## 

photo essay SNAPSHOTS OF PENANG WEEK 1977 IN ADELAIDE FEATURE THE SEAS ARE WARMING TOO AND THAT SHOULD MAKE US VERY AFRAID

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FEATURE THE LIMITED LOCAL BENEFITS OF SWIFTONOMICS





## SAVE ULU MUDA

Ulu Muda is the most important water catchment area in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER). Perlis, Kedah and Penang are dependent on raw water (rain water) collected in its 163,000 hectares of rainforests.

Kindly support our call to stop logging in Ulu Muda.

In fact, an "Ulu Muda Basin Authority" (UMBA) should be established to protect and conserve Ulu Muda...for the well-being of 4.2 million Malaysians living in 3 NCER states and the NCER economy.



More info: www.pba.com.my

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Weathering Climate Change-

EDITORIAL

FEATURE

#### NEXT MONTH ON PENANG MONTHLY



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THE	
LIMITED	
LOCAL	
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#### **MUSICAL**



Written and directed by Penang resident, Nancy Jenster, and choreographed by awardwinning Penang dance genius, Aida Redza, **Forkbeard: A Viking Musical Odyssey** tells the story of two rival Viking chiefs, their ambitious wives and the fight for Scandinavian dominance in 1000AD. The musical drama is sponsored by collaborative partner, HITS Recording Studios, and with the kind support of the Penang Arts Council.

DATE	20 April at 3pm and 8pm,
& TIME	21 April at 4pm
VENUE	Wawasan Open University, 5th Floor Auditorium
TICKET	RM65, RM45 for children aged 6 to
PRICES	12, Group Rate: 5 tickets for RM300
WEBSITE	ticket2u.com.my/event/34548/ forkbeard-viking-musical- odyssey

#### LEARNING

Organised by Penang Math Platform, **MathBoost** is a fun and engaging app-based learning experience focusing on arithmetic operations and numeracy skills for children aged 5 to 8. The class' clear and structured curriculum is aligned with national standards and ensures steady progress and mastery of key concepts. Classes are led by experienced instructors who provide personalised support and encouragement. The free one month trial class starts on 3 April.

DAY & TIME	Every Wednesday, 5pm–6pm
VENUE	Penang Math Platform 1, Jalan Kaki Bukit, Kampung Kastam, 11700 Gelugor, Pulau Pinang
FEE	RM50 per month
WEBSITE	fb.com/penangmathplatform
CONTACT NO.	+6012-488 9393 (Cheng)

#### DANCE

If you're a dance aficionado, be sure to catch **The Souvenir Effect**, a contemporary dance performance by Shu-May Dance Company. Created and performed by choreographic duo, Ashlynn Edward and Nathalynn Edward Lim, the company's debut production presents a sombre duet to bring attention to grief, an often overlooked and misunderstood process.

TIME	8:30pm
WEBSITE	cloudjoi.com/shows/the- souvenir-effect



Charis Hospice, a charitable NGO offering free palliative home care services for patients with advanced life-threatening illnesses in Penang Island, is organising **Happy Feet Charity Fun Run.** Covering 5km, it aims to build awareness of palliative care, foster a spirit of caring and serving, and raise funds for its organisation. Closing date for registration is 12 April.

FEE	RM60 (unless sponsored by company)
CONTACT NO.	+6011-1246 6757
EMAIL	charishospicepr@gmail.com
WEBSITE	charishospice.com/charity- run-2024



Lace up your walking shoes and let's walk towards a world free of cancer! The National Cancer Society of Malaysia in Penang is inviting everyone to join the **Walk for Cancer 2024: Hope in Every Step.** It is an opportunity for us to come together, show our support and raise funds for cancer support services.

**WEBSITE** fb.com/ncsmpenangbranch

#### FUN

Come and have a great time while making a difference at the **Food & Fun Fair** organised by Penang Animal Sanctuary Society. With a variety of mouthwatering food options and thrilling games, there is something for everyone. Your attendance will support the organisation's mission to provide a safe haven for animals in need.

DATE	20 April
TIME	10am–2pm
VENUE	Methodist Boys' School, Penang
CONTACT NO.	+6013-416 8324 (Nornee) or +6010-974 1581 (Mr. Oh)
WEBSITE	fb.com/pass.org.my

#### COMEDY

Get ready to laugh till your belly hurts because renowned comedian, Douglas Lim, is coming to town with **DOUGLAS LIM—BACK TO WORK**, his first big comedy special since 2019!

DATE	26 April
TIME	8pm
VENUE	Dewan Sri Pinang
TICKET	From RM88
WEBSITE	cloudjoi.com/shows/penang- douglas-lim-back-to-work



#### EXHIBITION

The Northern International Audio & Visual Show returns for its second edition, promising an unforgettable weekend of highend audio-visual experiences. Supported by the Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) with the event tagline "Visual Voyage, Sonic Story," it will showcase the latest innovations and cutting-edge technologies in the audio-visual industry. Visitors can also expect live performances at the exhibition.

WEBSITE northern-av.com



THE PENANG MONTHLY ENDEAVORS TO BE THE VOICE OF PENANG AND AN INSPIRING READ FOR THE CURIOUS MALAYSIAN. A PUBLICATION OF PENANG INSTITUTE, IT AIMS TO:

- Supply Penangites with information about significant issues in order to promote public participation;
- Encourage discussion about various aspects of Penang's fate and fortune;
- Profile Penang personalities who have contributed, sometimes in very unassuming but critical ways, to the reputation and wellbeing of the state;
- Put the spotlight on ordinary Penangites who otherwise go unnoticed, but who nevertheless define the culture of the state in essential ways;
- Highlight the importance of Penang as a generator of culture, education, industry and cosmopolitan values;
- Emphasise present trends in the arts, industry, politics and economics which affect the immediate future of the state and country; and
- Offer reliable socioeconomic data for the benefit of decision makers in government and the private sector.

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By Azmi Hussin

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### WEATHERING CLIMATE CHANGE— A BATTLE FATAL TO LOSE BY OOI KEE BENG



#### I REMEMBER STRUGGLING with the terms

"weather" and "climate" in primary school. And as with most related words, it was about knowing when to use one and not the other, not so much about understanding each of them properly or deeply.

I did say this was during primary school days.

Proper usage comes before proper understanding. Just like with my newest handphone, just like with AI programmes. In fact, just like with my old (vintage) car.

Now, half a century after trying to learn when to say "weather" and when to say "climate", I find that the two have become more intertwined in meaning than ever.

You get what I mean? If the climate in the place where you live is highly unpredictable, and prone to drastic changes, then how is it different from the weather in the place where you live? I exaggerate the overlapping, admittedly, but less and less so as time goes by.

Merriam-Webster tells me that weather is "the state of the atmosphere with respect to heat or cold, wetness or dryness, calm or storm, clearness or cloudiness". It also informs me that climate is "the average course or condition of the weather at a place usually over a period of years as exhibited by temperature, wind velocity and precipitation".

The climate of a place is decided backwards, of course. It is averages measured and calculated "over a period of years", which then give us a sense of what to expect in terms of temperature and precipitation, et cetera. But if the weather—I am sorry, the climate—changes radically and in often unpredictable ways, then can we still say the same thing in passing to our neighbour the way we used to: "Lovely weather today"? Or should we just as easily say "Lovely climate today"?

Your caring physician could once confidently tell you to move to some place with a climate probably more suited to your health. I am sure he is not feeling as confident about giving you that kind of apple-a-day advice today. You may be better off moving to some place with a weather that is comfortable to you for that day or that week.

Weather forecasters must be having a lot of fun nowadays. Their work cannot be as boring as before. Sadly, they can no longer become celebrities by merely promising good weather to their listeners. What they can offer instead is a promise of adventure and of uncertainty. Capriciousness is the essence of adventure, after all.

But to be fair to the notion of "climate", perhaps we should also remind ourselves how often in days gone by—like a decade ago or so—we had trouble predicting the weather as well. Did we use to exaggerate the predictability of the weather, or of the climate even?

Perhaps. Definitely to some extent. The weather is prone to change, and it was always a difficult thing to measure. But climates are based on long-term averages, and when these change radically or become unpredictable, given the limits to human resilience in the face of environmental changes, it is only rational that each and every one of us take proper note.

Ostriches with their heads in the sand just adds to the seriousness of the crisis.

As with all processes in a globally connected world, we need to collectively manage the challenges coming from climate change in a multi-dimensioned and multi-levelled fashion. If not, we will come to believe that there is nothing we can do: "We may have upset the environment but we cannot repair it."

That would be the height of cynicism and passivity, not to mention self-servitude.

Whose fault it all is no longer really matters. What will make a difference is consciousness and mindfulness over the worsening crisis. As thinking individuals, as consumers and producers, as parents or as future parents, and as policymakers and influencers, we will have to assume a desperate and proactive stance towards environmental challenges... and hope that the collective effect will be enough to make a critical difference.

As an individual, we have to adopt sustainable habits, practise rational consumption and reassess our values. As collectives, we have to demand mindfulness of others and of policymakers. As humans, we have to rein in our impulses and allow for other species to survive.

It is already very late in the day; if that weren't so, we wouldn't be talking about sustainability all the time.

In the end, it is not about the survival of Earth, but about the long-term survival of us humans—this insatiable and selfish ape with an enormous brain now clearly proven to be wrongly wired. Can this hairless ape weather Climate Change? The answer cannot be a simple "Yes." Not even close. At most, it's a "More or less."

### FISHING FOR A LIVING: THE CASE OF PULAU AMAN BY PHOTOS BY

IAN BROWNE



IAN BROWNE is an Australian writer who has travelled throughout SE Asia researching the impacts of development on social groups and ecosystems. His book, What the Monsoon Knows, is soon to be released in London.



Australian photographer, JAY PENFOLD, enjoys penning stories related to "paddock to plate" sustainable use of foods.

Both writers love the people, culture, cuisine and natural world of Malaysia. **AFTER A TEN-MINUTE** ferry ride from Batu Musang Jetty in Seberang Perai, we arrive to the "Island of Peace". Suggested as a fisherman's paradise, we quickly discover that "paradise" and "fishing" rarely go hand in hand nowadays.

Pulau Aman sits five degrees north of the equator. Out at sea as you pass by on the ferry, fish farms float with sentinel working cottages, signaling the endeavour of locals to continue eking out an existence around the island. The shoreline of the island is marked by long, dawdling wooden jetties leading to seafood cafes. A primary school straddles the side of the hill above the ferry landing, while little hammocks strung under breadfruit trees signal downtime in the tranquil location. However, environmental neglect in the seas is raising a lot of problems for the island natives.

Hollering out from a small home nestled between verdant jungle and ocean, a local man demands that we make our way no further along the foreshore. Obviously, this man has something to say about the current situation of the fishing industry here: "Pulau Aman hasn't functioned as a shrimp harvesting place since the 90s!" announces the one-time fisherman, Saiful.

*Belacan* is a necessity in many Southeast Asian recipes, and the star attraction in the punchy

condiment—the shrimp—is not faring so well. In fact, it is disappearing from the tropical waters of Malaysia. Though shrimp paste is still produced on the island, the shrimp—an Acetes species known locally as *udang geragau*—is harvested and delivered from elsewhere. The industry has been waning.

**JAY PENFOLD** 

Pointing towards the mainland from the eastern shore of Pulau Aman, this slightly built, middle-aged man scorns, "This new development is causing pollution to run out to the islands. This is no good for coral, no good for crabs. There is no retention of sediment leaving the sites. This is destroying nature for the fish."

Along the coast at Bandar Cassia and Batu Kawan, development is on the go, with 50,000 housing units being built to cater for a forecasted increase in population. Greater ease of connectivity between Penang Island and the mainland via the Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah Bridge (Penang's second bridge) and the Penang Bridge has provided an incentive for development there.

"Fishermen need to travel further now. They like to catch flower crabs. Unfortunately, when the bridges arrived at Penang, the shipping lanes changed. The ships don't pass here now; they instead have to circle Penang. Once, it was clearer because the crabs and









1. A makeshift wooden jetty.

2. A cat waiting for the fishermen to come back with their haul.

3. A large, intimidating turkey harasses the writer as he interviews Noraini. the prawns follow the shipping lanes. They follow the pathway of the ships. There is a trail of shells in the mud there.

"Now, fishermen have to travel further out to find the laneways and they only have access to 15 horsepower engines. Fuel is becoming more expensive, and it is dangerous now when travelling the greater distances. Waves can be disastrous for those in small boats. The whole thing is far from sustainable."

Saiful, like many on the island of more than 250 fisherfolk, decided to go further afield in search of an income. He now skippers a boat, ferrying workers to the mining platforms offshore from Singapore. His command of English is excellent, an advantage when working internationally. Many on the island are shy, rarely straying from their native Malay tongue. But Saiful is not one to remain silent on the negative impacts negating the livelihood of his fellow islanders.

"The fishermen have been compensated for their loss of income from the new developments—but only marginally. This includes making available to fisher families cheaper annual fishing visas. Some of the fishermen actually sell their annual fishing visas to others for a decent sum, three times the original price, and thus need to fish less now." According to Saiful, the abundance of female crabs has hampered reproduction.

"The shells that litter the shipping pathway are also much smaller than they used to be. The cockles are smaller now. Yabbies used to be plentiful. These are a good indicator for environmental change."

The Penang region now relies on importing seafood—and this, in a nation that is listed as having the second best food security in Asia after Singapore. Pulau Aman is among the three main aquaculture areas in the region.

Illegal fishing and pollution from intensive farming on land, and landfill sites, are further restricting the industry. Considering that Penang's live capture fishing makes up 77% of the local seafood industry, with aquaculture at 22%, this is a real concern.

At the very heart of this environmental change is inadequate protection of fisheries. Poor mapping of resource sites is a reality.

There lies a dire lack of trust among the fisherfolk. "Education is so important! The children need to know what is taking place here. The impacts of global warming and plastic items on our seas need to be expressed. Dolphins still pass by the island—this is a good sign. But don't take that for granted!"



FEATURE



Climate change impacts on fisheries in the region include rising sea levels, warmer ocean temperatures which facilitate disease outbreaks in marine fauna, and increased cyclonic activity. Marine nutrient and salinity qualities too are affected.

I also met with a mother of a fisher family. Speaking in Malay to our translator, the camera shymother of a fisher family, Noraini, is more than happy to discuss her family's life on the island. A gentle lady in her early 40s, she is the mother of nine young adults.

"We catch catfish, crab, stingray—big ones! Some of the stingrays can be 30kg in weight. The big boss arrives from Batu Kawan and buys directly from the homes here. He then sells the product at the market on the mainland."

The islanders also rely on live hauls of mantis shrimp, along with *gelama* (croaker) king mackerel, *kurau* (threadfin) and golden pomfret. Salted fish is another way to bring in an income.

"I have three sons and six daughters; they work in factories in Batu Kawan.

"One of my sons is 24 and when he arrives home at 7pm he goes out by boat to fish. Right now is a good time for fishing, as it has been raining, and the wind





is up, which means more fish. Between October to December, less fish is found, so we rest then.

"In the time of my grandfather, everyone fished 'fulltime'. The fishermen head out on the seas at 4am. They usually make their way over to the bridge. No specified fish species are targeted; we take what they can. The problem is that the average hauls are now less and yet the costs associated with fishing are increasing."

Pulau Aman was once a haven for pirates. On top of the island's hill lies the final resting place of the region's chief of pirates, Panglima Garang. I wonder what he would make of the environmental challenges the islanders are currently enduring.

There are many environmental impacts occurring that could be better managed. Land reclamation projects tend to swallow up shallow seabeds used by prawns, crabs and fish species. Mud and sand are dredged from the seabed and dumped in reclamation projects, smothering fishing grounds and seagrass meadows. This, of course, impacts the food web. Clearing of mangrove forests and land-based forests also increases silt discharge into the ocean, which then slows water currents and disrupts intertidal mudflats. Meanwhile, lack of protective legislation over the aquaculture industry has negatively affected natural and social systems.



In 2016, Malaysian prawn exports were banned by the US due to the presence of nitrofuran and chloramphenicol. Though forbidden in Malaysia, the use of many such chemicals is a reality on prawn farms. These seep into groundwater and disrupt the hydrological prosperity of wetland systems. The accumulation of harmful waste and the lack of fresh water mean that ponds become redundant.

Pulau Aman is no longer the shrimp haven it once was. But though the villagers are faced with hardship, they have adapted admirably, some diversifying to local industries, while others, sadly, have moved from the island in search of other jobs.



4. One-time fisherman, Saiful.

5. A fisherman casting his net.

6. Saiful and his fellow residents at Pulau Aman.



CLIMATE CHANGE IS IN PENANG'S OWN HANDS

"SHE IS HOT" exclaimed a male student, gaining immediate attention in my scientific lab. They clamoured to his monitor only to be disappointed to see that their colleague was only gawking at the heat map of Penang heralding extreme temperatures. The signal they should have picked up is that extreme temperatures will come to be our new normal.

Heatwaves are technically prolonged periods of excessively high temperatures, significantly above the normal averages for a region and often accompanied by high humidity, especially in tropical areas like Penang. These extreme weather events can last from several days to several weeks, posing serious health risks such as dehydration, heatstroke and the exacerbation of chronic health conditions. Beyond immediate health impacts, heatwaves strain the infrastructure, reduce air quality, impact water supplies and disrupt daily life and the economy. As climate change accelerates, heatwaves will become more frequent, intense and longer-lasting. Communities will simply have to adapt and mitigate these effects.

During these periods, the very fabric of daily life gets altered. Mornings, once the best time for a brisk BY ZULFIGAR YASIN AND HAJAR ARIFF walk or jog along the beach, become a race against the rising mercury. By midday, the heat becomes unbearable, smothering the city. Streets, usually bustling with activity, take on a deserted look as people seek refuge indoors. Everywhere, air conditioning offers a respite from the relentless heat.

The nights offer little relief. The promise of cooler air after sunset remains unfulfilled, with the heat lingering, thick and stubborn, refusing to dissipate. Sleep becomes elusive, as even the slight breeze from a fan does little more than push the hot air around. The constant hum of air conditioners from neighbouring buildings serves as a stark reminder of the battle we all wage against the heat.

The physical toll of these heatwaves is palpable. Even simple tasks become Herculean efforts. The body struggles to cope, with sweat beads forming at the slightest exertion and yet, offering little relief. There is a constant thirst, reminding us that dehydration is a real danger, not just a discomfort. Heat-related illnesses loom large, especially for those among us who are vulnerable—the elderly, the young and those with pre-existing health conditions.

But it is not just a physical challenge; it is a mental and emotional one as well. The heat can feel claustrophobic; we are trapped in our homes, our routines disrupted and our social interactions limited. The vibrant community life that defines our city, from outdoor markets to festivals, is put on hold. There is a collective sense of waiting, of holding our breath for the heatwave to pass so we can return to our lives.

The infrastructure struggles too. The demand for electricity surges, a testament to everyone's reliance on air conditioning. Water shortages remind us of the preciousness of this resource, particularly when dehydration threatens. Roads and buildings, especially weathered heritage constructions that were not built to withstand such extremes, show signs of wear, adding to the sense of a city under siege.

As these heatwaves become more frequent and intense, there is now a growing realisation that this may be our new normal. The challenges we face are a preview of the future, prompting us towards adaptation and resilience. It is a stark reminder of our vulnerability to nature's whims and a call to action to mitigate the impacts. Living through these heatwaves is a personal experience of climate change, one that leaves an increasingly indelible mark on our lives and our city.

#### HIGH HUMIDITY MAKES IT WORSE

Coastal cities like Penang tend to experience high relative humidity in tandem with the heatwave. Relative humidity (RH) is a measure of how much moisture the air is actually holding compared to how much it can potentially hold at a given temperature. The concept is crucial because the capacity of air to hold water vapour increases with temperature. Expressed as a percentage, RH is a way to describe the saturation level of the air with water vapour. The average RH for Penang is 73%—lowest in February (69%) and highest in October (73%). The value tends to be high for coastal cities in the tropics. It feels warmer when the relative humidity is elevated. High RH at high temperatures makes it feel hotter than it actually is because our sweat evaporates less efficiently, hindering the body's ability to cool itself. Understanding this may improve our resilience and raise livability in coastal areas.



PROF. DATO' DR. ZULFIGAR YASIN is a marine environmental scientist who is an Honourable Professor at Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Head of the Heritage and Urban Studies Programme at Penang Institute. His work now focuses on the sustainable development of the marine environment.



HAJAR ARIFF graduated from Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) with a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Industrial Statistics. She is an introvert who lends her time to activism whenever the need calls.

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER STRAIN**

Much of the urban landscape of Penang also experiences the heat island effect—a phenomenon where places with higher built-up areas and human activities become significantly warmer than their rural surroundings. This effect can amplify the impact of heatwayes, making cities even hotter and less bearable.

A study by Think City pointed to the heat island effect and increasing temperatures in Penang between 1988 to 2020, indicating high temperatures in George Town with particular peaks in ground temperatures at KOMTAR, Jelutong and Batu Lanchang. Cooler areas are found in Balik Pulau and Seberang Prai.

Dark surfaces such as roads and tarmacs, exposed high-rise concrete buildings encased in glass, and the lack of greenery increase temperatures, especially in urban settings. In megacities of the world, temperatures can rise between  $0.1^{\circ}C-3^{\circ}C$  higher than the surrounding rural landscape. In KL, this urban heat island effect has been seen to raise its temperature by  $4^{\circ}C-6^{\circ}C$ .

#### AIR CONDITIONING A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

While we may look to air conditioning as a panacea for tolerating heatwaves, its actual application may raise more complex issues and—as the temperature rises—be more limiting. We depend now on air conditioning as the necessary adaptation to rising temperatures. Indeed, it lowers indoor temperature and even reduces humidity, and keeps homes and workplaces cool. But there is a dark side to air conditioning.

Air conditioners consume a significant amount of energy, contributing to higher greenhouse gas emissions. In areas including Malaysia where electricity is primarily generated from fossil fuels, the environmental impact can make widespread air conditioning use more problematic. The paradox of air conditioning is that while it provides relief from the heat, it also contributes to global warming through high energy consumption and the potential release of refrigerants that are powerful greenhouse gases, altogether exacerbating the heat problem.

With the rising cost of electricity and higher needs during peak demand times, steep additional charges will apply. Even now, running air conditioning can become prohibitively expensive, especially at lower temperature settings or when used continuously.

Most residential and commercial air conditioning systems are designed to maintain a comfortable indoor environment under specific temperature ranges. During extreme heatwaves, where outdoor temperatures exceed these design parameters, air conditioners may struggle to cool spaces effectively.

In extreme temperatures, the electricity demand can outpace supply, leading to brownouts or blackouts. During such times, reliance on air conditioning





becomes not just prohibitive but impossible, highlighting the need for alternative cooling strategies to be put in place for Penang.

In any case, not everyone has access to air conditioning, which raises concerns about equity and vulnerability during heatwaves as well.

#### THE SELECTIVE IMPACT OF HEATWAVES

Heatwaves affect the population differently. This inequality in impact will affect labour and human productivity in various ways. Wealthier individuals often have better access to air conditioning and can afford to run it longer, while economically disadvantaged people might not have this luxury at all, raising their vulnerability. Traditional adaptations to heat, such as naturally ventilated housing with large windows and raised roofs have long been abandoned in favour of cheaper building alternatives in cities where accommodation is more congested, leading to maladaptation to temperature rise.

Those living in poorer housing, often without adequate insulation or ventilation, suffer more during a heatwave. Poorer urban neighbourhoods may be crowded and tend to have fewer trees and green spaces.

Many who work in agriculture, construction and other outdoor jobs are continuously exposed directly to the sun, raising the risk of heat-related threats. Their productivity can drop due to their need for more frequent breaks and the overall slower pace of work in extreme temperatures. Farmers and fishermen, for instance, cannot work at optimum capacity in the extreme heat. Such a negative shock on these sectors will impact our food security.

The elderly may have a reduced ability to regulate body temperature and may not recognise the signs of heat stress, while schoolchildren may be more active and not as conscious of hydration needs, making these groups particularly susceptible during heatwaves. In addition, we may ask—how many of our schools can afford air conditioning units to confront the heatwave? Individuals with heart problems, obesity or respiratory issues are also at a higher risk, as their conditions can be exacerbated by the heat, leading to a greater need for medical care.

In Malaysia, the stark reality of climate change and rising temperatures stands to deepen poverty, particularly among those whose livelihoods are intricately tied to climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, fishing and the informal urban economy. The vagaries of weather patterns exert a disproportionate strain on these individuals as unpredictable rainfall and intensifying heat threaten crop yields and disrupt natural ecosystems. The risk of wildfires is heightened during periods of intense heat.

The urban poor, often engaged in casual labour that lacks the security of formal employment, find themselves on uncertain ground. As temperatures rise and extreme weather events become more common, their already precarious position becomes even more tenuous, pushing those hovering just above the poverty threshold into deeper hardship. The implications are clear: without intervention and adaptation strategies, climate change will alter the socioeconomic landscape of Malaysia, with the burden falling heaviest on those least able to bear it.

#### WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

The Climate Risk Country Report for Malaysia done by the World Bank Group states that "the current median probability of a heatwave (defined as a period of three or more days where the daily temperature is above the long-term 95th percentile) now is very low, around 2%, but under the modelled prediction for the future this number increases dramatically to 93% by 2090". This means that we are on track towards a very warm future indeed. Let us not find comfort in the figures being for the "far future"; we have already managed to break the heat record recently, with Chuping in Perlis leading the way.

In Penang, the hottest months are usually in April, May and June. Acknowledging this trend and knowing how we should prepare for the future is central to how we are to survive the rising heat. There are several approaches and many of these are still within our capabilities to implement. Let us consider the following in preparation for the oncoming temperature rise.

#### HEAT RESILIENT URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

As cliché as it may seem, green infrastructure is probably the cheapest alternative for heat resilience. Planting trees and creating green spaces can provide shade and cooling through evapotranspiration. Car parks, rooftops and roads can be placed under green shades of vegetation through tree plantings. We may improve city life by having traffic-free and pedestrian-friendly walkways connecting our major urban conduits and homes. Surely the George Town World Heritage Site can be elevated with verdant greenery and shade.

Building with materials and designs that naturally reduce heat absorption and improve energy efficiency will be critical. Using reflective surfaces on buildings and roofs to reflect sunlight and absorb less heat will reduce indoor temperatures and energy bills. George Town's urban layout can certainly be improved to enhance airflow and help reduce the urban heat island effect.

In parts of the world, cheap solutions are already employed to reduce heat in living spaces. In India, there are experimentations with reflective paints applied to traditional corrugated roofs to cool homes. We can learn from these novel approaches.

In other locations, adaptive landscaping has helped in heat reduction as well as in providing secondary advantages to the heat problem. This includes the application of rooftop gardens and vertical farming



to cool buildings with the added advantage of providing food to the tenants.

The Penang state government's plan to plant 500,000 trees across the state by 2030 is a good start, as are the planting of mangrove tress along the coastline.

#### ENERGY AND WATER EFFICIENCY

Developing renewable energy and raising efficiency in water use are also key. Interest in investing in smart grid technology and renewable energy sources has grown. In the case of solar energy, while deployment costs remain relatively high, they have gone down significantly compared to the last decade. Capitalising on this, large-scale utilisation has started at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, for example, where rooftop solar panels are applied to almost all its buildings including the car parks. This is to encourage the transition to green energy.

As temperature rises, water supply will be an issue. While the price of water in Penang is among the cheapest in the country, this cannot last as freshwater becomes scarcer. Penang has already increased her water tariffs in anticipation of high water demands and its forecasted limited supply. Freshwater will be an expensive commodity in the future and new alternatives in water conservation need to be practised. The use of grey water is one significant source of alternative supply. Wastewater can be treated and recirculated for diverse uses in the city and industries. Moreover, in many housing areas now, rainwater collection from rooftops to support the main supply and reduce water demand from the grid has proven effective and should continue to be encouraged.

Our earlier preparation in the protection of catchment areas as natural water storage spaces has been shown to pay dividends, especially during times of droughts that coincide with the heatwaves. They not only reduce risks of flooding during the rainy season but also improve water security during periods of high temperature and droughts.

#### **"A CHANGE IS GONNA COME"**

There is a need to establish a system that alerts the public to impending heatwaves. Such a system can be supported with community outreach to promote heatwave readiness and adaptation. It has also become abundantly clear that we will need to adjust our lifestyles to a hot future.

As heatwaves become more frequent, Penang will have to adapt to survive. It is going to get hotter and more humid. As I write this, a tune echoes in my head. I hear the crooning blues singer, Sam Cooke, putting it succinctly: "It's a long time coming. But I know a change is gonna come... oh yes it will."

Perhaps in acknowledging this, we can then plan and prepare ourselves, ready our homes and educate our children about their future.

## THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RISING TEMPERATURES EXPECTED TO BE STRONG

PENANG STATE 1993

**PENANG STATE 2023** 

Data acquired: 8th March 2023

(USGS - Landsat 8)

Penang LST

34.7 °C

14.0 °C

Data acquired: 31st March 1993

(USGS - Landsat 5)

Penang LST

14.0 °C

#### BY SOFIA CASTELO AND MATT BENSON

CLIMATE CHANGE IS a global phenomenon whose impact on different regions varies in intensity. The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change has identified sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia as regions that will be most affected. Therefore, Malaysia is a hotspot where global warming effects will be clearly apparent, be it changes in rainfall patterns, increased temperatures and/ or a rise in extreme weather events such as heatwaves.

In Malaysia, a heatwave is declared when temperatures exceed 37°C for three consecutive days. The World Health Organisation (WHO) predicts that by 2050, Malaysia could experience 200 days of heatwaves per year (based on a scenario of a 3°C increase by 2100), compared with 20 days in the 1980s. Urban areas will bear the brunt of this rise in temperature due to the urban heat island effect. The built-up area trapping heat can increase urban temperatures by up to 8°C compared to the surrounding natural or rural areas. A recent study published by Malaysian scientists in the journal Scientific Reports indicates that the area affected by heatwaves in Peninsular Malaysia has been increasing at a rate of 8.98 km<sup>2</sup>/decade, with durations extending by 1.54 days/decade since 1950.

FEATURE

1. Side-by-side comparison of 1993 and 2023 Land Surface Temperature (LST).

2. LST changes between 1993 and 2023 in one image produced based on (1).

FOOTNOTE [1] https://www.buletinmutiara.com/penang-toplant-over-a-million-trees-onapril-22/



- 1) energy
  - 2) cost of living
  - 3) work productivity
  - 4) public health
  - 5) tourism
  - 6) loss of tax revenue
  - Modern buildings are designed to

require dominant energy consumption, including lighting, air conditioning and water heating. Increased demand for electricity will therefore lead to higher energy costs for households and businesses. Energy providers may need to invest in additional capacity loads. Additionally, extreme weather events can accelerate infrastructure damage, especially on façades and roofs. This also reduces the efficiency of large-scale solar energy systems and disrupts agricultural production, leading to food shortages and higher living costs, particularly affecting low-income groups.

Heatwaves can cause outdoor workers and builders in construction sites to experience heat stress, which can lead to occupational illnesses and injuries. Those who are older, overweight or prone to hypertension or heart disease are particularly at risk. As a result, work productivity will be affected, with workers needing to take additional precautions or even pause their operations. A 2019 study in the *Ecological Economics Journal* found that when feeling hot, survey respondents in Malaysia were only able to work at half their capacity, with annual productivity losses from heat stress estimated to be RM1,324 per person.

LST Difference

4 9°C

The rise in temperature also affects public health, especially among vulnerable groups such as infants and older adults. Heatwaves can increase cases of heat-induced kidney disease and other heat-related illnesses, putting a burden on caregivers who may need to take time off work. While there are studies in Europe on the economic costs of heat stress, in Malaysia, accurate data are scarce due to the way heat stress or heat stroke is coded, normally as being respiratory or cardiac in nature.

Many tourists from temperate countries flock to the equator during the winter months, and that is when tourism thrives in Malaysia, especially in Penang. However, with the temperature hitting record highs, tourism will potentially be impacted. During heatwaves, the appeal of exploring outdoor areas is likely to diminish, with tourists either spending less time



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or money in sweltering outdoor areas or being pushed to choose cooler holiday destinations.

The social and economic costs of climate-induced temperature increases are real. Lower productivity rates, loss of business activity, fewer tourists and reduced tax revenue all contribute to a lower tax base for government revenue. Therefore, reducing carbon emissions and implementing adaptation measures to lower temperatures are crucial, particularly in urban areas.

Think City, together with the Penang Island City Council (MBPP), are currently implementing low-cost, nature-based interventions to address heat stress. These interventions include green façades and rooftops to cool buildings, tree-lined streets, green car parks to maximise shade, blue connectors for wind channelling and alternative building materials to reduce the urban heat island effect. In fact, Penang is ready to plant over a million trees across the state to commemorate Earth Day on 22 April this year.<sup>[1]</sup>

While it is important to be cognisant of the social and economic costs of climate-induced heat stress, we must double down on efforts to cool the city and reduce the impact of rising temperatures.







#### BY AILEEN TAN SHAU HWAI AND HANIS RAZALLI

**PENANG IS SURROUNDED** by a sea that protects us, provides food and—the island being small—moderates our climate. Now, imagine a world where our oceans are heating up, leading to a cascade of threats to marine life and coastal communities—sea levels rise, marine ecosystems crash and extreme weather events become more frequent.

This crisis goes beyond mere sunburns at the beach; it is about the survival of diverse marine ecosystems and maintaining the balances which nurture life. As global temperatures climb, the ocean currents that dictate our climate patterns change. Studies have shown that sea surface temperatures have risen by an average of 0.18°C per decade globally, with coastal waters experiencing a higher rate of increase compared to open oceans. <sup>[1]</sup> This accelerates coral bleaching and kills reefs—over 90% of the reefs in the Great Barrier Reef in Australia experienced unprecedented mass bleaching in 2016.<sup>[2]</sup> Malaysia has not been spared; many of the reefs in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea have been affected.

As our oceans warm, a ripple effect threatens the foundations of global fisheries and aquaculture—industries that millions rely on for livelihood and sustenance. Rising sea surface temperatures lead to longer, more severe marine



FEATURE



heatwaves, disrupting marine ecosystems and causing fish habitats to change or disappear.

Here, this means that the whole seafood industry is at risk. A trawl survey in 2016 conducted by the Department of Fisheries Malaysia revealed a significant decline in the country's demersal (bottom-living) fish populations, showing an 88% decrease in biomass and densities compared to original stock levels.<sup>[3]</sup> It highlights a concerning trend in catch volume—in 2016, a notably productive year, Malaysia's total marine fish catch was 1.57 million tonnes. By 2022, this figure had fallen to 1.31 million tonnes, marking a substantial reduction of approximately 16.5% from the previous catch levels.

No wonder fish is now expensive.

AND THAT Should Make US VERY AFRAID



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#### THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE WARMING SEAS

Most of the extra heat from our carbon emissions end up in the ocean, causing not just surface warming but affecting the depths, altering the balance of marine life and the global climate. This increasing heating trend, driven by our carbon footprint, poses a significant challenge to many species on Earth, including us.

Imagine the ocean as Earth's thermostat, finely tuned to regulate the climate by absorbing heat from the sun and distributing it across the globe. The ocean's surface, often referred to as Earth's "skin layer", absorbs about 90% of the solar radiation that reaches Earth. This not only warms the surface water but also, through processes like convection and oceanic currents, distributes heat to deeper ocean layers, illustrating the ocean's capacity to serve as a critical climate regulator. But the whole ocean system is connected and what affects other oceans has dire implications on the seas around Penang.

As global warming reduces the Arctic Sea's ice cover, we observe the "albedo effect" at play. With less ice to reflect sunlight, the darker ocean surface absorbs more solar energy, significantly accelerating ocean warming. This is not just about warmer waters; it is a fundamental shift affecting everything from the ocean's depths to the polar ice cap and tropical marine ecosystems. For example, the warming sea has disrupted the breeding patterns of polar species such as the masses of Antarctic krill—a key species in the marine food web. Migratory species such as whales and birds that are part of our tropical ecosystem are also affected.

Ocean currents, acting as nature's conveyor belts, play a pivotal role in climate regulation by redistributing heat globally. The Thermohaline Circulation moves warm water from the equator towards the poles and cold water from the poles back to the equator—a critical process in stabilising the global climate. This intricate dance of warming waters and shifting currents highlights the ocean's power in shaping our climate; a dance that is now out of step, as it were.

#### HEAT AND ITS IMPACT ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

Rising sea temperatures have significant impacts on crucial marine habitats such as coral reefs and seagrass beds. Coral reefs the rainforests of the sea—are particularly at risk of bleaching, which occurs when their life-giving algae partner is expelled from their tissues, causing them to bleach and making them vulnerable to disease and death. The algae also provide corals with essential nutrients in exchange for a home and protection. This coral-algae relationship is crucial for their survival. Similarly, the growth, reproductive patterns and metabolic functions of seagrass beds and mangroves, which are crucial nurseries for many marine species, are also affected by warming waters. Increased sedimentation from climate change-induced rising sea levels and increased flooding restricts sunlight penetration essential for seagrass survival, affecting the habitat and food source for a variety of marine life.



As the ocean warms, a silent migration occurs beneath the waves; fish and marine creatures begin seeking refuge in cooler waters. This shift towards higher latitudes or deeper depths has led to tropical species appearing in temperate zones, such as the sighting of lionfish, a tropical predator, in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>[4]</sup> Such refugees can drastically alter local marine biodiversity. Species once alien to certain areas are now becoming local, disrupting existing food webs and competing with native species for space and resources. This changes the composition and function of marine ecosystems and challenges fisheries, conservation strategies and the stability of marine habitats.

Furthermore, our oceans are not only warming but also becoming more acidic, which poses a threat to marine organisms worldwide. Oceans absorb approximately a quarter of the  $CO_2$  emitted into the atmosphere annually.  $CO_2$  levels rising leads to a decrease in the pH of water and, by nature, its chemistry. This gradual acidification affects calcium carbonate availability, something crucial for the skeletal structures of many marine organisms such as corals, molluscs and many planktons.

Beyond physical harm, ocean acidification disrupts the sensory systems of some fish, making it harder for them to detect predators or navigate to breeding grounds. Research has shown that increased  $CO_2$  levels interfere with neurotransmitter functions, which are critical for these sensory processes.<sup>[5]</sup>

Moreover, ocean acidification can alter phytoplankton communities' structure, which forms the base of the marine food web. These communities, small in size but huge in numbers, are primary producers, which means that their decline has cascading effects up the food chain.<sup>[6]</sup> The combined effects of ocean acidification and warming threatens to lead to habitat loss and shifts in entire marine ecosystems, affecting biodiversity and ecosystem functioning.

#### **EFFECTS ON COASTAL FISHERIES**

Studies reveal a concerning trend: as waters warm, fish catches become smaller, younger and less abundant.<sup>[7]</sup> This phenomenon is attributed to the increased metabolic demand in warmer waters, which limits energy available for growth and reproduction. This warming effect, coupled with fishing pressures, paint a grim picture for fish populations, threatening the collapse of fisheries and the communities that rely on them. Coastal cities like Penang are particularly vulnerable.

Fishermen around the globe are navigating the stormy seas of change, triggered by climate change, overfishing and environmental degradation. As fish populations shift in response to warming waters, fishermen are forced to venture further out, facing rising fuel costs and longer journeys that strain their daily life.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including implementing sustainable fishing quotas, protecting critical habitats and investing in aquaculture as an alternative source of fish protein.

For communities that have thrived on fishing for generations, these changes threaten their way of life. As the impacts of climate change deepen, the sustainability of fishing practices and the communities that depend on them hang in a precarious balance, making the need for adaptive strategies and sustainable management more urgent than ever.

The potential for job losses and economic turmoil is significant, particularly as fisheries management adapts to these environmental changes. Implementing catch limits to protect fish populations may initially reduce income for fishermen. However, these measures are crucial for long-term sustainability, with economic models suggesting that they could lead to more stable fisheries and, consequently, more reliable incomes in the future.



Encouragingly, some communities are pioneering adaptive strategies, such as diversifying income sources beyond fishing and adopting new technologies for sustainable harvests. These efforts showcase resilience and the potential for a harmonious balance that fishing communities can strike with the marine environment.

#### **AQUACULTURE CHALLENGES**

Then comes the threat of diseases. Warmer temperatures create optimal conditions for pathogens to thrive—bacteria multiply and spread more quickly in elevated temperatures. This effect is especially pronounced during warmer months when water temperatures consistently exceed the normal range.

The challenge does not stop there; intensified farming practices amplify these risks, turning aquaculture into a tightrope walk between productivity and the outbreak of diseases. Adopting sustainable practices can mitigate these risks, such as reducing the density of fish stocks, which minimises stress and aggression among fish, lowering their vulnerability to infections. Similarly, enhancing water flow in farming pens improves oxygenation and waste removal, creating a less hospitable environment for pathogens.

Aquatic farming, from clam growth to plankton productivity, is acutely responsive to minor shifts in water temperature. Small shifts in water temperature can significantly disrupt the timing of critical lifecycle events such as spawning, migration and growth. A slight increase in temperature can accelerate growth rates but also shorten the lifespan of species like clam. This reduces the productivity of shellfish such as the blood cockles (*ham*), the Venus clam (*lala*) and other shellfish, both in the wild and in aquaculture systems.<sup>[8]</sup>

Increased temperature also translates to lowered capacity for water to hold oxygen, exacerbating the challenges in aquaculture by altering nutrient dynamics and microbial communities. This, disrupting the balance of microbial communities and favouring the growth of harmful algae over beneficial species, hinders the growth and health of farmed organisms and those in the wild.

This imbalance results in algal blooms, such as a red tide, which produce toxins harmful to marine life. As they consume vast amounts of oxygen, exacerbating deoxygenation, "dead zones" come into being which are so devoid of oxygen that most marine life cannot survive. This is already happening in Penang, as witnessed in the recent event at Teluk Bahang, where a significant loss of aquatic life had drastically impacted local aquaculture operations.<sup>[9]</sup>

Research demonstrates that clams and seaweed, integral components of aquaculture, play pivotal roles in enhancing ecosystem services. Bivalves, like oysters and mussels, naturally filter out pollutants, improving water quality in our seas, while seaweed acts as a carbon sink, absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and mitigating the effects of climate change. Adopting polyculture practices, where different aquatic species are farmed together, offers mutual benefits such as nutrient cycling and disease control. For example, combining seaweed with shellfish farming can enhance overall productivity and environmental health by utilising seaweed's ability to absorb excess CO<sub>2</sub> and providing habitat for marine life.



Implementing low-impact farming techniques such as floating cages for shellfish that allow natural water flow and that reduce the need for feed, minimises the environmental footprint. These methods not only preserve water quality but also ensure the health and growth of farmed species without disrupting local ecosystems. The Japanese oyster industry, severely impacted by climate extremes, saw an alarming 90% mortality rate in 2020.<sup>[10]</sup> This devastating loss, attributed to unprecedented warming waters, underscores the vulnerability of aquaculture to climate variability and the urgent need for adaptive strategies. There is a critical need for strategic planning and site selection in aquaculture, emphasising environmental resilience and climate adaptability. Carefully choosing locations by evaluating factors such as water depth, temperature stability and protection against extreme weather is key to safeguarding the industry's future and adapting to the unpredictable impacts of climate change.

In the face of warming seas, aquaculture—through a combination of cutting-edge science, innovative and resilient strategies, and mindful stewardship—is an answer offering sustainability and adaptability. One innovative response is the development of selective breeding programmes focused on creating heat-resistant breeds. By identifying and selecting genetic traits that confer temperature tolerance and disease resistance, researchers can produce parents that are better adapted to survive in warming waters. Genomic selection emerges as a powerful tool in this quest, honing in on disease resistance and other vital traits to secure the future of aquaculture species.

Beyond genetics, the blueprint for resilience includes revamping farm management—integrating advanced water circulation systems to stabilise temperature and oxygen levels, and optimising nutrition to bolster fish health and growth. The health of our aquatic farms also hinges on our vigilant monitoring of water quality.

Beyond immediate farm productivity, embracing sustainable aquaculture practices plays a crucial role in environmental conservation. Techniques such as polyculture (raising different species together), using renewable energy sources and participating in habitat restoration projects not only reduce the industry's environmental footprint but also contribute to the restoration of aquatic ecosystems.

#### MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF A WARMING SEA

We can alleviate pressure on the vulnerable marine ecosystems of Penang with the development of heat-resistant marine species, expanding protected areas, and embracing sustainable fishing and aquaculture. Community initiatives like beach clean-ups and mangrove reforestation, alongside global efforts to curb emissions, demonstrate the potential for collective action to foster change.

Adopting renewable energy and supporting conservation are also vital.

United in our efforts, we can preserve marine biodiversity, sustain fishing communities and secure food sources for us and future generations.

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## OUR WORSENING CLIMATE



**Climate change** is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. Source: METMalaysia



Malaysia generates substantial quantities of greenhouse gases annually, and is one of the major contributors to climate change in Southeast Asia. Malaysia relies heavily on fossil fuels for energy consumption. As of 2022, only **1.9%** of the energy produced in the country is **renewable**.



#### ANNUAL CARBON DIOXIDE (CO<sub>2</sub>) EMISSIONS BY COUNTRY Source: Global Carbon Budget (2023) & Statistica Research Department (2023)



If a high level of greenhouse

temperatures is expected by

the 2090s. If emissions are

successfully reduced under

RCP2.6, the severity of the

temperature increase would

gases at RCP8.5 continues,

a significant rise in

lessen.



Note: Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from fossil fuels and industry. Land-use change is not included.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES ARE PROJECTED TO INCREASE BY:

ե by the 2090s under the RCP8.5 emissions pathway.

by the 2090s under the RCP2.6 emissions pathway.

#### **CLIMATE FUTURE**

Both day and night temperatures are going up, and the rate of increase is faster than the overall average temperature rise.

Note: RCP (Representative Concentration Pathways) represents the global mean radiative forcing in watts per square-metre (W/m<sup>2</sup>) achieved in each of the scenarios by the year 2100. RCP2.6-a scenario where stringent mitigation limits the increase of global mean temperature to 2°C. RCP8.5-a scenario where the highest baseline of greenhouse gases (GHG) are emitted.

**RCP8.5** 

Source: WBG Climate Change Knowledge Portal (2021)

RCP2.6

Historical

#### **HISTORIC & PROJECTED ANNUAL TEMPERATURES** IN MALAYSIA (REFERENCE PERIOD: 1986-2005)



#### **VULNERABILITY AND READINESS TOWARDS CLIMATE CHANGE**



The low vulnerability score and high readiness score of Malaysia places it in the lower-right quadrant of the ND-GAIN Matrix. Adaptation challenges still exist, but Malaysia is well-positioned to adapt. Malaysia is the 49<sup>th</sup> most vulnerable country and the 54th most ready country.

#### **MALAYSIAN VIEWS ON CLIMATE CHANGE**



#### **PENANG: ANNUAL TEMPERATURE CYCLE**



**HEATWAVE IMPACTS ON PENANG** 

#### Domestic (MLD) Non-domestic (MLD) Total

Domestic water consumption in Penang shot up by 43 MLD (8.8%) in 2022 from 491 MLD in 2018. Non-domestic water consumption which had dropped in 2020 and 2021 also rose in 2022.

Penang's water consumption is increasing due to population growth and rapid urbanisation.

Penang's ability to obtain sufficient water supply for its residents may be significantly affected by future changes in water resources, resulting from climate change and rising temperatures.



PENANG'S WATER CONSUMPTION

Source: National Water Services Commission, SPAN (2022)

1,000



APRIL 2024

#### **ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION**



PADDY CULTIVATION

• Sum of rice production (metric tonne)





The production of rice relies heavily on various factors, with temperature being among the most crucial.

Paddy cultivation may face additional challenges during droughts. Historically, when extended periods of drought led to inadequate water supply, Penang had had to cease agricultural irrigation to prioritise water for household use.

26

Sum of paddy production (metric tonne)

#### **MARINE CAPTURES**

#### LANDINGS OF MARINE FISH IN PENANG Source: Department of Fisheries, Malaysia Tonnes 60,000 56,849 57.013 54,854 51 694 51,186 49,783 Trend line shows a downward 40,000 trend. 35,374 20.000 Year 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022



There has been a steady downward trend in the quantity of marine fish landings in Penang from 2015 to 2022.

Significant alterations such as increase in water temperatures can impact marine species and ecosystems, leading to fish migration in search of more suitable temperature conditions, causing a decline in their numbers.

#### **PROGRAMME ADAPTATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

Penang Nature Based Climate Adaptation Programme (**PNBCAP**) is a programme that seeks to deliver strategic actions for adaptation through funding from the Adaptation Fund.



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## BE AWARE OF Impending

(THE STAR, 25 FEBRUARY 2024)

The Malaysian Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia) has issued a Level 1 heatwave alert as scorching heat continues creeping northwards on the peninsula.

**THE COUNTRY'S HOT** spell could persist until July, and preparation is crucial. Some of us might not view the increasingly hot weather as a significant issue and imagine that merely increasing the use of air conditioning and hydrating more frequently would suffice.

The truth is, ignoring the severe health risks linked to exposure to this heat could lead to severe outcomes. Heatwaves are prolonged periods of sweltering weather, and MetMalaysia issues that having temperatures at 35°C to 37°C for at least three consecutive days already indicates a Level 1 heatwave. If humidity is high at the same time, the weather would feel warmer.

Extreme hot weather can pose various health risks. People not used to it are more likely to suffer from heat exhaustion; this is because the body finds it challenging to adapt to abrupt shifts in temperature. Elderly folk and those with high blood pressure are more susceptible due to a deteriorating central nervous system. Those working under the hot sun (and others who are brave enough to exercise at noon) are also susceptible to heat exhaustion. Heatstroke, however, is more severe. It is classically defined as having a core temperature of more than 40.5°C accompanied by a central nervous system dysfunction.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### HEATSTROKE INDICATIONS AND RISKS

The reality of heat-related illnesses can be more severe than expected. Once the

body's core temperature exceeds 40°C, an individual might experience mental disorientation, headaches and confusion, leading to unclear speech. The individual's skin may feel hot and dry, and appear reddened while he perspires profusely. Nausea and rapid breathing may also set in. Those with chronic health conditions such as heart or lung disease are also at high risk.

The Conversation reported that the average heatwave exposure in the 2010s was more than 40% greater among the poor than among the wealthiest quarter.<sup>[2]</sup> Those doing physical labour are more likely to suffer from heat-related illnesses; with low incomes, the homes of these people may not be equipped with cooling systems to protect them against the heat.

#### PREVENTING HEATSTROKE

Heatstroke is both predictable and preventable. Be sure to stay hydrated by drinking enough fluids so that you can sweat to maintain a normal body temperature. Hydrate adequately and take breaks in a cooler location. If it can be helped, schedule physical activities during cooler parts of the day, such as early morning or evening.

High-risk individuals such as young children or older individuals should be looked after closely. These age groups should avoid hot and stuffy environments. Identify early and act promptly if you notice symptoms of overheating that could lead to heatstroke.

There have also been a number of cases reported where children have died after being left in a parked car. Temperatures inside a parked car can rapidly rise to dangerous levels for anyone, be it children, pets or adults. Leaving the windows slightly open does not significantly decrease the heating rate. The effects of being locked in a car can be more severe on children because their bodies warm at a faster rate than adults.

#### COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HEATSTROKE

In the meantime, there are also persistent myths about heatstroke which lead to misconceptions and to potentially harmful practices.

Myth 1: Heatstroke only happens outdoors.

Fact: Heatstroke can occur anywhere, not just outdoors. Poorly ventilated or non-air-conditioned spaces can also lead to heatstroke.

Myth 2: Drinking cold water causes heatstroke.

Fact: Hydration is crucial in preventing heatstroke. The temperature of the water does not cause heatstroke. In fact, cold water helps cool the body.

Myth 3: Sweating means you're not overheating.

Fact: Sweating is the body's mechanism to cool down. However, excessive sweating during a heatwave can lead to dehydration, a key factor leading to heatstroke.

Understanding these facts about heatstroke can help us stay safe during hot weather. Remember, when temperatures rise, it is important to take precautions to protect ourselves and those around us. If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of heatstroke, seek medical help immediately. Heatstroke is a medical emergency and can be fatal if not promptly and properly treated.



DR. MOHD NURFAIZ MOHD NASIR is a doctor at Pantai Hospital Penang's Emergency Department. He is experienced in handling medical emergencies and uncertainties while guiding patients through the darkest storms of medical crises.

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## SIMPLIFYING TAX COMPLIAN

#### **BY GOH SHUAN THING**



GOH SHUAN THING enjoys helping businesses be heard and stay relevant through creative content strategy. You will occasionally find her lost in alternate realities of her favourite books.

IT'S TAX SEASON. While many begrudgingly file their details obediently, paying taxes is more than a duty; it is a vital contribution to the nation's development. Understanding and engaging with the tax system is crucial for every citizen; taxes ensure the smooth operation of public services and the realisation of broader societal goals.

#### THE TAX LANDSCAPE

Malaysia's tax system consists of direct and indirect taxes, with the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRBM), known to many as Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri Malaysia (LHDN), helming its administration. Citizens tout it as one of the most efficient departments in the country.

Taxpayers range from salaried individuals and freelancers to small-to-medium enterprises and large corporations, each with specific obligations and responsibilities. One of the most critical obligations is knowing when to pay taxes. Taxes for a given assessment year become due and payable on specified dates in the year following that assessment period. That means 30 April for individuals deriving non-business income and 30 June for those having a business income.

For many, tax compliance can seem daunting. As mentioned by many accounting firms, Malaysia's tax is one of the most complex—not due to the system, but to the regular policy updates and the fine print that comes with each update.

However, with a basic understanding of documentation and filing requirements, it becomes significantly more manageable. Recent tax amendments have further refined the process, making it crucial for taxpayers to stay informed. These changes often aim to simplify filing, reduce liabilities and encourage compliance, benefiting the average taxpayer directly.

If you have never filed your taxes electronically, start doing so on the MyTax website by LHDN. Begin by clicking on the e-Daftar button to start registration. Fill out the necessary documents and head to your nearest LHDN office to get a onetime pin number. Once completed, log in to resume e-Filing.

PENANG MONTHLY



#### **POWERFUL TOOLS**

Tax deductions and credits are powerful tools for reducing tax liability. From education and medical expenses to donations and investments, numerous opportunities exist for taxpayers to lessen their burden. Freelancers and individuals with multiple income sources should pay particular attention to these options, as they can significantly impact the final tax payable. Awareness and strategic planning can lead to substantial savings.

For business owners, the move towards e-Invoice marks a significant milestone in Malaysia's digital transformation journey. This system streamlines tax filing, enhances accuracy and curbs fraud, benefiting both the government and taxpayers. The transition to e-Invoice will simplify record-keeping, reduce errors and promote a more transparent tax environment. Taxpayers can look forward to a more efficient filing process, with less paperwork and quicker processing times.

#### THE SVDP 2.0 INITIATIVE

The IRBM has also launched the Special Voluntary Disclosure Programme (SVDP) 2.0, as announced in the 2023 Budget, for taxpayers to rectify past oversights and enter the era of digital compliance with 0% penalties (ending 3 May 2024). Designed for taxpayers who wish to voluntarily disclose undeclared or under-declared income, asset disposal subject to Real Property Gains Tax and unreported additional income, it offers a reduced penalty rate for disclosures made within the programme period, extending from 6 June 2023 to 31 May 2024.

By participating in SVDP 2.0, taxpayers can correct past mistakes to ensure up-to-date tax reporting before the full implementation of e-Invoicing, thereby avoiding the heightened scrutiny and penalties associated with the digital tax system.

The shift towards digital tools, including e-Filing and e-Invoice, aligns Malaysia with global trends in tax administration. These changes herald a future where tax compliance is straightforward, less time-consuming and secure. As we move forward, the public needs to understand and engage with these digital tools in order to be well-prepared.

However, if you ever feel overwhelmed doing your taxes, do engage with online resources and workshops on tax compliance. Consider discussions with tax professionals to gain a deeper understanding of new systems like the e-Invoice.



**TAYLOR SWIFT**, the queen of pop, transcends the realm of music. She is a cultural force, a brand powerhouse and—according to Swifties in political leadership—a significant economic driver. Her relatable lyrics, narrative-driven albums and social media engagement has created a sense of community and shared experience.

Her fervent fanbase translates into dedicated concertgoers, enthusiastic merchandise buyers and a loyal consumer base that fuels Swiftonomics—the Taylor Swift effect on the economies of cities and local businesses she holds concerts in.

# THE LIMITED LOCAL BENEFITS of Source of the second second

**BY PHILIP KHOR** 



PHILIP KHOR is a Visiting Data Scientist at Penang Institute with a background in financial sector regulatory modeling, technical writing and enterprise data science training. His interests include labour and health economics, the ethics of artificial intelligence and climate policy.

Intriguingly, Taylor Swift's critically acclaimed Eras Tour has sparked bad blood within ASEAN. Leaders across Thailand and the Philippines have criticised Singapore for entering an agreement with Swift's team to host concerts exclusively in Southeast Asia. Uncharacteristically, Malaysia's traditionally concert-averse conservative bloc has joined the Swiftian gold rush, with Bersatu leader, Sasha Lyna Abdul Latiff, asking the Anwar administration to explain the outcome of past negotiations between the Malaysian government and Taylor Swift's team during the Ismail Sabri administration.

ASEAN leaders wish Taylor Swift would schedule a concert in their respective countries, not purely out of fear of missing out (FOMO). The Eras Tour is the first tour to gross over USD1bil globally, and its companion concert film, "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour", took in USD261mil to become the highest-grossing concert film, more than doubling the previous record held by "Justin Bieber: Never Say Never" in 2011. The US leg of the Eras Tour generated USD4.6bil in direct consumer spending on expenses, including tickets, outfits, merchandise, food and beverages and travel, according to QuestionPro estimates. At the same time, Economic Effects NET named the Eras Tour Japan's biggest-ever music event by economic impact, generating USD229.6mil across four Tokyo shows. Even so, Nobel laureate, Paul Krugman, wonders out loud, why doesn't Taylor Swift earn more than she does?

#### LOOK WHAT YOU MADE SINGAPORE DO

Beyond short-term gains, Singapore bets on the Eras Tour and other mega-events to improve its allure for global entertainment acts, riding on the back of pent-up global demand following the relaxation of Covid-19 public health restrictions. While the island-state may lack home-grown cultural credentials, it is not for lack of trying. In 2012, Gallup ranked Singaporeans as the most emotionless people globally. Now graced by the likes of Bruno Mars, Coldplay and Ed Sheeran, Singapore is banking on the halo effect of these artistes to rehabilitate its image as Asia's "events and entertainment capital".

The appeal of mega-events has historically been a double-edged sword. World leaders' pleas for Taylor Swift's patronage echo the race for Olympic host nations in not-too-distant memory. Concerns about environmental impact, fuelled by Taylor Swift's sizable carbon footprint from private jet travel, loom large. Estimates for 2022—during which Taylor Swift was not touring—suggest that her private jet travel produced a whopping 8,300 tonnes of carbon emissions, equivalent to that from 1,800 (average) human beings in a year.

Moreover, it is unclear how the benefits of a Taylor Swift tour stop will be distributed within local communities. Matherson (2004) argues that businesses reap the lion's share of the profits from megaevents, which are unlikely to recirculate in the economy. Further, KPMG estimates that of the just over AUD100mil profit that Taylor Swift is to earn from the Australian leg of the Eras Tour, the net impact of the tour on the Australian economy would be just a tenth of that: AUD10.6mil, equivalent to 0.002% of Australia's quarterly gross domestic product (GDP).

#### I KNEW YOU WERE TROUBLE (TAYLOR'S VERSION?)

Back home, concert enthusiasts in Malaysia have endured disappointment after disappointment. With Malaysia's reputation for shutting down concerts in response to protests over performers' stage wear, the Eras Tour snub comes on the heels of opposition to Coldplay's November 2023 Malaysia show over their support for gender diversity.

Former Minister of Youth and Sports, Syed Saddiq, characterised the cancellation of Malaysian Coldplay tour dates as the country missing "an economic lottery", citing substantial spill-overs in the transport and food and beverages sectors. Likewise, the Arts, Live Festival and Events Association lamented the impact of protests on "our international business environment and reputation", citing the "millions in tourist income and benefit hotels, transportation, food and beverage, retail and more" that resulted from Coldplay's six sold-out shows in Singapore.

The uncertain business environment this has brought about bodes poorly for the local entertainment industry. Singapore's successful efforts in ensuring a Swift landing must be viewed in light of its historical disadvantage in home-grown talent, in which Malaysia arguably has the upper hand. However, multiple factors in Malaysia threaten to suppress local cultural dynamics—and the allure of dominant international acts such as Taylor Swift overshadows the real problems faced by local Malaysian artists, constrained as they are by shifting goalposts.

It is of little comfort that much of the purported spill-over effects of megaevents are, more often than not, an exaggeration. Economically, Malaysia has little to lose beyond the creative economy, which contributes just under 2% of GDP (2019), if it resists the Taylor Swift FOMO plaguing the ASEAN region. For any administration in power, the uncertain economic benefits are not worth incurring confrontation from religious fundamentalists. The prospect of Malaysia becoming a regional destination for megastars, as Singapore aspires to be, is politically unfeasible.

#### SHAKE IT OFF

It is crucial to remember the uncertain economic benefits of mega-events—these will likely have a limited trickle-down effect, with businesses often reaping the lion's share of profits.

Instead of chasing fleeting trends, Malaysia should foster its own rich cultural tapestry. By supporting and empowering local artists and creating a stable and inclusive environment for the arts to flourish, Malaysia can carve its unique niche in the region's cultural landscape; one that transcends the allure of international megastars.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF A PIONEERING BOYS' SCHOOL

ву EUGENE QUAH TER-NENG

The school in 1965. The current building, completed in 1938, was built over an old wooden bungalow that once belonged to Arthur Harold Savage. *Source:* Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, *No.* 1.







This Blomefield 32-pounder from 1797 made by the Walker Company of Rotterdam was gifted to the school by the late Khoo Keat Siew of Khoo Kongsi on 19 June 1975, in memoriam of his illustrious father, Khoo Sian Ewe. It is unclear how the cannon, which is similar to the ones at Fort Cornwallis, came into the possession of the family.

Source: Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, No. 1.



Left: E.M. Park, the fourth principal of the school (1954-1956). This photo was taken in 1936 when she was the Acting Headmistress of Geylang English School in Singapore. Middle: The second principal (1946-1947), K.O. Knapp seen here in a photo from 1940. Right: H.T. Tacchi became the first acting principal of Wellesley Primary School in 1948. She was later promoted to Director of Education (Girls) for the Federation of Malaya in 1922.

Source: Malaya Tribune, 23 May 1936, Page 15. The Straits Times, 14 October 1940, Page 9. The Straits Times, 9 July 1952, Page 5.

JALAN SULTAN AZLAN SHAH, formerly known as Northam Road, hugs the contours of North Beach, extending towards Gurney Drive. With the panoramic views it offers of the North Channel and the distant Kedah Peak, the island's affluent and illustrious residents have long been drawn to this stretch of road, often erecting their grand mansions along this picturesque thoroughfare, earning for it the moniker "Millionaire's Row".

Today, as you head towards George Town along this road, you can still see these stately homes. Upon reaching the intersection with Larut Road and taking a right turn, a colonial building comes into view. This structure, somewhat modest compared to its luxurious neighbours, serves as a public school. In front of it is a curious cannon, painted a gaudy gold, giving it a tacky and plastic sheen. This ancient artillery, however, is a real 32-pounder Blomefield cannon forged in 1797 during the reign of King Charles II. Students at the school had great fun sitting on it and playing pirates during recess time. Once in a while, it would happen that one of them would bump their head on it.

I was a student at the school during the first three years of my primary education. This school is SK Wellesley, known in its early days as Wellesley Primary School.

#### HILLVIEW BOARDING SCHOOL

Wellesley Primary School, though not of the same vintage as Penang Free School and St. Xavier's Institution, has been around in some form or another for a century. It started in 1924 under the name of Hillview Government School, located "near the corner of Burmah Road and Anson Road", about 250m south-west of its current site at Northam Road.

Hillview bungalow belonged to Alfred de Windt Neubronner, who came from an influential Malaccan family and was the father of the noted Penang architect, Henry Alfred Neubronner (see *Penang Monthly* October 2018 and March 2023 issues). The property consisted of the main Hillview house and a Hillview cottage (probably an annex building). Hillview was first mentioned by the press on 30 December 1895 as "the residence of the Consul of Siam and Mrs. Neubronner". Neubronner was in fact the Consul-General of Siam and was known to the Siamese with the titled name, Phraya Dwip Siam Kich Neubronner.

Neubronner put up Hillview, No. 70 Larut Road, for sale on 16 February 1910. According to Methodist Church records, its founder, Bishop William Fitzjames Oldham, "acquired two houses at Larut Road for a Boarding House and Missionary Residence". The bigger Hillview house was used as the boarding school.

By March, the school already had "some nice boys as boarders". An advertisement from 1916 indicated that the school was run by the "boarding department of the Anglo-Chinese School" (ACS) and promised to "give your son the education he needs. Strict personal supervision by a highly qualified European" in "[a] European home". Applicants were asked to contact Rev. B.J. Baughman, the Vice-Principal of the ACS. A year later, Hillview Boarding School already had students from "Penang, Siam, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula". The school closed in August 1918, and Hillview became "the home of the Mission Staff of the ACS". In the 1920s, Rev. George Frederick Pykett, "a renowned educator" and longtime principal of ACS, resided at Hillview. The nearby Pykett Road was named after him.

#### HILLVIEW GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

In December 1923, the Inspector of Schools, H.R. Cheeseman attended the prize-giving day at the Government Girl's School at Northam Road. After the prizes were given out by A.B. Voules, the wife of the resident councillor, Cheeseman was invited to give a speech.

"There was a time not so long ago," he said, "when it was quite impossible to get a sufficient number of efficient local mistresses [female teachers] in Penang." "Now, however, partly owing to the increased numbers in the secondary departments of the girl's



Top, right and below: Classes in progress, 1965 at Wellesley. The library had a Teacher's Reference library, which had books imported from Britain. The school was known for its high quality of teaching for much of the 20th century. *Source*: Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, *No.* 1





schools and partly owing to the Pupil Training Classes, we have no difficulty in this direction," he said. "For instance," he continued, "the new Hillview Boy's Primary School of which Mrs. Ferguson is to be Head mistress,... is to be entirely staffed, as indeed it should, by local mistresses."

By February 1924, Cheeseman announced, "[The Hillview Government School] opens on Monday, February 11, at 8am. There are vacancies for about 50 more boys." By 6 October the following year, Sir Laurence Guillemard, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, had announced in his annual address that, "In Penang, the temporary Hillview School has been opened."

Ferguson, the new school's principal lived nearby at No. 39 Northam Road. Known as Mrs. A. Ferguson, she was the widow of William Herbert Ferguson, the former municipal Chief Architectural Assistant who died in 1915 in Singapore, leaving behind four children.

The school continued to grow rapidly and, by 1928, was running out of space to accommodate new students and needed to move to a permanent site. *The Straits Echo* on 20 February 1929 reported that "the Hill View School in Burmah Road has now been handed back to the American Mission, owing to the removal of the government school to the corner of Northam and Larut Roads—a property which was acquired last March."

#### WELLESLEY PRIMARY

The wooden bungalow, once the home and dispensary of the late Arthur Harold Savage, "was taken over by the then Straits Settlements Government" as the new premises and the school was renamed Wellesley Primary School, after the former Governor-General of India, whom Province Wellesley was also named after.

The first Headmistress was Robina Duncan. She first arrived in Penang on 18 December 1922 to assume the post of the Headmistress of the Anglo-Chinese Primary Boys' School in Chulia Street.



The Wellesley Primary School Swimming Team at the Penang Chinese Swimming Club. The club house and pool were built mostly through the efforts and funding of rubber millionaire, Heah Joo Seang. Seen here is his grandson, Heah Sieu Lay (front row, right). He later became a banker; his brother, Sieu Ghnee, who also studied at Wellesley, became a general surgeon.

Source: Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, No. 1



Lim Hun Kung was the fifth principal of the school. He was also the first local and male to hold the post. He was succeeded by Barbara Robless, one of the many talented Eurasian teachers which included Glenn Johnson and Toney Foley, who worked at the school. *Source:* Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, *No.* 1 Just a few short years later, a larger building to house the school was required to accommodate even more students. In October 1936, Acting Inspector of Schools, J.M. Meade announced that, "Owing to the rebuilding of Wellesley Primary School, Primary Classes for boys will be housed in Hutchings School next year." At this juncture, the school was the only government school "in the Settlement of Penang which gives elementary education in English".

After some delays, the new building was finally completed in 1938 and the school, then with an enrolment of 600 students, moved into it on Thursday, 16 June 1938 and operated until the outbreak of World War II. Duncan lost her life while escaping the Japanese invasion of Malaya on the S.S. *Kuala* off the Riau Archipelago in February 1942. It was said that the Japanese forces occupied this building during the war, but I have been unable to verify this.

#### AFTER THE WAR

"After the Liberation in 1945, the building was requisitioned by the army for use by the Indian Army." Ooi Tiang Guan, although not officially the headmaster, was in charge and responsible for the reorganisation of the school. "The boys were accommodated at the Chowrasta Malay School in Hutton Lane and later moved to Westlands School using the building in the afternoon." Ooi would later become the principal of the Jelutong English School. It is interesting to note that the first four principals and three acting principals of the school were all women.

"From its inception up to May 5 of 1958, the school was a Primary School in the sense that it had classes from Primary I and Primary II." The boys were then transferred to the feeder schools such as Hutchings, Francis Light or Westlands Primary Schools, which, in turn, would send boys to the Penang Free School (Secondary School). One distinguished alumnus of the school who followed this educational path was Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail, the 12th Yang di-Pertuan Agong. His Highness, currently the reigning Raja



The first edition of the school magazine was published in 1965. The editor was Quah Liang Keng. *Source*: Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, *No.* 1



Quah Liang Keng, the 7th principal (1969-1974) at his desk. He was the first alumnus of the school to become its principal. *Source:* Majallah S.R. Wellesley 1965, *No. 1, Eugene Quah Ter-Neng (Photo).* 



EUGENE QUAH is an independent researcher and writer who is working on a book tentatively called "Illustrated Guide to the North Coast of Penang". He rediscovered the joys of writing after moving back to Penang from abroad.

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of Perlis, started attending Wellesley Primary School on 5 January 1950. After completing his early primary years, His Highness transferred to Westlands and then to Penang Free School for his secondary education.

After 1958, "the school became a Full Primary School with classes from [Standards] I-VI", after which the best pupils would proceed to Penang Free School.

#### ALUMNI

For many decades after its inception, the school was much sought after for its educational excellence. By the 1960s, it had one of the finest primary school libraries in the country which boasted "no less than 5,000 children's books". Notable families would enrol their children to be educated in English at the school.

Some of the descendants of Khaw Sim Bee studied there, the school being conveniently just a stone's throw away from their family mansion, Chakrabongse House. Heah Joo Seang, the rubber millionaire, also sent his kin to the school, which was also attended by numerous members of the Merican clan, such as Caleel Merican, one of the early Malay doctors and a senior of Mahathir Mohamad when they were both studying medicine in Singapore.

Other notable alumni include the historian, Ooi Keat Jin, the illustrious lawyer, the late Sulaiman Abdullah, David Arumugam and his brother, the late Loganathan Arumugam, who founded the iconic Alley Cats band popular in the 1970s, as well as two-time Olympic swimmer, Jeffrey Ong.

#### EPILOGUE

Although the origins of the Wellesley Primary School as a government-run school can be traced back to 1924, the school using its current name has existed for only 95 years. Today, the school is helmed by Puan Mashitoh Pakir Mohamed.

I decided to write this article about my alma mater after finding the first copy of the school's magazine, *Majallah Sekolah Rendah Wellesley*, published in 1965, among the papers of the 7th principal of the school, Quah Liang Keng. A Wellesleyan himself, Quah moved on to Hutchings and then later to Penang Free School. He was offered a scholarship to study in England but chose to stay in Penang to teach. By 1965, he was already a supervisor under the first local and male principal of Wellesley, Lim Hun Kung. Quah became principal of the school in 1969 and held the post until 1976. He was my father.

Wellesley is probably the only school in the country that possesses an 18th century British cannon; this curious relic came to be placed in front of the school during Quah's tenure. It was a gift from his friend, the late Khoo Keat Siew, to the school in memory of his father, Khoo Sian Ewe.

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## THE MODERN WORLD= NAVIGATING TRADITIONS **BY RAHIDA AINI**



**DR. RAHIDA AINI** works as a Publication Officer at Penang Institute. She enjoys writing and strolling along Straits Quay, appreciating the beauty of mother earth.

40 PENANG MONTHLY

**EID UL-FITR**, or simply Raya (celebration in Malay), marks the end of Ramadan and holds deep cultural and religious significance in the Islamic calendar. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm surrounding the celebration of Raya in recent decades has undergone noticeable changes.

Taking a stroll down memory lane back in the early 80s and 90s to recall how the celebrations went then, I realised it was quite different. I vividly recall the anticipation building up a week or two before Raya. My mother would persistently urge my dad to head to the wet market to buy palas leaves, glutinous rice and other essential ingredients to prepare the main dishes. As soon as the Raya date is officially announced on national television following the sighting of the new moon by the Keeper of the Rulers' Seal, my mother and I would busy ourselves with late-night tasks: boiling ketupat (compressed rice cakes encased in woven coconut leaves) and preparing her signature dish-Rendang Tok, a spicy and aromatic dish made of chicken, spices, chilli paste, coconut milk and ground coconut.

Today, that anticipation has undergone a transformation. With the convenience of online shopping, one can click to order palas leaves, glutinous rice, or *ketupat*, making Raya preparations much easier.

#### **CELEBRATIONS THEN AND NOW**

In the past, Eid ul-Fitr was celebrated with traditional customs, ethnic gatherings and a strong spirit of unity among families and communities. I fondly recall welcoming close neighbours to our home and reciprocating those visits later. The essence of the celebration lies in the warmth of physical presence, shared meals and sincere exchanges of greetings.

However, along with the advancement of technology, the landscape of Eid ul-Fitr celebrations is evolving. In the past, everyone was busy counting the days—a trip back to their hometowns—but now some request early leaves because they had purchased the online plane tickets months ahead to celebrate abroad!

Technology's pervasive influence has reshaped how people connect and celebrate Raya. With the rise of digital communication, families separated by geographical distances can now come together through video calls and virtual gatherings. In the past, people eagerly purchased Raya cards to convey heartfelt wishes via mail, turning bookstores into bustling hubs with Eid greeting cards flying off the shelves. Today, the exchange of greetings, gifts and well-wishes has transcended physical barriers, effortlessly downloadable and forwarded through Whatsapp and other social media platforms.

Time constraints and busy schedules often limit the ability to partake in communal gatherings and extended celebrations. For urban residents like Azlina, who does not have a *kampung* to *balik*, she sees Raya meals at a hotel with her in-laws as a practical choice. "With our hectic work schedules, I prefer choosing a hotel which offers a festive Raya ambience and homelike cuisine for our family get-together. This way, we can enjoy more quality time together instead of being confined to the kitchen," she says.

Changing family structures and dynamics further contribute to the evolving nature of Eid ul-Fitr celebrations. Modern values and societal shifts may have impacted familial traditions, prompting individuals and families to adapt their practices to align with the realities of today's diverse family setups. The essence of togetherness remains, but the ways in which families come together may evolve; like Ida, whose mixed marriage has transformed her Raya celebrations. Instead of the traditional ketupat and rendang, her signature dish for the occasion is spaghetti bolognese. "We still uphold the family tradition of assembling at our parents' house where extended family members contribute their dishes. The family reunion has

exposed my children to diverse cultures and flavours," Ida adds.

#### GLOBALISATION AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Once confined to specific cultural boundaries, Eid ul-Fitr now resonates globally. Globalisation has facilitated the exchange of Islamic traditions and practices, where Muslim communities worldwide have incorporated diverse elements into their celebrations. Like the Chinese Muslim communities in Xinjiang and Ningxia, Arabic and Mandarin prayers are delivered on that day at the mosque, followed by festive feasts, street music and dancing—showcasing their unity.

Malaysia, on the other hand, observes Raya with prayers in Arabic and Malay, visits to the cemeteries to offer prayers for their deceased loved ones, and seeking forgiveness from family members. The spirit of Eid continues for the rest of the day with visits to their relatives and friends with small paper packets filled with money given to children and those in need as an act of *sadaqah* (giving).

Our diverse population is also enriched by people from Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh who share a common unity—Islamic values. The intercultural marriages between these groups with the locals have resulted in a unique blend of traditions, festivals, languages, food and other cultural elements.

As we reflect on the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr then and now, it is evident that traditions are resilient, adapting to the changing times. The core values of unity, compassion and gratitude endure even as technology, globalisation and modern life's challenges affect the way we celebrate. As we navigate these contemporary challenges, finding a balance that preserves the richness of tradition is necessary while embracing the present. In doing so, we ensure that the spirit of Eid ul-Fitr remains vibrant and meaningful in the ever-changing world.

## ACCELERATING THE STATE'S DIGITAL DRIVE

#### **BY KEVIN VIMAL**

**DIGITALISATION HAS BEEN** a subject of interest for Penang's leaders and stakeholders, and faster connectivity continues to be a pressing need.

According to the Penang Quarterly Statistics Q4 published by Penang Institute a decade ago, the broadband penetration rate per 100 households was at 68.9%.<sup>[1]</sup> By 2022, 99.2% of Penang citizens are internet users, connecting via various devices. According to the findings by PayNet, Penang is leading the nation with a 90% penetration rate of digital payments as of October 2023.

In line with Penang2030's Theme D, i.e., to invest in the built environment to improve resilience and the D2 strategic initiative to strengthen mobility, connectivity and digital infrastructure, Penang Internet Exchange (PIX), powered by DE-CIX was launched on 5 January this year.

It stands as a new commitment to make Penang the preferred digital hub in the region. A collaborative effort between Digital Penang and DE-CIX Malaysia, sponsored by PDC Telecommunications Services (PDC Telco), PIX underscores the commitment of the Penang state government to foster strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors.

Now, who are these key players collaborating to provide faster and more affordable internet connectivity rates to Penang? Digital Penang was established to accelerate the capturing of the benefits of the digital economy while promoting a digitally engaged society. PDC Telco constructs, owns and leases telecommunication infrastructure across Penang and other Malaysian states. The non-government-linked entity here is DE-CIX, the world's leading operator of internet exchanges, which currently operates in 50 locations across Europe, North America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

During the grand launch that took place at Jen by Shangri-La Hotel, Penang Chief Minister, Chow Kon Yeow, who was joined by Minister of Digital, Gobind Singh Deo, described PIX as a digital tapestry that carries the vital role of empowering citizens, and acts as a catalyst for innovation, economic growth and infrastructure development in the state.

"The strategic localisation of internet traffic exchange within Penang is poised to reduce network latency for internet users and ensure a faster online experience for all Penangites," he said.

Before PIX, internet traffic within the state was primarily channelled through exchanges in KL, Johor and Singapore, one of them being Malaysia Internet Exchange (MyIX). This industry-driven, non-profit entity ensures smooth internet connection to the end user. Without it, data connection would have to travel through international internet traffic. Though technology has improved since MyIX's inception almost two decades ago, the introduction of PIX will enable internet traffic localisation for Penang, reducing application network latency between participating networks.

"In the digital world, it is neither the biggest nor strongest that wins but the small, the smart and the nimble who wins by being adaptable. Size or location no longer restricts us. Embracing digital extends our boundaries and taps into the global value chain," Chow said in his speech before taking part in the PIX launching ceremony.

Gobind, meanwhile, gave assurance that his ministry will embark on utilising artificial intelligence (AI) technology in various government agencies to elevate the quality of services to citizens. It holds the potential to stimulate the adoption of Industry 4.0 (IR4.0), virtual reality (VR) and the Internet of Things (IoT).

A more pressing question, however, seeing that inflation is on the rise, would be, "Will the local population be seeing a significant decrease in the cost of internet subscription?" We shall wait and see.

FOOTNOTE

[1] https://penangmonthly. com/article/2434/canmalaysia-achieve-high-speedwidely-penetrative-broadbandby-2020-1



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## SNAPSHOTS OF PENANG WEEK 1977 IN WORDS BY RACHEL YEOH MORDS COURTESY OF TUN DR. LIM CHONG EU FOUNDATION



1. Introducing sepak takraw, a traditional Southeast Asian team sport played with a ball made of rattan.

2. Locals enjoying trishaw rides during the festivities.

3. Penang's Chingay Parade stunts performed at Adelaide's parklands.

4. Introducing the map of North Malaysia to children eager to learn about the geography of Penang and the surrounding states.



A PARTICULAR INTEREST shown to visiting delegates of the Penang Development Corporation (PDC) to Adelaide by the then Premier of South Australia, Don Dunstan, in 1972 could have been the catalyst for Adelaide's sister-city relationship with George Town today. After the initial introduction to the heritage and culture of Penang, Dunstan paid Penang a visit, only to discover the father-son link between the two cities: Captain Francis Light set up a settlement in Penang and founded George Town, while his son, Colonel William Light, was one of the founders and the celebrated surveyor-general of Adelaide.

On 19 February 1973, Dunstan sent a proposal for establishing a sister-city relationship with George Town. On 8 December 1973, the sister-city pact was signed, and for several years thereafter, Penang Week was held in Adelaide, introducing the state's unique heritage, arts, culture and food to the people of Adelaide.

Penang Monthly presents several photographs courtesy of the Tun Dr. Lim Chong Eu Foundation, taken during 1977's North Malaysia Week<sup>[1]</sup>, also known as Penang Week in Adelaide.











5. Traditional Malay attap houses were brought to Adelaide for the locals to view. Before entering South Australia, every part of the house was fumigated to ensure no stray species from Malaysia enters Australia. The attap houses were then assembled for the festivities.

6. Children and adults trying their hand at drawing batik motifs (*mencanting batik*).

7. Penang's famous hawkers were flown in to serve authentic Penang cuisine. Among the dishes sold during Penang Week were Lor Bak, Pasembur, Curry Kapitan, Chun Pneah (spring rolls) and Char Koay Teow, among others.









8. Serving up wok hei to the locals.

9. Other relevant vendors also participated in North Malaysia Week. Here, a vendor is showcasing Malaysian textiles to a local.

10. Hundreds of thousands flocked to the North Malaysia Week festivities and there were very long lines for the food.

#### PHOTO ESSAY

11. Dunstan with Penang Chief Minister, Lim Chong Eu, leading the procession to start North Malaysia Week.

12. Dunstan painting the eyes of the lion presented to South Australia.

13. On the final day of North Malaysia Week, the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip arrived in Adelaide as part of their Silver Jubilee Commonwealth Tour. Silat (a self-defense originating from the Nusantara region)[2] was performed by the Malaysian contingent to welcome her at Elder Park.

#### FOOTNOTES

 FOOTNOTES

 [1] Penang Week in Adelaide started in 1975. Its success encouraged the Penang state government to plan something larger, involving the northern states of Penang; hence, the 1977 Penang Week was named North Malaysia Week. Penang Week continued to be celebrated a few times a decade until the 1990s.

[2] https://ich.unesco.org/ en/RL/silat-01504







14. Lim Chong Eu and wife, Goh Sing Yeng, escorting the Queen along the stalls and exhibits set up for North Malaysia Week.



**RACHEL YEOH** is a former journalist who traded her on-the-go job for a life behind the desk. For the sake of work- life balance, she participates in Penang's performing arts scene after hours.



## FINALLY A TRIP TO **BEIJING:**



## A PERSONAL CROSS-CULTURAL CONNECTION

#### **BY IYLIA DE SILVA**

MY FASCINATION WITH Chinese culture started at age nine, when I transferred to a Chinese vernacular school. While other children watched cartoons on weekends, I settled myself in front of the television with my chopsticks and rice bowl to indulge in one of my all-time favourite series, "My Fair Princess"—a major hit set in the Qing dynasty's Forbidden City. "Why use chopsticks for rice when a spoon is much easier?" my dad would quip. 1. The crowd in the Forbidden City.

- 2. View from outside of the palace.
- 3. The author dressed in a traditional *hanfu*.
- 4. The lake at Shichahai.







I have been hooked on palace-centred dramas ever since, featuring backstabbing concubines and power-hungry ministers. Naturally, I dreamed of visiting the palace someday. Last November, this dream came true—my first trip to China, and Beijing was my winter getaway.

Upon landing at Beijing International Airport, the immigration machines automatically detected passports and communicated with tourists in their native language, making the process hassle-free. As a Mandarin speaker, I was not too concerned about communication, except for the variations in dialect and pronunciation. But even for those who do not speak the language, I would say that the systems in Beijing are reasonably tourist-friendly.

Navigating through the bustling traffic of Beijing was a breeze, all thanks to DiDi, Beijing's e-hailing app, akin to Grab in Malaysia. I could effortlessly book a ride, and to my surprise, a Tesla or Xpeng (a leading Chinese smart electric vehicle company) would arrive—the fees were affordable, and the service was satisfactory. Most of the vehicles were electric vehicles (EVs), and there are tens of thousands of charging stations there. The city was kept clean by autonomous sweepers, both on roads and pedestrian walkways, frequently buzzing. A waste disposal method is also implemented, requiring households to sort their trash.





- A preserved building in the *hutong* area.
   Temple of Heaven.
- 7. A gazebo in the Imperial Palace.
- 8. Mala poached fish.
- 9. Observe closely, and you'll spot the Temple of Heaven in the distance.

I wanted an authentic cultural experience, and therefore, chose a hotel located in one of the *hutongs* traditional narrow alleys with houses built on each side, forming courtyards where locals still reside, some with a history of more than 700 years.

During the first few days of my visit, I engaged with the locals and learned a number of interesting titbits of information about life in Beijing. For one, I was recommended to lesser-known, non-touristy food spots. If residents are facing issues, they can just dial the government hotline, which is 12345—yes, very memorable, with a satisfactory rate of over 90%.<sup>[1]</sup> While cash was still accepted, China's shift towards a cashless society was evident, with the majority of vendors favouring apps like Alipay and Touch 'n Go for seamless online payments.

On the third day, I visited the highlight of my trip, The Forbidden City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, also known as the Palace Museum. This architectural marvel, covering more than 7.75 million ft<sup>2</sup>, served as the residence for Chinese emperors for nearly 500 years, from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) to the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).<sup>[2]</sup> The carving details and royal ambience matched my expectations, though it would be better without the busy crowds.

Every day, the palace receives thousands of visitors, capped at 80,000. <sup>[3]</sup> Despite the massive throng of people, popular spots such as the palace and Universal Studios Beijing require mandatory reservations at least a day in advance, efficiently managing the influx of visitors and allowing lines to clear quickly.







#### FOOTNOTES:

 https://global.chinadaily. com.cn/a/202310/31/ WS65403e9ea31090682a5eb8ab. html#:~text=The%20hotline%20 12345%20is%20becoming.dial%20 the%20hotline%20every%20day.

 https://www.nationalgeographic. co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2022/09/ go-inside-chinas-forbidden-city-domainof-the-emperor-and-his-court-fornearly-500-years [3] https://www.mybeijingchina. com/beijing-attractions/the-forbiddencity/#:~:text=The%20palace%20 0%20the%20Forbidden,to%20 80%2C000%20people%20per%20day.



The proceeds from ticket sales support ongoing restoration and maintenance, ensuring that the palace remains a historical window into China's past for future generations. As a safety measure, the palace gates close at 4pm, avoiding potential challenges of navigating the area once it gets dark.

Other renowned heritage sites in Beijing, such as Jingshan Park, the Temple of Heaven (a place for imperial prayers), and the Summer Palace (constructed for the Empress Dowager's summer retreat), are conveniently situated in the central part of the city. Numerous shops nearby offered *hanfu* and *qizhuang* rentals, traditional attires worn by the Han and Manchu people in China, allowing enthusiasts like me to role-play as a young maiden in Ancient China.

The sight of "concubines" and "princesses" leisurely strolling is common in central Beijing, often accompanied by professional photographers. I pondered the possibility of offering similar experiences in Penang, a city rich in heritage with a variety of traditional outfits available. Being a Mala addict (a spice mixture that consists of Szechuan peppercorns, giving a numbing and spicy effect), my cravings were satiated here. Aside from the obligatory Peking duck, I savoured dishes like Mala poached fish and Mala beef hotpot—ideal for the chilly weather.

Feeling adventurous, I tried stinky tofu, which was a funky experience I thoroughly enjoyed. For those seeking halal food options, pay attention to Xinjiang (home to the Uyghurs) cuisines, a rich culinary heritage shaped by a blend of Central Asian, Persian and Chinese flavours.

Scrolling through the hundreds of photos I took, it is obvious how much I adored my time in Beijing and I am certain I will return one day. My only regret was not being able to squeeze in a visit to the Great Wall of China in my itinerary due to unsuitable weather and time constraints. It is often said that a trip to China is incomplete without a visit to this wonder of the world, providing me with the perfect excuse to return though truthfully, none is needed.



IYLIA DE SILVA is a law graduate from the University of London. Balancing work and play, she savours every moment by indulging in her passion for food, languages, music and engaging with people from diverse cultures.





#### EXPLORING CULTURAL UNIQUENESS IN MUSIC BY PAN YI CHIEH PHOTOS BY UAH MUSIC CULTURE

#### FOOTNOTE

[1] In traditional Hakka, "Dabangni" means "grateful for having you", which expresses Liu's appreciation for the people who have helped and supported him and the band throughout their journey. AN ISLAND'S cultural traditions and social contexts often render "islanders" with unique yet versatile identities. Hence, they are sometimes described as having an "island mentality". This is not necessarily a bad thing. In all events, it is a good starting point.

#### One balmy Saturday afternoon in late December 2023, music lovers gathered at Hin Bus Depot for UAH Music Festival's "The Islander Surge". Reclined on the grass and deckchairs, they had the chance to witness a coming-together of islanders from Penang, Borneo and Taiwan. The festival featured five bands and musicians: Culture Shot and Buddha Beat from Penang, Anak Borneo & Alu8 from East Malaysia, and Dabangni Band and Shu-Chan Chiu from Taiwan.

If music creation is an exploration and a positioning of oneself in society, Malaysian musicians tend to be versatile, using diverse instruments associated with various traditions found within a multicultural society.

#### MUSIC AND CULTURAL ROOTS

Yew Kok Cheong, from the indie band Buddha Beat, is a very experimental musician who loves to combine different music styles, including rock, flutes and electronica. For years, Yew has been integrating his ruminations over the workings of a multicultural society into his music. The result is reflected in the tone of the music he makes—strong, explosive and avant-garde, yet sometimes sombre.



Anak Borneo (婆罗洲之子) & Alu8 (阿 陆八), in turn, are independent songwriters and music producers from East Malaysia. Much of their inspiration comes from their interaction with beautiful landscapes and aboriginal Borneo culture. The use of traditional instruments like the *sape* (an Orang Ulu stringed instrument) emanates a sense of vastness, expressing their love and affection for their local culture.

The music styles of Dabangni Band and of Shu-Chan Chiu—both from Taiwan are a reflection of their journey of reconnecting with their mother tongue—the Hakka dialect—and the culture associated with it. Their experiences showcase Taiwan's younger and middle-aged generation of singers, encouraged and supported by the cultural policy started in the 1990s to use their mother tongue when making music. Such music had once been suppressed and overshadowed by mainstream Mandopop. It also included other dialects, such as Taiwanese Hokkien and other aboriginal languages. The importance of this is reflected in the fact that many Taiwanese had left their hometowns to work in the cities, and were gradually disconnected from the social lives supported by their mother tongues and traditions.

> 1. Dabangni Band performing at COEX @ Kilang Besi during their sharing session.

2. Shuchan Chiu performing during the festival

3. Culture Shot performing during the festival, using traditiona instruments such as a moon guitar.



In 2011, Dabangni Band (打帮你乐团)[1] was formed, originating from lead singer Jung-Chang Liu's journey to reconnect with his Hakka roots. Two decades after leaving his hometown, a small Hakka village where his grandparents lived, he decided one day to move back and use Hakka as the primary language to create his music. This process, at first, was pretty challenging; his vocabulary was limited. He described it as "a journey to discover memories learned by my tongue before I was three years old". Dabangni is a five-person band comprising musicians adept at using a mix of traditional Chinese and Western instruments, including the *erhu*, *suona*, Chinese flute and jazz drums. They experimented by blending traditional Hakka folk songs and music styles with new forms to promote Hakka music's beauty. They perform live regularly at venues such as temples, schools, festivals and even funerals.

Shu-Chan Chiu's (邱淑蝉) music connects audiences with the emotions she feels for the Hakka language and culture. Clean and gentle, her songs are life snippets of her family and other memories. Chiu has won several awards since her entrance into the music scene four years ago, including "The Best Folk Song" in the 2023 Golden Indie Music Awards.

"The Islander Surge" marked Chiu's first overseas performance. In fact, this exchange is planned to ignite more of these connections between islands.

Besides music performances, two dialogues were also held at COEX@Kilang Besi, where musicians shared stories about their music creation and how it reflects daily life experiences, cultural traditions and identity. These testified to how festivals are crucial platforms for communities to understand and cherish each other's culture.



Local partner for this festival and UAH Music Culture founder, Ang Eng Bok, has observed how Penang has had many talented and passionate indie musicians: "However, it is hard to accumulate our knowledge and music traditions for younger generations due to its fragmented system." Feeling the urgency for mutual support and synergy among musicians, he established UAH Music Culture in 2007, which now functions as a platform for local indie musicians and brands. It holds various high-quality performances and festivals, which are especially needed for young singers to access the audience and market.

4. Anak Borneo & Alu8 performing using traditional instruments during the festival.

5. Sharing on the use of photography in reviving Semai culture.



PAN YI CHIEH is a research analyst at Penang Institute who was born in Taiwan but now lives in Penang. She is proud to be nurtured by the two beautiful islands she regards as home.



PICK-UP SPOTS PENANG

**George Town** 

Areca Books Black Kettle BookXcess Gurney Paragon ChinaHouse Gerakbudaya Bookshop @ Hikayat Gurney Plaza (Information Counter) Hin Bus Depot Art Centre Huey & Wah Cafe Le Petit Four Patisserie More by Arang Coffee Penang Institute Penang Island Municipal Council Pusat Harmoni (Harmonico)-Reception Ren I Tang Heritage Inn Sin Seh Kai Artisan Bakery **Tourist Information Centre** 32 Mansion

2 Bayan Lepas

Penang Skills Development Centre Spices by Yin's Urban Republic

3 Tanjung Bungah

Gusto Cafe Straits Mini Mart Yin's WholeFood Manufactory (Lembah Permai)

4 Tanjung Tokong

Blue Reef Straits Quay

6

Air Itam

Coffee Elements Penang Hill—Lower Station Tolk Cafe

#### 6 Gelugor

E-Gate (Security Desk located at the building's middle span) Universiti Sains Malaysia, Hamzah Sendut Library 1 (Main Entrance Foyer)

Batu Kawan

IKEA Batu Kawan

10

9

Seberang Perai Municipal Council

**Bukit Mertajam** 



AUTO CITY Management Office

## HERE'S WHERE YOU CAN FIND PENANG MONTHLY

6

2

7

Kuala Lumpur

**Petaling Jaya** 

Subang Jaya

PICK-UP SPOTS

KL/SELANGOR

Yin's Sourdough Bakery and Cafe

(Students Study Area)

Hubba Hubba Mont Kiara

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

 $\bigcirc$ 

Temu House

Sunway University

READING SPOTS PENANG

	0	George Town
	Bricklin C	afe Bar
	Kim Haus	
	Komichi T	'ea House
	Narrow M	arrow
	Wheeler C	Cafe
	3	Tanjung Bungah
	The Hillsi & Restau	de Cafe Bar rant
	4	Tanjung Tokong
	Leo Books	
	7	Balik Pulau
	Botanica I	Mansion
	8	Butterworth
	Artichoke	Cafe
	9	Batu Kawan
	Peninsula	College
8		10
	M	
	9	
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	9	



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