

## **INTERNATIONAL HELPER VISIT TO SUBUD MALAYSIA 24-30 APRIL 2009**

The 2009 IH visit to Malaysia began on 24<sup>th</sup> April in the beautiful, modern city of Kuala Lumpur (KL) with a very warm welcome from Sarinder and Raj Kaur, with whom Judy stayed, and Michael and Delia Alfonso, with whom Sugandi and Dahlan stayed.

In terms of membership, around 65 members are on the books but active membership is about 38 including Jamal who was opened on the 24<sup>th</sup> (actual numbers may be higher when those Moslem members who are 'unofficial' are included – refer below). The ratio of men to women is around 2:1. Most members are Sikh.

Subud is a registered society in Malaysia and has been in existence in that country since around 1960 or 1961 (exact date unknown).



Some members, including Charanjit Singh the outgoing Chair, and Michael Alfonso KC to his left, gather outside the Subud Hall after their Biennial General Meeting.

The drawcard of the visit was the Subud Malaysia Congress on the weekend of 25-26 April. Activities began on Saturday evening in the grounds of the apartment block where Sarinder and Raj live. After a relaxed meet and greet, latihan and testing took place in nearby rooms, followed by a delicious meal and a medley of entertainment.

Sunday was the business end of the Congress, held at Subud Malaysia's property located on the third floor in a Chinese district devoted to light industry. This location is significant for KL and Malaysia: it means that the latihan does not disturb the neighbourhood. If it were located in a Moslem area – which seems unthinkable in the current Malaysia - such would not be the case.

This last is an important point for Subud life in Malaysia: it became clear to the IHs that religious sensitivities are very delicate in Malaysia. In particular, Malays – who form a majority of the population and are invariably Moslem – are unable to join Subud freely. Some have joined – two recently – but in order to protect them, no application forms are filled out and their names do not appear on the membership list. Their latihan are often at someone's home, rather than at the hall – though God Willing that may improve, given its 'safe' location. Key to note is that many (most?) Malay Moslems take exception to others uttering the word 'Allah' and this would include people practising latihan.

The highlight of the Congress was undoubtedly Sarinder's appointment as Chair, a position which she held a few years ago. Her energy and dedication will undoubtedly prove a boon to Subud Malaysia in the coming two years and we wish her and her committee – which was rapidly formed with some continuing and some new office-bearers – every success. A hearty applause was given to Charanjit Singh for his chairmanship over the past two years. It was wonderful to learn that the property loan from MSF will be fully repaid this year. It was also clear that there is a wish by many for better premises in future.

It should be noted that testing for the SM Chair was not witnessed by the members, nor by the men helpers – the women helpers were not 'ready' for this, it seems...some members called for witnessing, but to no avail. The two candidates were women.



Sarinder Kaur, the new Chair, with Judy and Sugandi on an outing to the Petronas Twin Towers. These towers are each 88 floors and took an amazing 2.5 years to build.

On Tuesday evening the three IHs and several KL members travelled the 65 or so kms to Seremban for latihan with Amarjit, Gurucharan and wives, and several other members there. The welcome was warm indeed. The women latihanned at Gurucharan and his wife's splendid house, and the men at his office nearby. Unfortunately, we heard that some Seremban members currently latihan in different premises due to the issue mentioned earlier, of uttering 'Allah' in latihan. There are clearly two ways forward in dealing

with this dilemma: tolerance and testing....but it's oh-so-easy for 'outsiders' to offer solutions, isn't it?

After latihan in Seremban, everyone met up at an Indian restaurant for some delicious cuisine. One IH's appetite was put to the test in serving him twice, the second serving having been thought to have taken too long arriving. The challenge was met, followed by a round of applause. Upon leaving the restaurant, it became apparent that this was 'goodbye' between the IHs and most of the Subud Malaysian members present, so it was rather a special moment.

On the subject of general testing, members who went to Seremban on the Tuesday night had two opportunities.

Questions tested during the visit worth mentioning include:

- the significance of the upcoming World Congress (for both Subud and the world) – this had a strong impact on those testing.
- the men tested about the hurt and lack of forgiveness inside us, and how to become free of that.
- The women tested about the effects of criticism on ourselves and others and
- how was it for our ancestors before we were opened and how is it now.

Other points to mention about the visit to Malaysia.

- Nagainder from Malacca was appointed as woman KC as the current one needed to retire for health reasons.
- The men spent time with Major Harjit Singh, who happens to be the KC for Pakistan. Testing, which was at his request, showed that he should hand over to the current Chair in Pakistan (if he agrees)...of course, a new Chair would then be needed.
- The men latihanned at Michael's home with Feisal and Jamal and Mallek on one occasion, and with Dr Raj on another. Feisal is an isolated member from Johore, joined Subud 10 years ago but still doesn't move ..... but he does feel internal vibration, and he expressed more satisfaction with his latihan after testing together. Jamal and Mallek are Moslems and it is easier for them to exercise at someone's house. Dr Raj is a very busy hospital doctor (there's a tautology in there somewhere!) who has just been posted to Sabah in northern Borneo, for two years; for that period he will be isolated, save for occasional visits to KL.

- The financial/economic situation of the members generally seems quite healthy; this may reflect relative difficulty some poorer sections of the population have in joining Subud.

### Some challenges evident from the IH visit

1. Monthly helper and helper/committee latihans to be resumed. We were told there is intention within both the helper and committee sides to do this.
2. Cessation of combining helper and organisational duties (e.g. Michael Alfonso, a tower of strength in SM, is KC and is also heavily involved in organisational affairs of SM).
3. The four NHs including KCs to become active in terms of travelling in Malaysia and operating as a dewan.
4. How to respond to members who disagree with members uttering 'Allah' in latihan.
5. There are members in Shah Alam but they don't regularly latihan in KL or together.
6. Medium term goal: to seek better latihan premises – notably, ones without stairs (or with a lift) and where all members (still) feel safe to attend.

If we had to suggest improvements for future visits, two would be:

- to commence the visit with a meeting with the KL dewan, and secondly,
- to allocate more time for latihan and testing so that we are not constrained by the next event (in this case, dinner).

Subud Malaysia looked after the IHs extremely well, dining them -though not wining them – almost round the clock. We weren't allowed to pay for anything, either, although one of us did manage to pay for a bottle of water and another to buy some ice creams and smoothies ... the latter only after some insistence!

Looking out from the Petronas Twin Towers Skybridge 41 floors up, as we did at the end of our visit courtesy of Chair Sarinder, it was easy to sense the beauty, energy and aspirations of Malaysia. God Willing these will be more than replicated in the growth of Subud Malaysia in the years to come.

PS we have received positive feedback on the IH visit, which felt was genuinely appreciated. Lucky IHs whoever goes there next time.

Love from Judy, Sugandi and Dahlan