

The Perak Development Experience: The Way Forward

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Abstract

Brothers and Sisters,

Allow me to briefly mention to you some of the more important stuff that we have implemented in the last couple of years before we move on to others areas including the one on "The Way Forward" which I think that you are most interested to hear about.

Under the so called Perak Amanjaya Development Plan, some of the things that we have tried to do are the same things that I believe many others here are concerned about: first, balanced development and economic distribution between the urban and rural areas by focusing on developing small towns; second, poverty eradication regardless of race or religion so that no one remains on the fringes of society or is left behind economically; and, third, youth empowerment.

Under the first one, the state identifies viable small- and medium-size companies which can operate from small towns. These companies are to be working closely with the state government to boost the economy of the respective areas. By early last year, Lawin and Tapah Road were the two small towns that have found success under the program. In the next few years, I am hoping to see similar success stories for towns such as Selama, Batu Kurau, Trong, Changkat Lada, Batu Kurau, Ijok, Bandariang, Kati, Sauk, Lekir and Kubu Gajah. These and other small towns are to become Perak new growth centers. InsyaAllah.

As for poverty eradication, allow me to state first and foremost of the fact that I came from a humble background. With such social background, it has helped me to easily understand the need among the concerned Perakians for real changes in their lives. Hence, I am happy to note that for some years now we have in the state YBU (Yayasan Bina Upaya) which not only addresses poverty issues but empowers the poor. Schemes such as micro credit facilities are given to single mothers regardless of race and religion. By the beginning of the last quarter of 2010, we had 1,362 recipients. Through YBU too, the state has initiated housing projects for

the poor. By the beginning of the last quarter of 2010 too, we had built 156 houses and repaired hundreds of others. Mind you, these figures do not include efforts undertaken by the Federal Government and other agencies. We also initiated Anak Angkat MB Programme which gives hope to the children of poor and marginalised families, regardless of race. As for the squatter issue, by the beginning of the last quarter of 2010, 70 per cent out of the 14,282 cases recorded had been resolved.

It is perhaps important to note that two years ago, that was up to middle of October 2010, based on report issued by e-Kasih, there was a total of 2,450 heads of household who are categorized as hard core poor with another batch of 3,596 categorised as poor in the whole of Perak. A study made by a state agency (Pejabat Pembangunan Negeri) showed that by the end of 2010, a total of 1,148 heads of household from among the hard core poor was capable of being moved out from such existence through various programs organized by numerous agencies.

Related to this, it is perhaps worth repeating what I said in my speech in May this year during the launching of a symposium held to bring together people from the private, governmental and non-governmental agencies so that they can discuss and coordinate activities and communities programmes to help the hardcore poor and which was attended by some 400 representatives from non-governmental organisations from all over Perak.

First, the remarkable work done by YBU in bringing down the number of hardcore poor families in Perak from over 7,000 in 2010 (when the YBU was formed) to 1,700 two years later via various empowerment measures has now inspired the Federal Government to conduct a study on the foundation's method of operation with the mind to implement it nationwide. Second, many schemes introduced by YBU such as its Micro-Credit facility, housing aid, and foster children schemes are efforts by the state government to not only eradicate poverty, but also provide them with the empowerment they would need to lift themselves from the poverty cycle and become independent thriving people who perhaps someday would be able to help other unfortunate citizens. Third, YBU has currently managed to assemble a fresh community of volunteers from private and corporate bodies, government departments, as well as from NGOs, who have all joined hands with the sole aim to eradicate poverty in Perak.

Now that I have told you a little bit on YBU and what it has accomplished, I would like to talk about another entity formed by the state government which may not directly concern with poverty eradication but which is certainly helping to ensure all residents, including those with lower levels of education, get the chance to find employment so that they could support their families. I am of course referring to the so called Amanjaya Career Centre (PEKA) that was formed in March 2011.

I am happy to note that a month after it was established, a total of 116 job opportunities were channeled to PEKA and over 600 residents seeking jobs have applied for work from the centre. Also, I am happy to note that within that short time period, PEKA was able to sit down with several big companies, such as Mydin, Kencana HL and The Store supermarket, as well as hold talks with the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) and the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) – all with the aim of bringing employment to Perakians. In less than a year later, that is by early this year, for your information, PEKA had successfully

arranged interviews for 3,000 fresh applicants out of whom a little more than 2,000 had landed jobs and internships in various employment categories

Finally, on empowering youth, the state has tried to open up opportunities and avenues for the young to be independent and responsible. Such pursuit is based upon our belief that the social, political and economic approach of yesteryears that views youths as only leaders of the future is no longer relevant. Instead, youths must be given more opportunities to assume the leadership role *today*. In this regard, it is perhaps worth noting the establishment of PORT (People of Remarkable Talent) in Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah. At PORT, youths gather to exchange ideas on music and other art fields among themselves.

I mentioned at the beginning of the speech that which is called Perak Amanjaya Development Plan (PADP). It would be remiss on my part to assume that everyone here is on the same page on PADP. Hence allow me to state a number of important points regarding PADP.

PADP which was put together by the state's think tank Institute Darul Ridzuan (IDR) was launched in January 2011 after it had earlier been given the green-light by the federal government in early 2010. Its aim is to achieve a developed or high income state status for Perak by 2015 in line with the Federal government's aim for a high impact economy for the country. (But, mind you, a year ago, during the winding-up of the state 2012 Budget, marking the last day of the state assembly sitting, I mentioned that the vision of becoming developed state is expected to be realised in 2018 instead of 2015. This is due to the "current erratic economic climate".) Conceived in 2009, the plan is on the look out for a total of three Qs for the people of Perak:

- *quality opportunities* are to prepare the people with the necessary skills whenever a job opportunity presents itself.
- *quality income* are concerned with improving the salary levels in the state similar to those in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Achieving this will enable Perakians to obtain greater purchasing power in a cost competitive living environment.
- *quality living* is the creation of a peaceful, crime free as well as a controlled pollution free environment to enable the development of quality individuals.

There are seven Key Result Areas (KRA) stipulated in order to achieve the goals of the 3Qs:

- *equitable development and distribution*: raising living standards of low-income households.
- *skilled, ethical and knowledgeable society*: improving student outcomes.
- *strong, catalytic and inclusive government*: improving government delivery system.
- *network of infrastructure and public facilities*: improving basic rural infra-structure.
- *participative youth and social harmony*: improving youth knowledge and survival.
- *vibrant public sector*: improving investment and business eco-system.
- *eco-friendly and sustainable development*: improving quality of living and urban public transport.

By the end of the third quarter of this year, the state had identified a total of 45 programs to be developed under these KRAs (following the identification by late 2011 of close to 130 sub sectors to be developed under PADP.) The successful completion of these programs should lead to the emergence of a total of 100,000 job opportunities by the year 2020 with monthly income per capita for Perakians at the amount of RM4,125.

As perhaps to be expected, PADP has had many detractors. Note on the following three views coming from what appears to be three different individuals which were forwarded online within the period of a few months just before and not long after the official launching of the PADP:

AmanJaya is long on generalities and very short on specifics on how to achieve its objectives. Many of the objectives are subjective and difficult to gauge effectiveness and success. The many meetings and labs have yet translated into impactful development programs. YBU's micro-credit loan program is commendable but some of YBU's projects lately seem to be political, such as providing funds (to BN parties) to renovate/rebuild old broken down houses.

Perak can't even solve the transportation problems and yet want to be a developed state by 2015. I say, learn how to crawl first before starting to run. Anyway, come GE13, all plans will be shelved. Mark my words.

A Developed State by 2015? By whose standard? OECD? Do you think that we are able to comply 32 indicators which include economy, social, infrastructure, environment and administration of OECD just like Melaka!

And not to be surprised too there are also negative remarks being thrown at IDR. Note on the following views - the first two were forwarded online within the period of a few months just before and not long after the official launching of the PADP in early 2011 while the next two came out early last year:

IDR is not completely a joke; it's utter madness! How many of Perakians understand the so-called "web circles of qualities" lauded by IDR? Not even the pakciks and makciks (including myself) understand where it's going.

IDR Perak the thinktank developing the implementation model for the Amanjaya Development Plan is a complete joke. They are totally unprofessional and have no clue about socio-economic development whatsoever. They are a hole in the taxpayers pocket!

Emulating the approach of the darkest five-year of Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to appoint consultants such as McKinsey, BCG, Binafikir, Ethos and Innovation Associate to do the 'thinking' role for the Federal Government (previously carried out by EPU, ICU, MAMPU and Treasury), IDR became 'consultant' to the Perak state government...IDR lack the macro planning expertise and experience... The labs are supposed to formulate policies and game plans to work within the meaningless tagline. Like PEMANDU, these labs don't really work. They formulate plans that are not easy to roll out. As consultant, IDR have minimal knowledge and experience on how to make the 'plans' work and realisable into significant impact on the lives of Perakians.

This IDR outfit is nothing but another consultant with no real business experience. Amin joined Zamry to make money for himself from state projects, etc. He recruited his staff from Innovation Associate (IA) that are mostly fresh, and worst, they are specialised in IT/system. So how can these young inexperienced consultant-wannabe advised the Perak State on macro economy, investments, social policy, etc? Looks like Zamry is digging his own grave after all. Najib must act fast!

Finally, note on the following related to what some have felt towards what we have been trying to do under the PDAP – the first came out in October 2010, while the next two in the March 2011:

Dewan Pemuda PAS Negeri Perak (DPPN Pk) tidak faham usaha kerajaan negeri dengan mewujudkan Yayasan Bina Upaya (YBU) dan juga pengurusan projek Perak Aman Jaya di bawah Institut Darul Ridzuan amat bertentangan dan membazir wang rakyat. DPPN Pk melihat dengan kewujudan YBU dan projek Perak Aman Jaya ini jelas akan menambahkan lagi penyaluran keluar wang rakyat. Ianya juga sumber kewangan bagi Umno / Barisan Nasional (BN) kerana peruntukan yang telah di salurkan mencecah jutaan ringgit. Sebagai contoh, fungsi yang dimainkan oleh YBU sebenarnya sudah pun di bawah tanggungjawab Pejabat Pembangunan Wanita (PPW) dan juga Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM). Seolah-olah YBU mengambil tugas dan fungsi PPW dan JKM dan juga menggambarkan kedua-dua agensi kerajaan ini tidak menjalankan tugas mereka. Manakala projek Perak Aman Jaya pula dilihat sama peranannya seperti pembangunan Koridor Ekonomi Wilayah Utara (NCER) dan juga fungsi Bidang Keberhasilan Utama Nasional (MKRA).

The career centre was reported to be proposed by Talent Solutions Sdn. Bhd. and as a content provider and operator, where else IDR will be the front for getting in all the monies from Perak state government. PEKA seemed to be a noble idea for Perakians to be trained and up-skilled with the necessary programs and eventually placed. However, PEKA would be in collision with the Ministry of Human Resource (MOHR) Jobs Malaysia program, now being regenerated nationwide. If PEKA is a good program for Perak, then the Exco should have been briefed and an approval from the highest decision making body be obtained first. However, Dr Zambery by-passed and just went along with Talent Solution's first job since being inception, which is less than four months ago, using IDR as the conduit. Part of the program of 'train and place' or what this blog describe as "propose and plough" scheme is for Perak to pay for the training of the candidates on behalf of the industry or specific companies. Otherwise, specific Federal Government agencies such as MOHR or MARA would foot the bill. PEKA would go around industries within Perak and then source out the candidates to be 'processed' via these expensive specific training programs candidates. Some of the companies to benefit from the overly generous program will include Kencana Petroleum (*via* Kencana HL - which based in Lumut) and Mydin. Why these highly profitable companies need not pay for these training still baffles many but obviously these profit making entities are benefiting from budgets meant for social and economic development programs which do not bring returns? Whether Perak or Federal Government such as MARA (using the 'Malay Agenda' excuse) is footing for this hare-brain scheme, it is clear that former Datuk Dr. Hamzah Kassim's right hand peoples' handiwork are at its best. Already they are laying the groundworks with seminars and forums before they actually go for the kill.

Another cronyism creature created by Zambery is Yayasan Bina Upaya (YBU). With IDR given the 'softwares' to play with, YBU gets the 'hardwares'. YBU gets the high value physical projects such as property development and public and low cost housing. The CEO is Khairul Azwan, who is Pasir Salak UMNO Youth Chief and a strong advocate for

the nationally-loathed UMNO Youth Chief Khairy Jamaluddin. IDR CEO Aminuddin Hashim, who was Datuk Dr. Hamzah's IA Associate Director also sits on the board. It is notable that a number of the negative views which I have just presented is actually sections of more fully developed ones. And whether in combination or separately they should not be allowed to bring us down. For after all we do have a job to complete! (That is, to bring our beloved Perak and Perakians to the next level of development.) In addition, we do have some hopeful and positive remarks from some other parties such as the following two:

We, Perakians have experienced several administrations proposing glorified development plans. After several years though, the "plans" simply vanished. Hopefully with Zambry's team of energetic intellectuals and his "no patchwork analysis strategy," Perak Amanjaya will indeed achieve its goal.

I WELCOME the announcement by the Perak Government of a comprehensive proposal to revive the past glory of Perak ... "Major growth plan for Perak" (*The Star*, Feb 4). It is indeed heartening to note that Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Kadir has in just a short span of time in office managed to pool all his resources in finding ways and means to improve the economic standing of the state despite the political pressure and uncertainties. This speaks volumes of his leadership and his ability to perform. The Perak Amanjaya Development Plan is a far-sighted and concrete master plan for Perak and if only we had visionary leaders like Dr Zambry in the 70s and 80s, when the tin prices were tumbling, Perak would not have been in this sorry state of affairs in terms of economic performance.

And as you can see from what I have delineated earlier, PDAP in less than two years of its existence has indeed brought forward today those which we all can be proud of for what they have come out to be (Lawin and Tapah Road) and for what they have been able to generate (YBU, PEKA and PORT). All in all, under the PDAP, there is still much to go for. But we have made our first few tentative steps. Hence, there is no turning back for us.

In that spirit, I would like to begin talking about one of the fields that we need to look seriously into *while* continue on the various productive paths that we have ventured into including those I mentioned earlier. The concerned field is tourism. I shall first delineate some recent developments in the sector to be followed by that on what I would like to call issues and challenges at the ground level. By doing this I hope to be able to pinpoint afterwards what need to be done not just in the tourism sector but also in other areas so that we all can try to move Perak forward in the coming years.

Tourism – Recent Developments

During the tabling of the Perak Budget 2012 at the state assembly in November last year, I mentioned that in view of Visit Perak Year 2012, an allocation of RM18 million had been set aside for the maintenance, improvement and upgrading of existing touristic sites. Also, a number of events were being planned to attract tourists to Perak. With an estimated tourist arrivals breaching the 5-million mark, income spin-off was valued at RM5 billion.

And for your information, exactly six months ago, we had informed the media that more foreign tourists, especially those from Singapore, China, the United States and Japan, are flocking to Perak. To be more exact, there was a 26.5 percent increase in foreign tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2012 compared to the same period last year. That is, a total of 25,029 foreign tourists visited Perak from January to March, against 19,940 in the same period last year. There was also a 7 percent increase in hotel room occupancy in the state for that

period in comparison to the same period last year. This latter figure was the result of a survey on 11 hotels under the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH). It is also notable that new hotels (under the MAH) but not included in the survey had also recorded an average of 50 percent to 60 percent room occupancy in the same period.

All this are perhaps not surprising. For some time prior to VPY 2012, the state had among others marketed itself aggressively abroad by promoting attractions dubbed the "10 Icons of Perak". The ten icons are: the Royal Belum world's oldest rainforest; the Gua Tempurung largest limestone cave in Peninsular Malaysia; the Matang mangrove swamp forest, the Taiping Zoo; the Perak Herbal Park; the Orang Utan Island at Bukit Merah Laketown Resort; the Felda Residence Hotsprings in Sungai Klah, Sungkai; the royal town of Kuala Kangsar; Pangkor Island; and Ipoh, which is well known for its beautiful limestone hills and diversity of food.

To ensure that tourists continue to come to Perak in big number even after the end of VPY 2012, in recent time, the public had also been informed of a number of interesting developments that are in the pipeline including:

- A mixed development initiative consisting of a major township development, an auto city and a Formula 2 race track that all in all should strengthen the position of Ipoh city as an international tourist destination.
- A theme park similar to Universal Studio in Singapore will be built in Ipoh soon as part of the government's strategy to make Perak an animation haven. The park, besides being a source of entertainment for the young and old, will provide facilities for the production of animation films. It will be built on a 12-hectare site at Bandar Meru Raya, Jelapang. The main emphasis of the park will centre on the state's rich biodiversity and natural resources. However, it will also serve as a centre for animation production, providing local talents an opportunity to market their products internationally.
- Ipoh's Silveritage Galleria commercial centre (which was opened for business in 2001 but which had not been doing well since then) will be transformed into Perak's showcase for its handicraft and specialities like batik, labu sayong pottery, Tambun pomelo, Ipoh white coffee and kacang putih. The one-stop centre will be similar to must-visit destinations like the Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah in Kelantan and Pasar Mayang in Terengganu which have a myriad of local stuff under one roof.

For your information, last year, we have also informed the general public of several projects which should boost the tourist figure further upon full completion. Among the notable ones are the following two:

- A new eco-tourism product to be fully completed in five years time known as the Kledang Saiong Wilderness Park located at the Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve in Meru Raya, Ipoh. It is notable that this park with quite an attraction in the form of 1,058m Gunung Peninjau had already undergone preliminary works costing RM1million.
- A centre to showcase the orang asli handicrafts known as Abor Haknuk Kraf located at Bandar Ipoh Raya near the Yayasan Orang Asli Perak (YOAP)'s office. This centre which was supposed to be opened early this year would have between 30 and 100 items of mainly games, souvenirs and medicinal ingredients that are collected from orang asli communities throughout Perak and also areas across the Titiwangsa mountain range. It is interesting to note that there would be a workshop set up at the back of the centre to repair broken handicraft and also to increase their attractiveness and durability before being sold. The workshop would also provide tourists the chance to see for themselves how the handicrafts are made.

In recent time, a number of initiatives had also taken place to improve the tourism sector in Perak including:

- The Perak state government granting a 99-year-lease to the pomelo orchards in Tambun in early 2010 has not only ensured the survival of the locally grown pomelo, which has become synonymous with Ipoh, but also held tremendous potential for tourism as every week busloads of foreign tourists visit the orchards in Tambun and Ampang located just outside Ipoh city centre.
- The Perak state government reactivation of Lumut Sea Festival (renamed Pangkor Sea Festival) late last year after having failed to take place for close to two decades.
- The Perak state government formation of the state tourism council and the conduct of a series of meeting in late 2009 in order to draw up a tourism strategic action plan.
- The Ipoh City Council issuing 29 planning permissions for the development of hotels and giving approval for the building plans of 23 new hotels.
- The IDR conducting two Teh Tarik sessions (*Rebranding Pangkor as Ecotourism Site through Multidisciplinary Approaches* in July 2012 and *Sustainable Development of Heritage in Ipoh* in October 2011) at its premises.
- The Perak Tourism Office organising a two day program (*Perak Tourism Retreat: The Way Forward 2011*) in April 2011 to discuss five key areas critical to success of the tourism sector in the state. The concerned five areas are: infrastructure readiness; human capital development; product development; promotion and marketing; and enhancing the role of the private sector.
- KPerak and Clarify Consulting Sdn. Bhd. coming out with *DiscoverPerak*: a mobile tourism application for smartphones (currently Android and iPhone supported) to assist tourists to discover events, foods, historical and cultural places. The smart integration of Google Map within the application not only provide users with an indication of the location of the attraction/destination but also guide them to reach the intended destination. The software which is available for free has of course several other capabilities that are too many for me to mention here. Interested parties may go to www.facebook.com/DiscoverPerakPage.

Aside from all that which I have outlined above starting from the increase in the number of foreign tourists to our beloved state and ending with the listing down of a number of notable acts on the part of various parties, I would like to point out next a number of issues and challenges that we have had to face in developing the tourism sector in recent years. In my humble view, there is an acute need for their identification before we can talk about charting out our next move in the sector.

Tourism – Issues and Challenges at the Ground Level

In discussing the various issues and challenges, I have opted to quote the remarks coming from various sources which can be found freely in the internet. These remarks were made within the last few years. By raising these remarks and not others which came out earlier, I simply want to show that the challenges we are facing are quite current and that we need to figure out ways in dealing with them so that we can have fewer of them in our effort towards making Perak a must see and favorite destination for both local and overseas guests. I very much believe that we just cannot afford to have these issues and challenges in our midst when we all know that Perak has just got almost everything to attract tourists in big number so that with the money they bring we can raise the standard of living of our people like what is aspired under the PDAP.

Allow me to begin talking about the issues and challenges in the tourism sector by quoting the very first paragraph of a hard hitting article published late last year:

While Hamidah [Perak's State Executive Councillor for Tourism] has traversed the whole state from Gua Tempurung, Gopeng to Royal Belum in Grik and took in the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar and Pangkor Island as well, all part of the 10 Tourist Icons of Perak, questions arise as to the ancillary services, such as: Are the buses and taxis that physically transport visitors to the icons available? Are there sufficient tour guides around to explain to visitors the wonderful points of our tourism products and in the visitor's native tongue? Are the local tour agents supportive in promoting and ferrying inbound tourists to the 10 icons?

In the same article, the author plus one out of three who give comments had described several instances which showed the glaring inadequacies of Perak **public transportation system**. These cases include the following:

Recently, *Ipoh Echo* received feedback from a visitor about difficulty visiting the Icons of Perak. The visitor is what the industry terms as FIT or Foreign Individual Tourist. She tried enquiring about getting on a local tour but was told that if she could get a group together, then the local operator could organise one. To get to the Royal Town of Kuala Kangsar, the only option she had was to hire a taxi that would take her to the places of interest. The taxi man did take her to a few of the locations on the brochure and the tourist felt very disgruntled as she felt that the price she paid for four hours of the taxi time was way too high since the actual travel time to and from Kuala Kangsar took up at least one and a half hours, and not enough time was left to explore the sights. On the first day of CNY (23-1-2011) my family of 4 made our way to Pangkor to visit some relatives there. The Lumut Jetty was a scene of chaos with not a single jetty personel in sight to control the crowd. There were day-trippers everywhere jostling, pushing and surging forward every time a ferry approaches. There was no orderly queue and people (there must be at least 300-500 of them) were not giving way to the elderly or women with infants tagging along. It took us more than 2 hours to board a ferry.

In the same article, the author has also referred to the April 2011 retreat that was organised by the Perak Tourism Office mentioned earlier whereby among others the following was mentioned:

Another finding from the Retreat was the inadequate bus services. Although a bus service was available to the various Districts it did not extend directly to the tourist sites themselves. Some examples are: Gua Tempurung, Gopeng, Banding Lake at Royal Belum or Lenggong Museum, all of which are a considerable distance from the main roads. Similarly for Ipoh, although there is a bus service, commuters say that the bus schedules are not published and do not run on time. Commuters are unaware of the Ipoh City Tour bus service, although it was launched in the middle of this year, to ferry visitors and tourists to and from their hotels to popular places of interest, food courts and restaurants. The alternative mode is to use a taxi. However, taxi fares here do not run on a meter and are at the whim and fancy of taxi operators.

Aside from the depressing nature of services coming busses and taxis, note also the following that is concerned with Medan Gopeng Bus Terminal:

The Retreat also identified Ipoh to be the 'main gateway into the state' as the airport, railway station and express bus companies are located here. The recommendation proposed was to 'create a tourism-focused area in Ipoh' from which to ferry visitors

'to other tourist attractions in the state'. Of the three transport modes, the express buses ferry the most number of visitors or commuters into the state annually and is said to be several millions more when compared to air and rail modes. Unfortunately, the entry points for bus commuters at Medan Gopeng and Kidd Road Bus Terminus, provide a most dismal first impression of Ipoh due to its shabby image and haphazard operations structure.

As if those visiting Perak are already not having enough problems in their hands related to public transports, there are additional woes coming from the so called **tour guides**. Note the following coming from one of the other two commentators to the article:

During our recent trip to Ipoh our group of 8 persons we were charge RM80 per person for a 1/2 day city tour. The travel agency send a minibus with a driver who acted as our guide and makan companion. In total the 8 of us paid RM640 and we dont get to see much of Ipoh.

One may be pardoned for asking the question of what should have been the case. Well, check out what the author himself has mentioned in the body of the article:

There is a perception that local travel agents promote more outbound than inbound tours. "Not so," says MATTA Perak Chairman Ranjit Singh, adding that its members do promote inbound packages. The inbound tour charge is around RM200 and usually "caters to a van load which is approximately 6-8 passengers" at a rate of RM25-RM35 per head. The role of the tour guide is to bring life to a product. All tour guides are licensed and can practise throughout the country. The Ministry of Tourism has a guideline that for any coach with more than 8 passengers it must be accompanied by a tour guide. According to several sources this ruling is being implemented strictly in KL and Penang but not so in Perak.

Aside from charging too much for their services, there is the issue of the language capability of the so called tour guides. Note the following coming from another author whose writing was published in October last year:

On recent visits to see fireflies in Kampung Dew and to explore Gua Tempurung, I specifically requested an English-speaking guide for my foreign visitors. I did not receive this and ended up translating for my guests. On another trip, my Japanese friends were fortunate to be able to understand Malay, but what about the thousands of foreigners who do not speak the language? If the Balinese and Thai can converse well in other languages, besides English, why can't we train our tour guides to speak other languages?

For another writer who recounted his trip to Temenggor/Belum Forest in early 2010, the following was mentioned:

The treks were reasonably easy although in part very steep, and on the first day they included Pulau Tujuh and its seven waterfalls, Kampung Chuweh, an Orang Asli Village on a separate island and Pulau Besar with its Rafflesia site. Day 2 took us on a short, (50 minutes) steep climb up to the viewing tower on Pulau Talikali. The view was well worth the climb. Our guide was reasonably knowledgeable about the flora and fauna but could only speak Malay which could be a setback, although it was no problem to us.

At the end it appears that the problems residing with Perak public transportation system and its tour guides pale in comparison with **the lack of basic facilities and cleanliness in eateries**. Note the following mentioned in the comment posted in response to an article published in October last year:

Recently, I stopped at the 'Rest Area' at Tasik Raban on my return from Lenggong. The place has great potential for its views, the landscape and the breeze. But the only facility operating in this 'expensive' development is the toilets, and yet we have to pay 30sen to use the broken and dirty toilets. The main building complex is an abandoned white elephant. Alarmingly, Lenggong may soon be on world map as UNESCO World Archaeological Site.

Also note the following comments made to another article published in September last year:

You can count how many fluent English speaking guide in Royal Belum. Banding island public jetty toilet is a nightmare. Lifejackets on boats scare the shit out of my customers. The SOLAS sticker on lifejackets peeled off last year! Well, pls don't ask the boatmen if they know what SOLAS is. The safety briefing is only "Pls wear your lifejackets", period.

I flinch every time I hear talk of tourism products, and tourist destinations, where one is more likely to find badly kept toilets, rubbish all over the place left by careless people and uncollected by the local council, and a lack of consideration for long-term benefits to the locals. When I map a heritage trail, the first problem is to identify clean toilets and clean eateries along the route ... Do we understand what tourists need? Do we know the different needs of tourists, local or foreign, and know that the lower tolerance must be dealt with – local tourists can take a lower standard for cleanliness but not the foreigners, especially those coming from countries where cleanliness is next to godliness.

When it concerns **cleanliness** in particular, note the following mentioned in article published in early 2010:

Turning to more general aspects of our trip, we were very disappointed in a number of things. First, our joy at arriving at Pulau Banding Jetty soon turned to dismay when we saw that, despite the huge red sign that prohibited littering, there were polystyrene food packets, plastic bottles and paper covering the entire jetty area with Roti Canai curry sauce all over the seats. Nothing short of disgraceful and if we understand correctly the stall holder who sells these offending items is responsible to the government for the cleanliness then he is just not doing his job. From all accounts punitive government action is long overdue in this area.

Hence, it should be worth reminding time and again the following mentioned by a well known writer in her article published in September last year too:

The most important preparation we should make is in-house. It has to do with cleanliness, hygiene and communication. There is little headway with filth and litter. Our streets are dirty and our drains support more plant growth than is found in some of our gardens. The smells from rotting food waste and the vermin that thrive on waste, lie beside some of our best food stalls. Where are the health inspectors and why is there a lack of enforcement? If we are really serious about welcoming these visitors, we need to improve our cleanliness. Impose a heavy fine on those who litter indiscriminately and close down the establishments which continually break the rules. Perhaps the people in charge have different standards of hygiene or have a higher tolerance of filth.

Other than problems that are concerned with the public transportation system, tour guides and the lack of basic facilities and cleanliness in eateries, there is the problem with the **lack of signboards**. Note the following two remarks – the first was mentioned in an article

published in October last year while the second which is concerned with one of Perak's newer attractions and was published in early 2010.

Tourists who drive are dismayed by poor signage. Try leaving the Taiping zoo after the night safari and navigating your way home. There are no signboards to direct you back onto the motorway. The roads are dimly lit making signboards invisible.

Perak's Herbal Garden – one of the state's 10 tourism icons – is being proudly presented with a big billboard at the junction of Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah Utara (Jalan Tasek) and Jalan Teh Lean Swee in Ipoh. The poster does not state where the Garden is located or give any contact details. However, the website of Perak Tourism is given in a panel under the poster. When I enquired how to get there from Ipoh, the receptionist in the Garden informed that I should drive along Gopeng Road and turn right into the road leading to Kellie's Castle. The Garden is about one kilometre from the main road. There is no signboard of the Garden along the main road. How are tourists going to get there?

It is notable that a year later (that would be early last year), an individual had left a comment in response to the writing that includes the second remark above. He had this to say:

I went to Ipoh last week. I asked five Ipoh taxi drivers about the herb garden but nobody knew this place. How the government promotes tourism? Many Ipoh residents also did not know this place.

Finally, there are also other problems which are rather hard to designate. Perhaps you could try to do so yourselves? The first came out in a writing published in early 2010 that is concerned with a trip made by the writer to Temenggor/Belum Forest while the second in June last year and was concerned with Ipoh's Gunung Lang Recreation Park:

Next came the Orang Asli Village which is an absolute disgrace and not worth the journey. We are sure that at one time this was an untouched sanctuary where the people lived as they have for centuries. But today the village is spoilt by an ugly, government built, water treatment and distribution plant, right in the centre of the village consisting of bare steel girders with tanks on top. It could not be uglier if it tried. Now of course, providing clean water for the people is a noble and necessary thing to do, but when it is done with no thought for nature or the village environment then it becomes an eyesore. We implore the government to be more thoughtful of the environment in their future projects on the islands... Secondly the solidly constructed boat jetty cannot be used as its designer did not taken into account the rise and fall of the water and apparently being designed for low water is completely submerged. We therefore boarded our boat over the muddy, litter-strewn bank. A standard floating jetty, in use all over the world is what the government should have spent our money on! Why didn't they? Surely Perak must have someone with knowledge of such basic requirements. One wonders how the contractor qualified for the job.

The kampong houses need sprucing up. This is an eco-park and the plants and trees should be labeled and brief descriptions given. The focus should be more on landscape rather than as an animal park. Maybe the deer and ostrich can be let loose or given to other petting zoos. With few recreational activities there is little to do in the park other than strolling. The park needs hiking trails, hill climbing and exploration of the caves for the more adventurous. The Perak House adjacent to the jetty needs to be maintained. A few household items should be placed inside the house. Nor Sarul Rizal bin Kassim, assistant officer of the city council's landscape and recreation department

located at the park, said that University Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Tanjung Malim has carried out a study on the park for the past two years and would submit its proposals for improvement soon.

Before I end this rather depressing accounting of issues and challenges at the ground level for the tourism sector in Perak as a whole, I believe there is a need for me to give similar accounting for Ipoh in particular. In doing so, like before, I shall quote on what may be found readily in the internet and which were published within the last few years.

Ipoh – Issues and Challenges at the Ground Level. A person in commenting to an article which was published in November last year, had this to say about Ipoh's **public transport**:

Ipoh public transport...really need to upgrade. The Century bus is so old. Taxi wise, still not running on meter, well, but not so bad, as the fixed fare is reasonable at the moment. The airport, really need to improve, hope more flights can fly there. The arrival custom also very "traditional", passenger had to open up the case for them to search. Whereas, JB custom already implemented scanning of luggage.

Over an article published in the preceding month, a commentator had this to say:

Nothing is mentioned about local transportation ie. bus and taxi where waiting time for bus is horrendous and taxis not up to standard. What are the tourist going to rely on, their own 2 feet?

And check out what was mentioned by a writer in his writing published in May 2010:

Though Ipoh has grown from a sleepy hollow on the banks of Sungai Kinta, in size covering 643sq.km, new commercial areas and suburban towns have increased the population to over 750,000. However it still lags behind other cities in the country in terms of public amenities. For example, bus services in the city needs to be urgently overhauled so that it will be the choice mode of transport for the residents, as well as tourists arriving by bus, train and air. Taxi service in the city is equally bad. The drivers have been stubbornly refusing to use taxi-meters and will charge at least RM7 for just a short distance.

When it concerns **the lack of signboards**, note the following published in the middle of last year on Gunung Lang park located just north of the city off Jalan Kuala Kangsar and easily accessible by road:

It has taken about two decades to turn scenic Gunung Lang, which is nestled in the midst of limestone outcrops, into a recreational park with a potential for becoming a tourist attraction. Despite all the time spent and an expenditure of over RM11 million, Gunung Lang still fails to achieve its desired objective which is to be a recreational park as a getaway for city folks and also to attract tourists. In spite of being on the outskirts of the city and within easy reach by those with cars, the park has not been attracting visitors as many residents are not aware of its existence and even those who have heard of the name do not know where it is situated. The inherent seclusion and tranquility of the place provides a perfect retreat for families to enjoy their weekends of relaxation. The surrounding limestone hills draped in lovely greenery is a living tapestry for the eyes. There is a lack of signage especially along the highway to divert some traffic to the park. Even at the entrance to the park there is no proper signage. At the jetty there is a plaque giving general information. However, there is no site plan of the area and visitors going to the other side of the lake have to walk aimlessly not knowing what the attractions are.

Note that at the end of the article, the author had this to say:

Menteri Besar, Dato' Seri Dr. Zambry Abdul Kadir, has called on the city council to upgrade Gunung Lang into a recreational cum tourist spot for both local and foreign visitors. "I've asked MBI to find ways to improve the park so it will become a viable tourist attraction," he said.

And the writer himself in the second to the very last paragraph of the article had mentioned the following:

There is no denying that it is a great location with a lovely environment of limestone hills and a cave, but the marketing for the facility is very poor. The city council should go on a more aggressive marketing drive to let members of the public know more about its scenic attractions.

As for issue of **the lack of cleanliness**, note the following mentioned in an article published in late 2010:

The 'City that Tin Built' will soon be known as "cattle city" if no action is taken soon by the relevant authorities. Although it was accorded city status 22 years ago, cows and buffaloes still roam freely on its roads, commercial areas and housing estates. Judging from the amount of complaints and police reports lodged by residents about stray cattle, the situation is becoming serious. Stray cattle are sighted daily in various parts of the city, particularly in the Lahat, Menglembu, Silibin, Jelapang, and in the Jalan Kuala Kangsar areas. These stray cattle are not just a nuisance, but also a threat as they have been known to attack and gore people while grazing in parks, children's playgrounds, commercial and residential areas. They also obstruct traffic, destroy plants and rummage in dust-bins in the housing estates, leaving trails of dung and urine with their accompanying foul smells in front of houses and along roads.

It is notable that in response to the article, a commentator had this to say:

We just do not know why the MBI is reluctant to take immediate action regarding the cattle menace. It is the responsibility of MBI to the taxpayers in addressing this issue. They must come out with some sort of solution and not close one eye and shut the other. I would suggest that the MBI officers call the cattle owners for a dialogue and ask them their grievances. The State Government should also be invited for the dialogue. I have attended many functions of the State Government and many a times, the Menteri Besar has mentioned with concern that Ipoh must be a clean city so that Investors are happy to invest in Ipoh and its neighbouring towns. Biocity is developing fast around Jelapang/Meru and the MBI MUST buck up and work with the State Government closely to bring glory to Ipoh as one of the cleanest city in Malaysia. Currently with MBI's thought of going in for ISO is certainly not justifiable.

In July last year in response to an article, a commentator could not have been clearer on the matter of lack of cleanliness in the capital of Perak. He or she said:

The first thing to be done before luring tourist to Ipoh is a big clean up. Just stand in front of Wah Nam coffee shop and Wah Pan coffee shop at Jalan Leong Sin Nam/Jalan Raja Ekram, look into the drain and breathe in if you dare. The sight of noodles, curry, vegetables, styrofoam cups and plates, etc stagnant in the drain speaks too loud. It's amazing nobody is taking action about the filth that's been on-going for years. Complaining to MBI, as always, fell on deaf ears. I just saw 2 ang-moh tourist standing there during lunch time today and I wonder what their reaction and impression of Ipoh would be should they look into the drain. Just that, any good impression they have goes down the filthy drain.

To round up this discussion on the issues and challenges that the capital of Perak seems to be facing as far as the tourism sector is concerned, I would like to share with you several other comments made in June last year on the piece of writing on Gunung Lang park that was referred to earlier. I believe that as a whole they should be able to remind us of how acute the problems we are facing in trying to bring in droves of tourists to various nooks and corners of Perak when Ipoh the capital and what appears to be the most developed part of the state to this very day appears inadequate in getting things right as far as the tourists are concerned! Here they are:

The beauty of Gunung Lang are its limestone hills, the cave, the artificial tunnel for vehicular access to the park, the vegetation and the bodies of water. The concept of the development at Lang is fundamentally flawed. [But,] Buildings are badly designed and constructed, the garden landscape poorly executed while workers try their best to right the wrong. Theme buildings are hollow, unusable, and not authentic in any way – relocating a few good old kampong houses would have done the trick. There is not even a decent cafe in this isolated area. And yet, we are told we are not meant to complain about these things.

I went there as an overseas visitor in January 2011 and the cafe is a disgrace. Dirty, and a very poor choice of food and drink. We were made to feel as though we were not wanted by the cafe operators.

I was there once and was never think of going or bringing oversea friends there again due to the poor management and poor maintenance. What a disgrace!! think more efforts and actions should be taken to improve in order to attract more tourists in future!

Nothing to do in this park. No good restaurant to hang around. Beautiful scenery though. Allowing fishing tour, kayaking or bamboo floats with a surround jogging track should lure more people over. With additional activities, this place will be much better than Taman DR Senivasagam or Polo

I used to go to Gunung Lang almost every weekend with my family. There is actually nothing to do, but to feed the fishes in the lake and have a stroll around the surroundings. DBI must buck up and add more attractions to lure more visitors. Perhaps, DBI can work with the tourist industry players and in collaboration with the tourist department of Perak to come up with a comprehensive plan, instead of doing it alone.

Lucky for us for there are also those who have come out with some constructive points:

They should just get the Japanese to come over, they will give it a perfect makeover.

This place has the attraction. Most important is how to make a good job!

Find the real people to do the best job!!

To end this whole delineation of recent developments and issues and challenges in the tourism sector of Perak, I would like to inform you that what I did on the latter just now appear to be mere the tip of an iceberg! For more, please check out the Appendix A to the text of this speech. There you shall find a total of over eight pages of a myriad of issues and challenges raised by various parties in the last few years. Together they bring out the picture that we in Perak have indeed got in our hands quite a large room of improvement to make in the tourism sector.

In the next section, I would like to go big on what we need to do not just for the tourism sector in the state but also other areas so that we can truly move the state to another level. The

journey may be long and arduous – but that appears to be the case for just about everything that is worth achieving. Don't you think so? Anyway, I like to think that we do not really have much choice on the path to take unless we are prepared to have those who come after us – our children, the children of our children and so on and so forth – to look back in time and accuse us here today as failing to do the necessary for Perak and its future!

The Way Forward

For decades prior to and after British Malaya achieved its independence in 1957, Perak could easily be considered the richest land in the Peninsular. And this was primarily due to the fact that Perak had (still has?) the richest alluvial deposits of tin in the world. But the collapse of the world's tin industry in the 1980s had caused prices to fall sharply leading to the closing down of the tin mines. Hence, in contrast to what happened until at least the Second World War where Perak - with the best infrastructure, largest population disposition and sizeable towns such as Taiping, Ipoh and Kuala Kangsar - was perhaps the most advanced in comparison to other states, for several decades now other states such as Perak's neighbours Penang and Selangor have overtaken Perak in many different ways.

Perak today is facing stiff competition from its neighbours. Perak today also has the highest number of bottom 40 percent household income group in the country. Nonetheless, during the last few years, Perak's GDP has consistently grown at more than six percent on average, except in 2009, where the global economic crisis impacted not only the state but also Malaysia and the world.

This is in addition to the fact that Perak is still the second largest state in Peninsular Malaysia! This means it has an abundance of land that booming economies like Penang or Selangor can only salivate about. In comparison to some other states too, Perak has the advantage of vast infrastructure with over 200km of the North-South Expressway passing through it, a long railway line, the Perak River and a long coastline. Finally, let us not forget the fact that Perak is dotted with so very many interesting sites from north to south and from the mountains to the sea that nature lovers, thrill seekers, history buffs and food aficionados from all over the place would want to explore – if only we (yes, we!) in the state play our cards right!

Who would dare to deny the following? In the world of *superlatives*, Perak as stated out in a number of sources to date has

- the world's oldest rainforest (estimated age of 130 million years: older than the jungle of Amazon or that of Congo) / the largest continuous forest complex in the Malaysian Peninsula and which crosses into Southern Thailand - Royal Belum State Park
- the oldest site for human existence (outside of Africa) - Lenggong Valley
- the most beautiful garden in South East Asia / the biggest urban parkland in the country (at 222 acres) - Lake Garden Taiping
- (one of) the most beautiful mosque in the world - Ubudiah Mosque Kuala Kangsar
- the most exquisite dish - Rendang Tok
- the most delicious fruit - Durian of Batu Gantang – Changkat Jering
- the oldest weekly market - Changkat Jering
- the largest heronry in the country - Kinta Nature Park
- the largest mangrove swamp forest in the Peninsula Malaysia - Matang
- the longest double zipline flying fox in Malaysia - Bukit Kinding Eco Park Resort Tanjung Rambutan

- the largest of the oldest limestone massifs in Malaysia - Kinta Valley (stretching from Tapah in the south to Lintang in the north with Ipoh right in the middle)
- the largest limestone cave in Peninsular Malaysia - Gua Tempurung
- the tallest waterfall in the country - Lata Kinjang Chenderiang (which can be seen clearly from the North-South Expressway)

And we also have in Perak small and not so small towns' items or experience of different kinds that are waiting for us to promote to the world outside. These include the following:

- Freshwater prawns – Tanjung Tualang
- Sweet pineapples – Kampung Selabak Teluk Intan
- Rock climbing over limestone hills – Tambun
- Guava fruits – Sitiawan
- Colonies of tropical fireflies – Kampung Dew Kamunting
- Salt and pickled fish (ikan pekasam) – Tasik Raban Lenggong
- Natural attractions (such as beautiful limestone outcrops with fascinating cave temples); beautiful architecture / historic buildings (such as the Railway Station, Town Hall and High Court and 20 plus others along the Old Town's heritage trail); and iconic products (such as pomelo, white coffee and bean sprouts) - Ipoh
- The place where modern Malaysia began to take shape (since it is the site where the origin of independence movement against the British began in the form of the killing of the first British resident of Perak, James W.W. Birch on 2nd November 1875) – Pasir Salak
- Gaharu Tea Valley (covering 300 acres and planted with about 200,000 gaharu trees) – Gopeng
- Groundnuts – Menglembu
- Herbal Garden (a 50-acre piece of land planted with more than 500 species of herbs) - on the way to Batu Gajah.
- Leaning Tower - Teluk Intan
- Kellie's Castle - Batu Gajah
- Night Safari – Taiping
- Sport fishing and shrimping – Teluk Intan
- Turtles – Segari
- Hot Springs - Sungkai

On the basis of all this, I would like to simply say that in my humble estimation Perak's salvation is in two sectors – agriculture and tourism - that others in the country could have much problem in doing better than us in the long run even though in the short run they may still be able to get the better of us since they have started much earlier and have indeed found success in them.

“Rome is not built in one day”. (And if you were to consider the Sirah of Ar Rasul saw, it was the same thing too: it took him 23 years from the time he was paid a visit by the angle Jibrail in a cave in Mount Hira on the outskirts of Mecca to finally be able to get Islam to move up into the world.) Hence, I would like to think that Perak should be of no different. It is the job of us all here to make sure that there exist the right surrounding for Perak to emerge top again in perhaps five to ten years from now. Therefore, I would like to submit the following to be those areas which all of us together need to look seriously into with the intention of putting them into action:

- the setting up of a faculty or a university for the following two fields (preferably with the involvement of those from overseas who have tasted success): agriculture (particularly agro food) and tourism
- the strengthening of local governments including city councils with performance evaluations filled by ratepayers
- the use of internet and social media networks in various sectors and operations and particularly in classroom learning experience
- the enhancement of soft and virtual skills and foreign language capabilities among students at different levels of education and others looking for employment or having interest in starting up business operations or NGOs
- the building up of more and better infrastructure needed for easy and cheap access to various points of interests in the physical and virtual worlds
- the closer involvement of various parties from outside the government circles in generating ideas, decision making and monitoring of government operations
- the continuation of the policy of attracting domestic and foreign direct investment with a closer attention to the need to keep local communities happy and environment safe

By working for the high level of success in these seven areas should lead to a Perak deep in knowledge and excellent in practice in the fields of agro food and tourism, higher level of transparency and accountability in government operations and last and certainly not the least high level of employment among the people. Hence, we should be getting ever more closer to all that I have pointed earlier that come under the PADP. Surely this is what we all want even though it may probably lead to more and never ending budget deficits in the years to come (to add to nearly a decade old budget deficits that the state has been experiencing thus far)?

Aside from achieving the goals of the PADP, I would like to share with you some information that you may have missed but which lead to the picture that these seven areas are down right appropriate for us (and for that matter others in the country) to go after:

- Malaysia today is listed as the world's 9th most visited country. Top 10 in terms of arrivals. And top 15 in global receipts. However, the numbers are not as good as those of Singapore and Australia! Having said that, by 2020 tourism is expected to contribute just over RM100 billion in GNI with foreign arrivals reaching 36 million (from 2011 figures of close to RM60 billion in GNI and approximately 25 million in foreign arrivals).
- In 2015 with 600 million people, the single regional market known as the Asean Economic Community (AEC) shall come to existence. It should lead to among others the expansion of middle income bracket. The growing middle class cluster in Asean shall parallel that in China, India and Africa in using services more as a proportion to the consumption.
- The United Nation has given warning in 2013 there shall be world wide food crisis and the collapse of global food supply.
- World renowned economist Professor Jeffrey Sachs has declared that sustainable development involves not just economic prosperity and social inclusion, but also environmental sustainability and that governments should be reporting on the progress made of each these three areas annually.
- Cyberjaya, the national information, communication and technology (ICT) hub, has recently become the first city in Malaysia to be fully wired with high speed internet

broadband at 100 megabits per second (Mbps). If Cyberjaya can do it, surely others including Perak can make it too – sooner rather than much later?

Due to time constraint, for the next few minutes, I shall dwell a bit on merely one half of the first out of a total of seven items which I believe we should seriously embark upon from now on. I am referring to the idea of the setting up of a university or a faculty in the state focusing on the field of tourism.

University or Faculty for Tourism

During September last year, after having launched the logo of Visit Perak Year 2012 as well as Perak's tourism tagline "Yours to Discover" at the MBI Square, I mentioned to reporters that tourism products and attractions in the state are able to generate big profits for the government and its people. I was also quoted to say: "With its many tourist attractions, we are set to get Perak into the world tourism map as one of the best spots to visit in the country." After more than a year later I believe in those words more than ever before.

Hence, it may be safe for me to say that all this time we in Perak have been living very, very close to the solution of our economic malaise. The solution is not quite found in the factory floors, computer screen and what not of similar limited space and age; instead, we have actually had the solution in the form of our favorite foods, the architecture of our old buildings and the serenity of our age old hills and the challenges brought forth by our mountains! In short, all of this and more are potential money spinners. What we need now are the best brains (in addition to what we have currently of course!) to help us all in charting out the exact path that we need to take for years to come to bring the tourists to our Perak.

As you can see from what I have mentioned earlier, in the past few years, we have implemented a number of moves and we have also planned out some other moves – all with the intention to bring in more and more tourists. And yet we are still bogged down with some debilitating issues and challenges that could very well hamper our efforts in bringing in the tourists. Could it be that the lack of fund is not quite the reason for the emergence of much of the issues and challenges? Could it be that we need more of smart people who are well versed on various theories in the tourism field and who can conduct all kinds of research and offer needed consultations for the tourism sector in Perak to reach its full potential?

Related to this latter question, recently it has come to my knowledge that a group of academicians from the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris with financial assistance coming from the IDR was able to complete the research project that came under the title 'Tourism Products Marketing Strategy'. Such effort is quite encouraging. However, we need a great more of such work – and I am not so sure that such would take place without the presence in the state of a university or a faculty focusing on tourism.

Before I dwell on the issue of the need for a university or a faculty focusing on tourism, I would like to share with you three real life cases that show the potential of tourism of the type known as Eco Adventure in bringing in money to the state and its people and - not to forget – thrills and frills for the so called eco adventure tourists. These cases may also perhaps open up our eyes to the possibility that it is in the tourism sector that our young - after having been given the appropriate "tools" - could find the jobs that they have been looking for. A university or a faculty focusing on tourism should be in the appropriate position to provide the young with those "tools" that they need.

The Roots. In late 2009, Kinta River saw for the first time its first eco-resort. It is named 'The Roots'. It is located 12 km away from Ipoh at Tanjung Rambutan on the banks of the Kinta River. The owners of the resort are comprised of dedicated conservationists Bridget Hedderman and her partner Peter Witzigmann and Ecofieldtrips Pte Ltd of Singapore. While

Bridget is an experienced biologist and conservationist with a Masters in Education and is proactive in marine conservation and education, Ecofieldtrips Pte Ltd which has been in operation for a period of ten years is devoted to teaching young people about the environment by taking them on field trips.

Both Bridget and Peter, who run a resort at Tioman Island, had taken less than six months to set up the resort at the Kinta River. In their view, compared to the Tioman resort, the one in Perak is better. Why? Allow me to bring down for your consumption what exactly was mentioned by Bridget herself (as found in the writing piece published in December 2009):

Perak... has so much to offer. You have the limestone hills with its impressive cave systems, Orang Asli communities, white-water rafting and the Matang mangrove swamps. At Pangkor Island we can teach about marine biology. Even Ipoh town with both its elegant and decrepit shop houses and colonial mansions can make for a great lesson for history students to learn about this once thriving city of tin. This place is an unmatched combination of adventure, history, culture and nature exploration, an unforgettable educational experience...

And what do you know? During the first quarter of the following year, as mentioned in another writing piece published in March the following year, the resort had its first intake of visitors from the German European School in Singapore. Comprised 71 students and four teachers, the group was on a five-day field trips throughout Perak. Allow me to quote extensively on what these trips entailed from the author of the March 2010 writing piece:

The students, whose average age is 13 years, were taken on action-packed field trips from Gua Tempurung at Gopeng and its surrounding adventure camps to Matang Mangrove Forest at Taiping where they had a chance to re-plant mangrove seedlings, thus replenishing an important habitat for many endangered bird species found nearby. Conservation of indigenous cultures is also part of the programme and as such their trip included a visit to the Orang Asli village at Kampong Tonggan, Ulu Kinta where students integrated with the children of Orang Asli families. The ice-breaker activity was singing the song "heads, shoulders, knees and toes" repeatedly but in various dialects starting from English to Bahasa Malaysia. Back at The Roots, the students learnt to play *sepak takraw*, made a poster inspired by the Orang Asli visit, and even had some target practice using traditional Orang Asli blow-pipes. For a sense of adventure the students visited Kellie's Castle where they participated in a quest designed by Ecofieldtrips that took them through its dungeons and secret passageways to discover the tale of The William Kellie Smith family. Ipoh history was a major focus throughout the week especially the tin industry culminating in a fun tin panning session. Throughout the week the students were led by a team of eight experienced biologists to learn about the diverse history, biology, people and attractions that Perak and Ipoh have to offer.

As revealed in the writing piece, all this fit in with the resort's study programme focusing "on raising awareness of environmental conservation and sustainability issues, particularly to young people who have the power to shape the future of our planet." And what do you know too? As revealed in the writing piece, for the remainder of 2010, the resort had already got bookings from another 10 schools from countries like France, Singapore, Dubai and Hong Kong as well as KL and Penang!

It is perhaps important to note that the programme for their first batch took over eight months to prepare. But, it appears that it is all worth it. Note on the following as mentioned

in the March 2010 writing piece: “One of the visiting teachers said that the Roots programme was one of the best programmes available for eco-tourism and educating young minds.”

The Nomad Adventure. Nomad Adventure was formed in 2003 and is the first adventure operator in Gopeng. Its founder Chan Yuen Li, an adventure enthusiast, captained the first Asian team to complete the 1998 multi day expedition Eco-Challenge competition held in Morocco. Nomad Adventure operates in two locations – Earth Camp and Mountain School. As noted the author of May 2012 writing piece on the former:

Visitors can stay at its eco-friendly Earth Camp-site which provides accommodations in green-house dormitories or tree houses to get the feel of communal living in a rainforest environment. Its water activities along the Kampar River include the exciting white-water rafting which traverses 22 rapids of grades 2-3 all the while surrounded by the rainforests along upper Sungai Kampar. Subsequently this is followed by a relaxing and scenic kayaking float trip down the lower Sg Kampar drifting through river villages until Kuala Dipang.

As for the latter, this was mentioned:

Nomad’s Mountain School at the limestone outcrop of Gua Kandu offers rock climbing, a unique high ropes course along a limestone and jungle environment, and free hanging abseil. Visitors are also taken for caving at Gua Tempurung and encouraged to participate in the Academy Kampung community cultural activity to have a complete eco-adventure experience all within Gopeng itself.

It is notable that in early April 2012, Nomad had received 160 visitors from the Middle East who came for a day trip of adventure. Not that long after, Nomad Adventure received another confirmation from another but smaller Middle-East group for a mountain-to-sea challenge: a 6D5N stay which takes the visitor to Cameron Highlands for the start of a 2-day trek down to Gopeng, then white-water rafting, mountain biking and caving at Gua Tempurung before taking a 70-km cycle ride to end at Teluk Batik, Lumut.

Bukit Kinding’s Eco Adventure Park (BKEAP). BKEAP located at Tanjung Rambutan is a 1,400-acre resort that sits at the foothills of the Titiwangsa Range. As noted the author of a writing piece published in May this year:

Since last November when it introduced a string of adventure activities ranging from free kayaking to zorbing, paintball, mountain biking and later the Flying Fox, the resort has experienced a growth of new customers using their facilities mainly for team building and adventure activities.

Although BKEAP is new to eco-adventure activities, as noted the same author, it has been having impressive bookings from colleges, universities and corporations for its adventure activities since it started its adventure park to the point that it is “currently constructing new chalets and dormitories to accommodate over 600 guests at any one time.”

From these three cases, one can safely conclude that tourism of the type known as Eco-Adventure can and should be made a major source of revenue for the state and its people. Did I hear someone asking the question of what is Eco-Adventure Tourism? Well, allow me to quote extensively from what appears to be a very knowledgeable source:

The definition of Eco-Tourism refers to tourists wishing to experience and appreciate the natural and cultural heritage within an environment and foster a greater appreciation of its natural habitat. Adventure tourism on the other hand attracts tourists seeking excitement through activities that require significant personal effort and some degree of risk such as white-water rafting, rock climbing or even mountain biking. When one combines these two definitions, Eco-Adventure Tourism, one

immediately realises that Perak has all these products. Our eco-tourism products such as Gua Tempurung and Royal Belum are world-class gems, pristine and precious and offer a wealth of knowledge. Similarly interesting are our Orang Asli villages and Ipoh's Heritage Trails. For adventure there are white-water rafting, caving and mountain biking, to name a few. Package all of these activities together and the result is a fun and adventurous eco-adventure holiday.

All in all, with Perak having all that that eco-adventure tourists are looking for, they have no need to travel to the four corners of the country. They should just simply come to Perak and within a few short days they shall experience it all! But I would like to raise a question: has Perak done all that which is needed to get the visitors coming in in droves? Based upon what I had laid out earlier under tourism's issues and challenges at the ground level, we are certainly far away from that goal! Related to this, note on what was mentioned just a few months ago by Bridget the co-owner of the resort the Roots as published in a writing piece just a few months ago: "Perak has a lot to offer [on eco and adventure tourism] though I doubt that it has been marketed to the public yet." Indeed, we appear to have also failed on the marketing side. That is, as far as the subject matter of promoting Perak aggressively and with innovation as the place to go to in order to experience nature and history, we currently do not appear to have that much to be proud of.

So, what are we to do now?

As I allude to above, just as we need policy makers and other parties such as hoteliers, restaurant owners and operators of public transports to be doing and giving their best to bring in visitors to the state, we need people who are on top of the various theories that are around in the tourism field and who can conduct research of various types (and subsequently provide consultations) to do the necessary together with so many other parties including those I just mentioned for the good of the sector in the state. And since currently we hardly have these people around, I would like to suggest that we should go all out to identify the party or parties who can work with us in the setting up of an establishment in the form of either a university or a faculty for this type of people to be working in.

The party or parties involve can come from anywhere – even outside the state or the country's borders. And the learning entity that they set up with or without the state government as the co owner can operate from anywhere in the state. From the top of my head I can think of one of three most attractive places for them to set up their base at: Pulau Banding, Pulau Pangkor and Ipoh. (But it could very well be somewhere in Batang Padang since it seems to me it is one of the districts in the state of Perak that appears for some time now to be very much in need for some large scale investments.) To make it quite an attractive offer, I believe we should provide the concerned party or parties with the permission to set up a hotel of some international standards at their premise. This hotel can help the institution to generate income besides being a premise for the needed training of its students. So, what do you think of this suggestion?

The Final Word on Tourism and University or Faculty for Tourism?

There is a lot of money to be made in the tourism sector. And what more is that it can perhaps be one of the few rather uncomplicated ways at our disposal to stop the youths from leaving the state in search of jobs. With the presence in the state of a university or a faculty focusing on tourism (and the hospitality) sector, a good number of Perak youths may also be stopped from leaving the state in search for higher education. Finally, as far as the intention of having around a university or a faculty focusing on tourism is concerned, the state government is doing nothing more than what it has been trying to do for some time now: to turn Perak into

an education hub. Note what I mentioned early this year during an interview with the newspaper *The Sunday Star* related to the question on the development thus far for Perak to become an education hub:

We are now on the right track towards turning Perak into an educational hub as evidenced by the number of institutions of higher learning submitting their building plans to the state for approval. We are also in the midst of talks with several universities on having them set up their branches here.

Having said just about everything that I would like to say on this subject matter of tourism in the state of Perak, I would like now to present to you what I believe most of us here are quite aware of. I am talking about today in Perak and elsewhere in the country we are facing a general public who is not easily satisfied and deeply critical with just about everything we do. To show you *exactly* what I have meant with that remark, note the following response made to an article which was published in April this year:

It is 7 months since Perak unveiled its Visit Perak Year 2012. As a resident in Perak, I would like to ask the tourism exco in the Govt whether they have the 7 months evaluation and reports from the campaign. Personally I do not think there is much to shout about and impact from the money wasting campaign. Until the authority can show the half year statistics of tourism arrivals and the revenue from the campaign I am not convinced they have achieved anything. Asked any ordinary Perakian or Ipohites they will probably go in a daze that there are such a campaign. Let's face reality, over the years Perak has never achieved much in the tourism industry. Because it is implemented according to the whim and fancies of the incumbent Exco of Tourism to suit his or her personal image. And most of the programs and campaigns are done on an ad hoc basis and never in a serious manner. Tourist arrivals and revenue will only be achieved after a long period of time of continuous campaigns and programs. There is no political will from the Chief Minister himself to make tourism an important industry in the state. Penang, Melaka, Sabah, Sarawak and Selangor of late are the only states that are far ahead in getting tourism serious into the state agenda. Perak is so far lagging in this, despite having good tourist products. A study was made sometime ago in 2005 that Perak should focus on 2 or 3 major products and places to see it progress well in the industry. In return for reasons best known by the policy makers and for personal egos, went into so many areas of tourism instead. And this had confused the tourists and tourist industry players. I can recall that at one time Perak had championed itself as a shopping paradise. Many things can be said about tourism in Perak but until such time that the State give it to the real tourism players, people with experience and expertise. Not to political yes man and little Napoleons in the Tourism Departments and agencies, Perak will remain in the tin can for many years to come.

Trust me that that person is not alone with such view. To prove that that is the case note the following comment that came out early this year:

I have been in and out of M'sia all the while "even before you took over the helm in the State/Ipoh" everytime I come back to Ipoh, I have not seen anything done for the Ipoh folks. It mostly in "planning stage or whatever". Pls correct me if I am wrong. Pls tell me ONE good project which benefits the tourism industry in Ipoh? The eyesore one see around Ipoh are the blasting of the Limestone hills. These are our real tourist capital, BUT instead of using and profiting from these natural beauty, the State tourism industry and the State government is allowing the beauty of the limestone to

be destroyed and to benefit a small group of people. I am sure your office have received many complaints from the ipoh folks, have your office done anything so far? The so to say "tourism attraction" for ipoh city are a few of those ugly metal arches. What Greentown walk and so on.... Ask any folks in Ipoh and i guarantee they will tell you how happy they are with your governments achievement!!!. Everytime i read about a new plan from the government, it sound great BUT what have been done and achieve that the local folks are proud of?

Now, what do we do with this kind of stance? Do we ignore it? Or, would we try to make sure in our words and deeds that Perak's tourism today as far as the state government is concerned is quite a serious matter? That is, we do know exactly what we are doing and where we are heading and that whatever limitations taking place in the past should not have been viewed to still be the case at the present time and in the coming days. To ensure that the critical minded ones among us are persuaded that we are far from being rhetorical, I would like to share with you what I hope we shall try to avoid from happening again.

Let me begin by saying that just a few months ago in an article dated 16 July 2011, it was mentioned early on that Perak is to embark on an aggressive programme to promote tourism in the state. It was also mentioned that the state government had set a target for three million tourist arrivals under the Visit Perak Year 2012. Next, the state tourism chairman, Dato' Hamidah Othman, appeared to have been quoted to say that while Perak had many tourist attractions, it had not felt the full impact of the country's successful tourism industry each year. This was reflected in the form of the following facts: though tourism is the second largest revenue earner in the country earning RM56.5 billion from the arrival of 24.6 million visitors in 2010, Perak recorded just 2.2 million tourist arrivals during the same period. In fact, the number of visitors to Perak had been experiencing a declining trend since 2009. Apparently it was all due to the fact that tour agents from Penang and Kuala Lumpur were fond of organising only day trips to the various tourist attractions in the state, while local tour agents appear to be just interested in outbound tours.

But guess what? Just a few months later, in another article dated 29 September 2011 Norshamshida A. Rahman, the director for Tourism Malaysian Perak, was quoted to have said that the state of Perak had achieved third place in attracting local tourists in 2010. She was also said to have mentioned that there was a total of 12.2 million tourists coming to Perak in 2010 in comparison to 6.1 million in 2009. She was quoted to say this: "The record includes day-visit and overnight-stay tourists in the state. Visitors from Selangor totalled 911,300, Kuala Lumpur (372,500), Penang (292,000) and Kedah (156,700)."

Whatever may be the logical explanations behind the discrepancy in figures, it is my fervent hope that from now on we have to try very, very hard to ensure that it shall never happen again. After all, it does not make a good picture of anyone or anything if we cannot get our facts straight. Also, if we are not able to get it right for something as simple as the number of tourist arrivals, we may end up with a situation whereby the people may think that we hardly know what we are doing for the rest of the sector or for that matter in the state's administration! Surely that is not what we are after?

Perak, Here We Come!

As you know, the theme for the Pangkor International Development Dialogue 2012 is the socio-economic transformation for the people. And as you probably have noticed already the sub themes of the PIDD 2012 are

- economic transformation for the low income bracket
- human capital: creating a world class workforce

- gen-y: moulding a first class citizen / preparing gen-y for the future
- accelerating economic growth
- achieving sustainable development after rio +20

With all this at the back of my head, I have come out with a speech that looks ahead for Perak that we would like to see and experience. In other words, that Perak is in my humbled opinion capable of translating into action the very words that come in the form of PIDD 2012 theme and sub themes – through the working out of each of the seven areas which I have delineated earlier.

I am pretty aware that during the PIDD 2012 others may have other views that are contrary or complementing to mine in regard to these seven areas. Please note that I welcome whatever the case may be with open arms. I understand that all of us here and so many others outside this gathering have only wanted the best for Perak – even though we may have different ideas as to the path to be taken.

Finally, this I have to say: in coming out with a list of the seven areas that Perak need to move into, I had among others looked through numerous writings available for free in the internet (which I had subsequently analysed inductively). I would like to believe that such effort is needed for surely what members of the public have in mind and which they are able to articulate are worth more than a single person's ideas – even when that person is the chief minister of a state like myself! And as some of you may have noticed, by the fact that I did that was akin to what I have been doing from day one as the chief minister of the state: *go down on the ground, empathise, and find solutions.*

Now, for your advantage, I have placed in the Appendix B to this speech a majority of the important remarks found in the numerous writings that I had alluded to just now. The rest of the important remarks may be found in the Appendix A and within the text of this speech earlier. Trust me that it was not an easy at all in looking out for the right writing materials and subsequently in figuring out what is relevant inside them – all within a span of a short few weeks. But, it should all be worth it for the Perak that we all love!

With that remark, we have come to the very end of the speech.

I wish every one a productive time at PIDD 2012. Also, I would like to wish everyone an enjoyable stay in Perak.

Thank you.

APPENDIX A

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACING PERAK'S TOURISM SECTOR

Norshamshida Abdul Rahman [the newly appointed director for Tourism Malaysian Perak] who had a hi-tea meeting with media members and hospitality industry players at Ipoh Heritage Hotel..., said before being posted to Ipoh to take on the position, she was unaware of the various touristic treasures of this state which she later started discovering. (January 25, 2011)

Tourists like to see and experience what they don't have in their home state or country. Natural surroundings, jungles, and hills which are perfect for adventure tourism, and are felt to have a huge potential being so close to home (Ipoh). However, they caution that Gopeng hill is already over developed. (June 16, 2011)

Is Gua Tempurung really 1.5 billion years old? If it's true, the cave could be among the oldest existing natural features in the world. A Chinese geologist visiting the cave on January 17, 2012, claims Gua Tempurung has existed for more than 1.5 billion years and now the Perak state government may soon conduct further studies to ascertain if it is really that old. Earlier studies by Perak's state government on Gua Tempurung which is one of the top tourist attractions in the state, had estimated the cave's age at about 400 million years old. (January 18, 2012)

Then as we made our way around the lake over the next three days we were surprised to see how many islands are occupied by government departments, we believe as private recreational facilities. Add to these the small tour operators who provide campsites and floating chalets with doubtful control of effluent, litter and use of the lake and again, we worry for the future of the ecology of the area. Unless properly controlled, more people invariably means more pollution, degradation and destruction of nature's gifts, all in the name of profit. Malaysia really needs to take a leaf out of Australia's or New Zealand's book as to how to control reservoir and forest activities without stifling tourism. (March 9, 2010)

If we are really serious in promoting the Lenggong valley as a tourist destination, a separate body needs to be set up to single-mindedly focus on this product. It could be modelled on the Perak State Parks Corporation. At the moment, save for the museum, which I must say is well designed and the artefacts well presented, the archaeological sites are not easily accessible and more importantly not ready with infrastructure to not only support visitors but safeguard the integrity of the sites. Rules and regulations need to be devised and strictly enforced to ensure that the value of the sites is not compromised in any manner. If this is not done we will only be inviting disaster. (July 1, 2010)

Dato' Hamidah Osman and her tourism entourage visited Lenggong Valley recently to see things first-hand. Her concerns were the requirements stipulated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in reviewing the valley's heritage status. A management plan has to be submitted to UNESCO by February 2014. The most pressing issues are sign postings on roads leading to the Lenggong Archaeological Museum and Gallery and the availability of guides who can take tourists to the seven archeological sites scattered around Lenggong Valley. Since acquiring the heritage site status, visitors to Lenggong Valley have doubled... Infrastructure up-grading works are required. They range from lodging to transportation and promotion. (September 30, 2012)

... beliau mengakui masih terdapat kelemahan di peringkat hadapan (frontliners) melibatkan petugas-petugas di Pusat Penerangan Pelancongan (TIC) di negeri ini dalam menyampaikan maklumat terutamanya kepada pelancong. Sehubungan itu katanya, satu kursus intensif selama sehari telah dijalankan melibatkan golongan tersebut termasuk pihak hotel, pemandu teksi dan penyedia produk pelancongan selain mewujudkan 10 kiosk interaktif di pusat-pusat awam termasuk di stesen kereta api dan lapangan terbang. (November 25, 2011)

Malaysia's oldest prehistoric rock paintings found at Gunung Panjang, Tambun (Gua Tambun) was the focus of a group of students led by Professor Dr Lynn Hollen Lees from the University of Pennsylvania. The University Malaysia Kelantan students are currently attached to the Ministry of Tourism (Perak) on a 4-month practical training. The day trip was organised by the Perak Heritage Society as part of its efforts in promoting historical heritage to visitors... Evidence of vandalism is obvious as some of the paintings have been defaced. Steps to protect these 2,000-year old rock paintings have been taken but they are not sufficient. The difficulty in accessing the location is what that keeps intruders away. But for how long? According to Professor Lynn, the paintings were similar to rock and cave paintings she had seen in other parts of the world. The site was gazetted by Ipoh City Council in 1986 and was declared a national heritage by the Department of National Heritage on January 10, 2010. (April 16, 2012)

Despite its importance to pre-history of Malaysia, the site is not secure and open to vandalism, as has happened. The authorities must at least post some guides to visitors, about not taking anything away and not stepping on the old siput scattered all over the floor of the rock shelter. There is a pondok at the base of the stairs where this can be done very simply. Individual responsibility is critical. Best we do not encourage visitation until some measures have been taken to protect the site. Or we face further ruin. (August 19, 2012)

PTA, MATTA PERAK CHAPTER, PERAK TOURISM, WHAT HAS HAPPEN. HOW COME SUCH A REPORT COME OUT ARE YOU ALL SITTING OR WARMING YOUR SEATS & DOING NOTHING. MBI, YOUR COUNTER GIRLS ARE THERE TO ENSURE THE TOURISTS ONLY SIGNED FOR THE BROCHURES TAKEN AND HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION ON PERAK WAKE UP LAH START TO HIRE PENSIONERS WHO CAN SPEAK PROPER ENGLISH & HAVE KNOWLEDGE ON PERAK. (October 1, 2011)

I too find the official tourism in Perak rather bleak and upsetting. The staff do not seem to be trained or enthused about their job at all. I've been to many of the offices just for a quick look see in the past few years and truth be told, the staff really gave the impression that they were there just for the sake of having a job and getting their 'hard earned' salaries. I was lucky enough to be exposed to the great wonders of Perak, that when it came to bringing foreign friends around was a breeze. But on the days that they ventured out to explore Perak by themselves, they really couldn't get much help or information from these official places. They were better off wandering around and striking up conversations with locals instead. (October 3, 2011)

This is my second time commenting about VPY 2012 on Ipoh Echo. I don't think the Perak State Tourism Chairman even bother reading any of these. No wait, I don't think ANY of the local council and power-that-be bothers to read anything from the locals. They are too busy planning for 'study trips'. Such a waste of tax payers money. Sad to say, even I myself, a Perakian, would have to agree with the Australian tourist. I've

been to smaller towns in other countries, and believe me, they know their local attractions and its history like the back of their hands. They may lack resources but they definitely compensate it with their enthusiasm. Can't say the same about our own here though. Appalling! (October 9, 2011)

Most importantly, the counter STAFF MUST UNDERSTAND AND BE ABLE TO SPEAK ENGLISH. If they've at least, completed form five level and sat for their SPM, The eleven years of schooling and learning English should be able to give them a good command of English. Next is the attitude to RESPECT every customer, local or foreigners. Must have politeness, courtesy and patience to be able to answer inquiries with confidence and look at the enquirer's eyes. I know how these girls mumble mumbo-jumbo, poke at their friends for help, answer in a sheepish voice and if we asked too much, they become rude and their friends will join in cursing us. As though we are giving them extra work to think. I am sure there are many fluent-speaking Indian and Chinese young Malaysians who are very responsible in their duty commitment and can make Perak proud. Behaving like sweet-young-things is not the main reason they're there. Don't bring the kampong image to town and to your work place. Be professional. (November 23, 2011)

For a brief spell, a couple of months ago, I was part of a team assigned to conduct an audit of the tourism attractions in north-eastern Perak. The opportunity gave me a rare insight into the workings of Perak tourism. One feature that kept repeatedly emerging was the lack of common vision not only between the public and private sector but among the various levels in each sector. Whilst steps are being taken to address the weakness in public and private sector coordination by the setup of the Perak Tourism Council what needs to be also resolved is the problem between the various levels involved in tourism efforts... Three distinct levels of management direct tourism in the public sector. At the top are the decision makers who also assume the role of identifying projects and deciding implementation. The middle rung is occupied by those who have the responsibility of actualising these decisions. At the bottom are those tasked with carrying out operational tasks on the ground. What is disturbing is the lack of common purpose amongst the three levels. Little fault can be attached to the middle rung. Those in this quarter appear to be well informed, possess quality, are knowledgeable and demonstrate commitment and passion. They appear to know what would work and what would not, why some effort succeeded whilst others failed and how to generate the optimum results. They in fact have the pulse of the tourist industry. The top level however appear to be unwilling to take advantage of the middle rung personnel, preferring to make decisions in seclusion. At the bottom level, personnel lack understanding of the nature of their role and how their task relates to the entire tourism effort. As the ones with direct contact with the tourists the impact of their ignorance is far reaching. The following episode is an instance of the problem. At Ubudiah Mosque in Kuala Kangsar we observed the guard standing at the entrance steps gesticulating animatedly with his hands, shooing off some French tourists attempting to enter through the main gate of the mosque as if they were a bunch of undesirables. The tourists appeared to be in shock while their tour guide looked embarrassed and helpless. Upon inquiry the guard's explanation for his behaviour was that the visitors were improperly garbed. To me they appeared properly dressed with all parts of their body covered save that some of the ladies were in slacks. It was only when the guard was reminded that the mosque had gowns for visitors not properly

dressed that he reluctantly fetched them and gave it to the visitors. The fact is there are sign boards let alone all kinds of brochures and literature inviting tourists to visit the mosque. All this effort is neutralised if the people on the ground behave in this manner. It would be better if the mosque is closed to visitors – at least negative publicity could be avoided. And even if the visitors are to be denied entry for whatever reason, surely we could be polite. After all, our state is supposed to be the land of grace. It is not the guard's fault. It is not the lack training that is at the root of this mischief but failure to equip him with a macro vision of his task in the overall endeavour. (April 16, 2010)

Visit Perak Year (VPY) 2012 must be Perak's best kept secret. Why? When I paid a visit to the Perak Tourism Office beside the Ipoh Padang, the staff there were unaware it was VPY 2012; If they did, they kept it well under wraps. Despite dropping several hints about a group of foreigners who were planning to tour as much of Perak as possible the following year, the two employees at the front counter, could not suggest any places of interest and did not breathe a word of VPY 2012 to me. Perak State tourism chairman, Hamidah Othman told the Ipoh Echo, last July, that "locals must think Tourism and do Tourism." She stressed, "Visit Perak Year 2012 will involve the whole state. We need to create awareness throughout the state and have the local residents as well as local councils to participate." It appears that either she or her assistant has forgotten to inform those at the front-line of the Perak Tourism Office, of VPY 2012. Two years ago, I sought information at the same tourist office. I then wrote an article titled "Is Perak serious about promoting tourism?" in issue 80 of the IE. Back then, it was a disappointment to see shabby, dusty exhibits and staff, who despite being friendly, appeared clueless about the attractions they should have been promoting. Fast forward to 2011, and service has definitely worsened... If this is how Perak Tourism employees respond to genuine local and foreign tourists, then VPY 2012 has failed before it started. The command of spoken English of both employees was poor. The Malay man kept referring to his Indian colleague for confirmation, not just of the 'Bahasa' to English translation, but also of the answers to my questions about the places of interest. Neither inspired confidence and both were hesitant when answering the questions that one would expect most tourists to ask, like directions to places and other attractions in the locale. As we left the tourist office, I asked the Australian, who was waiting for a taxi, for his first impression of the tourism office. He said, "It's a dump. The staff are useless. I could not understand them and they did not know anything." I asked, "Did they tell you about VPY in 2012. Would you visit Ipoh again?" His reply: "You must be joking. I've stayed in smaller towns in South East Asia where the people do not speak any English but they were more helpful and more accommodating. Visit Ipoh? Never again."... Many tourists make the tourism office their first port of call. It is important that the Perak tourism office staff are friendly, helpful and can offer advice on Ipoh and beyond. If they appear disinterested, how can they promote Perak successfully? If they lack motivation, then their leaders are to be blamed. My second experience at the Perak tourism office has been disappointing. Lessons have not been learnt. (October 1, 2011)

It is bewildering that VPY 2012 could be attempted at all. It seems nothing is in place to open Perak to visitors, let alone for visitors, foreign or domestic, to return and savour a cherished memory of a great place. The total concept of tourism is misunderstood. Ipoh tourist office at Jalan Tun Sambanthan has been carrying on

uselessly. What happens in other places out of Ipoh and Taiping? Where would tourists go for help? The police stations? Recently, I stopped at the 'Rest Area' at Tasik Laban on my return from Lenggong. The place has great potential for its views, the landscape and the breeze. But the only facility operating in this 'expensive' development is the toilets, and yet we have to pay 30sen to use the broken and dirty toilets. The main building complex is an abandoned white elephant. Alarmingly, Lenggong may soon be on world map as UNESCO World Archaeological Site. Thanks, Mariam, for the wake up call. But I wish the government and the local authorities hear you and strategise their action plan and implement it swiftly and efficiently. Otherwise, we will be wasting a lot of money to make ill the reputation of Perak as a tourism haven. (October 1, 2011) What nonsense! I have heard it all before. Pure rhetoric! What good is promoting Perak when the Ipoh city is dead! The only way to promote Perak is true sheer hard work. It is pointless to suggest, plan or simply talk about it when the speaker does not bother to do the work of promoting. There is not even a coordinated marketing, advertising, promoting, selling and servicing plan. All we have is some people talking and dreaming of Perak being a vibrant tourist destination. Dream on folks. Ipoh city is dead! (January 21, 2010)

Only by working hard can Perak and specifically Ipoh can be the tourist centre. Otherwise, like most politicians, talk is cheap. Going forward 10, 15 or 100 years, one still here of people saying the same thing all over again. Perak to attract and be a tourist centre. Well, you can fool some people sometime but you cannot fool all the people all the time, yes? (January 21, 2010)

We must involve the community at all levels and the street activities are thus a brilliant idea. Not only will such activities stir the economy, they will begin to attract foreigners to Ipoh and hence, foreign investment. But first we have to clean up our act! Some of the unpalatable things that take place in our public areas must go to make way for the new. For a start, polo ground must be spruced up and the hawkers relocated immediately! Tourists who come to Ipoh are often disappointed and disgusted when they visit polo ground. The sight that greets them is a hawker-infested chaotic mess instead of a pleasant community park for family picnics, rest and relaxation. What they find is too much traffic choking the area and too many inappropriate activities for a small park to handle. Ipoh needs a governing body to manage its parks and gardens, which are central to the development of tourism in any city... No city can attract tourists if the authorities cannot manage their parks and gardens well. (February 8, 2010)

The trouble is, the government doesn't listen to the rakyat any more. They like to do things based on Frank Sinatra "I do it my way." No wonder, not many Perakians are aware of Visit Perak Year, including yours truly. For that matter, many people outside of Perak know it either. Perak indeed has a lot of interesting places, many cultures and festivals to boast of. The trouble is, it is not reaching to the ground and to the foreigners who will bring in the big bucks. We have Belum, Caves, Places of worships, Resorts, Bukit Larut and etc, etc. Marketing and Networking are the essence of promoting Perak to the locals and the foreigners. (September 16, 2011)

We should be thinking about the fundamentals of transport and cleanliness for tourists. Not all tourists come in cars. There are not enough clean and nice taxis either. The electric trains link KL to Ipoh but the station hotel is not even operational, nor the bar and other vacant spaces in the majestic train station in the heritage enclave of

Ipoh. Are the people of Ipoh sufficiently involved to make VPY a success. Hardly. (October 4, 2011)

Perhaps one of the first things to do is for the City Council to spruce up the city with beautification projects. At this moment there is no project worth mentioning. Instead, whatever beautification we have, such as fountains and gardens, are being neglected. And the rubbish is everywhere. Lack of an efficient rubbish collection scheme has resulted in thousands of illegal rubbish dumps all over the city. Frequently, buffaloes and cows are still seen in the city, obstructing traffic, messing roads with dung, damaging flower plants and fruit trees in housing estates. In fact, ever since Ipoh was declared a city it has deteriorated rapidly probably because it was accorded in the wake of the collapse of the tin mining industry. Prior to being declared a city, it was a vibrant town and a playground for the rich, with more posh cars in a one kilometre radius than anywhere in the country. It was also reputed as one of the cleanest towns in the country with potted flower plants located in strategic places and even hanging from street lamp-posts. There were well maintained public parks, Taman D.R. Seenivasagam, People's Park, Children's Park and the Japanese Garden. Now, many of the buildings in the old city centre are empty, condemned or abandoned, painting a gloomy picture. (May 16, 2010)

Upgrading works at Kellie's Castle will be sped up to bring forward the date of completion from October to earlier in the year. State Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Hamidah Osman said she had spoken to the Public Works Department and contractor assigned to carry out the RM5mil upgrading job to speed up the work. "The construction progress is, to date, 35% complete with piling and foundation works already finished... Hamidah visited Kellie's Castle after The Star carried a report detailing issues related to the lack of parking space for vehicles, including tour buses, and road signs. It was also reported that the initial long period needed to carry out the improvements was counter-productive as they were only to be ready in October, three months shy of the end of Visit Perak Year 2012..." "I will also speak with the Batu Gajah District Council on the possibility of removing trees that obstruct the view of the castle to make it easier for tourists to take photographs," she said. Hamidah said the state would also make sure that local products such as Ipoh white coffee, pomeloes and kacang putih would be served at the tea garden and food stalls planned for the castle. "This is the best opportunity for us to promote our local products," she said. (February 14, 2012)

As part of the **VPY 2012** upgrading plans by the Perak Tourism to upgrade the areas around Oldtown specifically along the heritage trail among which lies the Birch Clock Tower which was seen recently given a bold color after it's peachy old one Not only was it newly painted but construction works are still being done and will be completed "hopefully" by the middle of this year. (March 13, 2012)

Fresh forest clearing in the Belum-Temengor wildlife corridor has alarmed environmentalists who are demanding an immediate halt to development plans in the critical buffer zone and the Perak Government is moving in on the case. It is learnt that some 74ha of state land is set to be cleared, believed to be for oil palm plantations, posing a serious threat to endangered wildlife such as the Asian elephant and Malayan tiger. A check with the orang asli living in one of the nearby settlements confirmed that clearing began some two weeks ago. (Septembr 18, 2011)

For most domestic and Singapore tourists, the mention of Ipoh immediately brings food to their minds. But once they're here and catch sight of the natural surroundings, they are astonished. They often wonder why visitors are not told about Perak's other attractions prior to their arrival in the Silver State. Aggressive marketing and promotion is essential. (June 16, 2011)

Recently, there has been a lot of talk about promoting Ipoh – the City That Tin Built, as a tourists' destination, all of which was looking at a bigger picture of some ambitious plan or project. What these plans failed to do was to take note of some of the seemingly minor details that needed to be urgently fixed first. For instance the iconic Ipoh railway station, which will certainly become an important entry point for tourists with the introduction of the fast inter-city electric passenger trains. Although the railway station has been renovated as part of the Ipoh-Kuala Lumpur dual-tracking project, its surroundings are yet to be spruced up. The Moorish architecture, albeit impressive, appears desolate and lacks public transportation, unlike most entry points for tourists. The Ipoh Map and Guide produced by the city council some years ago described the railway station as an impressive structure "fronted by a beautiful floral garden which serves as a charming welcome for tourists". This garden which is right in the middle of the "Heritage Walk" being promoted in the city and also the location of Pokok Ipoh (*antiaris toxicaria*) from which the city got its name, was fondly referred to as 'a mini garden of Taj Mahal'. Today I wonder if it still serves as a 'charming welcome' for tourists as the area reeks of neglect. The beautiful fountain has stopped gushing and gurgling for some time and is collecting rubbish. Who knows, even *Aedes* mosquitoes may be breeding should there be stagnant water inside the empty fountain. The Medan Stesen and its fountain need constant attention. We cannot adopt a "tidak apa" attitude as maintenance and minor repairs must be constantly carried out if we are serious about attracting tourists, whether local or foreign. (September 1, 2010)

... for heritage was one of the two key areas for Perak tourism identified by the recent State Government study – the other being nature..._that a State Government Exco member is desperately trying to spur us all on to work for heritage tourism, but at the same time there is no evidence that this "top down, bottom up" approach, requiring love and respect for our heritage, exists anywhere in our city. If Dato' Hamidah cannot inspire us all to start considering heritage in our daily toil then there will be no heritage tourism, no UNESCO listing and frankly, no future for Ipoh as a city of tourism. Not just Ipoh on its knees, but flat on its face, allowing others nearby to trample all over us. Is that what you really want? Remember it is you who has the future of Ipoh in your hands. (November 15, 2010)

But there are those who believe that the Kinta Valley should have a tourism attraction based on our tin mining heritage. However, despite all the nice words written about heritage and tourism in past issues of Ipoh Echo, no one, not our local philanthropists, old tin miners or *towkays* have come forward to set up the Kinta Valley heritage gallery of mining and pioneer miners, as been suggested (Ipoh Echo Issues 83 and 84). Nor have they, apart from Century Mission Sdn Bhd, put anything substantial into saving the dredge. Consequently, with no other tin mining heritage available to visit, the dredge does have major significance to our state and should draw tourists dollars to help pay for it, if it was properly maintained. (December 21, 2009)

I got to know that there is a turtle sanctuary in Segari when it was mentioned by one of my colleagues during our short trip to Pangkor Island recently. We decided to check the place out on our way back to Ipoh... We saw what looked like an exhibition area but to our horror, the cases were dusty and some exhibits were missing! It looked like many other poorly maintained establishments that we often see in our country... We decided to explore the place on our own. It was not going to be a wasted trip. There had to be something we could take home – at least some photographs! There were a number of ponds, some fenced, some not. The unfenced ponds housed several turtles each in them, and the kids were happy enough at his point with what they saw. The consolation is that the ponds looked clean and well-maintained, as opposed to the exhibition area... What's sad is that this centre is supposed to be a main tourist attraction (according to its objectives) but there is so little official information on it. It is potentially an education and tourism main draw to the state of Perak and I wish more could be done to encourage this. A quick search on the internet only resulted in mentions of it in some private blogs. And some of these bloggers also noted how they managed to explore the place upon a lucky encounter with some personnel on site – pretty much like our own experience. Visiting hours are from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. daily, so this place deserves more publicity by the relevant authorities. It may not be a profit-generating enterprise but they have to realise that the benefits returned are immeasurable. (November 20, 2009)

The controversial Perak Tourist Information Centre near Ipoh Padang will undergo a name change soon. Long the bane of tourists and visitors to Ipoh and Perak, the Centre was in the limelight recently when a piece by Mariam Mokhtar in Ipoh Echo (Issue 129) caused raised eyebrows within the state government... A major grouse with visitors is the absence of capable staff knowledgeable enough on Perak and its surroundings. Suggestions by well wishers keen on making it an information centre of substance have fallen on deaf ears. The Perak Tourism Association has even offered to train the staff and provide volunteers to manage the centre. The council gives lip service by being a good listener. Its reluctance to incorporate changes is puzzling considering that Ipoh is the entry point of visitors to Perak and the Visit Perak Year 2012 (VPY 2012) is imminent. Dato' Hamidah's visit provided the senior executive councillor with an opportunity to see matters for herself. Hamidah, Fathil Ghani, Perak Tourism CEO and media representatives dropped in at the centre on Friday, October 7. She was received by MBI's Assistant Secretary, Hj Azizuddin Hj Alias and was briefed on the touristic developments taking place in Ipoh. The council has received RM3.8 million to upgrade public toilets, Medan Kidd, the railway station and the Ipoh heritage trail. Works on the projects will begin in November and will end in April 2012. (October 8, 2011)

So, a visit was made after all the grouses were aired but isn't it a bit late? Hello, it's now October! Have they forgotten 2012 starts in January, 2 mths from now? Work on projects to complete in 2012? at RM3.8m? My goodness! By the time it's in operation, we'd already be half-way through the year of VPY 2012! So what have they doing all this while? Oh yeah, I forgot, they must have been too busy going for 'study trips' studying other countries' tourism industry they forgot there's much to be done here. (October 9, 2011)

Me and my uncle visited Kinta Nature Park on 1-4-2012. We managed to enter the park around 9.30am. On the way out, a guard by the name of En Alias told us that the Park is now under the jurisdiction of MD Kampar effective 1-4-2012. Hence a written

permission is required in order to enter the park. While we were considered “lucky” to be able to enter the park, not so for another 2 visitors. What happened next was unknown. MD Kampar shall have put up notices or put in place a proper admission system so as not to inconvenience visitors to the park. Would it be fair to turn away outstation travellers because no proper notification was issued or no proper admission process was in place? So much for Visit Perak Year 2012... (April 8, 2012)

My family & I visited the place a few months back but the experience was nowhere as ‘worth a visit’ as MM wrote. The mini-train we were on, in addition to being noisy & smoke-belching, had such a poor speaker system, we could hardly hear the ramblings of the driver/guide. The mini-train only stopped once (at the elephant enclosure) and we did not have the opportunity to ‘explore the Zoo on foot’ as MM did as the driver/guide next dropped us right at the exit! Add poor lighting, broken directional signs and missing/unreadable plaques... none of us will ever want to return to the Night Safari again! (December 2, 2011)

It was only on the return journey that the fumes from the diesel boat irritated us. Even the noise of the diesel engines was beginning to drown our conversations. Perhaps, the driver of the boat was at top speed to rush back. Or had we been so excited about seeing the fireflies that we did not notice the fumes and noise before? Is there an allocation under VPY 2012 for the villagers/tour guides to purchase quieter and cleaner engines for a truly memorable experience? The encroachment of oil palm plantations may soon destroy the habitat of the fireflies. There was only a small buffer zone to protect the natural habitat of the riverbanks, and according to the villagers, who acted as the crew and guides, the plantation workers clear the trees on which the fireflies live. The crew claimed that they had protested about the lack of protection for the habitat of the fireflies and of their new source of tourist income. Perhaps, their complaints have fallen on deaf ears. If the Perak state authorities are serious about empowering the villagers to promote village life and eco-tourism, they must help protect the villagers from the big-industrial players which promote their own interests and increase their profits with ruthless efficiency. (November 17, 2011)

In Kuala Selangor where such firefly tours are found, I realized the differences: the boats use almost silent electric engines (no sound, no fumes), the guide explains before and after the tour (it was total silence during the trip), no flashlights or camera flashes were allowed (the fireflies really light up in total darkness), and the sites are protected areas where no development or plantation is allowed. What is Perak Tourism doing about this gift of nature to ensure future generations will continue to enjoy it? (November 17, 2011)

It was fortunate that we telephoned the Matang Forest Reserve office because we had wanted to go for a walk along the boardwalk to observe the mangrove swamp at close quarters and also because two children in the group were keen birdwatchers. That was when we discovered that the boardwalk had been closed for the past couple of months and would be out of bounds to the public until the end of the year. We were not given this information about repairs to the boardwalk, when enquiries were made at the Perak Tourist Information Centre in Ipoh, the previous week. Perhaps, the relay of information between tourist sites and the main Tourist Information Centres in Perak could be better coordinated... In the west, pet-shops sell gnarled pieces of mangrove root at GBP20/ USD31 each, and we were disappointed that the boardwalk tour was off because we wanted to see mangrove growing in the swamp. If there was any other

criticism, it was that there was no one selling cold drinks to quench our thirst. I am surprised that no one has tapped into this need. (November 1, 2011)

APPENDIX B

AREAS OF IMPORTANCE

Tourism

Ipoh can be known as a center for performing arts or for pottery and bonsai, and many others. (July 2, 2011)

Single mothers are being roped in to make souvenirs for Visit Perak Year 2012 to allow them to earn extra income... (October 27, 2011)

Negeri Perak dan Kelantan telah bersetuju untuk bekerjasama di dalam mempromosi sektor pelancongan kedua-dua negeri. (January 26, 2012)

Majlis Bandaraya Ipoh (MBI) mengharapkan Ipoh dapat dijadikan sebagai Geopark dalam masa terdekat ini kerana ia mempunyai potensi besar dalam pelancongan warisan dan eco-tourism. Datuk Bandar Ipoh, Datuk Roshidi Hashim berkata, pihak Jabatan Geosains dan Mineral telah membuat pembentangan kepada kerajaan negeri dalam mesyuarat perancangan pagi tadi supaya Ipoh ditukar menjadi Geopark. Menurut beliau, sekiranya ia menjadi kenyataan kawasan Geopark ini akan meliputi seluruh kawasan Lembah Kinta bermula dari kawasan Banjaran Titiwangsa yang membabitkan Gunung Korbu, 16 bukit batu kapur disekitar Bandaraya Ipoh sehingga ke Kampar yang membabitkan Gua Tempurung dan Gunung Mensah. (October 9, 2012)

...the Ipoh City Council has now come up with plans for a Walking Street akin to that in Songkhla, Thailand... The Walking Street... is open only on weekends and operated from evening to midnight. (October 5, 2011)

Perak will see a new eco-tourism product in five years time. The Kledang Saiong Wilderness Park to be developed in three phases will be located at the Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve in Meru Raya, Ipoh... department deputy director Roslina Nordin said the park would be different from other recreational parks in the state. "We will have controlled activities to attract visitors," she said, adding that the forest reserve would remain a green lung for Meru Raya. (October 11, 2011)

Ecofieldtrips, a Singapore-based company that conducts field trips for students from primary to tertiary level from around the world has listed Perak as one its field trip destinations. (May 1, 2012)

The Federal government has been asked to expedite the Perak state government's proposal to set up the Pulau Pangkor Development Authority (PPDA) to boost the tourism industry in the island... Pulau Pangkor Development Authority would play a similar role played by the Langkawi Development Authority (Lada) which has succeeded in turning Langkawi into a preferred tourist destination... the state government had also proposed to turn Pulau Pangkor into a duty-free zone to attract foreign tourist. (May 30, 2012)

It must be noted that Nomad being the market leader in this eco tourist market, has achieved some significant benchmark initiatives such as treating its grey water and achieving ISO9001/2008 certification, making them the only resort operator with ISO certification. (May 1, 2012)

What we really need is to beautify the stretch of Sungai Kinta's embankments, not water-related activities as they would be a waste of public funds... Famous cities all over the world, which were founded along rivers, have been beautifying their river embankments. Look at London, Paris, Amsterdam and even Singapore where their

riverfronts have become well-known landmarks. The cities are beautiful because of the rivers, where the bridges and riverbanks are spruced up to blend with the development. However, Ipoh is just like many others in the country which have yet to make use of their rivers for beautification purposes... The riverfront can become the rendezvous for visitors to refresh themselves and visit the tin mining gallery before setting out to the various mining and cultural heritage sites in the state. While the city folks can walk or have a "teh tarik" and some food at one of the outlets. However, to make the project a reality, there is a need to put a more determined effort to developing the riverbanks. (December 17, 2011)

All natural and cultural heritage sites have tourism potentials. Agreed, fragile archaeological sites such as the Lenggong Valley's excavations must be carefully managed to "safeguard the integrity of the site". Selective visitation may be the rule. Non-sustainable tourism cannot be allowed. When the Perak Heritage Society members visited Lenggong in 2004, a guide recommended by the museum was hired. Off the beaten track, the dedicated museum at Kota Tampan is not well-visited. Exciting events can be held there, but who will go all that way? While locals can easily visit the museum for information and knowledge, any promotional infotainment to raise awareness of the universal archeological values of the Lenggong Valley should be held in urban areas with a ready audience. Better still, make a documentary on Lenggong Valley and air it in rtm TV. (July 10, 2010)

Tourism in Perak will grow, this is inevitable. As soon as it becomes commercially viable, that is, makes good bucks for those who take the trouble to dig out interesting facts and locations. Also there is this fear that the masses that will invade these areas will altogether ruin the site! Alas, such is the contradiction. Many visitors Perak have experienced and told wonderful tales of secluded and serene unknown attractions that abound in the State. Hopefully, overcommercialisation of these attractions will be sufficiently planned and developed to avoid deterioration of its environs. (April 29, 2010)

Wooing domestic tourists to Perak will be top priority for the revamped Perak Tourist Association (PTA). Its newly elected president Haji Mohd Odzman bin Abdul Kadir stressed that he shares the sentiments of Tourism Malaysia when it launched the slogan 'To Know Malaysia Is To Love Malaysia'. "There is huge potential in domestic tourism, and Perak should capitalize on it", said Mohd. Odzman, who took over from Datuk Mohd. Zainal Abidin bin Hj. Abdul Kadir after being the association's secretary since 1984. "We can save a lot money on promotion, compared to budgets for international tourism. We will encourage Malaysians to visit our tourist destinations in the state through various activities and programs." He said PTA will work with Tourism Ministry and Education Ministry on how to promote tourism aggressively among students, and as well as to inform youth organisations of the various business potentials and job opportunities in the tourism sectors. It will also seek the opinions of major tourism players such as the YTL, EMKAY and Sunway groups, who have invested millions of Ringgit to develop the Perak tourism potentials. "However, PTA would not completely ignore the international market, with its prime target being Singaporeans. Our eco tourism should be our selling point", he added... As PTA president, he believes that the state government must play the leading role to complement the private sector but, the public sector must play an active role in strategic planning. "We need to ask ourselves what are our strengths and weaknesses

in the way of tourism products and why we have so far failed to make a similar impact as other leading tourist states.” He is confident that the state government has the political will and commitment to promote tourism in the state and is open to new ideas. Perak, he said, has good tourism products, some even surpassing other destinations in the country, which needed to be promoted. The state needs to have its own identity, a tourism icon, that should not be changed from time to time as has happened in the past. Mohd. Odzman outlined a 10-point plan to stimulate tourism in the state. Among them cleanliness at food outlets, improving public transportation, availability of literature on places of interest, tourist centres manned by pro-active personnel and well-trained and well-informed tour guides. (January 14, 2010)

All the above suggestions by Nasaree sounds good to me. Why can't we have marching bands marching their way through the main street every Sunday? Or maybe a static performance at Ipoh Padang. That'll give the performers an outlet for their talents. Can't we have local music schools organising classical performances? Can't we have magic shows, street performers etc etc.? I hope whoever is handling tourism look into ways on how to create activities to make Ipoh a vibrant city and to draw tourists. (January 23, 2010)

Learn from Penang tourism. Ever since Penang tourism promotion was given high priorities in 1996, tourist arrivals in Penang had increased tremendously. The highly successful Visit Penang Year 1998 launched by Dato Kee Phaik Cheen created an unforgettable brand experience by tourists, local as well as foreign.

It has also created a vivid brand image consistent with its unique heritage values as a tourist destination. I was involved in the creative strategy for Visit Penang Year working hand in hand with PDC's tourism department staff in areas of strategic planning, implementation of A&P and creative communication.

Perak has great potentials as a tourist destination with nature and culture as its competitive edge which offer unique experiences for tourists. (May 1, 2010)

All these places attract thousands of tourists a year. Tourists who spend millions on food, accommodation, services, gifts, etc. Tourism is a big contributor to the public coffers in all three examples. The circulation of money from tourism is often direct and is spread beyond the pockets of the few. Furthermore it is a contribution which is eco friendly, sustainable and which will continue long after the last unit in The Haven is sold. **The writer has decided that the only use for Ipoh is as a tourist attraction. Unfortunately those of us who are not fortunate to live elsewhere but have to eke an existence here have to look at other avenues of economic activity. Reminds me of the American Jews who want Israel to remain a relic and the people poor to deliver them an experience for their rare visits.** (May 19, 2010) (Emphasis already around.)

Daerah Manjung yang terkenal dengan hasil lautnya kini menjadi tumpuan untuk diketengahkan sebagai salah satu lokasi produk pelancongan di negeri Perak. Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Industri, Pelaburan, Pembangunan, Usahawan, Pelancongan, Hal Ehwal Wanita dan Kebajikan Negeri, Datuk Hamidah Osman berkata Daerah Manjung menjadi destinasi utama pelancong ke Negeri Perak di mana Pulau Pangkor dan Teluk Batik antara tumpuan utama pelancong-pelancong dari dalam dan luar negeri sekian lama. “Selaras dengan visi pembangunan sektor pelancongan untuk menjadikan sektor pelancongan sebagai penyumbang utama adalah perlu kita melihat mana-mana produk pelancongan yang perlu diketengahkan sempena Tahun Melawat

Perak 2012 (TMP) nanti. "Sitiawan, Lumut, Pantai Remis, Pangkor antara daerah yang mempunyai keistimewaan tersendiri. Saya melihat daerah-daerah ini mampu menarik lebih ramai pelancong sekiranya usaha dari semua badan kerajaan dan swasta bergabung tenaga', katanya. Hamidah yang mengetuai rombongan Tourism Perak sewaktu lawatan kerjanya ke Manjung turut singgah melawat ke Sime Darby Beverages sebuah syarikat mengusahakan produk jus jambu batu yang terletak di daerah Sitiawan. Keluasan ladang jambu batu yang seluas 15 hektar merupakan ladang setempat terbesar di dunia. "Produk yang berasaskan buah jambu batu merah ini cukup bermutu, ini adalah tarikan utama kepada pelancong. Akan tetapi pihak pengurusan haruslah memikirkan bagaimana untuk memperkenalkan dan mengambil peluang bagi menjadikan ianya lebih berpontensi agro pelancongan yang terkenal. Banyak aspek harus difikirkan bagaimana produk jus jambu batu ini boleh menjadi tarikan kepada pelancong. Berbagai kemudahan dan aktiviti pelancong harus diperkembangkan lagi dari masa kesemasa", katanya. (December 9, 2011)

We are fully aware of this and are addressing the issue. We know these are God's treasures to Perak and if we plan well, we can benefit from them. We have everything, from the sea to the mountains, lots of delicacies and food products. If we can combine them to make Perak a saleable product, tourists will come here. (December 31, 2011) Make Kampar educational center of Perak State... Since UTAR and KTAR is already there. Kampar now is quite prosperous for a rural town. I can't wait for more and more universities built in Kampar. At the West of Kampar, there are lot of abandoned mining lakes untill Tanjung Tualang and North to Malim Nawar. These lakes able to house scenic and large university campus which these not able be done in Selangor, lands in Selangor are scarce, and expensive. (May 11, 2010)

Tourism Perak would also promote Taiping, Kuala Kangsar, Manjung and the Royal Belum Rainforest. "Perak holds great potential due to its wealth of historical, cultural and natural assets," she added. Norani said the state was also looking into ways to inject positive changes in the tourism industry by installing proper road signages, upgrading road infrastructure and upgrading security. (August 4, 2009)

The Perak government is expecting spin off worth RM1 billion from the upcoming Visit Perak Year 2012. Perak's Chief Minister, Datuk Dr.Zambry Abdul Kadir, said tourism products and attractions in the state are able to generate big profits for the government and its people. (September 27, 2011)

According to the co-owner of the resort, Bridget Hedderman, the programme for this first batch took over eight months to prepare together with her team of biologists. Bridget herself is an experienced biologist and conservationist with a Masters in Education and is pro-active in marine conservation and education... With this in place, Perak now has a tour programme, albeit a study programme, which enables participants to appreciate the diverse natural attractions available in the state, as well as to learn about its history. (March 22, 2010)

A check with Dato' Hamidah acknowledged that she was aware of the issue and would be sitting with all the industry players. "Let us not forget that 2013 is Visit Malaysia Year. Lets fine tune during 2012 and reap the full benefits for 2013," added Hamidah. (December 1, 2011)

Feeling hemmed in & looking for a place to chill? Look no further for you have come to the right place. Gopeng Rainforest Resort (GRR) is like a 'Garden of Eden' nestled in the mystical rainforest of the main range of west Malaysia. Only a stone throw away

from the lovely town of Ipoh but a world of difference, is this gateway to nature & eco-adventure.

GRR caters to the young & even those in their twilight years. There are also ample opportunities for the camera to be whipped out. Different packages can be arranged by David & his wife Janice who runs this lovely & rustic resort. (May 13, 2012)

Pemilihan 2012 sebagai Tahun Melawat Perak sememangnya tepat dan kena pada waktunya memandangkan negeri ini kini sedang mengalami transformasi pembangunan dan ekonomi yang begitu rancak sekali. Pembangunan pesat ini boleh dirasai penduduk terutama wargakota Ipoh yang ketika ini terpaksa berhadapan dengan kesesakan lalu lintas di sana sini sejak tiga tahun kebelakangan ini yang merupakan petanda tahap pembangunan yang dialami sesebuah bandaraya. Konotasi seperti 'bandaraya pencen' yang sering dikaitkan dengan Ipoh bakal menjadi kenangan lalu berikutan kewujudan banyak kawasan komersial baru dan bangunan tinggi yang sudah sedikit sebanyak mengubah landskap Ipoh menjadi bandaraya metropolitan. Paling ketara adalah kemunculan beberapa hotel-hotel baru bertaraf antarabangsa di sekitar negeri Perak dan bajet hotel yang tumbuh bak cendawan selepas hujan terutamanya di bandaraya Ipoh. (January 20, 2012)

CRSC is partnering with Aman Resorts International to develop the six-star Belum Island Resort in Perak. CRSC plantation unit, Citarasa Murni Sdn Bhd has embarked on the Lancang Agriculture Project to cultivate organic fruits and vegetables. Khazanah Holdings Bhd's subsidiary Malaysian Agrifood Corp Bhd will market the produce on a contractual basis for both the local and export markets. "We also see potential in agro-tourism and hope to open our farms to the tourists..." (June 23, 2008)

Kawasan Hutan Belum ini mampu menjadi salah satu destinasi tarikan pelancong luar negara yang meminati keindahan alam semulajadi serta. Ia juga mampu menjadi salah satu kawasan bagi peminat aktiviti sukan lasak bagi Negeri Perak. Oleh itu, aktiviti promosi perlu dilakukan dengan lebih giat lagi bagi memperkenalkan kawasan ini supaya keindahan fauna ini tidak di sia-siakan. (January 9, 2009)

Now lets get to the hard part, the sustenance for the dredge. If this is not done, all the money and effort spent on the repair would have gone down the drain and the dredge would rot faster and I'd rather it not be repaired in the first place. Any Perakian worth his salt knows that the most freshest prawns come from Tg Tualang, only a few minutes drive away from the dredge. People from as far as Singapore, Hongkong, China, even Canada come to Tg Tualang only for 1 reason, the prawns. If we can accept Maine lobsters why not Tualang prawns? It does not take a genius to figure out how and why. One only need to enter into one of the restaurants serving the famous prawns and look on the walls decorated with photos of famous stars and singers sampling the local delicacy. Simply put, prawns are to Tg Tualang what groundnuts are to Menglembu and chicken bean sprouts and white coffee are to Ipoh. Ipoh and its surroundings are already famous for food. Why not capitalize on this advantage? Now can we not somehow mix these two together? Perhaps set up a Tg Tualang Fresh Prawn center just next to or around the dredge and rent it out to the local restaurateurs on costs basis? Or can we convince them to set up shop themselves? How about a restaurant or coffee house right in the dredge itself? Old Town White Coffee anyone? This will certainly attract patrons and visitors from all over the world. Imagine this: dining on world famous fresh prawns and seafood gazing out over a piece of Perak history and after dinner, board the dredge and visit the museum within the

vessel. Children can play and learn safely in a playground inside the dredge, all hazardous and high areas cordoned off. All can view a working scale model of the dredge perhaps built using Meccano or Lego parts. Let me build the model. Children press buttons and hey the model conveyor rumbles into life, the tiny buckets carrying dry sand into the belly of the mechanical monster. Another crane model requires children to turn the winches by hand, hauling up model stuff and the likes. In short, a mechanical science museum for kids and adults alike. Could we not have a small hotel built nearby? Or even inside the dredge. In the daytime tourists can go fishing for the equally famous toman (giant snakehead) in the numerous ponds. A friend from Germany had the time of her life fishing for the elusive snakehead when she was here. How about a caravan or camping park? 4WD adventure on the sands? Lets see who gets stuck. Extreme sports anyone? How about rope access training on the boom or rock climbing on the sides? Certainly not for the faint hearted. Could we not promote the dredge as a fine example of heavy mechanical engineering to visiting university students from near and far? Don't we have a university each in nearby Kampar and Tronoh? Can't the universities arrange field trips for the students to study the inner workings of the monster? Can we not have a prawn fishing competition around the pond where the dredge is moored? Is it true that there is a crocodile farm nearby? Can't they set up shop selling crocodile skin handbags etc. I have been to Germany & Europe and have seen how ships & buildings far older than this dredge have been saved and preserved for future unborn generations so that our rich history is not lost to time. I certainly hope other readers can contribute more ideas on how to save this piece of history. Lastly I thank Ian for his gallant efforts in archiving and maintaining Perak's history for us. (December 29, 2009)

There is ample land available at the present site. Induce development or turn the area into a park and call it "Kinta Tin Mining Village" or by any other names associated with tin mining. Perhaps even hire guides dressed as 'dulang' washers to show people around. Something catchy to draw tourists and as well as reflect how important the tin mining industry had been to Perak where not only Ipoh was built on tin, also other towns such as Gopeng, Kampar, Chemor, Tanjung Tualang and Papan. The proposed "Kinta Tin Mining Village" can be a new tourists' spot in the state, where the dredge is the main attraction. It needs to be managed and be promoted by a non-profit-making heritage foundation with annual grants from the federal or state government. It must not charge high fees for entrance. As I see it, this unique tourism project can be a success if properly planned and managed. It could gradually generate tourism activities around it. Most tourist spots can turn out to be disappointing, but here, we can display a heritage that had meant a lot to the economic development of the country, as well as an opportunity to marvel at a giant mining contraption. The 60-year-old dredge had been one of 39 that were like some prehistoric creature grazing on the plain of the richest tin-bearing valley when mining was at its peak. (March 15, 2010)

Agriculture – and Other Sectors

... the state government was planning new sectors to attract school leavers to remain in Perak and work. Efforts towards retaining Perak's talents included creating new jobs in agricultural, natural resources, bio-diversity and creative fields... (April 23, 2012)

Perak has given the go-ahead to Universiti Utara Malaysia to build its RM600mil agriculture faculty complex in Banding, some 150km from here... an approval in

principle had been given on Monday to the university to construct the complex on the 809ha site. (January 31, 2008)

The Perak Government is gearing towards exploring its agricultural sector in the hopes of generating more downstream industries that can bring lucrative trade opportunities for the state... this would help Perak ride the economic wave during difficult times... he [State Health, Local Government, Consumer Affairs, Environment, Public Transport and Non-Islamic Affairs Committee chairman Datuk Dr Mah Hang Soon] would be chairing a meeting with several government agencies to discuss the various channels to improve the state's agricultural sector... he would also be exploring opportunities to attract foreign agricultural experts from countries like Japan and Taiwan into Perak. (September 5, 2009)

Dalam pada itu, beliau memberitahu, kerajaan negeri sudah menzonkan kawasan-kawasan pertanian utama di Perak dalam usaha menjadikan negeri ini sebagai pengeluar utama makanan negara. (March 3, 2010)

Bumiputera terutamanya golongan belia khasnya graduan disaran menyertai program Taman Kekal Pengeluaran Makanan (TKPM) yang dijalankan di negeri Perak...Dr Zambry berharap supaya impiannya untuk menjadikan Perak sebagai negeri terbesar mengeluarkan makanan seperti mana di Delaware Valley di Amerika Syarikat yang mana satu kawasan lembah yang penuh dengan pelbagai bentuk tanaman dan konsep itu diterjemahkan menerusi TKPM berkenaan. (Apr 12th, 2011)

The Perak Amanjaya Development Plan, touted as a comprehensive blueprint to revive the state's past glory, has been given the go-ahead... He said one of the programmes was to make Perak the country's main food producer. (March 3, 2010)

Fish bred in Temenggor Lake in Upper Perak have made their way to thousands of tables in the United States, Canada and soon into the European Union countries. Trapia Malaysia Sdn. Bhd. a subsidiary of GenoMar ASA of Norway, which holds 70% in a joint venture with Malaysian partner Dalefin Holding Sdn. Bhd., is exporting 400 tonnes of the fish per month to those countries. Perak is now the largest producer of 'fish for food' in the country... One other project in Perak is Flora Kancil Sdn. Bhd., located at Menglembu. It was recently awarded the Good Aquaculture Practice Certificate by the Perak Department of Fisheries. The company produces red Tilapia and produced over 86 metric tonnes of Tilapia last year valued at RM520,000. While this figure may not appear to be significant, one needs to consider that the volume was produced on a three-acre farm of which the production area covered just two acres. Even more interesting is the fact that the fish are grown in polyurethane tanks instead of fish ponds as are commonly found around the Kinta Valley. Flora Kancil Sdn. Bhd. was formed by a resident from Bukit Merah near Menglembu, Lee Chee Sing... For the future, Lee stated that he had identified an area 100 acres in size around Tronoh which he intends to develop in a joint-venture exercise to create 36 integrated farms. (August 16, 2011)

Now, Perak is the biggest aquaculture producer in the country contributing 25% of output with a value of RM2.28 billion from marine fish, aquaculture, ornamental fish and food processing activities. Even the director of the State Fisheries Department, Haji Sani Mohd Isa, admits that the aquaculture industry does have a strong potential for growth. The department is very positive about the fish industry in the Kinta Valley and had proposed the setting up of an Aquaculture Industrial Zone in the Kampar

District. Their recommendation is based on the fact that the presence of disused mining ponds makes them a natural choice for an aquaculture industry. Additionally the presence of limestone in the environment contributes to better water quality which enables a healthier ornamental fish crop... there are approximately 500 ornamental fish operators and 400 freshwater fish breeders located in the Kinta Valley and Bidor. Only a few of them have received their land titles... According to Tan the sale of freshwater fish has grown by 30% over the last three years. The possibility for the operators to improve their productivity is good but would involve more investments which none of the operators are willing to do for fear their land could be taken back on short notice at any time. (October 1, 2010)

Perak once contributed 60% to the national GDP. No other state in history is near Perak's track record. I believe Perak can rebuild itself to again become an important contributor to national growth. We are trying to do this by looking at new sources of growth. This includes, among others, leveraging on value-add activities of tourism and agriculture. Over the past five years, Perak's GDP has consistently grown at more than 6% on average, except in 2009, where the global economic crisis impacted not only the state but also Malaysia and the world. (March 5, 2011)

The plight of the aquaculture operators might have sunk in as Menteri Besar Dato' Seri Zambry Abdul Kadir announced recently, after a meeting with the State Agricultural Development Corporation (SADC) that the body would be restructured to enable the state to be a "comprehensive food-producing state" and that aquaculture was a "strategic industry". (October 1, 2010)

... the state government was planning new sectors to attract school leavers to remain in Perak and work. Efforts towards retaining Perak's talents included creating new jobs in agricultural, natural resources, bio-diversity and creative fields... "The truth is Perak is like sandwich... we are sandwiched between two states (Penang and Selangor) which are far ahead in the industrial sector. "We cannot compete with them. That is why Perak needs to find new fields to develop to become magnets to attract youths to come back to the state," he said. (April 23, 2012)

Echoing a view that Ngeh had also raised, Gan said that the Perak government needed to focus on creating more jobs for professionals to stop the brain drain that the state had been suffering from over the years. Ngeh said that with the large number of universities in Perak, like the Tunku Abdul Rahman University and Universiti Teknologi Petronas, the state was not short of talent. "We have the capacity to create a good quality human capital and what we need to do is to capitalise on this. Create more professional industries here so that these youths can stay and work here — contribute back to the state's economy," he said. (March 8, 2010)

"At the moment, the service sector is contributing 60 per cent of the state's gross domestic product (GDP). (November 26, 2011)

He said new industries and sectors, such as shipping, solar and defence, would be created and they would continue with efforts to enhance education and the automotive industry. (January 31, 2012)

"They asked me why Perak when we have only 2.3 million people but I told them I'm talking about a 500 million population market in South-East Asia," he said, adding that he wanted them to use Perak as their launchpad into the Asean Free Trade Area. (December 14, 2009)

Although Perak means silver, the silvery product that brought prosperity and turmoil to Perak was tin. Whether it is reflective a delusional psyche of the Perakians or high expectations, Perak have not been able to revive it's economy since the tin market crashed in early 1980s. (February 21, 2011)

Terminal Makanan Negara (Teman) kendalian Lembaga Pemasaran Pertanian Persekutuan (FAMA) di Simpang Pulai dekat sini akan beroperasi dengan rasminya pada Mei tahun depan. Teman yang bakal menjadi pusat sehenti semua hasil pertanian bagi Perak, selatan Pulau Pinang dan Kedah serta utara Selangor itu dibina dengan kos RM116 juta di atas tapak seluas 20 hektar... terminal makanan itu akan menjadi pusat jualan dan borong dengan konsep pemasaran moden di Malaysia dan Asia Tenggara. Teman ... menggunakan sistem pemborong bersepadu seperti yang diguna pakai di negara-negara maju bagi menggalakkan para petani meningkatkan hasil pertanian mereka. (December 9, 2009)

The Perak government will create new industries and sectors such as shipping, solar and defence and enhance education and automotive to achieved developed state status by 2015. (January 30, 2012)

Environment

The limestone hills of the Kinta Valley come in all shapes and sizes and Ipoh is home to imposing karst outcrops and craggy jungle-topped limestone monoliths. Some hills are cloaked in virgin jungle but all are rich in flora and fauna – serows, monkeys, birds, orchids and ferns. These hills have a unique natural beauty and are appreciated by many people. Why are quarry operators exploiting Ipoh's impressive natural backdrop to extract limestone, marble, lime and aggregate for use in road-building and the construction of houses? Why are the few allowed to destroy what remains one of Ipoh's last natural heritage which have stood for millions of years but have fallen prey to man's greed and folly? (May 16, 2011)

"Yes, quarries need to operate and the Perak government needs the income from taxes derived from these quarries, but if done at the expense of destroying the venerable charisma of Ipoh's landscape, one needs to stop and ask where this detrimental action will eventually lead us," said Idris, a businessman who frequently travels to and from Ipoh. (May 16, 2011)

Ipoh has lost its "wonders". Travelling back to Taiping from KL, I enjoyed the luscious, green scenery from Tanjong Malim to Bukit Merah, Semanggol. Now, passing through Ipoh became a sight for sore eyes: hills being ravaged for the benefit of some people. It is quite ridiculous that at one point the PSDC stated: "we (the people) have to pay for the cause of development" but this is ridiculous. Ravaging mother nature is not the answer. Find a suitable and probable cause, I'd say. (May 18, 2011)

The rate of destruction going on in the limestone hills in Kinta valley is alarming. Yet, many a times, the state government just brush aside with many excuses that they have limited the issuance for quarry licences. To them quarrying is necessary for state revenue. Note that the State Government has all the authority to deal with these matters on resources/land/hills. Once the hills are gone, there are gone forever. One example is Gunung Terendum near the highway just before reaching Ipoh toll from KL (on the right hand side) is just one example of a limestone hill complex totally destroyed beyond recognition. Another Limestone complex urgently needing

attention is the Gunung Lanno complex, which is being destroyed at an alarming rate. The eastern sides are totally destroyed and now moving on to the northern sides. The hill complex has many caves and some are really interesting to explore and preserved. There is an ex-tin-mining cave there which was worth preserving as a heritage site but is now going to the quarries.

The peak of Lanno was another challenge to reach as in the old days, the miners will go up to have a bird eye view of the Gopeng tin-fields. To see another loss of this marvellous heritage is a “big slap” on the faces of Ipohite and Kinta Valley. SOS!!! Urgent attention to Save Gunung Lanno: Strongly suggest to bring to the attention of the various NGOs and the community of Kinta valley (Ipoh, Simpang Pulai, Gopeng etc.) It has to be a community driven initiative. (May 24, 2011)

... the state government had instructed its development arm Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Perak (PKNP) to cancel a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Hong Kong-based CVM Minerals Limited for mining rare earths in Bukit Merah near here.

... PKNP in a statement issued by its chief executive officer Datuk Shamsudin Hashim yesterday had announced that the MOU had been cancelled... the MOU was an internal matter between PKNP and a subsidiary which had yet to be forwarded to the state government. (April 30, 2011)

... Vale would invest between RM9 billion and RM14 billion. Hamidah confirmed that the Vale plant in Lumut was located in a tourism zone and said, “... the Vale management is confident that it will be able to fulfil the detailed environmental impact assessment requirement for the project in Lumut.”... Vale executive director Jose Carlos Martins Antonio reassured Perakeans that Vale would take all precautions to protect the environment. “It is our commitment to this country, authorities of this country and to the people of Perak. We are here to improve the people’s livelihood.”... Fears expressed by civic groups and local residents concern the destruction of the environment, the livelihood of locals, particularly fishermen, and beach-side tourism. Countering these fears, Vale said: “We adhere to strict low-impact shipping practices. Vale’s ships will not pollute or cause other environmental damage.” Nevertheless, the nearby Outward Bound School has alleged that part of the jungle is inaccessible to its teams. Other education and training institutions are also barred from entering the area. Consumer and environmental groups have joined in the condemnations with claims that the ecosystem of the area, formerly gazetted as a forest reserve, would be destabilised. The plant is located on a 450-acre site which was originally a Permanent Forest Reserve but the state government re-gazetted it to an ‘Industrial Zone’. Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman, Secretary of the Perak Environmental Association, said that the area is classified as an ‘Environmentally Sensitive Area Class 11’ and is only suitable for small eco-tourism projects but not for industrial use. He questioned why the plant had not been sited at the Manjong Industrial Park. The Perak Department of Wildlife and National Parks said that the area is rich in flora and fauna and protected under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The site is surrounded by mature and regenerating natural primary forest whilst the bird life and mammals are protected by national and international laws. The area is also home to leopards, white-bellied eagles and the endangered palm plant, *Phoenix paladosa*... Penang (CAP) research officer S. Mageswari alleged that Vale had not fully addressed concerns about the ecosystem. “They claim there would be no problems but these ships that are coming in are huge vessels. Their movement would definitely affect the fisheries and coral reef.” “We are

not convinced and assured. What are they going to do about the dust pollution, the health hazards to nearby residents? The dust, which will have sulphur and nitrogen oxides in it, affects the respiratory system.” She voiced concerns over dredging activities and asked how this would be enforced. She raised issues to do with water quality, marine life and the contamination of ground and underground water through leaching... In a public hearing organised by the state government in November 2009, Abdul Rahman Said Alli, President, Perak Environment Association said that the authorities had conveniently turned a blind eye to the objections raised by the local community. He dismissed the claim that the factory would provide jobs for the local community and said that the highly mechanised nature of the industry would require only a few professionals. He said that the main livelihood of the people living in the area is fishing and that their livelihood would be lost forever as the movement of big ships in the sea lanes would prove dangerous for their fishing vessels. Pollution would affect the water quality of the seas, with disastrous consequences for the popular Teluk Batik beach and Pangkor, which are located about 500m and 5km respectively from the plant. The effect on hotels and associated businesses would negatively impact the tourist trade. CCCP chairman, Zainal Abidin, warned of the security threat to the Naval Base which is located close to the plant and stressed that the jetty should remain a national asset. Perak Fisheries Department when contacted, said that the impact to the fishermen at the project site will be temporary. Once all project start-up work is completed, the environment should return to normal. The Department also stated that Vale would be creating artificial reefs later to stimulate marine life in the area and also confirmed that the aquaculture farms along Sg Manjung will not be affected in any way by the Vale project. (March 1, 2012)

Might the Perak state government’s controversial cable-car project linking Taiping to Bukit Larut, go the same way as the Penang botanical gardens project dubbed ‘the fallen arches’?... What happens if the project fails to attract the so-called development? What happens if the rich bio-diversity is lost forever? What happens if the water catchment area suffers irreversible damage? What will happen to the residents if they were never consulted about any developmental proposals in their area?... In the third and latest revival of the project, the Menteri Besar’s comments caused consternation. He said, “An Environmental Impact Assessment report is not required as the project does not involve major development – no trees would be felled or clearing of land”... Many expressed their disappointment with the Menteri Besar saying no Environmental Impact Assessment was needed because, “the project did not involve major development”. A Taiping student now studying in Singapore said, “He is neither an environmentalist nor a conservationist. He is not qualified to make such statements.”... Today, conservationists have discovered that Bukit Larut is home to small animals such as the rhinoceros hornbill, large moths, butterflies, birds, beetles, monkeys and Pope’s Pit Viper. With a cable-car, the constant stream of day-trippers will have dire consequences on the fragile ecosystem of Bukit Larut. At present, the limit on people, because of transportation, becomes a good protective mechanism. Thus, another ‘Pulau Redang situation’ is averted – when huge visitor numbers destroyed the island’s coral reefs... The development and conservation of Bukit Larut requires foresight and vision. Our other hill stations have lost their charm and have become too commercialised, polluted, congested, warmer (in temperature) and they suffer massive litter problems. Once Bukit Larut is ‘modernised’, with food outlets and

other amenities for our instant entertainment and gratification, the destruction will accelerate. Politicians should not sacrifice our natural treasures in the name of progress and development. What will we leave our children, if there was nothing to appreciate and continue to protect, on behalf of future generations? (July 16, 2010)

Land Rover services up and down the Larut Hills are unique in Malaysia. While the other hill resorts are over-developed at the expense of natural terrain and vegetation Bukit Larut remains the last, quiet hill destination for nature lovers. Sustainable tourism is not possible with non-sustainable numbers. Can the hills cope with 1000 visitors per hour, that is, about 8000 per day? How much more concrete amenities are needed? How many of the cable cars will be constantly carrying rubbish to be disposed of in Taiping. Were you thinking that rubbish should be left up there? What about sewerage treatment and disposal? Keep the ecologically and physically fragile Larut a nature lover's hill resort for tranquil, low impact tourism. It will get more popular if kept low-key for the right tourists, not the rushed day-trippers; but, not if the cable car goes ahead. While these hills are permanently scarred, what are the chances for it not to become a white elephant? Taiping does not need to compete with other developed hills. Please stop the project before you create another environmental disaster and deprive the people of a natural hill destination. (July 20, 2010)

A report for sustainable development and global tourism potential of the oldest rainforest in the world at Belum and Temenggor would be ready soon. The report which is an effort undertaken by the Perak state government and Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) is 60 percent complete and would be fully done by year end... the state will launch campaigns on eco-tourism based from the master plan with attention to the Banding area which is set to become a world renowned attraction... The integrated master plan aims to provide a check and balance system and also to maintain preservation, and conservation while promoting sustainable development. (October 20, 2011)

Infrastructure

The construction of the RM38mil Ipoh Integrated Bus Terminal and Complex in Bandar Meru Raya near Jelapang is almost done and would be in time for operations in June...The project, which began in 2010, would consist of a business centre, food court, basement car park and petrol kiosk. It would serve as an inter-city bus terminal to be connected to the Ipoh central bus station via shuttle bus service. (March 2, 2012)

Perak merancang untuk meningkatkan perkhidmatan bas awam di seluruh negeri setelah mendapati sistem pengangkutan awam itu berada pada tahap tidak memuaskan sejak beberapa tahun lalu. Menteri Besar, Datuk Seri Dr. Zambry Abd. Kadir berkata, buat masa ini, perancangan sistem pengangkutan awam yang efisien dan selesa hanya melibatkan kawasan Lembah Kinta dan tidak merangkumi seluruh negeri... perkhidmatan bas awam di daerah-daerah seperti Manjung, Parit Buntar, Bagan Serai dan Kerian sering menjadi rungutan pengguna kerana tidak efisien. (November 19, 2009)

Perak state government should think of reviving / rebuild the railway line from Tapah Road to Lumut via Teluk Intan. Lumut-Sri Manjung is third largest urban area in Perak and Teluk Intan is fourth largest urban area in Perak, both of them add up got 400k population, and Teluk Intan have potential become manufacturing center of Perak Hilir and Batang Padang, and its good will be exported in Lumut. Another railway line is from Batu Gajah to Lumut via Sri Iskandar. If I not wrong, new airport will be build in

Sri Iskandar right? Make the airport have railway service. Sri Manjung will become manufacturing center of Perak Tengah and Manjung. Raw material from Perak Hulu, Kuala Kangsar and Kinta will be manufactured in Ipoh, export in Lumut. (May 11th, 2010)

I like your idea to revive the Tapah road-Lumut railway line. Prior WW2, there was a railway line from falim to tronoh. That was visible because of the tin industry. Bun then the line has been abandoned due to the existence of road. But i believe that Ipoh-Lumut line is more viable. I do believe it is viable, because this will eventually lead the full usage of Lumut port. We may start with freight-only, non electrified track, because speed is not important. Low speed track means that the track can be built without the need of the expensive viaduct for unstable ground. Soon, if the demand is there, we can have that double tracking that is far more expensive. Some may say that this may become under utilize, but look at the Penang Bridge. At the time when the bridge proposal is mooted, CAP has made a calculation on how the bridge will be under utilize if ALL the traffic using state ferry diverted to penang bridge. But they have failed to realize the impact of the construction of the bridge. Traffic increases because vehicle could move with ease.

The same goes to Ipoh-Lumut line, because the line could save millions a year if we utilize the Lumut port. Furthermore, Manjung area is a district in Perak that recorded highest economic growth. The Tapah Road-Teluk Intan line has been abandoned for more than a decade, and to have this line extension is, I believe, is expensive, due to the fact that most of the line has to traverse the swampy Lower Perak area, and a superlong bridge has to be built to cross Perak River near it's estuary. (May 12, 2010) ... the long-delayed RM7.07 billion West Coast Expressway (WCE) to be constructed by West Coast Expressway Sdn Bhd (WCE Sdn Bhd), is expected to stimulate growth in areas stretching from Taiping to Banting on the west coast of Perak and Selangor. Beneficiaries include several sectors such as real estate, industrial and tourism, in areas such as Lenggong, Taiping and Pangkor in Perak; and Banting and Sepang in Selangor...recently that construction, expected to take about five years to complete, would start in the second quarter of next year after the fund-raising exercise was completed...The WCE is expected to accelerate the development of Perak's tourism sector, especially in the northern, north-western and western region, covering Lenggong, Taiping and Pangkor with enhanced accessibility to these areas. This is in addition to Prime Minister Datuk Sri Najib Tun Razak's Budget 2012 announcement, that the government has made a RM978 million allocation to accelerate the development of five regional corridors, one of which includes heritage tourism development in Taiping in the Northern Corridor. The WCE will make travelling to Pangkor's sandy beaches a breeze, and the beneficiaries of this development would include its hotels and resorts, such as YTL Hotels' internationally renowned Pangkor Laut Resort. Furthermore, the archaeological heritage of Lenggong Valley, in upper Perak, which has been declared recently as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where the earliest human skeletal remains in the peninsula, the 11,000 year-old Perak man was found in 1991, has now put it in the international tourism map. In summary, despite the many reservations about the expressway, there will definitely be positive spill-overs including enhanced accessibility to a major tourism region in Perak that is formed by Lenggong, Taiping and Pangkor; as well as generally spurring growth in real

estate, industrial, and tourism in the west coast of Perak and Selangor. (August 24, 2012)

Sebuah lebuh raya baru bakal dibina dari Ipoh ke Selama di sempadan Perak/Kedah dan bersambung ke Lebuh Raya Kulim-Sungai Petani... "Lebuh raya tiga lorong ini bermula di Jelapang dan dilengkapi dengan susur keluar di Sungai Siput, Karai, Kati, Anak Kurau, Batu Kurau dan berakhir di Selama. "Jalan baru ini akan bersambung hingga ke Serdang dan terus ke Lebuh Raya Sungai Petani... (May 11, 2010)

... the state government had planned to open up three more interchanges to exit from the North-South Expressway... "We have approached the MHA to build the three toll booths at Gua Tempurung, Alor Pongsu and Meru Raya... (June 10, 2011)

THE state government is considering developing the Gerik military airstrip into a commercial airport to solve the problem of connectivity to the Royal Belum State Park... the airstrip would be extended from its present length of 450m to 800m to allow the landing of Fokker aircrafts... The state...had approached Berjaya Air to fly to the state park once work on the airstrip was completed. (February 3, 2012)

Why the need for an international airport, when there is one in Penang in the north, and KLIA and Subang in the south, a short flying time away? Why not develop Sultan Azlan Shah Airport into a feeder airport for low-cost carriers to link with other South-East Asian countries?... the airport should be upgraded and offer flights to Asean destinations, such as Bangkok, Hanoi, Jakarta, Macau, Hong Kong and Guangzhou in Southern China. (November 15, 2010)

menteri besar speaks about turning perak into a developed state in five years, can it be done? i doubt it. even the decision to improve the sultan azlan shah airport is taking a long time, how can he hopes to achieve developed status within the time frame? in perak it is all just talks or mere dreams. improve the airport first and bring it back to its status of the 90s, then we can woo investors and develop the state. (November 24, 2010)

The main argument against building a new airport is the worry that the airport will be a white elephant. This is really a chicken-and-egg argument. Without a new airport, it is very difficult to attract investments to Ipoh. On the other hand, while many people lament the lack of investment, they are not convinced that a new airport is needed. Very often, required infrastructure must be built first in order to attract and convince investors to take a risk to invest in that particular place... Planners and the people must think long term. Equally important is to have a development plan that leverage on the airport. The Bayan Lepas FTZ may not be as successful now without the airport close by. Electronics factories were established there because electronic components and products are always exported by air. So are pharmaceutical products. Most people don't know that Sarawak has three international-class airports. It is high time that Perak has one. (November 29, 2010)

However, having a viable commercial airport alone is insufficient to attract investors and tourists to the state. There must be good investment environment and good tourist attractions. Otherwise, such an airport will only serve outgoing tourists from the state and not the other way round. Who would want to come to the state if there are no ideal investment opportunities or renowned tourist attractions? Therefore, the state needs to improve and develop business and tourism aspects, commensurate with the development of the airport so that it would not merely facilitate transportation but be an avenue for economic development. (April 30, 2010)

Being a feeder airport will exclude Ipoh from being a high-technology center because most high-tech products are transported by air. Many products such as pharmaceuticals are also time-sensitive. Without the availability of air transport, investors in these industries won't set up operations in Perak. (May 1, 2010)

Before all the master plan (presumably at strategic level), please make sure air travel is easily accessible by both domestic tourists. This not only encourages domestic tourism, but also international tourists with travel itinerary included to travel to Ipoh via air transportation rather than land transportations. Many international tourists would like to have connecting flights from KLIA to Ipoh for fast access to the city. Please take this proposal seriously. (January 16, 2010)

Tourism cannot succeed without a good infrastructure to support the demands of tourists. It is only when China with resources generated from tremendous economic growth developed its infrastructure that they were able to attract the number of tourists that they have now. Similarly Ipoh to successfully promote its attractions needs the quality of infrastructure that is able to satisfy the very demanding tourist. To develop and maintain this type of infrastructure. (May 19, 2010)

Every time a person boards an express bus, or taxi, he wonders if this will be his last journey. The seat belts, like the meters in Ipoh's taxis, rarely function, whilst stage buses appear to be driven by drivers who are clueless of the Highway Code. Not every visitor tours with his own car. Many tourists, local and foreign, rely heavily on public transport. What has Ipoh to offer in the way of cheap, reliable and efficient public transport? (October 16, 2011)

I have written too many times that it is perfectly legal for taxis in Ipoh not to use meters. Look at the sign at the roof of the taxis. It says "Kereta Sewa" or hired car, not "Teksi Bermeter" or metered taxis as found in Kuala Lumpur. This means that taxi drivers are free to negotiate their fares with passengers. So don't blame the taxi drivers, blame the government agency that issued the permits. (May 17, 2010)

Firefly will double its Singapore-Ipoh services to 14 times weekly by January next year from seven times weekly now, a company official said yesterday... the community airline would be adding three ATR 72-500 aircraft by February next year to 10 from seven currently. (October 14, 2010)

However, the State Government proposes to change the route through Bagan Datoh, Manjung up to Changkat Jering (coastal road), which means that the road through Teluk Intan, that was in the original plan, will not be implemented. Compared to major towns in Perak, Teluk Intan is the only major town that is far and isolated from major highways such as the Ipoh-Lumut Expressway or North-South Expressway.

The construction of the West Coast Expressway was expected to boost the economy of Teluk Intan. However, if the Perak government's proposal is implemented, then the main towns in Manjung District, like Lumut and Sitiawan, that already has the Ipoh-Lumut Expressway will also have a West Coast highway while towns like Teluk Intan will be left out again. I hope that the state government will review the proposal so that development can be felt by all. (June 10, 2011)

Already, transportation links to Ipoh have improved with the new high-speed electric train that links Ipoh to Kuala Lumpur, in a mere two hours. This will be extended to Singapore to the south and the Thai border to the north. (January 29, 2011)

Barangkali election campaign again! Just listen and don't take it too seriously as our Perak MB was only good in mentioning of all the mega projects, tetapi semua tak

pernah jadi from the ambitious Space Project (Ipoh Airport), Air Asia Northern Low Cost Hub (Ipoh Airport), New Airport at Sri Iskandar, Animation Hub (Meru), Water Theme Park (Meru), after 10 years delayed double rail track from Rawang to Ipoh finally ready to be used but the Transport Minister mentioned not enough coaches to run the line, Ipoh - Lumut Highway, Cable Car Project (Larut Hill, Taiping), Jetasia flying from Singapore to Ipoh (but we understand from Airasia the runway from Ipoh too short for Airbus 320)and lots more projects. Very soon, even Batu Berendam Melaka has an international airport, what happen to bigger state like Perak? As a Perakian, we would like to see more developments and job opportunities in Ipoh and Perak State and not just talk (NATO) and signing of MOUs only. (February 18, 2008)

There is a lot of industrial parks in Ipoh, but all kosong, tak ada factory langsung or Factory tutup pintu. I have been to Chemor Ceramic Park , Sri Iskandar Industrial Park, BG Bemban Industrial Park or the latest mentioned Meru Raya Hi-tech Park, resemble the one in Kulim, but semua hanya cakap or shiok sahaja. I think 2020 Perak Aman Jaya hanya mimpi sahaja. (December 2, 2010)

masih seperti dulu, sama seperti di bawah pemerintahan Tajul Rosli.....suka hebohkan pelbagai projek tetapi akhirnya dibatalkan (klu ni x pulak dihebohkan). conthnya, projek biodisel di Trong, bandar hadari di Behrang, Perak tourism Hub, bangunan pusat Islam setingi 20 tingkat di Meru Raya, hospital baru di seri iskandar dan parit buntar, universiti perubatan di Gua Tempurung, kampus pertanian UPM di Hulu Perak dan macam2 lagi. More talk than action. kalau x komited nak nk buat, lebih baik jgn umumkan. publisiti murahan (August 6, 2009)

Local Governments and Other Governmental Bodies – and the People

This two-day fishing fiesta was held at a spot along Sungai Perak near Teluk Intan recently. Over 300 fishing enthusiasts, including some from the ASEAN region, participated. A few Arab anglers were also present. The objective of the fiesta... was to showcase Teluk Intan as a prawn capital of Perak besides it being a programmed activity of VPY 2012. A food court selling prawn dishes and *ikan bakar* (barbecued fish) will be built soon by the local council to tap on the crustaceans' popularity. (March 1, 2012)

Mother Nature is kind to Perak and has blessed her with many natural phenomena which some have taken for granted. One such occurrence is fireflies that are found in abundance in mangrove swamps along the coast of the state... Realising the tourism potential these insects have to offer, some very enterprising individuals in the village formed the Kelab Chaya Alam Perak. Its objective is to promote the Kampong Dew fireflies to tourists as part of an eco-tourism package. However, facilities are still lacking and drawing tourists to the area may be problematic, considering the many shortcomings. Dato' Hamidah Osman, the executive councillor for tourism, dropped by the village recently to see the extent of the problem. She acknowledged that the club requires assistance and pledged RM50,000 to upgrade facilities such as a covered walkway to the jetty, a waiting area, signage and a sturdier jetty. (May 16, 2011)

Pangkor has experienced rapid growth throughout the years... the tourism industry allowed many locals on the island to have job opportunities and investment in the industry. "To further boost the industry, I [Lumut MP, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Kong Cho Ha] have also recently approved licenses for speed boat operators who have adhered to the guidelines in ferrying people around the island," he said. (August 29, 2012)

Pusat Kerjaya Amanjaya (PeKA) berhasrat melahirkan kira-kira 500 usahawan baru di kalangan belia di kawasan bandar dan luar bandar di bawah Program Keusahawanan Amanjaya, tahun ini. Pengarahnya, Ameron Zulqarnaen Yeop Rashidi, berkata setakat ini, lebih 200 belia telah dikenalpasti untuk menyertai program itu yang turut menyediakan khidmat nasihat kepada golongan berkenaan untuk menceburi bidang keusahawanan. (Oct 17th, 2012)

The swearing-in ceremony of the Ipoh City Council councillors was reported in the New Straits Times as "ENCORE: State councillors re-appointed in the hope that they would again deliver excellent results". Dato' Dr Mah Hang Soon, state local government committee chairman, said that the state was satisfied with their work and so they were re-appointed. No survey was carried out among the residents on the performance of the councillors. What criteria did Dr Mah use to claim that all the councillors have done well? I receive many calls from residents complaining about their problems mainly with clogged and broken drains, grass cutting and garbage. I always tell them to contact their councillor first. Many residents do not know who their councillor is. Those who know inform that it is difficult to contact the councillor and even if they do make contact, the person is too busy to attend to their problems. That is the reason they call me... In Penang several civil societies organised a *Know Your Councillor* campaign, whose purpose was to enable Penangites to judge for themselves whether their councillors were up to the mark. The councillors were given a questionnaire which required them to list three of their major achievements for last year and to give three of their main goals for this year if they were re-appointed and reason for re-appointment. When I googled "report card for local councillors", I found that many local councils in other countries assess the performance of their councillors annually. Their grades are available online with their achievements and failures... It is time for NGOs in Ipoh to come together and carry out a similar survey. Let the residents judge the performance of the councillor (February 16, 2012)

Most of the Councilors are appointed because of their political affiliation. Even if they failed to perform, nothing that the community can say or do will stop them from being reappointed, despite to contrary "official" claims. This can be seen by some of the Councilors reappointed year after year. Having a performance survey won't make much difference... Councilors are paid pittance... While a few are career politicians, many of them have to work or run their businesses. Yet the community expects them to drop everything and look into all their complaints. When something goes wrong, it becomes the fault of the Councilor. But the Councilor can't issue instructions to MBI. He can only raise up the matter with the Datuk Bandar or Council Secretary and for them to take action. An important point is that not all the Councilors are of equal standing. Some are more influential than others. So some areas get more attention from MBI while other areas suffer. On the whole, most people, including me, are dissatisfied with Councilors. But until the time when Councilors are elected, we can only hope and pray that whoever that gets appointed will be sincere to look after and assist the community. Appointment by political affiliation should be a thing of the past because the Councilors are not beholden to the community but rather the political party that got them appointed. (February 23, 2012)

In the past, we did not have a proper line of communication between council presidents and the state government. It used to be very official where meetings were held only once in three to four months. And then, they will be called to meet the

mentri besar to discuss issues from time to time or meet the mentri besar during official visits to their areas. That has all changed. During my time, we have initiated a monthly meeting between district officers, council presidents and the MB. It is an avenue for them to freely communicate with the MB. In some ways, it is like another form of a state executive meeting where we discuss policies and problems openly. This is one of the things we have done to change or to transform our local councils and also district offices. (December 31, 2011)

Ahli -ahli Majlis adalah merupakan wakil rakyat bagi kawasan kerajaan tempatan. Sebelum ini perantaraan mereka dibuat melalui pilihanraya Majlis Tempatan. Tetapi sekarang pemilihan dilakukan melalui cadangan daripada parti-parti yang memerintah. Sistem ini berjalan dengan lancar dan menjadi sebahagian daripada struktur majlis kerajaan tempatan. Ahli-ahli Majlis yang dilantik mempunyai tanggungjawab besar untuk memastikan setiap majlis daerah dapat berfungsi dengan baik. Tanggungjawab mereka samalah seperti Ahli-Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri iaitu perlu sentiasa berada di lapangan melihat segala permasalahan yang berlaku. Sekiranya mereka yang dilantik gagal menaikkan peranan maka rakyat akan melihat sebagai kegagalan kerajaan yang memerintah. Mereka perlu menjadi lebih inklusif dan efektif bagi melunaskan tanggungjawab kepada rakyat. Dalam suasana yang lebih terbuka hari ini tugas mereka sentiasa dinilai oleh rakyat... Dalam Majlis Tempatan kini sudah mempunyai Agenda 21. Ia adalah bagi memberi ruang kepada NGO dan suara-suara masyarakat sivil untuk turut berpartisipasi dalam Majlis-majlis tempatan. Saya telah mengarahkan supaya Agenda 21 ini diaktifkan sebagai suatu lagi bentuk dan struktur dalam Majlis Kerajaan Tempatan. Saya harap idea ini akan diterjemahkan bagi membolehkan rakyat dapat lebih aktif dan berpartisipasi dalam memastikan kerajaan tempatan yang baik dan efisien. (December 6, 2009)

Ipoh was a beautiful city. Sadly the place was and is run by groups of self-serving people, who have used and abused Ipoh for their own interests. They have neglected the city and its people. These selfish people include politicians, councillors and greedy developers, who are not just ashamed of Ipoh's glorious past, they also place NO value on the things which make Ipoh attractive. Buildings, greenery including trees and now our hills are destroyed. Instead of taking stock of what Ipoh is famous for, they are killing Ipoh. The people who are supposed to steer Ipoh forward lack vision. Their disjointed policies and half-baked projects, will only propel Ipoh into another slum. And this same group of selfish people do not like dissent either. They are sensitive to criticism and expect everyone to agree with them. There is no avenue for people to express their disapproval. Is it any wonder our young and creative people leave and our elderly shake their heads with despair? It is like Malaysia's brain drain – Ipoh's best will stay away because their ideas and views are not even acknowledged, appreciated and approved. We need more people who are willing to speak up for and on behalf of Ipoh. And we certainly do NOT need the same people who spew out the same tired phrases and ideologies. These people in positions of responsibility, travel abroad on their so-called study trips using our money (taxpayer's money), they enthuse about the places they have visited but they come back and are still close-minded and display their tempurung mentality. (May 16, 2010)

As a former resident of Ipoh who was born and bred in this serene, mid-size Malaysian city, I strongly feel that our beloved hometown still has its innate charm intact even though the general condition of the city has degenerated substantially over the years.

Instead of indulging in finger-pointing and be conveniently carried away by the blame game, the political bigwigs in the city should take the initiative to establish a special commission to draw up a master plan for Ipoh's future growth and development into the next century. Rope in civic leaders, community activists, business professionals, real estate developers and town planners, and solicit their input. The task is not easy but with local pride at stake, this elite group should work as a team to strategize for the overall improvement of the city. The plan must be inclusive in nature and everyone, from the privileged to the average man on the street should have a piece of the pie. It takes someone with leadership, foresight and a deep sense of commitment to start the ball rolling and the plan should be fine-tuned when there is a need to do so. (June 5, 2010)

As an expatriate with PR who has only lived in Ipoh for the last 10 years+, I have read the 11 posts on this subject (so far) very carefully but I feel honestly that I have heard it all before – time after time. Meanwhile Ipoh continues to deteriorate There seems to be quite a strong group of people in Ipoh who want the city to be brought back to an attractive place to live and over the years they have been quite vocal about it. Promises seem to have been made to them and not materialised and sometimes things appear to have been done exactly the opposite of what the people want... It almost seems to me that the master plan is to let the city fall down and then either rebuild it in the way the government would like it or relocate it all to Jelapang. Perhaps I just do not understand the local culture! (June 3, 2010)

You see, Ipoh does not lack attractions but the know-how, professionalism and commitment to learn about them and conserve them for the benefits of the people and the city we are so proud of. There is plenty of money to be made in this process by local people, and success in this regard can reverse the outflow of capital and human resources. (July 1, 2010)

If Malaysia wants to be a developed country then it must adopt these types of laws. If MBI engineers were aware of these laws and applied them, the project could have been scaled down and a number of mature trees could have been saved. Can the engineers replace these trees which may be more than 100 years old?...The second project is the construction of the retention pond in Merdeka Garden. All the trees in a large area have been cut and there are no trees in the vicinity. There were fruit and coconut trees. Birds used to nest in the trees and now have been stripped of their habitat. Where I used to see iguanas and wild fowl, the construction has decimated them. Was it necessary to cut all the trees? If the engineers had been discriminating, many of them could have been saved. I have seen mature trees being dug up and replanted using cranes. I understand that if the trees were not cut, it would be difficult for movement of machinery. This has to be done to preserve nature. The third project is the construction of the Esso filling station along Jalan Raja Musa Aziz (Anderson Road). When the trees were cut, a number of readers phoned Ipoh Echo to complain. There was no explanation from MBI. Was it really necessary to cut that many mature trees? In fact the trunks of the trees were tall and would not have obstructed the view of the filling station. Is this a suitable place for a filling station? Do we really need all these developments at a cost to Mother Nature? It is our duty to preserve the earth for our future generations. We must not allow a few people to make quick money. Has man the right to destroy the flora and fauna. We must have a holistic approach in

approving projects and think of the long term impact and not of making a quick profit. Let us replant our beautiful trees and restore Ipoh to its former beauty. (June 1, 2012) We must also not forget the trees that were felled near where the present Courts Mammoth is. Then, there were a lot of hues and cries about the whole matter. Many Ipoh citizens were upset. But did the DBI cared? They never seem to learn that trees are just as important as oxygen in the air. Now, they felling trees here and there. Is there no guidelines and rules pertaining to felling of trees in Ipoh? DBI should come down hard on those who cut trees indiscriminately or purposely. It takes a few decades for a tree to mature but only an hour or so to cut it down. Even if one were to start planting now, by the time it matures, it will be my grandson who will witness the magnificent tree. Therefore, please stop felling of trees. It is my sincere plea to the Authourity. If you have to fell one tree, then three trees should be replanted. Is that a fair request? (June 1, 2012)

Yesterday would be especially meaningful to residents of Ipoh who can expect more green spaces for recreational activities or relaxation as City Mayor, Datuk Roshidi Hashim is making another of his vision become a reality and this one is themed Ipoh – City with 1,000 parks. At an event in Station 18 this morning, Ipoh City Council (MBI) joined hands with property developer Team Keris Berhad, to turn an idle piece of land into a pretty and useful park for the people. To date, Ipoh city has over 1,400 parks of various sizes but only 500 are big enough for recreational purposes. Therefore, MBI hopes to increase the number to 1,000 public parks in Ipoh, thus complementing its vision for “Clean, Green and Developed City.” (October 10, 2011)

Ipohites have long had running battles with the Ipoh City Council (MBI) regarding trees that have been chopped. Last July, concerned people contacted the Ipoh Echo (IE) to report tree felling activities along Jalan SP Seenivasagam in front of St Michael’s Institution. Reporters rushed to the scene and found the remains of a casuarina tree stump. Michaelian students, ranging from their teens to those in their forties who were former students, expressed sorrow as “that was the tree where we waited for our parents after school”. MBI said that “checks on the health of the trees found that the roots and stem of this particular tree was rotten and posed a danger to the public. Hence it had to be felled soonest possible”. (February 1, 2011)

In addition to Ms. Mokhtar’s article, the perception of “development” in the minds of our so called “administrators” is one of modern high tech buildings, 6 lane highways and interchanges, electronic gizmos, whistles and bells at every street corner. This is the message that clearly comes across when we read about “development” in Ipoh and the whole, Malaysia. Mature trees are felled wantonly without much thought or consideration of options, tree wise and development wise. The so called “experts” who are employed by the civil service and unfortunately in the public sector are none too aware that trees, especially mature trees are actually an asset that proves invaluable to a district or zone in terms of aesthetics. Renowned master planners and architects worldwide, except in Malaysia, acknowledge this fact. Yes PAM, wake up and take note! Are the architects you certify as professional capable of this philosophy? Are your so called architects thinking green or is it just a ploy of salesmanship to the unknowing public. Likewise IEM, are the engineers you certify as “professional”, only applies to practice to “Malaysian Standards”. The standard being not to rock the boat when it comes to the commercial aspect of your business??... Heritage Society, your silence is indeed so disheartening. Are these trees that were

chopped down not part of the heritage of the environment in Ipoh. As I had previously written, "HERITAGE" is NOT only applicable to buildings, but it does, in Ipoh. (February 1, 2011)

Although we lack seasons to appreciate the changing tree foliage, we are amply rewarded with the wealth of colour from the different flowering cycles. But that is all history. Over several decades, nondescript palms replaced these trees. Sadly, Ipohites only know about a tree's removal when confronted with the tree-stump, as the removal is usually done without warning. Usual official responses are a combination of the following: 1) don't know, 2) only following orders, 3) the tree is rotting and presents a danger to the public, 4) palm trees like those in the holy-land, are preferred. Ipoh is not the only city to suffer from 'tree attacks'. The removal of trees in Kuala Lumpur happened because of a premature act, done in the name of progress and development. However, Ipoh's trees did not make way for development – they were removed because of ignorance, apathy and an unwillingness to nurture and maintain the trees. How is it that Singapore, a concrete jungle, can be termed the 'garden of the east' with people from all over the world singing praises about their beautiful tree-lined boulevards? Why can they manage a rigorous maintenance, pruning and horticultural regime but not us? These 'jobs' provide employment as well as beautify the city. We don't hear of casualties from people incapacitated by falling branches or uprooted trees (except during a severe thunderstorm). The Singaporeans had the good sense to acknowledge the social, communal, environmental and economic benefits of trees. Sadly, it appears that Ipoh's city planners have ignored all these. Down in Putrajaya, a delegation will soon attend a two-day study trip in Singapore, on planting and maintaining trees. Many wonder if the trip is another jolly or an opportunity for Christmas shopping, combined with a family-holiday, during the end-of-year school vacation? This is another wasteful extravaganza at the taxpayer's expense. Is it necessary for a whole 'delegation' to go? Another reason why Malaysians are mistrustful of sending civil servants on foreign study courses is because very little of the knowledge gained, is shared with other staff, on their return. Is our Agriculture College at Serdang inadequate? What about the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia? I know these places have knowledgeable and helpful personnel. Or should we close these establishments down because they lack the expertise and quality staff? Nearer to home, Perak's own Jabatan Pertanian in Titi Gantong provides useful courses about aspects of botany including the planting and maintenance of trees. The lecturers from the nearby agricultural college are specialists in their various fields. Hopefully, Ipohites are more sensible than their KL colleagues about sending people on pointless study trips abroad. Our experts are just as knowledgeable. Why not allow our horticulturists, arborists and tree surgeons to perform their jobs with minimal or no political interference? Let us replant our beautiful trees and restore Ipoh to its former beauty. (November 30, 2010)

In the past Ipoh City Watch fought against the indiscriminate felling of trees and had suggested that instead of felling them (assuming that it is unavoidable) they should be transplanted in a new location. This way mature trees would be saved. Unfortunately ICW's pleas fell on death ears. I remember one incident when the Director of Parks threw two members of ICW out of his office when they dared confront him on the matter of cutting down the trees in Ipoh Padang. (December 3, 2010)

The value of trees will only increase as the local council, JKR, DID and the hodge podge of of the civil service do not give two hoots about the current “bank” of the trees in Ipoh. For example (oh no!!) the trees that stood by the Kinta River ! Hey guys.....Moon River.....Morubina development.....several magnificent trees were felled on the right bank some well over 600mm girths without even a blink from those guys in the first para. The usual comment – outside the reserve therefore not in my jurisdiction. apa boleh buat ?? ini developer punya tanah ! so on and on it goes. (December 5, 2010)

As a former resident of Ipoh who was born and bred in this serene, mid-size Malaysian city, I strongly feel that our beloved hometown still has its innate charm intact even though the general condition of the city has degenerated substantially over the years. Instead of indulging in finger-pointing and be conveniently carried away by the blame game, the political bigwigs in the city should take the initiative to establish a special commission to draw up a master plan for Ipoh’s future growth and development into the next century. Rope in civic leaders, community activists, business professionals, real estate developers and town planners, and solicit their input. The task is not easy but with local pride at stake, this elite group should work as a team to strategize for the overall improvement of the city. The plan must be inclusive in nature and everyone, from the privileged to the average man on the street should have a piece of the pie. It takes someone with leadership, foresight and a deep sense of commitment to start the ball rolling and the plan should be fine-tuned when there is a need to do so. (June 5, 2010)

In Issue 142 of the Ipoh Echo, the article “Mayor’s Concerns” gave an interesting insight into the attitude of public servants and their sycophants. The article generated a lot of criticism but there were some members of society who failed to see the bigger picture. They did not see the problems in Ipoh society but just wittered on about the way that the mayor should be addressed. They failed to understand that respect has to be earned, especially by a public figure. The article said that the Mayor was late. This is inexcusable. It shows arrogance and a lack of respect for other people and their time. The media representative, Rosli Dahamin did not appear. So, are we to be proud of wasting other people’s time? This is a community paper and some residents have used this vehicle to express their beliefs that new blood should be injected into Ipoh. Many Ipohites suffer from the stagnation that comes when people remain in their jobs for too long. These people lack perspective and motivation. Some are simply warming their seats till their retirement... Before they know it, 2020 will be upon them. Do we need reminding that *Visit Perak Year 2012* suffered from poor planning and a late start because of this laid-back mentality? The article also exposed the lack of engagement by our city officials. How does one expect things to move forward with this attitude and mind-set? When will our public servants reach out from their ivory towers? (August 1, 2012)

It is now mid-September 2011 and January 2012 is just around the corner. For those who are unaware, 2012 is Visit Perak Year. Some people may believe that Perak is geared up for this very important year but are they being realistic? How many people are aware that 2012 is Visit Perak Year? Last July, the Ipoh Echo published a report which said that the calendar of events would be ready by September. Why have the authorities not engaged the general public to suggest ideas for events or venues? What do the Perakians know about the events planned for 2012? What has been the public’s participation in these? How have the authorities presented the array of

activities, venues or special exhibitions to showcase Perak to the whole world? The Ipoh Echo may be accessible locally and on-line but is this enough? Who is the target audience for tourism Perak – the foreigners or local (Malaysian) tourists? Is the approach for each different? Everyone knows that the preparation and the promotional events for the Olympics are started well in advance and sponsorship obtained years before the site is ready. In the schools our children attend, the school diary is prepared a year, or two, in advance; the schools know what events should be included in the academic year and it has a rough idea of who it plans to invite to give talks to the students. Perak is not short of people who have interesting ideas. Why is their creativity not being tapped? Why do we shy away from engaging the wider public to participate in an event which will ultimately benefit them?... People flying by MAS into KLIA are normally treated to a tourism Malaysia promotional advert on the monitors, prior to landing. Why are they not told that it is Visit Perak Year in 2012? Where are the flyers, or to save costs, a notice on their screens to inform them about the event? Why are Tourism Malaysia offices overseas not promoting Perak at all? Many people book their holidays well in advance. Can't we at least tempt them now, so they can include Perak as a possible destination? We have a brilliant, direct bus service between KLIA and Ipoh, which very few people know about. There should be billboards as we arrive at KLIA showcasing Perak and telling them that they can go direct to Perak on this bus service. KLIA has nothing to tell the traveller about Perak. Why can't the authorities have adverts promoting Perak painted on the outside of buses and coaches outside of Perak? It is those people outside the state we need to entice. (September 16, 2011)

Imagine I only just found out (last month in Aug) that 2012 is VPY and the clincher here is I found out while visiting Singapore...well, so ok, they are doing their job of promoting VPY 2012 outside the country, but come on, where's the internal marketing? YOU – the local govt & councils – need your 'internal people' aka all Perakians to pull the whole thing off and make it a success. You need us to 'buy in' – at the end of the day, whether these tourists have a good impression of Perak and having the desire to re-visit ultimately depends on what they see in the community – not just how beautiful the roundabouts/memorials are (although they still need the upgrading work) ...buck up! We're only 3 mths away...do we have to wait another decade for the next VPY to get something of quality done? Don't waste us taxpayers money that funded all those study tours of other cities to see how they do it – make it happen! (September 22, 2011)

Beautification and cleanliness projects can be undertaken by the Council but the attitude of Ipohites should be changed first. What is the point of all the projects when Ipohites don't care or even abuse what was implemented. For example, smokers throw their cigarette butts into plant pots. There are even people who conveniently throw plastic bags, plastic bottles or metal cans into the plant pots instead of throwing into the rubbish bin. How many of us have seen people indiscriminately throw cigarette butts, tissues, etc, out the car window? Too many Ipohites are not bothered at all about keeping Ipoh clean. Are we to expect that the Council will succeed? (May 17, 2010)

... that the attitude of Ipohites must change first before beautification and cleanliness projects can be carried out. If this is the case, we may have to wait till kingdom comes before we can live in a beautiful and clean environment.

How do you think the attitude of the people can be changed? Please tell.

Remember before the PAP government took control of Singapore, the China Town was filthy and clothes hanging on poles from balconies of the high-rise apartment buildings to dry. The PAP government did not wait for the Singaporeans to change their attitude first, it went ahead with all projects and at the same time strictly enforce its anti-litter by-law.

Now look at the same China Town, and Singaporeans as well as tourists dare not litter. Don't blame on Ipohites, there are good and responsible residents as Ipoh Echo had highlighted. Just because of those irresponsible ones, must the rest be deprived from living a beautiful and clean environment? (May 17, 2010)

... we already have anti-litter laws. Do the people care? Perhaps a stricter enforcement is needed. But then people will complain the authorities are too strict and ample warning should be first given. The thing is that everyone knows that we should not litter and yet so many people simply do it without a second thought. There are of course Ipohites who are mindful of cleanliness. But don't simply blame the Council when much of the fault actually lies with the people especially the younger generation. I am not advocating that Ipoh City Council neglect their responsibilities to beautify Ipoh and keep Ipoh clean. I am merely saying that much of the Council's efforts are defeated by the very people that the projects were carried out for. Perhaps I should have said that the people's attitude must be changed at the same time while carrying out beautification and cleanliness projects. However, I think that it is a lot easier to carry out projects than changing people's attitude, and so the change should be done first. (May 17, 2010)

I am very aware of this shortcoming. I hope Ipoh City Council doesn't create 'a state within a state'. The Council has to comply. Ipoh is the capital city of Perak and is the nerve centre of the state. Like it or not MBI has to play its part by setting a good example for other local councils to follow. The Mayor and the Council members must remember that they are being appointed by the state government. Conventional wisdom dictates that they should follow orders, not otherwise. It's therefore incumbent upon them to keep Ipoh clean as that is what is being expected of them. They have to walk the extra mile. However, you can't blame MBI alone. Residents too need to change their mind-sets. They can't apportion blame on City Council whenever garbage is not collected or when an area gets dirty. It's a collective responsibility. Both MBI and Ipohites are equally liable. Changing of habits and mind-sets will help resolve this problem, especially when we play host to tourists during *Visit Perak Year 2012*. The imposition and enforcement of laws will have little impact if people refuse to change their habits. (January 16, 2012)

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Malaysia and Traffic will be among the two major NGOs involved in a state government's newly formed committee to put a stop to poaching and encroachment at Royal Belum State Park. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambray Abd Kadir who spoke to reporters after a weekly state Exco meeting in Ipoh last Wednesday said the new committee is among the several recommendations by the Perak State Government to curb illegal activities in the pristine forests and preserve its natural wealth. (February 10, 2012)

One major reason small businesses cannot thrive is because our state government lacks vision in promoting these small businesses. In practically every country, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute almost 90% of all commercial business

activity. Some benefits of SME's are: contribution to the economy in terms of output of goods and services; creation of jobs at relatively low capital cost, especially in the fast growing service sector; they provide a vehicle for reducing income disparities; develop a pool of skilled and semi-skilled workers as a basis for the future industrial expansion; provide opportunities for developing and adapting appropriate technology; offer an excellent breeding ground for entrepreneurial and managerial talent. However, the Perak administration tends to favour big and/or international businesses over the SMEs. (March 1, 2011)

The trouble with Perak is the government servants and its leaders. They are clearly only interested in lining their own pockets, otherwise licences and approvals will be delayed etc. etc. That is why most people would rather invest elsewhere, like Penang where at least Pakatan government is trying to stamp out corruption and save on wasteful spending by previous government officials. That was in the past. I wonder what ICW is doing now about issues like that now. (March 1, 2011)

English language proficiency among graduates and diploma holders is poor. It affects their chances to be gainfully employed. Industrial players too are selective when looking for candidates to fill up vacancies. I have discussed this with captains of industries and FMM Perak to seek a long-term solution to the problems mentioned. Industries are themselves worried about losing those whom they have trained to third parties. This is a universal phenomenon which affects not only us but the rest of the world. I suggest that employers take measures to instil loyalty by sending the employees abroad for specialised training as a means of maintaining their loyalty. Regarding soft training, I have also suggested that vocational-training institutions conduct language courses to prepare their graduates for the job market. Polytechnic Ungku Omar is receptive of the idea. (January 16, 2012)

The Perak government is to reduce bureaucratic red tape to expedite approval for investment projects... Immediate approvals would enable the investors to launch their projects quickly and the state government would be able to garner revenue fast, he told reporters after performing the ground-breaking for the fabrication plant of UMW Fabritech Sdn Bhd at Lumut Port here... the state government had approved the application to set up the plant in less than 24 hours and all other processes at the Manjung District and Land Office and other agencies were completed in three weeks... the RM100-million project was the first approved in the period of the first 100 days of the Pakatan Rakyat state government. (June 28, 2008)

Persidangan Majlis Masyarakat Sivil Amanjaya (MMSA) yang dianjurkan oleh Institut Darul Ridzuan (IDR) merupakan usaha mencari idea, pandangan serta cadangan daripada pertubuhan masyarakat sivil (CSO) dan Badan-badan Bukan Kerajaan (NGO) bagi mengisi jurang dalam mengurus tadbir kerajaan negeri. Melibatkan seramai 45 ahli yang mewakili keseluruhan NGO dari Perak... persidangan itu selaras dengan saranan Menteri Besar, Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir untuk mengadakan perbincangan dengan kumpulan kuasa ketiga (third force)... input yang diperolehi di penghujung persidangan itu akan dijadikan dibawa kepada pihak kerajaan negeri dan jabatan-jabatan yang terlibat untuk diperhalusi untuk diambil kira dalam sebarang pelaksanaan yang dilakukan. (September 30, 2012)

Bagi meningkatkan mutu pentadbiran kerajaan negeri, Institut Darul Ridzuan (IDR) akan mengemukakan beberapa resolusi bagi tujuan penambahbaikan khususnya

dalam aspek pembangunan dan ekonomi dalam masa terdekat ini... Resolusi tersebut dicapai hasil perbincangan bersama 45 anggota yang mewakili keseluruhan Badan-badan Bukan Kerajaan (NGO) dan Pertubuhan Masyarakat Sipil (CSO) negeri itu melalui persidangan Majlis Masyarakat Sipil Amanjaya (MMSA), pada 30 September lalu. Persidangan yang diadakan dua kali setahun, anjuran IDR merupakan usaha mencari idea, pandangan serta cadangan daripada CSO dan NGO bagi mengisi jurang dalam mengurus tadbir kerajaan negeri dan mempromosikan dasar yang tidak dapat dipenuhi dan disokong oleh strategi kerajaan. (October 17, 2012)

Since Dato' Seri DiRaja Dr Zambry Abd Kadir's ascendency to the Chief Ministerial post of Perak on February 6, 2009, talks were rife that constructive engagement with civil society would be the staple of the new government. The days that the government knows best were over, declared the Prime Minister and the sentiment was echoed by Zambry, nonetheless. Perakeans were thrilled that people's participation in determining their destiny was becoming a reality. Institut Darul Ridzuan (IDR), an independent think-tank formed in 2005 and given a new lease of life by Zambry, was tasked to prepare the groundwork for the much-awaited discourse. Overtures to non-governmental organisations, associations and advocacy groups were made. They were tempted with the prospect of being elected to the august Majlis Masyarakat Sipil Aman Jaya (Aman Jaya Civil Society Council). The council will consist of both BN friendly and unfriendly NGOs' heads selected based on pre-determined criteria. That idea was mooted in mid-2009 but became a non-starter largely due to inertia on the part of IDR... Finally when it took off the timing was way off the course and so was public interest... Some 200-odd people were present to witness the ceremony, a far cry from what was generally expected... What is most pertinent, however, is the timing of the meeting. Having it at the tail-end of the state government's tenure in office and at a time when election fever is running high, is not the best of options. "It's better late than never," said one observer. I feel otherwise. The state government has missed a golden opportunity to engage civil society in Perak on an even keel. This feeble attempt at interaction, done at the very last minute, may seem correct to some but, in all fairness, it is too little too late. The opportunity cost lost is immense, and so is the goodwill. (October 16, 2012)

Kerajaan negeri akan menganjurkan Dialog Antarabangsa Pangkor berkaitan teori pembangunan yang dijangka berlangsung di bandaraya Ipoh pada November ini, kata Menteri Besar, Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir. Beliau berkata persidangan itu merupakan mercu tanda dalam menaikkan imej Perak sebagai pusat persidangan bertaraf antarabangsa. "Kita harap dengan usaha ini kita dapat menjadikan Perak sebagai sebuah negeri yang sentiasa dapat bersama-sama dengan sebahagian ahli akademik yang menyumbang ilmu serta menjadikan Perak sebagai pusat percambahan ilmu di peringkat antarabangsa," katanya... (September 11, 2012)

I totally agree with Jerry Francis that Ipoh needs to show it is well managed, clean and beautiful if it is to attract tourists. His suggestion for a special allocation and a flying squad to deal with minor repairs to public property and infrastructure without delay too should be taken into consideration by the city council.

Mayor Dato Roshidi Hashim and his team of city councillors must be sensitive to the views and complaints of the residents. They must not be "caught" as in the case the Raja Muda Raja Dr. Nazrain Shah's recent inspection (Sept. 1) to an illegal open

burning and dump site following numerous complaints by residents. Act now and restore the image of the city as one of the cleanest in the country. (September 6, 2010)

Described as a mini Taj Mahal, the garden – Medan Stesen surrounded by some of the city's most famous iconic heritage buildings – Moorish architectural Railway Station, Colonial-style Town Hall and High Court buildings, has been the focal point for locals and visitors. It offers a postcard view of the city. It is also smack in the path of those arriving by train, which has increased its trips between Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh daily since the introduction of the electric train service. Just take a look at it. Is the city council doing enough to maintain the garden? I am ashamed as a resident to point this out, but it is necessary before the garden deteriorates further. What used to be appealing is now appalling. The only Pokok "Upas" (*Antiaris toxicaria*), from which the city got its name, is in the centre of the garden. It was planted by the Rotary Club of Ipoh in January, 1980, and has grown into a healthy matured tree. A marble plaque under the tree, which contains some information about the tree, has lain smashed into pieces on the ground for months. Yet, no attempt has been made by city council to replace it. Only the plaque laid by the Rotary Club to commemorate the planting of the tree is still intact, but the words are fading. The beautiful fountain with water spouting high and lit at night, stopped functioning years ago. All its magnificence has also faded. Some mosaic on the fountain walls and tiles around too, are breaking up. The rusted piping system of the fountain is exposed with a pool of water and litter inside. It appears to be an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes in which case, to whom is city council going to issue the summons? The fountain is like an unwanted child. It is being left to whatever fate the city council may decide for it later. At one end of the fountain, the war memorial which commemorates Perak's war dead of the First and Second World Wars, has been vandalised. The inter-crossing footpaths and rows of shrubs and trees are poorly maintained. Litter bins are toppled and litter often swept under the plants, which are not properly trimmed. Racks, brooms and dustpans are also left under the shrubs. For now it has to endure an existence in disgrace under the excruciating gaze of the hundreds of people crossing over to the railway station or strolling about in the garden. The garden is the first place that visitors to this "city that tin built" will see on their arrival by train. This is also the first image they will record with their cameras. It is also the starting point of the "Heritage Trail". Therefore, it is important that the city council maintain a good "first impression" of the city. (May 16, 2011)

First world infrastructure, third world maintenance. DBI must buck up on their maintenance schedule. Perhaps, our MB should pay a visit to this place. GE 13 is approaching. Must we wait for it to come before any work will be carried out? This reminds me of another fountain which is not working for the past one year. That is located at the pond at the polo ground. It was working initially, but now in a very sorry state. If it is a sponsored project, get the sponsor to rectify it or else remove it. (May 16, 2011)

I have to agree with the writer this time around. This fountain has been ignored for years! It's just lucky that that entire place stands up to the neglect! What is the problem with the fountain really puzzles us! If it's lack of funds I think MBI must start to wise up in looking for sponsors that can keep the fountains running. I don't think the bill runs up to thousands monthly. But, it's useless talking about this fountain when even the ones right under their noses at the Dataran Ipoh there are in a state of

neglect! I went there recently, and couldn't believe my eyes with what I saw. (May 22, 2011)