garden project.

Their home plots of ladies' fingers, tapioca leaves, yams, curry leaves, chillies and limes were the result of effort and patience, with their endeavours starting well before the MCO.

Leong and Zainal Aznam Mohd Jelani, 70, a retired Universiti Putra Malaysia professor of animal nutrition, are putting their knowledge to use at the community garden.

Zainal has planted 130 mulberry



Au Yong's crickets from his farm. Mulberry leaves from the community garden are used as feed for the insects, which are in turn used as fish feed for the new tilapia project at the garden.

trees in the community garden's hilly terrain and the leaves, in addition to being used by residents for tea, are used as cricket feed at fellow resident Au Yong Soon Kok's farm.

The 60-year-old farmer, who was exporting his cricket frass to the international market, said his business was affected when the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in port lockdowns and disruptions in the container shipping industry.

Au Yong's crickets are now being fed to tilapia fish at the community garden. The tank is filled with an overland rainwater harvesting system built by Leong.

The fish project is only three months old but residents are already looking forward to harvest once the fish are big enough.

As for the mulberries, Yuan has plans to turn them into jam.

### A place for wholesome activities

As interstate travel bans continue to remain in place, more people are taking up gardening as a way to pass time, observed Burhanuddin Mohd Ghazali who is chairman of KK4 Precinct 14 Community Garden in Putrajaya.

This community garden is one of 11 urban farms in the administrative capital under the national Local Agenda 21 programme.

Located beside a five-block apart-

ment estimated to house 750 units, Burhanuddin said the 35 members tending to the community garden were mostly civil servants.

"They still have their jobs, but many are experiencing work pressure."

"So, they are turning to the therapeutic benefits of gardening to de-stress."

"The satisfaction of seeing the herbs and vegetables one has cultivated grow, is something one has to experience to know how it feels."

"The feedback I have from them is that gardening is like a sport too. It can be a wholesome family activity," he said.

To sustain the garden, members derive proceeds from the sale of surplus seedlings, soil and fertiliser. Most of it is sold to the community at below market prices.

"A daily price check with the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (Fama) is done for spinach, *bok choy*, mustard leaves, lettuce, cherry tomatoes, turmeric, torch ginger, *pandan*, English parsley, lemongrass and coriander because these are grown in our garden. They are sold below the Fama listed prices," said Burhanuddin.

To encourage more residents to cultivate edible gardens, members have come up with a solution — hydroponics.

"Our hydroponics have built-in water level indicator that tells when a plant needs watering. It's good for beginners," he said, adding that hydroponic planting and fertilization method was widely practised at the Precinct 14 community garden.

Another reason that should motivate more to invest their time in home edible gardens was the cost savings factor, noted Burhanuddin.

"From feedback, members and some residents who started as early as 2018 say they can save as much as 50% in grocery bills. Sure, it may cost as much as RM150 to invest in a home hydroponic planting system but bear in mind that one can get as many as 40 plants from just one system."

"We have gardeners in our group who tell us that they no longer need to buy vegetables daily," he said.

FEDERAL TERRITORIES



Tay says their books are intended for children of any age who need English literacy intervention.



Lim says with the pandemic, virtual counselling ensures safety of both counsellors and clients.

## Groups engage with the vulnerable via digital means

By AIDA AHMAD  
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LOCAL online community support has grown by leaps and bounds in the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Community leaders have adopted new ways of working and have improvised their daily operations to continue helping vulnerable members of society.

*The Star* speaks to two groups in the fields of mental health and education on how they have embraced online platforms to reach out to people.

### Counselling during Covid-19

The prolonged isolation and worry over various issues as a result of the pandemic and subsequent movement restrictions have put many people under stress.

But with traditional face-to-face counselling proving difficult, some groups began offering online or remote counselling.

One such group is Partners in Counselling (PiC), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded by a group of counsellors-in-training comprising Master of Counselling students from Open University Malaysia.

It was formed in February last year as a way for students to fulfil their practicum hours due to limited access to resources and relevant activities.

PiC, with about 30 active members in the group, provides *pro-bono* services via counsellors-in-training and connects those in need with professional help, including licensed counsellors and therapists.

"People are stressed out over the prolonged movement control order, so at the moment online counselling is the only way for people to seek therapy," said Lim Wei Wen who is PiC vice-president and one of its founders.

She said virtual counselling was the mode of choice to ensure the safety of both counsellors and clients.

Lim said some of the challenges the clients faced were difficulties adapting to changes such as jobs, lifestyle and day-to-day shifts in behaviour brought on by the pandemic, and coping strategies.

"We can help clients adapt and accept those stressful changes they are going through," she explained.

She said the clients' stressors and coping strategies evolved into three phases since the start of the pandemic last year.

"The first phase was dealing with job loss and lifestyle changes, where those who could no longer pay rent on their homes, for example, had to move in with their elderly parents."

"During our time in school, we realised that our students could not read basic English sentences and were unable to follow lessons in class."

"Three of my colleagues and I decided together to create our own literacy toolkit based on the Malaysian context, and build it into a structured reading programme," MYReaders co-founder and executive director Tay Sue Yen told *The Star*.

MYReaders books are intended for children of any age who need English literacy intervention via the recommended one-on-one or small group teaching approach.



A child uses a phone to access MYReaders reading resources.

"In the second phase during the recovery movement control order last year, we noticed clients were depressed, anxious and frustrated because the previous coping strategies no longer worked."

"Phase three is grieving clients, as in those who lost loved ones to Covid-19, where they had to adopt new coping strategies to deal with death," said Lim, 33.

PiC continues to provide free online counselling, with appointments being made via <https://sites.google.com/view/partnersincounselling/counselling>

### Journey of young readers

In 2015, four school teachers came together with one vision in mind — to ensure that every child in Malaysia will one day be able to read and write in English.

To meet this goal, they formed MYReaders.

Accredited as a social enterprise by Entrepreneur Development and Cooperative Ministry and the Malaysian Global Innovation & Creative Centre (MaGIC) in 2020, MYReaders' mission is to empower children through communities by providing free structured and sustainable reading programmes.

MYReaders was founded by four Teach For Malaysia fellows who were teaching in high-needs secondary schools.

"During our time in school, we realised that our students could not read basic English sentences and were unable to follow lessons in class."

"Three of my colleagues and I decided together to create our own literacy toolkit based on the Malaysian context, and build it into a structured reading programme," MYReaders co-founder and executive director Tay Sue Yen told *The Star*.

MYReaders books are intended for children of any age who need English literacy intervention via the recommended one-on-one or small group teaching approach.

"We have two models. The first

our school mentor-mentee programme model, but since the Covid-19 pandemic last year we have been using Google Classroom for a parent-led model where the parents read with their child."

"Our Community Model is where we pair volunteers with students, one-to-one."

"We used to conduct this face-to-face but since physical classes are not possible at the moment, we now conduct reading sessions through WhatsApp."

"We use WhatsApp because it is a familiar tool for families from all backgrounds and it can run on a basic smartphone with minimal data."

"We pivoted to online learning since March last year, and we are currently rolling out new programmes to recruit more organisations to run our community model programme," added Tay.

The MYReaders Literacy Toolkit books are written in a structured manner to help children build up their foundation in phonics, and in the Malaysian context so they can relate to what they read.

MYReaders has recently also introduced LitHubX, a community-based literacy programme that provides reading diagnostics, structured resources and support for children to learn and read in English.

Each child will be assessed and guided one-on-one by volunteers and using self-paced modules with parental guidance.

"With LitHubX, we are looking to scale our impact across Malaysia to reach 200 children in the B40 group by June 2022, supported by a MaGIC Social Impact Matching grant," said Tay.

So far, MYReaders has impacted more than 31,647 children, 92 parents, 777 teachers and 780 volunteers.

Those who wish to be part of the MYReaders volunteer community or fund their programmes, donate or buy their books, can visit [www.myreaders.org.my/](http://www.myreaders.org.my/) or email team@myreaders.org.my





(Above) MBSA's Environmental Health Department team sanitising a public market after hours.

(Left) MBPJ Civic Hall near Petaling Jaya New Town opened its doors as a vaccination centre (PPV) from July 9.

# Joining forces for public welfare

Local authorities and govt agencies step up to the task in Covid-19 battle



By JADE CHAN  
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LOCAL councils in Selangor have been kept busy caring for public safety and welfare since the Covid-19 pandemic started.

With people frequenting public places like markets, cleaning works and regular sanitisation efforts have been intensified to ensure such premises remain safe for traders and visitors.

"Shah Alam City Council's (MBSA) Environmental Health Department carries out weekly sanitisation exercises at public markets but efforts are increased if there are reported Covid-19 cases," said MBSA Corporate and Public Relations head Shahrin Ahmad.

"Common areas such as railings and walkways outside banks and supermarkets are also sanitised on a scheduled basis.

"If there are requests, the same team will carry out sanitisation services for free at mosques and *surau*," he added.

Over at Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ), its contractors are instructed to step up daily cleaning works at city council-owned assets such as public markets, food courts and stalls.

"This includes floors, table surfaces, chairs, toilets, prayer rooms and high-touch surfaces such as switches and railings," said MBSJ Corporate and Strategic Management Department deputy director Azfarizal Abdul Rashid.

"Disinfection works are done at markets after operating hours, on a needs basis," he said.

Local councils have also been busy conducting regular enforcement in checking on businesses' compliance with the National Security Council's (NSC) standard operating procedure and council bylaws as part of efforts to safeguard the people against Covid-19.

Such operations are carried out jointly with the police and other government agencies including Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry, Immigration Department, Home Affairs Ministry, Occupational Health and Safety Department and Construction Industry Development Bhd.

"MBSJ has held 43 joint operations during the movement control



MBPJ's trucks are used to transport and deliver goods to people in enhanced MCO areas. One team is seen here loading goods for residents at Gugusan Semarak in Kota Damansara, which was under strict lockdown from Aug 6 to 19.

order this year," said Azfarizal.

"We have issued 172 compound notices, closed two premises, carried out five rounds of confiscations and held two demolition exercises for various offences thus far," he elaborated.

"Petaling Jaya City Council's (MBPJ) SOP compliance inspections and enforcement operations are targeted at commercial areas, shopping complexes, supermarkets as well as manufacturing and service sectors," said MBPJ Corporate Communications officer Ahmad Iskandar Mohamad Mukhtar.

"Between May and July 2021, MBPJ carried out 13,117 inspections at business premises, factories, hawker stalls and recreational spaces including Bukit Gasing Educational Forest.

"Based on those inspections, 1,570 enforcement actions were taken, including issuing compounds for various offences (eight under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1998), verbal warnings, confiscations and closure notices."

Iskandar said that while most of the inspections were done by MBPJ's enforcement team, there were also 155 joint operations with the Petaling Jaya police and other enforcement agencies.

## Food distribution partnerships

Being aware of how some folk in their administrative areas are struggling to get by, the local councils have stepped beyond their customary roles.

They are actively distributing food aid, either through collaborations with partners or contribu-

tions from donors to run in-house campaigns.

"We introduced the 'Program Bakul Prihatin MBSA - Rezeki Kasih' (MBSA Caring Basket Programme - Sustenance of Love) early this year," said Shahrin.

"The programme is run in partnership with 99 Speedmart supermarket chain."

He said people could contribute by purchasing vouchers, priced between RM10 and RM50, which covered basic food items and nutritional food for babies.

"The vouchers can be purchased at any of the 80 99 Speedmart stores under MBSA's jurisdiction.

"From Feb 8 until June 30, the public contributed RM148,240 to the programme and MBSA distributed 5,054 food baskets to people in need," said Shahrin.

He added: "The programme's target recipients comprised those from B40 groups, individuals with disabilities or have dependants with disabilities, senior citizens, those who lost their jobs, single parents and families with many dependants (more than five persons)."

On the other hand, MBPJ has set up PJ City Food Bank that collects food donated by private companies and organisations which is then sent to senior citizens, welfare homes and the hardcore poor.

"MBPJ ran a Covid-19 assistance programme last year, channelling foodstuff to 509 Petaling Jaya residents who were affected by the movement control order and the economic downturn," said Iskandar.

"In conjunction with the 15th anniversary of Petaling Jaya's city

status this year, MBPJ continued extending assistance under its food bank's social outreach efforts.

"As of late July, 1,023 hardcore poor individuals and 21 welfare homes in the city have received aid," he added.

## Facilitating PICK

In supporting the government's drive to get as many people vaccinated as possible, local councils have stepped up and played a role in ensuring the success of the National Immunisation Programme (PICK).

Employees of city councils in Selangor volunteered at Sunway Pyramid Convention Centre vaccination centre (PPV), which was also the first large-scale private PPV under PICK.

There were 40 employees from MBSA, 16 from MBSJ and 10 from MBPJ.

During the two-month stint, the staff-volunteers helped facilitate the vaccination process by working as ushers, counter personnel and traffic guides.

In addition, several community halls have been turned into PPV, such as MBPJ Civic Hall near Petaling Jaya New Town starting July 9 and MBSJ Multipurpose Hall in Puchong Indah starting July 26.

"The initiative was done through a strategic collaboration with the National Covid-19 Immunisation Task Force (CITF), which oversees the PPV operations, while MBSJ provided the venue and logistics at no additional cost," said Azfarizal.

"MBSJ's personnel are not involved in volunteering at the



One of the MBSJ staff volunteers (left) on duty at the Sunway Pyramid Convention Centre vaccination centre.

MBSJ Multipurpose Hall PPV as the 100 non-medical volunteers were appointed by CITF."

Similarly, Iskandar said MBPJ provided logistics and services support for the disabled at MBPJ Civic Hall PPV while CITF supervised and managed operations.

"To ensure PICK's success, MBPJ's PJ City Bus provides free rides, through designated routes, for those with vaccination appointments at the Civic Hall.

"MBPJ also provides free transit van service for the disabled to get to their vaccination appointments at selected PPV locations in the Petaling district," he added.

Over in Shah Alam, Shahrin said, "MBSA Hall in Section 19 was turned into a PPV by the Selangor Health Department and Petaling Health Department. MBSA has been assisting in terms of logistics and other needs since May."

In Subang Jaya, MBSJ Multipurpose Hall at 14th Mile functions as a Covid-19 screening centre while Laman Puteri 3 Multipurpose Hall in Puchong is used as a food aid storage centre.

MBPJ has also been involved in offering assistance and manpower at locations in Petaling Jaya placed under enhanced MCO since last year.

The city council provided logistical support, such as trucks, tents, tables and chairs needed by the secretariat, while PJ City Food Bank contributed food aid to affected residents and packed meals to frontliners stationed at enhanced MCO sites such as Mentari Court and Damai Apartment in PJS 8 and Petaling Jaya Old Town back in July.



To put a smile on its customers' faces, UEM Sunrise kick-started the *Happy Chase 2021* virtual live show on its Facebook page on Sept 4. Enjoy special rebates including offers under the government's Home Ownership Campaign and Maybank Islamic's HouzKEY initiative for selected development projects in Johor and the Klang Valley.



# SHOW THAT YOU CARE AND WIN GREAT PRIZES

Property developer UEM Sunrise has lined up activities and promotions to inspire happiness and bring smiles to the people

THE Covid-19 pandemic has been tough on everyone, but we can weather the storm by standing strong and united as a nation – with a smile on our face.

As a caring and fun-loving organisation, UEM Sunrise has launched a series of initiatives for the public under its National Smiles Campaign – Smiling Proud, Smiling Strong and Smiling Together to foster the spirit of unity and happiness as the nation celebrates National Day, Malaysia Day and World Smile Day.

According to UEM Sunrise CEO Sufian Abdullah, the campaign which runs from now till Oct 16 is aligned with UEM Sunrise's CHIEF (Caring, Honest, Involved, Enthusiastic, Fun-loving) values and inspired by Malaysians' tenacity, unity and caring spirit.

The campaign logo and concept are based on UEM Sunrise's ubiquitous Smiley symbol, which represents joy and happiness, in line with the company's tagline "Find Your Happy".

All the activities organised are aimed at bringing forth greater happiness and spreading smiles to UEM Sunrise customers, loyalty programme members (Trésorians), social media followers and the public.

If you missed out on the Smiling Proud: Find the Smiley contest and Publika Shopping Gallery's National Day giveaway, fret not as there are more events to come with attractive prizes.

Current and upcoming campaigns include The Happy Chase 2021 virtual live show, Smiling Strong (a user-generated content video contest), the Go The Distance – Hope and Unity virtual race, Planting Seeds of Happiness and CSR/community outreach programme Smiling Together.

## The Happy Chase 2021

Property consultants from UEM Sunrise and hosts will bring viewers on a virtual tour of their exciting developments on offer in Johor and the Klang Valley while sharing the easiest ways to win attractive prizes.

From now till Oct 16, a total of 10 projects will be showcased on seven Facebook Live sessions, which are open to the public on [www.facebook.com/UEMSunrise](https://www.facebook.com/UEMSunrise).

The residential developments featured are Aspira ParkHomes, Aspira LakeHomes, Aspira Square,



Senadi Hills, The Maris, Bayu Angkasa and Serassa Greens in Johor; and Verna Serene Heights, Allevia Mont'Kiara and KAIA Heights in the Klang Valley.

Stand a chance to win Grab or high tea vouchers by answering a few questions during each session.

House buyers will also get to enjoy rebates and benefits under the Government's Home Ownership Campaign (HOC) 2021 and Maybank Islamic's HouzKEY programme, whereby first and second-time house buyers of selected projects will get the opportunity to own their dream home with zero payment during the construction period, zero down payment and 100% financing scheme; great add-on rewards of RM2,500 rebate\*, Happy Hour Rewards worth RM6,888\* exclusive for Saturday and Sunday bookings, and 12 months zero maintenance fee\*.

\* Promotions are unique to each property and virtual tour session, and terms and conditions apply. For more info or to RSVP, visit [www.uemsunrise.com/highlights/happenings](https://www.uemsunrise.com/highlights/happenings).

For the full schedule of The Happy Chase 2021 virtual live show, go to [www.facebook.com/UEMSunrise](https://www.facebook.com/UEMSunrise).

## Smiling Strong

Spread positivity, do your part for the community and stand a chance to win attractive prizes.

Organised in conjunction with Malaysia Day, Smiling Strong is a user-generated content contest that invites the public to spread positivity while giving back to the community in true Malaysian spirit.

Share a video or compilation of

all things that inspire you or can inspire others. The contest runs from now until Sept 27.

For every entry received on Instagram, UEM Sunrise will donate essential packs to identified food banks, homes and communities.

The donations will be distributed during World Smile Day on Oct 1 under the Smiling Together initiative.

The most creative videos will be selected as winners, with RM1,500 (first place), RM1,000 (second place), RM800 (third place) cash prizes and 20 consolation prizes of RM100 e-vouchers to be won.

Details of the contest can be found on UEM Sunrise Instagram. More information is also available at [www.uemsunrise.com/NationalSmilesCampaign](https://www.uemsunrise.com/NationalSmilesCampaign).

## Go The Distance virtual race

Participants can walk, run or cycle to win attractive lucky draw prizes. As many as 800 participants can walk, run or cycle at least 5km anywhere and anytime between Sept 16 and Oct 22 in this virtual race.

It serves to promote a healthy and balanced lifestyle, and to act as a positive platform that can motivate the community to stay active and united. Register now at <https://bit.ly/RacexasiaUEMSunriseGoTheDistance>.

## Planting Seeds of Happiness

Plant seeds of happiness on Oct 2 at a virtual planting workshop exclusive for UEM Sunrise customers and residents called Trésorians to promote the Greening Malaysia Programme.



In conjunction with Malaysia Day celebrations, UEM Sunrise invites Malaysians to participate in the *Smiling Strong* creative video contest to inspire positivity while giving back to the community.



For every entry received via the *Smiling Strong* contest, UEM Sunrise will donate essential packs to charity. The donations will be distributed during World Smile Day on Oct 1.

**Go THE DISTANCE**  
Walk, Run & Ride | Anywhere, Anytime

**Race Period**  
16 September - 22 October 2021

**Race Pack** **Lucky Draw**

\*Terms & Conditions apply

**ENTRY FEE RM35 only**

Register now at <https://bit.ly/RacexasiaUEMSunriseGoTheDistance>

**#UEMSunrise #GoTheDistance**





Calvin helping a vaccine recipient fill up the form at the Persada Johor International Convention Centre PPV. — Photos: THOMAS YONG/The Star

# Youths stand tall at vaccination centres

Johoreans step up in fight against unseen enemy

By VENESA DEVI  
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YOUTHS from all walks of life are not taking a backseat in the fight against Covid-19. Many are stepping up to do their part to support the country's efforts to vaccinate the population.

Despite the risk of being exposed to thousands of people every day, youngsters are continuing to serve the community tirelessly at vaccination centres (PPV) with the aim of helping the nation move a step closer to achieving herd immunity.

Among the unsung heroes is Persada Johor International Convention Centre PPV volunteer Muhammad Hariz Abu Bakar, 20, who decided to volunteer to lighten frontliners' burden and help the country fight an invisible enemy.

"I recently finished my matriculation programme and am waiting to enter university. Since I have a lot of time to spare, I decided to apply to be a volunteer at the PPV



in Johor Baru.

"Although we are not able to help our medical frontliners directly because we are not trained in the field, we can at least help in other ways.

"It is at times like this that society needs people who are willing to help," he said, adding that he hoped more people would register for vaccination.

University student Calvin Dcroix Manicam, 19, spends his weekdays studying and attending online classes while volunteering at Persada PPV on weekends.

"I started volunteering during my semester break in June and spend my days at the PPV, almost daily, from morning to night.

"It is a great experience. I made a lot of new friends through volun-

teering," he said.

Calvin said that although being a volunteer was initially exhausting, he had gotten used to it and had adapted well to the routine.

"I had initially planned to cease volunteering in early August as my semester break had come to an end.

"But I later decided to continue helping out on weekends as there is a shortage of manpower at the PPV," he said, adding that he was glad to be able to continue contributing to the country.

Former administration executive M. Navajothi, 29, was inspired by other Malaysians who went out of their way to help others in need during the pandemic.

"I saw many people donating food, clothes and other stuff to those struggling to cope with the pandemic.

"I was eager to do my part and thought of becoming a volunteer at the PPV," she said.

Navajothi said that despite the



MALAYSIA PRIHATIN

## Happy Malaysia Day

Amidst the throes of a pandemic, our commitment to provide sewerage service as best possible remains undeterred







Muhammad Hariz decided to volunteer to lighten the burden of frontliners and help the country in the fight against Covid-19.

challenges faced by volunteers, the understanding and appreciation from the public made it so much easier to serve them.

"I am touched by the simple and sweet gestures of fellow Malaysians who sometimes give us 'thank you' cards to show appreciation to us," she said, adding that the volunteers were always prepared to help anyone who required assistance during their visit to the PPV.

College student Chin Wei Bin, 23,



Ainur Bahirah says her experience as a volunteer allows her to see the hardship people have to go through during the pandemic.

is glad that he decided to volunteer at the PPV as he has learned invaluable lessons.

"I volunteered because I wanted to challenge myself and try something new.

"I also wanted to contribute my time and effort to help the country get through such difficult times.

"It has been a very meaningful experience for me as not only do I get to meet new people, I also get to improve my communication skills



Chin is glad that he decided to volunteer at the PPV as he has improved his communication and leadership skills.

as well as my leadership skills," he said.

Freelance photographer Ainur Bahirah Ahmad Hafiz, 21, said that her experience as a volunteer allowed her to see the hardship that people were experiencing during the pandemic.

"My mother sent me a link to register as a volunteer and she encouraged me to sign up.

"Although we know that there are risks in volunteering at PPV

because we will be exposed to thousands of people every day, we decided to face the risk so that we can help people.

"For me, it is not a stressful job. It is fulfilling as I know that it can help protect the people from Covid-19," she said.

Flight attendant Tan Yong Yee, 22, who has more time on her hands due to a reduction in flights, has been volunteering since June.

"I started volunteering at the Austin International Convention Centre (AICC) PPV, which is under the Public-Private Partnership Covid-19 Industry Immunisation Programme in June.

"In July, I volunteered with

DOC2US where I served at several mobile PPV to help vaccination efforts in the industrial sector.

"So far, I have been involved in the mobile PPV work in Johor Baru and Pontian," she said.

Tan said that sometimes there were language barriers as some of the vaccine recipients were foreign workers, which was challenging but it was part of the whole experience of volunteering.

"They are also those who give us notes to express their appreciation to us as volunteers," she said.

She added that she hoped the public would continue adhering to the standard operating procedure and register to be vaccinated.



By IMRAN HILMY  
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IT WILL be the second time that frontliners from Sabah and Sarawak working in Georgetown, Penang, will celebrate Malaysia Day far away from their hometowns as their priority is in shouldering their responsibilities in battling the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nurse Fathin Athirah Ladi, 27, from Tamparuli, Sabah, said she would be celebrating Malaysia Day with her husband's family and her colleagues at the hospital where she worked.

"Since we cannot *balik kampung* due to work, I will get to spend quality time with my husband's family and my colleagues," she said, adding that since last year, most of her time was spent at the hospital due to Covid-19 cases.

Fathin, who is of Dusun ethnicity, said although she could not experience the excitement of celebrating Malaysia Day in her hometown, it was normal to share and discuss current issues with her colleagues.

She said the camaraderie between Malaysians from Sabah and Sarawak at her workplace was strong and they did their best to support each other during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fathin said this was the time that everyone must lend a helping hand to friends and colleagues.

Being so far away from home for such a long time does make her miss traditional foods like *bosou* and *tuhau*.

"*Bosou*, also called *noonsom* or *tonsom*, is the Kadazan-Dusun term for a traditional tangy fermented meat.

"*Tuhau* is a type of wild ginger, specifically the stems of the plant popularly served as a relish by the Kadazan-Dusun community.

"It's so rare and I can never get to eat such food in Penang," she said.

She urged Malaysians to always stay alert and adhere to the standard operating procedure (SOP).

Fathin also reminded Malaysians to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their families.

Sarawakian nurse Chiong Sie Ing, 21, said every Malaysian should observe all the SOP mandated by the government.

"Do your part to stay at home while we stay at work for you.

## United and soldiering on at the front line



Chiong (left) and her colleagues holding the Jalur Gemilang as their way of celebrating Malaysia Day at a private hospital in Penang. — Photo: LIM BENG TATT/The Star



Nikki (middle) and her colleagues of different races are rooting for Malaysians to get through the pandemic together.

"We must work together to reach herd immunity to combat the pandemic.

"Let's use Malaysia Day to instill the concept of national unity in our children and make greater strides towards a stable and prosperous society," she said.

Chiong has not been able to return to her hometown of Sarikei since last year after the country was gripped by the pandemic.

She said she was aware that it would be difficult for her to travel to Sarawak or any other place following the spike in Covid-19 cases, and this was not the time to let her guard down.

"What we can do now is spend more quality time at home.

"I miss my home back in Sarikei, but duty comes first.

"I am thankful I have good friends and colleagues who are always here with me," she said.

Chiong said Malaysia Day was a day to celebrate how far Malaysia had progressed.

Malaysia Day, she said, was a symbol of unity with various races living together as one nation despite their numerous differences.

She hopes that Malaysians will continue to help those who are in need.

She also urged everyone to stay healthy by avoiding crowded places and following the rules and regulation set by the government.

Accident and emergency department nurse Nikki Fabian misses home as it has been more than a year since she went home.

The 26-year-old nurse from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, said that prior to the pandemic, it was routine for her to return home thrice a year including for Christmas.

"This is the longest time I've been away and I am longing to go back home as soon as possible.

"It is just different not being able to spend the holidays with my family in my hometown.

"I left home when I was 18 years old to pursue my studies at a college in Penang and continued to work at a hospital here.

"Ever since I was a student, I have always looked forward to Malaysia Day as it is a public holiday and my family and I would be off from school and work.

"We just gather together and have quality family time.

"Sometimes we go to the beach and have a picnic. Other times, we go to the mall as a family or do a family cookout of special dishes at home," she said.

Nikki said she salivated whenever she thought of *Kicap Cap Ayam* from her home state.

"It is simply the best. I can eat it with just rice and fried egg.

"I also miss *tuhau* and *bosou* as it is really difficult to get them here, and I don't know how to make them," she added.

Nikki hopes for life to return to normal as soon as possible.

"Many people have succumbed to Covid-19 and some are suffering from poverty and mental illness.

"Frontliners are exhausted. "One thing I have learnt from the



Chiew misses 'ayam pansuh', a traditional dish in her hometown of Sarikei, Sarawak.

pandemic is that life is too short to be taken for granted.

"It is the time for us to humble ourselves and help one another," she said.

Nurse Chiew Hui Ling, from Sarikei, Sarawak, misses *ayam pansuh* which is a traditional dish in her hometown.

"The dish is basically chicken that is prepared in bamboo with *dabai* (a type of exotic fruit in Sarawak). We cannot get *dabai* here.

"I really miss home. The last time I went back was in February last year before the Covid-19 outbreak.



Fathin will be celebrating Malaysia Day with her husband's family and her colleagues at the hospital.

"This is the longest period I've been away from home.

"However, I'm grateful that the hospital I work at, treated all employees to a lunch during the Kaamatan and Gawai festival, which made it feel like home.

"Malaysia Day is a memorable day for me as it commemorates the day when Sabah, Sarawak and Malaya came together to form Malaysia.

"Since it is a public holiday, I usually spend time with my family and friends doing things together to mark this special day.

"This year, I will stay at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The pandemic has affected our lives in many ways and we have to adapt to this new norm.

"People should always follow the SOP and get vaccinated as soon as possible to achieve herd immunity," she advised.



# Putting poor's needs above own hardship

## Restaurant owners provide free meals in historic city and beyond



By RSN MURALI  
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DESPITE lacklustre earnings and financial hardship, three restaurant owners in Melaka are putting their personal problems aside to assist those in dire need of help.

These restaurateurs are lending a helping hand by delivering meals to needy folk under home quarantine as well as to migrant workers and orphans in the state.

Bertam Satay owner Denny Long Wei Siong sets aside RM20 from his daily sales at his shop in Taman Paya Rumput Utama, Cheng, to buy groceries for those impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Long, 40, said he decided to continue his grandmother's legacy of helping others as she often gave to the poor her traditional Peranakan Chinese satay that she cooked at her rickety wooden pushcart in the 1980s.

"My grandma believed that providing food to others was a blessing. I am emulating her good deeds despite facing a decline in sales since the pandemic started," he said.

He also delivers free packets of satay to his customers who have become jobless.

"Some of my loyal customers are unable to order satay due to financial constraints, so I deliver it to them, for free, on weekends," he said.

People lining up outside Noorfazlinda's bubble tea shop along Jalan Hang Tuah to collect food packs.



There are even customers from as far as Tampin in Negri Sembilan who share on social media how they are missing his satay dipped in peanut sauce, but currently cannot afford to order the dish.

Knowing how many have fallen on hard times, Long takes it upon himself to deliver satay to his regular customers to maintain his good relationship with them.

"I know they will support me once their financial situation improves. For now, money is not important," he said.

His grandmother's sauce recipe, which has curry powder and turmeric among its ingredients, is as it was 30 years ago.

Long has also reserved a corner of his shop to store dry foodstuff.

The items are given to families facing difficulties and sent to welfare homes that request for help.

Another restaurateur is touching the hearts of Melakans whenever he responds to social media posts from foreign workers and families who are without food.

T. Thanabalan, 66, from Seremban, Negri Sembilan, is continuing his late wife's charitable work by feeding the hungry despite having to pay for transportation to deliver food to Melaka.

His late wife Mary Goh Mei Ling used to help migrant workers and cancer patients, he said.

"I used to organise about three to four charity events at my restaurant when times were good, and I continue this effort even though it is a struggle to stay afloat during this pandemic," he said.

Thanabalan prepares the food packs at his Curry Leaf Restaurant in Jalan Rasah, Seremban, before sending them off to Alor Gajah and into the heart of Melaka.

He gets information on hungry folk from WhatsApp groups and Facebook.

Thanabalan ensures that donated meals are nutritious so that the recipients can enjoy a hearty meal.

The meals of *briyani*, chicken and mutton curry, eggs and various vegetables are packed and sent

to migrant workers in dire need of food.

Besides Melaka, Thanabalan also provides meals to migrants in Selangor and Negri Sembilan.

The father of three recently sent food to a family in Semambok, Melaka, after learning of their plight through WhatsApp.

Another caring entrepreneur who is doing her part for the needy is Noorfazlinda Tambi Chek.

Noorfazlinda, 32, is the founder of the latest bubble tea shop at Jalan Hang Tuah in the heart of the historic city.

Barely a few months into operations in 2020, she was forced to shut her shop during the MCO enforced because of Covid-19.

Although Hang Boba Cafe's revenue has been hit by the restrictions on dine-in, it has not stopped Noorfazlinda from carrying out charity work.

In July, she launched her food bank initiative to feed the needy.

"My business was badly hit but I managed to stay afloat thanks to

loyal customers who continued to place online orders," she said.

Noorfazlinda sets aside an amount from her income to buy groceries such as rice, egg, milk powder and other essential items for the less fortunate.

The food is distributed, to anyone in need, every Friday from 2pm to 8pm at her eatery.

She said it would not take long for the 30 food aid packs to be snapped up.

Latecomers, she said, did not go home empty-handed as she provided cooked food for them instead.

"There were about 300 people who queued up at my cafe when I started my charity project and I ensured that everyone went home with some food," she said.

Noorfazlinda also feeds vagrants along Jalan Hang Tuah daily.

"The task of feeding street people is delegated to my staff but those who are hungry can also come to my outlet to get food packs," she added.



Thanabalan preparing food packs at his restaurant in Seremban for distribution to migrant workers in Alor Gajah, Melaka.



Long preparing satay for his customers who are facing hardship.

# App by four friends helps connect donors to aid recipients



By ONG HAN SEAN  
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MALAYSIANS are a generous lot when it comes to helping those in need.

But, more often than not, it is difficult to connect donors with eligible recipients.

Four friends in Kuantan, Pahang, have come up with a mobile app to solve this problem.

James Lee Meng Guan, one of the founders of the Bantu app, said people who needed help with food, groceries and other household supplies could list out the items and note down their address in the app.



"We will screen the applicants to make sure their requests are genuine and then deliver the items bought using donated funds.

"It helps local businesses too as they can sell off stock that's near expiry date," he said.

Donors can also choose to have the supplies delivered to several charity organisations collaborating with Bantu.

James, 42, said the idea to create the platform came to him and his partners after seeing the White Flag movement.

"There are a lot of people in need during this Covid-19 pandemic period.

"We were wondering about the efficiency of the White Flag movement and whether the people who called out for help ultimately

received assistance.

"With this app, we hope the goodwill and donations from donors can reach the intended recipients in a transparent manner.

"This is our effort to help the community," he said.

James said the response had been quite good since Bantu's launch on July 31, with some 100 people benefitting from the project

as of late August.

He said the app was not limited to the Kuantan area but available nationwide as well.

"We are pretty much covered in Kuantan, but there are also many requests coming in from across the country.

"For that, we will do our best to network with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or engage delivery services to have the items sent to the needy," he said.

James said they were looking at continuing Bantu as a long-term project into the post-pandemic period.

He added that more businesses and NGOs were welcome to join the platform to help distribute provisions to those in need.

The Bantu app is available on Google Play Store and Apple App Store.

Three of the four partners who created the Bantu platform. From left: Amos Lee Meng Wei, Low Chong Kei and James. Not pictured is Kelvin Lee Boon Leong.





Volunteers from Masjid Qaryah Ibnu Khaldun Lavender Heights helping to distribute rations to the less fortunate.



St Mark's Church Seremban's care and concern ministry team as well as other volunteers packing and distributing groceries to people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

# Being the answer to someone's prayer

Religious groups in Seremban go the extra mile to assist communities in need



By C.S. NATHAN  
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HELPING people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic has brought individuals and groups together over the past year-and-a-half.

Religious bodies, in particular, have been involved in providing assistance to the needy regardless of their faith.

In Seremban, Negri Sembilan, Masjid Qaryah Ibnu Khaldun Lavender Heights (MQIKLH) secretary Zulkifli Abdul Aziz remembers when a young man walked into the mosque compound seeking help in March last year.

The man had lost his job and worried about feeding his family. A few days later, another family came by with a similar story.

These incidents happened right after the first movement control order was implemented, prompting the mosque's committee to set up a food bank.

Committee members then spread the word on social media, urging those who had fallen on hard times to contact the mosque for assistance.

The committee also delivered food hampers to those in need but were unable to get to the mosque. Zulkifli said MQIKLH helped anyone who asked for aid, regardless of race or religion.

"To date, MQIKLH has contributed over RM200,000 in groceries and cash to 160 families in Seremban.

"The funds come from residents, congregation members and corporate sponsors who banded together for a good cause," he said, adding that even out-of-state requests were fulfilled.

While the mosque has a list of recipients who receive fortnightly supplies of essential items such as rice, sugar, flour, soy sauce, canned sardines and eggs, Zulkifli



Members of the public queuing to get food at the Sri Maha Mariamman Temple in Bukit Tembok, Seremban.

said cash aid, too, was given to help families settle bills or buy diapers for babies.

During last year's lockdown, *sevadars* (volunteers) at the Gurdwara Sahib Seremban who were accustomed to preparing *langgar* (vegetarian meals) for up to 500 people per sitting, turned their attention to cooking for frontliners.

Every morning for two months, *sevadars* chopped onions and potatoes, stirred vats of dhal and rolled *chapati* by the dozens to prepare lunchboxes for 30 employees of the state Health Department.

Gurdwara Khalsa Welfare Fund head C. Jagdev Singh said its management committee rolled out several community initiatives after the MCO was enforced in March 2020.

These initiatives, which are still ongoing, include supplying food baskets and cash to those in need.

"We have been giving dry rations to those who lost their jobs or are without means of supporting their families, as well as foreign workers.

"It was for all races... no one was ever turned away," said Jagdev.

The committee also coordinated with *gurdwara* in other districts in Negri Sembilan to identify people in need of aid.

Those who required groceries could go to a *gurdwara* nearby for the necessities.

"No questions were asked, no photographs were taken," Jagdev said, adding that more than RM50,000 was spent on providing aid including free meals, food baskets and cash assistance.

Devotees from Sri Maha Mariamman Temple in Bukit Tembok, too, are doing their part in supporting the local community.

A few devotees had approached the committee requesting for a food bank to be set up when white flags were noticed in homes near the temple.

The shelves were emptied within a few hours on the first day the food rack was put up.

The committee then set up a registry to ensure that food aid was fairly distributed to those hardest hit.

Temple president Datuk Dr Thavananison Arumugam expressed his gratitude to devotees and the committee for their effort in making the month-long project a success.

From July 4 to Aug 5, 845 grocery bags with rice, onions, potatoes, eggs, canned sardines and coffee were given away daily.

An average of 25 families, from all faiths and backgrounds, collected groceries at the temple.

Dr Thavananison said he was



(Above) Volunteers at Gurdwara Sahib Seremban cooking for the local community.

thankful for donations from well-wishers, which helped supplement the temple's charity fund.

"Without the donations, we would not have had sufficient funds to provide aid.

"Malaysians have big hearts and I'm very grateful to all the donors who contributed in cash and kind," he said.

Last year, the temple also provided *ananthanam* (free meals) of packed vegetarian food for 70 days during the first MCO.

Dr Thavananison said that another project for Deepavali was in the works – to provide bakti and cooking ingredients to brighten up the Festival of Lights for the needy.

Mobilising devotees into action proved much easier for religious organisations with outreach programmes in place pre-pandemic.

Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) Seremban's Caring Programme for the less fortunate was extended to include the distribution of aid to frontliners, charitable bodies and the public.

Its chairman Datin Yong Chou Lian said the organisation, which goes by its "We Care, We Do" motto, increased efforts to channel aid to those badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

BLIA sourced for and supplied face masks, sanitisers and personal protective equipment (PPE) to at-risk folk including frontliners.

To relieve the burden of low-income households, BLIA members distributed food baskets to the needy and provided cash relief for primary and secondary school students.

Yong said lending a helping hand to everyone, regardless of race and religion, was a Buddhist's duty.

"The teachings of the Buddha advocates compassion for all and this is what we try to practise."

In July and August, BLIA Seremban distributed food baskets at a petrol station and fast food outlet in Bandar Sri Sendayan near Seremban.

The 1,000 food baskets cost RM50,000, which was raised from the organisation's members, their relatives and friends.

Seremban's St Mark's Church also has a division dedicated to giving assistance to those in need of aid.

Its care and concern ministry chairman Sam Chandran said help in cash and kind was extended to the less fortunate even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

"Since the pandemic struck, the church has received even more requests for aid, mainly from people who lost their jobs and are struggling to put food on the table.

"This prompted us to organise a mobile food bank to provide groceries and daily necessities to anyone in need," he said.

Pre-loved items such as furniture and electrical appliances were also collected and distributed to people who required them.

Sam and his team do house-to-house deliveries to distribute food and pre-loved items.

Since March last year, some 500 families have received food aid and pre-loved items such as wheelchairs, TV sets, stoves, sofas and water heaters from the church.





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