

# MALAYSIA

*49 years*









MALAYSIA

49 years

A special publication of the  
High Commission of Malaysia,  
Singapore in celebration of  
49 years of independence

31 AUGUST 2006



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.... PROBABLY MALAYSIA'S BEST CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

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**Cover:** *Haron Mokhtar, Warna Alam I (detail), 1997, Acrylic on Canvas, 211 x 121cm*



# ....FROM THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

**O**n 31 August 2006, Malaysia turns 49, celebrating nearly half a century of independence and freedom. Much has happened during this period. While many of the legacies of the past from British days still permeate Malaysian life, the country has also seen the gradual evolution of its own unique Malaysian identity, drawing strength from its multiracial, multireligious and multicultural background. Malaysia today is a country on the move, modern and sophisticated, in tandem with the times.

Its geographical proximity to Singapore allows a visitor to reach Malaysia virtually within minutes, by air, road, rail and even by ferry. The diversities that exist in Malaysia cannot but enchant any visitor.

As we enter into Visit Malaysia 2007, a whole range of events are being prepared to welcome our foreign friends. So, wait no more. Just pack and go.....to Malaysia!

In celebration of Malaysia 49, the High Commission has put together a collection of articles, pictures and paintings which focus on some of the cultural, historical and artistic aspects of Malaysia. Some of the articles in this publication, such as that on "Stadium Merdeka – Malaya's Independence Stadium" by former Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji, and also that on "Ho Ah Loke – Reminiscences, The Forgotten Figure of the Malay Film Industry" by renowned Malay film director Dato' L. Krishnan have never appeared in print before. For these, we wish to



record our deep appreciation to both Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji and Dato' L. Krishnan. Our thanks also go to the many others who had contributed articles as well as financial support to make this publication possible. So, enjoy these vignettes on Malaysia!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "N. Parameswaran". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

DATO' N. PARAMESWARAN  
High Commissioner of Malaysia

31 August 2006 / Singapore

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*Congratulations to Malaysia  
on their 49<sup>th</sup> National Day.*



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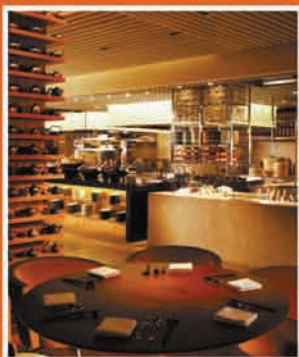
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# STADIUM MERDEKA

## MALAYA'S INDEPENDENCE STADIUM

*Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji*



*Stadium Merdeka depicted in a stamp issued on 31 August 1958 to commemorate the first anniversary of Malaya's independence*

**A**s a symbol of Malaya's independence (on 31 August, 1957), Stadium Merdeka (Independence Stadium) is unique. A New Straits Times editorial on 11 February 2003 stated that, "As cultural and historic properties, both Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara form the basic elements of national culture. They are symbols of the socio-historical identity of the nation." Certainly, Stadium Merdeka holds the unique distinction in the history of modern South-East Asia of being the only purpose-built venue for a Declaration of Independence ceremony.

But the history of the site goes back an even longer way. For over 113 years, the site of the two stadiums had the distinction of an uninterrupted history as a sports and recreational public access space. In 1893, the Selangor Golf Club (now the Royal Selangor Golf Club) was established with an 8-hole golf course and a clubhouse. Over the next

renamed Coronation Park in commemoration of the coronation of King George VI in 1937. In 1956, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra (subsequently to become Malaya's first Prime Minister), saw the potential of the site for the building of Stadium Merdeka. It was at the very centre of Kuala Lumpur, very easily accessible to the rakyat (people) and



*Stadium Merdeka today*

*Courtesy: Azrul Abdullah*

28 years, the club enjoyed these facilities before it relocated to its present site on Circular Road (now Jalan Tun Razak).

After the golf club moved, the site was turned into a recreational ground, People's Park. It was later

the urban poor. Most importantly, the Tunku saw its potential as a “national home for all sportsmen in Malaya”. Stadium Merdeka was built in just 13 months at a cost of RM2.3 million. To build a stadium of comparable size and seating capacity today will cost in excess of RM100 million. Stadium

Negara, on an adjacent site, was the country's first indoor stadium built to complement Stadium Merdeka. Built for RM4 million between 1960 – 1962, it had a dual function – hosting international and local sports events and also cultural performances.

The site has retained a continuous use as an educational precinct with four schools, including the prestigious Victoria Institution, located in its immediate vicinity. In addition, there is a symbiotic relationship between the students who studied there and its use as a public recreational and sports grounds. It has equally strong religious and social significance, being the site of several institutions like the Ni Tin Keng (built in 1893), YWCA (built in 1926) and an old Muslim cemetery which remains extant to this day.

The site is a memorial to Merdeka. Stadium Merdeka remains a symbol of Malaysia's multi-cultural society promoting cultural integration through sports, recreation, education and nationhood. For almost 50 years now, Stadium Merdeka has been adapted to cope with changing trends in the sports and entertainment industries.

Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara faced the wrecking ball in the mid 1990s. In a rather ironic way, it was the economic downturn of 1997 which saved the two stadiums. In 2000, PNB (Permodalan Nasional Berhad) purchased the land on which

the two stadiums stood, together with some of the adjacent land. PNB together with Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust) a non-governmental organization, are now initiating a programme of conservation and preservation of the two stadiums as part of Malaysia's national heritage. This programme will see both Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara restored to their original forms (1957 and 1962 respectively), in order to fully recover and enhance their heritage value, appreciate the significance of the original design philosophy and re-establish the identity of Malaysia's first monuments.

Both stadiums are icons of the country which cut across creed, race and class. With their restoration and rehabilitation, they will be venues which will help re-establish the understanding of the nation's independence especially among the younger generations. Both Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara will become major cultural tourism venues to interpret this Merdeka Vision to all visitors through museum displays and research facilities. Stadium Merdeka will have a museum called "The Road to Nationhood", and Stadium Negara, another museum, "The Magic Moments of Sports".

*Courtesy: Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji, Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust) / Jabatan Pos Malaysia*

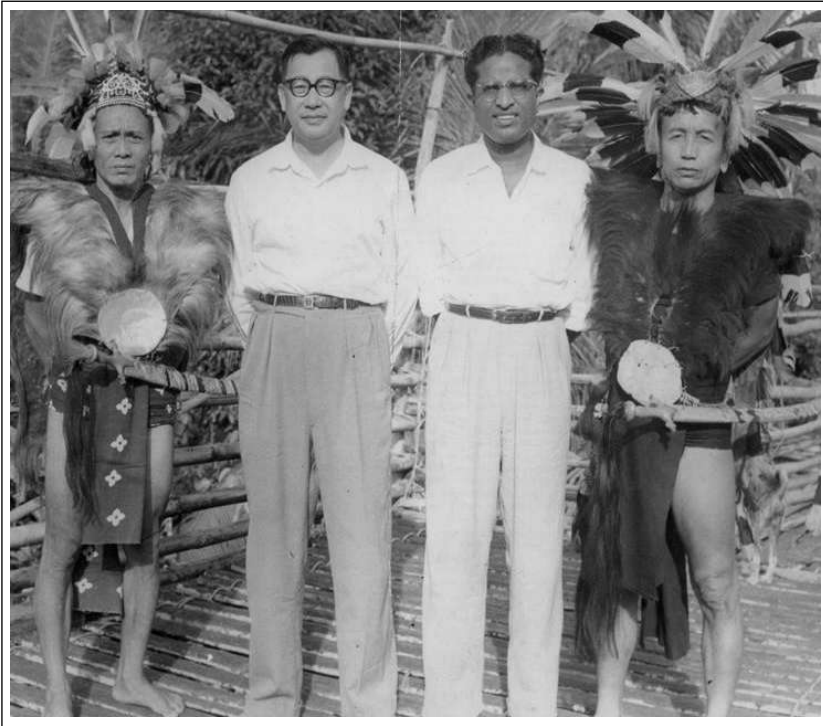


# HO AH LOKE

## REMINISCENCES

THE FORGOTTEN FIGURE OF THE MALAY FILM INDUSTRY

*Dato' L. Krishnan*



*In Sarawak while filming The Virgin of Borneo*

*From left: A tribal chief, the late Ho Ah Loke, Dato' L. Krishnan and the late Tun Temenggung Jugah Anak Barieng (a political figure who later became a Federal Minister)*

**I**s Man made fortunate by birth in an era that is conducive to his aptitudes, his will and his ambition? Rather, does Man make an era what it is, by applying his inclinations to optimum, by matching his will to grit, and, by honing his ambitions to prevailing criteria? I have pondered this many a time when I drift into nostalgia with my memories of Ho Ah Loke.

This gentle, unassuming man who cast such a giant shadow is truly and sadly an unknown hero of this land. Like the soldiers of foreign lands who came and gave so much to this country, this man has left a legacy that a rare few know of.

This man, Ho Ah Loke, was the first and only founding father of the Malay film industry in Malaysia. Even in Singapore, he was the much respected film mogul who stood on even ground with giants like Shaw Brothers and Loke Wan Tho.

Born in British Guinea in 1901, many will be surprised to know that this traditional Chinese gentleman was popularly known as Abe - short for Abraham. He was privileged with education in Scotland, Penang and a tertiary round-up in Hong Kong (majoring in engineering). This gave him an open minded internationally - focused head start in life. He loved cricket, and was made



*Ho Ah Loke (left) receiving a farewell gift from Dato' L. Krishnan (centre) before his departure from Cathay Keris Studio*

the champion of all athletes in Hong Kong University, for 3 years running.

Somehow his lady admirers seemed to always be aware of this, and, I used to tease him on this incessantly, much to his chagrin, over the many beers and brandy shots we shared, for quite nearly a decade and a half.

In 1925, then in his mid twenties, Ho Ah Loke pioneered into movies - by becoming a mobile film show exhibitor in North Malaya and South Thailand. Roaming the kampongs and towns, he brought smiles and happiness to thousands.

The simple folk of the simple years cherished the slapstick of Chaplin and fantasised in the loves, romances, and swash buckle exploits of the greats gone past.

Ho Ah Loke thrived and prospered. He bought public halls to show his films. His first, he bought

within a year; his second on the fifth year, and by World War 2, he had etched his reputation as a movie tycoon.

The arrival of the Japanese, and the preceding knowledge of the danger to the Chinese, prodded him to a wise decision to move to south Thailand.

A return in 1945 saw a merger of interests with Loke Wan Tho (in 1948). Thereon, in barely three years, this gung-ho entrepreneur set up Keris Film Studio. The first two films were entrusted to me as a director. Many films followed in the decade of the Glorious Fifties and by its end, Ho Ah Loke was firmly established as a movie producing magnate of the region.

Ho Ah Loke then conceived a grand vision to cross the Causeway into Malaya and begin a film studio there. A plot of jungle land was acquired and put in my charge – to clear and build the nation's first studio. This I did within the year.

This studio Ho Ah Loke named the Merdeka Studio - to honor the country's independence. This studio was the beginning of a new life for so many people - myself, a prime example. The love of a patriot will forever shine!

The Merdeka Studio was the site of the first ever local productions. It produced classics like Tun Tijah and Keris Sempana Riau. Eventually, it was the site that gave the Malay icon P. Ramlee the opportunity to produce his final works.

These works elevated Malaysia from being a country that had the negative status of having to rely on it's neighbor for even cultural produce to satisfy the emotional yearnings of its own Malay people. Most importantly, the nation gained its own standing as the newest member among film-producing nations.

The Merdeka Studio, initially, was the vision of a daring pioneer nearly half a century ago. Today, this vision has resulted in a multi million ringgit industry that gives sustenance to thousands in Malaysia, both directly and also through its downstream industries. The studio that Ho Ah Loke built has today been expanded, and has been made the national film centre of Malaysia. The people now know it as FINAS (Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia

/ National Film Development Corporation). Sadly, the name Ho Ah Loke seems to be a long lost echo in the wilderness of time gone past.

Let me share with you some insights into the life of this great man who achieved so much. His character was what made him a giant amongst men. It seems to be a norm, in this world, amongst this species, to be a grasping individual - to scheme and enrich oneself with another's gains. Ho Ah Loke was different - he was a true Abraham. He was a giver who gave aid unreservedly to the fallen.



*Ho Ah Loke (right) with his wife (left) and the late Datin Selvarani (departed wife of Dato' L. Krishnan)*

He was generous to his friends and dependants. As an example, he gave me and two other film directors in his employ a grand German car each. Reason - he wanted us to be happy. When I edited a Chinese film for him as a favour, he presented my wife a Triumph Herald. Ho Ah Loke was the legend with the paper-bag full

of cash - money for expenses, and money to give and bring happiness.

Make no mistake though that Ho Ah Loke was not one to be taken advantage of. This soft spoken gentle being could be firm and forceful when provoked by negative elements with an ego / attitude problem. I remember a situation once. Money had been paid to Nusantara Studio for its



hire. The Night Manager had not been informed of the transaction and refused us entry. Production crew and stars were on set. Money was ticking by the minute. The Night Manager was adamant and unrelenting. A heated exchange between him and Ho Ah Loke resulted in the Night Manager being slapped. Much later, when matters had cooled down, seeing the man visibly shaken and in tears, Ho Ah Loke felt really bad. Magnanimous as ever, expressions of regret, a hand of friendship, and the legendary ang pow slipped discreetly into the pocket, created yet another friend.

Another incident I learned of reflected his strong sense of right and wrong. Ho Ah Loke was in the

binge. They began a noisy and abusive tirade that was extremely offensive to the local patrons. Ho Ah Loke switched on the lights, and with the daring that few possessed, approached them with an appeal for calm and a show of respect for local values and particularly, the local elders who were present. This plea for reason was misinterpreted as a sign of native weakness. Sportsman Abe then showed that he was still in full form. A solid jab to the soldier's face was made more meaningful by the question, "Would you have done this in your own country?" This story was narrated to me years later by a friend who had been present.

This man lived by fundamental principles. Family

credentials were deeply ingrained. He was a man of honour from a highly respected family. In Singapore, the famed attorney-at-law, Phillip Hoa Lim is his brother. Right here in Malaysia, the equally renowned lawyer and diplomat, Ms. P. G. Lim is his niece.

The Ho Ah Loke saga can stretch into many pages. Today, I shall end



*Ho Ah Loke (left) with renowned music director and composer from India C. Ramachandran (centre) and Dato' L. Krishnan (right)*

projection room of his theatre in Ipoh. Screening had been interrupted because the film had snapped. This was quite common then. Some of the patrons in the cinema were British soldiers after a drunken

here. In parting, let me just remind all Malaysians that we must remember always that the man to thank for the early beginnings of our contemporary cultural expression is Mr. Ho Ah Loke.



*An old image of the main street in Papan*

# PAPAN

## AN OLD TOWN IN PERAK RICH IN HISTORY AND HERITAGE

**T**he settlement of Papan in the state of Perak started as a timber town in the 1840s. Chengal, a local hardwood, was extracted by Malay woodcutters and sawed into planks by the Chinese. Papan, in Malay, means wood; in Chinese, it has come to be known as top-grade plank. In both references, the origin of the settlement is obvious.

Papan was the political domain of Sultan Ismail of Perak. With the signing of the Pangkor Engagement in 1874, the British replaced him with Sultan Abdullah. Both were implicated the following year in the murder of the first British Resident, J.W.W. Birch. In pursuit of the conspirators, Frank Swettenham enlisted the help of Raja Asal and his Mandailing men who had

fled Sumatra to avoid the Dutch administration. Raja Asal was rewarded with the sole right to mine tin in what turned out to be probably the richest tin-mines in the Malay Peninsula.

As tin production from the Larut District declined, the Kinta Valley, wherein Papan is located, became the new focus of miners and investors. The tin rush began. There to exploit this natural resource were the Mandailings and their Hakka Chinese friends who worked together in harmony. Papan grew rich and became one of the earliest

buildings. A market, a theatre, a dispensary, a tin smelter and a court room were also soon established. A penal day-camp worked the granite quarry for the construction of railways and roads.

Papan's history is enriched with the legacies of historical figures. There were the Mandailing nobilities: Raja Asal and his successors Raja Bilah and Raja Ya'qub. Dr Sun Yat Sen too visited Papan before 1910 to garner support from the Chinese and raised funds for the Chinese Revolution. Local Chinese community leaders and towkays



*The early Chinese Community in Papan*

successful tin-mining towns in the Kinta Valley. In the late nineteenth century, the main street had over 100 shophouses in various styles and tastes. Single-storey houses of timber, their swept atap roofs keeping the insides cool, jostled on the periphery along with a scatter of free-standing

(businessmen) formed clan associations and provided for their miners.

According to a local historian and author, Ho Tak Ming, "Papan is what it is today because of Hew Ah Ngau", who came to work Raja Asal's tin-



mining concessions in Papan. The community benefited from the generosity of this wealthy Hakka leader. The cemetery hill is a gift from him. Perhaps unique in Malaysia, sharing this hillock and in its own enclosure is the Muslim burial ground of the Mandailings.

As Ipoh grew rapidly early in the twentieth century, the Kinta Valley and a network of small mining towns boomed. Shophouses in Papan were gradually rebuilt in bricks, the last probably a double-shophouse in 1936.

With the outbreak of World War 2, Dr A.C. Kathigas, a prominent obstetrician, and his wife Sybil and their family moved to Papan to avoid the bombing in Ipoh. Other than providing medical services to the community, they also treated the freedom fighters of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) and Force 136 operatives who hid in the hills nearby. Papan was a sensitive spot. After twenty months of this "secret service", someone betrayed them to the Japanese. They were arrested, tortured, tried in a kangaroo court and jailed. For their heroism, both Sybil and Dr Kathigas were honoured after the war. In fact, Sybil Kathigas remains the only Malayan civilian woman ever to be awarded the George Medal. Their clinic and shophouse in Papan, at No. 74 Main Street remains as a monument to their courage.

Papan today is a small vibrant town of people who work as shopkeepers, farmers, chit-blinds makers, professionals, builders, contractors, drivers,

cooks, mechanics, welders, labourers, and a few also as tin-miners. On former-mining land, cash crops provide a livelihood for those involved in agriculture. Fish farming is also another source of income. The hills of Papan, Gunung Hijau, is a forest reserve and is also a popular training camp and garden of jungle herbs. Picnic grounds and waterholes and the cool cascades in the mountain stream are a great draw to the people of Papan and nearby Pusing and Batu Gajah, especially on hot days.

Another historical site of interest in Papan is Raja Bilah's Rumah Besar. This two-storey palace-like building, together with the adjoining Papan Mosque, are reminders of the important role that the Mandailings played in the history of Papan.

In the past thirty years, as the population declined, buildings were neglected. They fell into ruin or were destroyed for building materials. However, some of its heritage has survived. A village of devoted locals continue to live in shophouses, some in quite a dilapidated condition. Those who had moved away still maintain close social ties with the community in Papan.

Papan is only a short drive from Ipoh, the capital city of the state of Perak. Though off the beaten track, this one-street town remains an interesting small town steeped in history and heritage of the days gone by.



*Dr. A.C. Kathigas*



*Sybil Kathigas*

*Courtesy: Law Siak Hong, Perak Heritage Society, Ipoh*



*The imposing main entrance*

# KHOO KONGSI

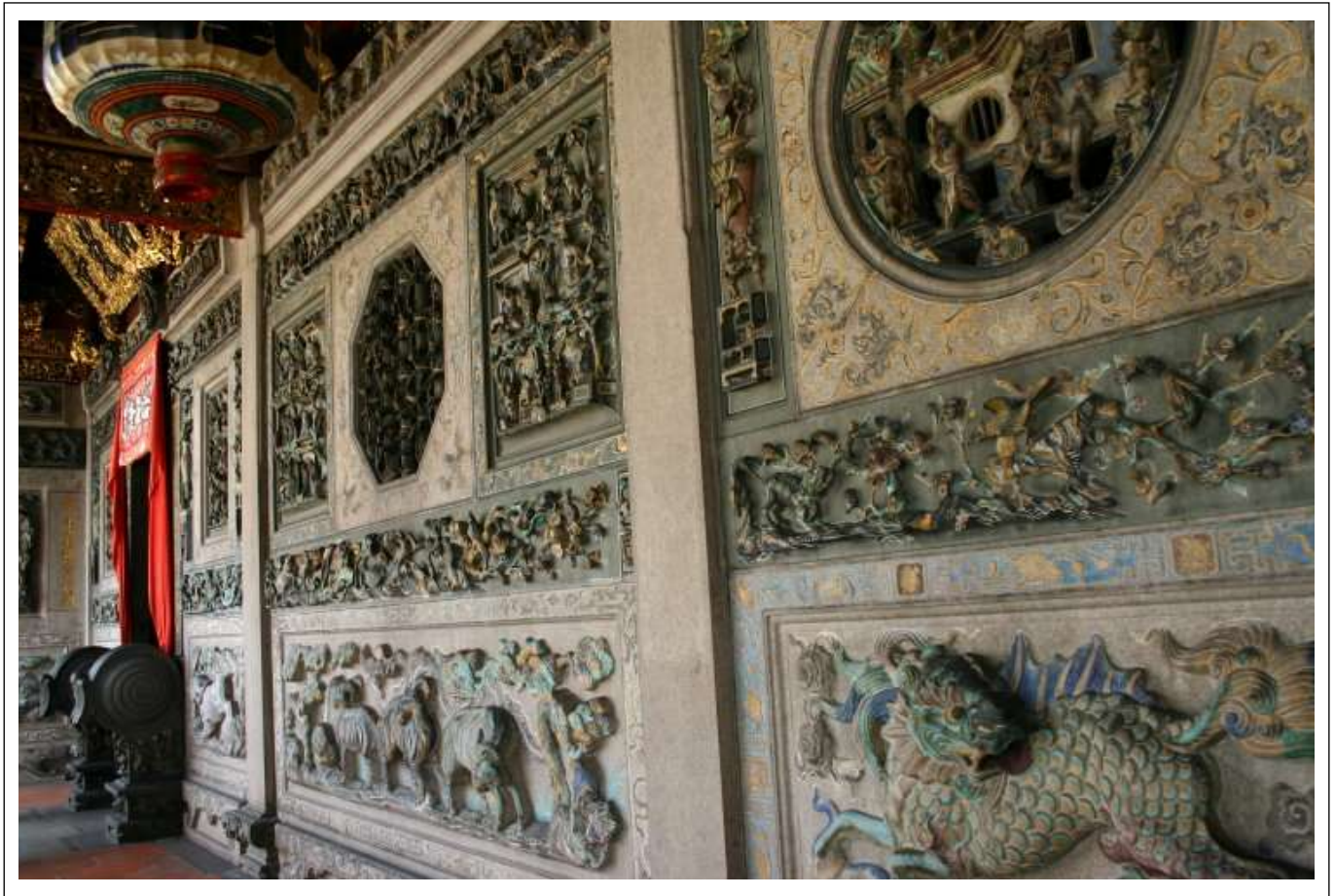
**T**he Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi (Khoo Kongsi) in Penang is one of the finest Chinese clan houses to be found in Malaysia. It is also one of the oldest clan associations in Penang. The Khoo Kongsi is in fact a miniature clan village set into the city of Georgetown, Penang.

The Khoo Kongsi was founded in 1835 when 102 members of the Khoo clan gathered to form an association to look after the welfare of Khoo

clansmen in the Nanyang (the Southern Seas). It was to be similar to another Khoo association in China, the Ee Kok Tong. One of the functions of the association was to keep records of the clan ancestors and descendents. Hence, the Khoo Kongsi has one of the most complete genealogical charts of its clan members in Penang.

The ancestors of the Khoos can be traced to a common progenitor, one Chan Chian Eng who ironically was given away to a Khoo family of





*Detailed wall frescoes*

another village and took on his adopted surname. Chian Eng had a son who settled in the village of Sin Kang in Fujian Province, China. The Khoos of Khoo Kongsi can trace their ancestry back to the Sin Kang clan village. Many of the town houses surrounding the Khoo Kongsi clan temple bear the sign Sin Kang, as do the gateways leading into the Khoo Kongsi.

Over the years since the acquisition of the land in 1851, the Khoos prospered and established themselves in Penang. In 1894, an idea was mooted to construct a new clan temple to replace the existing structure. It was a highly ostentatious project to showcase their new-found wealth. The grand new temple took eight years to complete. Strangely, just 29 days after its completion, on the eve of the Sin Chui Year, a fire occurred,

destroying the whole temple. The only item salvaged from the inferno was a pair of carved bamboo couplets known as "teik lean". These are still on display today in the Tua Pek Kong Hall in the Khoo Kongsi.

The fire was explained as the wrath of the gods over a temple regarded too exquisite for ancestor worship. A few years after the first temple was destroyed, plans were drawn to rebuild it again. In order to please the gods, the new temple was constructed as a scaled-down version of the original. Materials were shipped from China and master craftsmen, artists, artisans and sculptors were also brought in from China to complete the new temple. It was finally completed in 1906, another masterpiece, at a cost of 100,000 Straits dollars.





*The main altar*

During the Second World War, bombings by the Japanese partially destroyed the roofing along with about 20 of the townhouses around its courtyard. After the War, restoration works were done. This took four years and cost 60,000 Straits dollars.

The splendour of the Khoo Kongsi lies in its highly detailed wood carvings, wall frescoes and roof decorations. The roof structure is the best example of the cut-and-paste chien nien technique, where shards of ceramic bowls are used to form patterns, beasts and beings.

Owing to past renovation works, today only two of the three original passageways leading to the Khoo Kongsi remain. The passageways from Beach Road (Lebuh Pantai) and Armenian Street (Lebuh Armenia) have since been sealed off and only the one from Cannon Square (Medan Cannon) exists.

A clan museum has been opened on the ground floor of the temple. Visitors are charged an entrance fee which is used for the general upkeep of the premises.

*Courtesy: Timothy Tye, Asia Explorers, Penang*



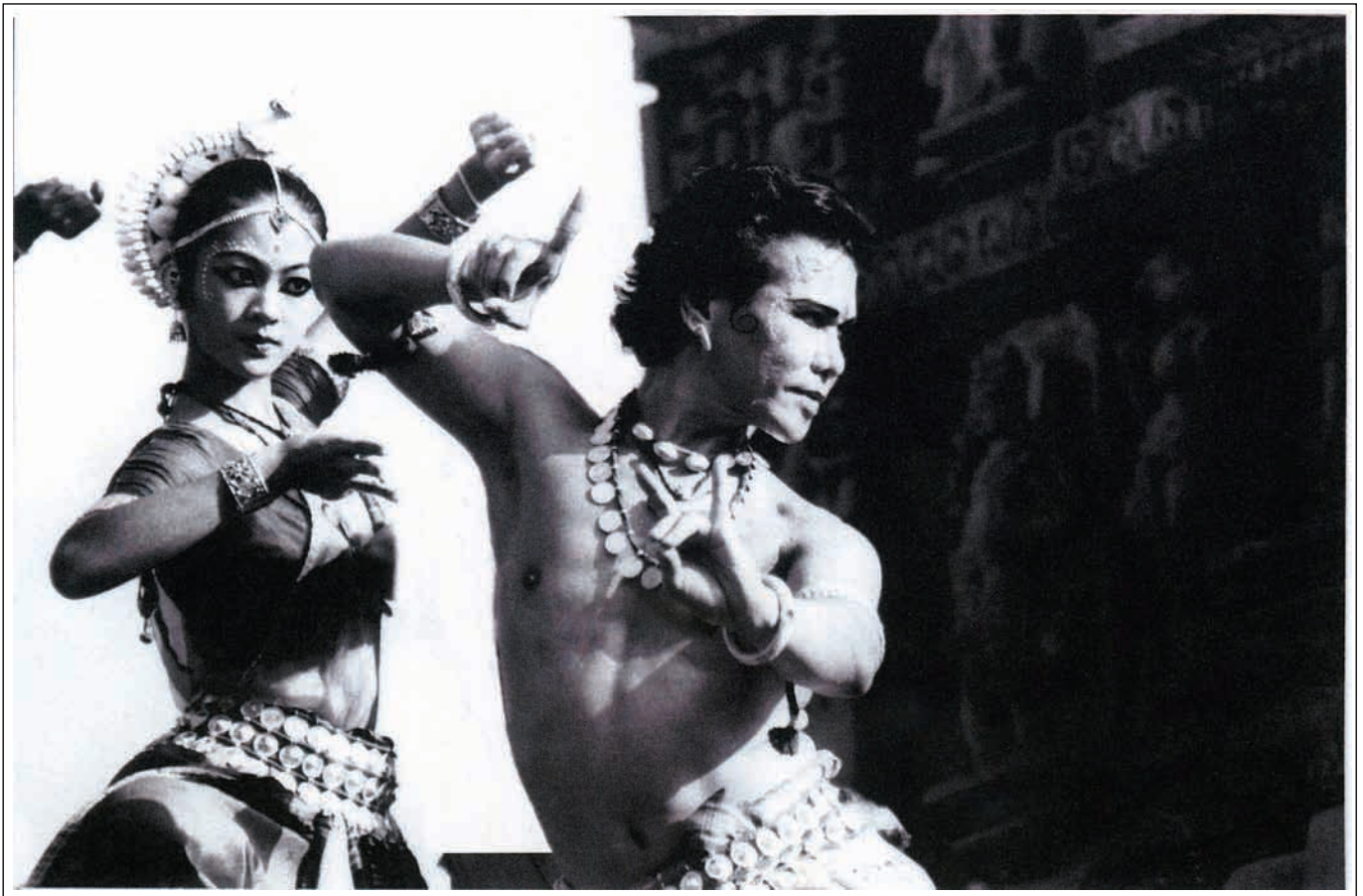
**R**amli Ibrahim is an acclaimed dancer, choreographer and Artistic Director of Sutra Dance Theatre. He is the recipient of the Fulbright Distinguished Artist Award in 1999, the Lifetime Achievement Award at Kakiseni's 2003 BOH Cameronian Arts Award (2003) and also the J.S.M. (Johan Setia Mahkota) Award in 2004.

Trained in classical ballet, modern dance and Indian classical dance, Ramli performed extensively with the Sydney Dance Company (1977-



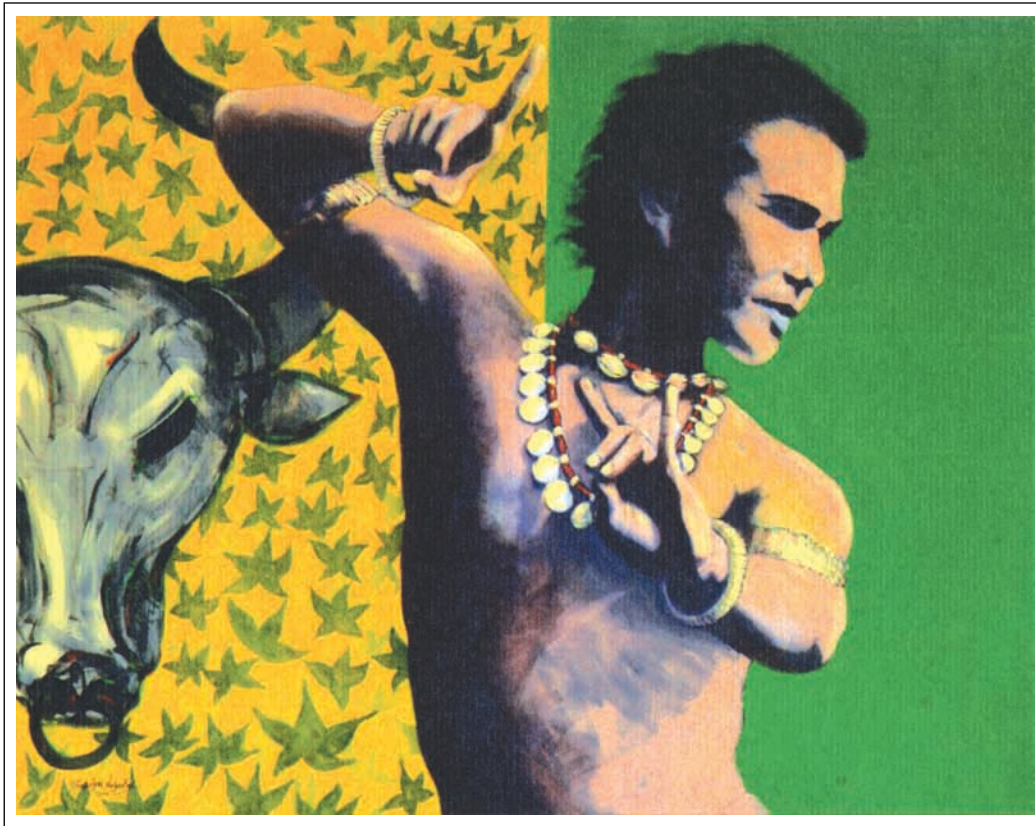
1982) and later, with Sutra Dance Theatre which he founded in 1983. Ramli studied Bharata Natyam under Padmashri Adyar K. Lakhsman and Odissi with the late Guru Deba Prasad Das. He is intimately associated with Odissi, which he has successfully implanted in the Malaysian dance soil. A free spirit and dynamic force in Malaysian theatre, Ramli is a cultural icon who has inspired and cultivated a whole generation Malaysian dancers.

# RAMLI IBRAHIM



*Ramli Ibrahim dancing the Odissi with Sutra Dance Theatre's star artiste, January Low  
Courtesy: Sutra Dance Theatre, Kuala Lumpur*



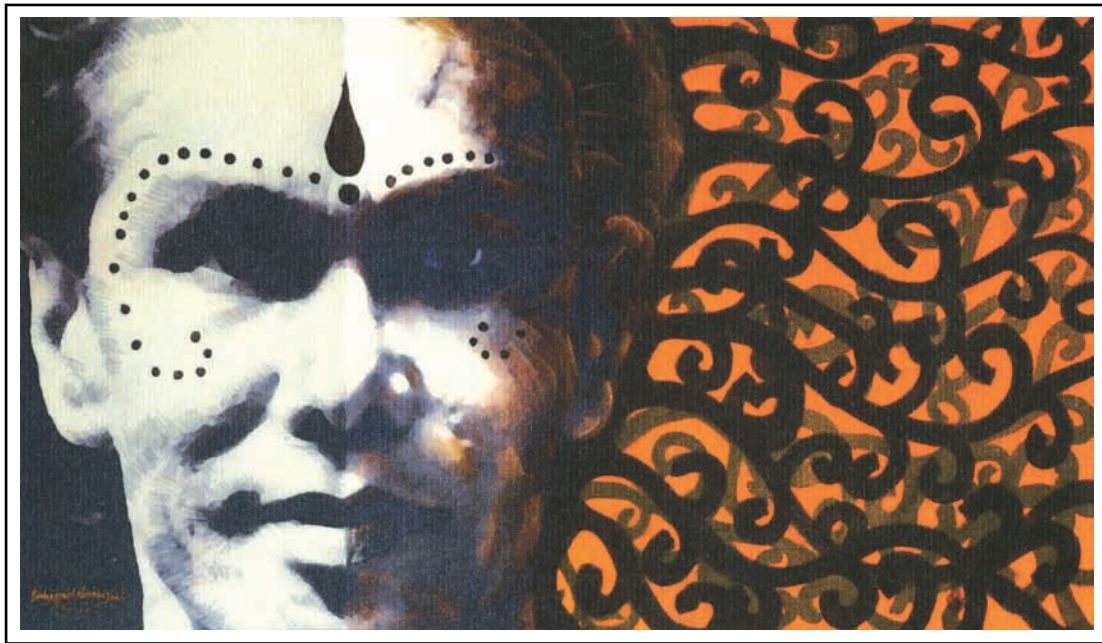


*Sivarajah Natarajan, Tandakku, 2006, mixed media on canvas, 107 x 137 cm  
(Collection: N. Parameswaran)*



*Sivarajah Natarajan, Profound Grace, 2006, mixed media on canvas, 70 x 120 cm  
(Collection: N. Parameswaran)*





*Sivarajah Natarajan, Ardhanareeswar, 2006, mixed media on canvas, 70 x 120 cm*



*Sivarajah Natarajan, Earthbound (iv) 2006, mixed media on canvas, 90 x 124cm*

*Courtesy: Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Malaysia for write-up on Ramli Ibrahim, extracted from "Titiwangsa!" performance (15-22 July 2005, Kuala Lumpur) catalogue.*

*Sivarajah Natarajan, for reproduction of paintings on Ramli Ibrahim*

# GHEE HIANG TRADITIONAL BISCUITS

*“Ghee Hiang...since 1856...its been a tradition.”*

*(the company's motto)*



*Yesteryears along Beach Street*

**G**hee Hiang, with a 150 years old history, was established in 1856 by the Teng family. The current management made up of the Ch'ng, Ooi and Yeoh families bought over the business in 1926.

Ghee Hiang started off as a traditional Chinese biscuit maker. It concentrated on typical Chinese pastries with fillings and also became famous for its Chinese ritual and ceremonial biscuits such as wedding cakes, moon cakes and oriental almond cookies. In the early 1930's, Ghee Hiang began to



*Ghee Hiang's current product range*



also produce sesame oil and later in the 1950's, it added coffee powder to its product range.

Ghee Hiang's products became popular primarily because they were all handmade, based on century old Fujian Chinese recipes. Over the years, some of its products were discontinued. However, today its Tau Sar Pneh (green bean paste pastry), Beh The Saw, Phong Pneh and Hneoh Pneh are household names among Penang's traditional biscuits. Its sesame oil, the only non-pastry item, has captured more than a 50% market share in the Malaysian market.

In conjunction with Ghee Hiang's 150 years celebration this year, it has decided to reintroduce some of the old favourites, including its coffee powder, moon cakes and oriental almond cookies.

Ghee Hiang's Macalister Road outlet in Penang today serves as its new retail premise.



*Present packaging of Ghee Hiang's famous  
Tau Sar Pneh*



*Ghee Hiang's new premise today along Macalister Road*

*Courtesy: Ghee Hiang Manufacturing. Co.  
Sdn. Bhd, Penang*



# NORTH BORNEO RAILWAY



*Chugging along as in the past*

From available records, the origin of a railway system in North Borneo can be traced back to the 1890s. When the tobacco industries revolution took place in the 1880's and 1890's, the British Chartered Company began to open up lands for tobacco plantations in the interior of North Borneo. Owing to the difficulties of transporting this produce, a solution had to be found. In 1894, William Clarke Cowie was appointed the Managing Director of the British North Borneo Company and he was given the responsibility of solving this problem. Inspired by the railway's success in Peninsular Malaya, Cowie proposed



*The old -horse steam locomotive*



*Inscription on the Vulcan Steam locomotive*

that to resolve this matter, a railway line should be built. As a result, the construction of the first railway track stretching from Beaufort to Weston, a distance of 32 kilometres, started at Bukau in 1896. The railway service was managed by the North Borneo Railway and it ran smoothly until the beginning of the Second World War and the Japanese Occupation.

During the Japanese Occupation between 1944 and 1945, the railway transportation system was almost totally destroyed. This was due to damages caused to the tracks, bridges and stations. North Borneo Railway initiated its own rehabilitation programme on the tracks and services in 1949 and 1960.

Ever since the railway system in North Borneo began in 1896, several types of steam locomotives to pull the passenger coaches and goods wagons

had been used by North Borneo Railway. The early steam-powered locomotives included also the British Vulcan, designed and built by the Vulcan Foundry in Newton-le-Willows, England in 1954 as part of the last order before the factory converted to diesel and electric locomotive construction. Like the other steamed-powered locomotives earlier de-commissioned from service, the Vulcan 6-015 too was de-commissioned from general use by the Sabah State Railway Department in the early 1970's.

In 1971, steam engines were replaced by Japanese diesel-driven locomotives (Kawasaki, Hitachi and Sharyo), which were cheaper, speedier and easy to operate.

From 1963 onwards, the railway service was administered by the Sabah State Railway Department with its headquarters at its main station





*Logo of the North Borneo Railway*

at Tanjung Aru in the city of Kota Kinabalu. In 2000, the Sabah State Railway Department entered into a joint venture with Sutera Harbour Resort to provide a service for tourists using the Vulcan steam locomotives to draw coaches. The Vulcan steam locomotives represent the last of a fleet of steam engines that plied the tracks through Borneo since the late 1890's. It is also one of the only functional wood-burners left in the world. Six coaches have also been meticulously restored and renovated to reflect the era of the steam train. The exterior utilizes the traditional deep green and cream of the original North Borneo Railway, with carved brass logos featuring the original British seal. The interior, highlighting the natural woods of Sabah, has comfortable seating and dining facilities. Every carriage provides the amenity of a modern washroom onboard. Seating accommodates 36 passengers per carriage, with a total train capacity of 180 passengers. An exotic

bar car and observation deck accompanies the train, providing a comfortable lounge area. A train ride with the Vulcan steam locomotive and its restored colonial era coaches would surely be a delightful experience to treasure.

Until only half a century ago, the railway remained the only means of transportation into the interior of North Borneo (now Sabah). It helped transport products such as tobacco, rubber and coffee from the interior.

It also opened up the country and saw the emergence of towns like Bukau, Weston and Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu, Sabah's capital city). Today, the railway runs from Tanjung Aru to Tenom, passing coastal and rural areas, picturesque villages and small towns, a mountain tunnel and a spectacular gorge.



*Logo of the North Borneo Railway*

Courtesy: [www.sabah.gov.my/railway/history](http://www.sabah.gov.my/railway/history)  
[www.northborneorailway.com.my](http://www.northborneorailway.com.my)  
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Michel Ozaki, Singapore, for reproduction of photos





*The colourful and ornate frontage of the mansion*

**T**he Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion situated along quiet Leith Street in the middle of George Town, Penang, is an old Chinese-style mansion that once belonged to a fabulously wealthy man. Born in the small village of Tai Pu in China, Cheong Fatt Tze (1840-1916) showed little promise in his youth. He left China as a penniless 16-year old in 1856 and grew to become a one-man

multinational conglomerate. Cheong's big break came in Jakarta when he was taken under the wing of a rich merchant as an adopted son. Cheong founded a steamship line operating between Medan, North Sumatra, and Penang and this proved to be a success. Cheong made further investments in trade goods, banking, mining, and textiles. As business blossomed, Cheong came to the attention

# CHEONG FATT TZE MANSION





*The mansion as viewed from Leith Street*

of the Manchu Chinese Government which offered him a series of Government positions in its attempt to promote mutual interests in Southeast Asia. The Empress Dowager elevated him to a Mandarin of the Highest Order and appointed him as Special Trade Commissioner for Southeast Asia. After the overthrow of the Manchus, the Republican Government that followed continued to seek his services in an advisory capacity.

Cheong built his mansion at the North end of Leith Street in Penang, a street which at the turn of the 20th century was an enclave for the Hakka upper crust. Although the Hakka formed a minority among the



*Intricate latticework  
in cast iron*

Chinese in Penang, they wielded enormous economic power, controlling much of the property and trades in Penang. To the other Chinese communities, they were called *khek* or *khek lang*, which means guests-only they called themselves *Hakka*. Usually close-knit, they also chose to build their homes in proximity with one another. Hence, Cheong Fatt Tze built his house near to that of his cousin Chang Yu-Nan, Kapitan China of Medan; Cheah Choon Seng, Kapitan China of Aceh; tin-mining tycoon Leong Fe, Cheong's son-in law, and Tye Kee Yoon.

The Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion at No.14 Leith Street occupies a site of 56,000 square feet, with a builtup area of 33,000 square feet. It was built over a period of seven





*Cast iron stairways*

years in the 1890s, fully taking into account all the Chinese feng shui principles. While the mansion looked decidedly Oriental, its fixtures and furnishings were a fusion of Oriental and Western architectural concepts. Alongside Chinese-style doors, filigree and latticework are contemporary Western introductions including Gothic louvred windows, art nouveau stained-glass panels, Scottish cast iron works and Stoke-on-Trent floor tiles.

The mansion is also well known for its elaborate colourful murals that depict scenes from nature and Chinese opera. However, these murals were not printed on but were constructed with multicoloured shards of porcelain bowls, a technique known as *chien nien*.

The Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion is probably one of the biggest Chinese courtyard houses to be found in Southeast Asia, and is also possibly one of the most exquisite of its kind anywhere in the world outside of China. The mansion was one of many houses that Cheong Fatt Tze owned. His vast estate stretched from Java to Sumatra, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and China. But of all these properties, the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion in Penang was his favourite and thus Penang became his operational base. All eight of his sons were raised under its roof and they were sent to receive a Western education at the St Xavier's Institution nearby. The house was also home to his third, sixth and seventh wives.



*The Oriental Cheng Fatt Tze*



*In Western Attire*

To ensure that the mansion stayed in the family and remained in a good state of repair, Cheong took pains to draw up an iron-clad will that prevented the sale of his estate until the passing on of his last son. He also put aside funds to ensure that the house was properly maintained. Sadly, after he passed on, his beautiful home was left to decay. The funds that he had set aside for the maintenance were not adequately disbursed. It was a fixed sum and did not take inflation into account.

Cheong's last son Kum Loong and his wife Thong Siew Mee paid scant attention to the maintenance of the mansion. They let out rooms, corridor spaces, halls, stores and every inch of the mansion that could earn them rental. For more than half a century, the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion was in a pitiful state, host to numerous occupants. With the death of the last son Kum Loong in 1989 the trust under which the mansion was held was

In 1990, fearing that the mansion faced demolition, a small group of local conservationists led by Laurence Loh, an architect, acquired the mansion to ensure that it would be restored to its former glory and be maintained for posterity. Beginning in 1991, the project to restore the mansion was executed with much care and love. Master craftsmen and material were also brought in from China for this purpose. It was restored bit by bit, from top down, employing techniques that conformed with the traditional methods that existed when the mansion was first constructed. It was a journey of rediscovery for the conservationists, as the mansion revealed the secrets of its workmanship.

The fine restoration works done on the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion earned the project an UNESCO Heritage 2000 Award.

*Courtesy: Timothy Tye, AsiaExplorers, Penang*  
[www.orientalarchitecture.com](http://www.orientalarchitecture.com)  
[www.cheongfattzemansion.com](http://www.cheongfattzemansion.com)



# AHMAD ZAKII ANWAR

....PROBABLY MALAYSIA'S  
BEST CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

*N. Parameswaran*



*Mantra 2005, acrylic on canvas, 69 x 201 cm*

Ahmad Zakii Anwar, born in 1955 in Malaysia's southernmost State of Johor, bordering Singapore, had his art education at the School of Art and Design, MARA Institute of Technology (now MARA University of Technology), located in the outskirts of the Federal capital, Kuala Lumpur. Trained as a graphic designer, the early part of his career was devoted to advertising and publishing and in these areas, he also did a lot of work for major companies in Singapore.

Over the years, in fulfillment of a personal quest, he took the bold decision to move into the world of fine art and to become a full-time artist. He began painting seriously, mainly in acrylic on

canvas, and almost immediately his works captured the public imagination. He moved from painting still lifes to the very difficult area of portrait painting. It was in figures and portraits that the best of Zakii emerged. He was able to capture portraits almost as real as they came and his figures displayed movement and vibrancy rarely seen. Resplendent in colours, Zakii's works remind one of the shades and hues employed by masters such as Rembrandt and Mark Rothko. The subliminal and spiritual characteristics in his works evoke deep and profound feelings. It was therefore not long before Zakii became a rage, not just in Malaysia but also internationally. Zakii has exhibited widely in various parts of Malaysia,



*Blue Kebyar, 2001 acrylic on canvas, 122 x 122 cm*



*Legong, 2004, charcoal on paper, 183 x 98cm*



*Silat, 2005, charcoal on paper 183 x 99cm*

Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia (in Jakarta as well as in Bali), Hong Kong and also in New York. Since 1999, his paintings have also featured in the auctions of Christie's, Sotheby's and Larasati.

Happily married with a charming wife and two boys, Zakii today lives in Johor Bahru, across the Causeway from Singapore, continuing with his life's passion in his own world of art. His gentle and soft mannerisms belie the fame that this artist enjoys in Malaysia's contemporary art scene. Many would agree that Ahmad Zakii Anwar has now emerged to become probably Malaysia's best contemporary artist.



*Syed Ahmad Jamal, 2004 charcoal on paper 77 x 122cm*

*Courtesy: Ahmad Zakii Anwar, for reproduction of paintings*



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