

# Quenching the thirst for development

JUST last month, I finally set foot on North Kalimantan for the very first time.

The adventure began with an exciting express boat ride from Tawau to Nunukan Island. Much like other seaports in Southeast Asia, the humid atmosphere in Tawau Ferry Terminal brought a mix of scents that filled the surroundings – the smell of the sea, sweat, strong perfumes, and the odour of freshly caught fish and other seafood.

The boat, capable of accommodating over 100 people, was bustling with activity and a diverse group of individuals. Everyone seemed to be in constant motion, engaged in lively conversations and brimming with energy.

Among the passengers, I noticed some carrying boxes of electrical appliances, while others had mysterious sealed bags and white styrofoam containers. A young man roamed the boat, offering bottled drinks infused with excessive sugars that promised an instant energy boost. Nearby, another man held a large stack of cash, providing currency exchange services to those in urgent need.

The boat swiftly carried us across the border in just 1.5 hours. Upon reaching Nunukan, the dynamic energy pulsed through the air, beckoning me to embrace the lively ambiance of the border town.

Nunukan, the name shared by the regency, the island, and the town itself, exudes a unique charm with its narrow roads, colourful buildings, busy motorbikes, and little vans packed with passengers. The 64,000 people living in this little town seem to share a deep appreciation for coffee. I was pleasantly surprised to discover a delightful array of cafes offering an enticing selection of coffee beans from Gayo Aceh to Papua.

## Exploring Sustainable Development



with Dr Goh Chun Sheng

The following day, we embarked on a packed three-hour boat ride from Nunukan to Tarakan, a much larger city with 270,000 breathing people. After writing about it in an earlier article, I finally experienced the city first-hand.

Here, I came across some familiar shops like Mr D.I.Y. and J&T Express. I used the express service to send two copies of my book to a friend in Palangkaraya. It cost me 55,000 IDR, or less than RM17, which was much cheaper than if I had done it from Kuala Lumpur.

The next leg of our expedition took us along the majestic Sungai Mentarang, a river brimming with life and enveloped by lush greenery, but also home to a coal terminal and timber plantations.

Our journey continued as we headed northward, transitioning from the river to an asphalt road. The paved road, albeit with potholes here and there, guided us through the region bordering Sabah.

After a four-hour ride, we embarked on an invigorating speedboat journey from Sei Ular to Nunukan. Cruising through the waterways, we marvelled at the vast seaweed farms dispersed among the mangroves.

### Facing the paradox

Like many other parts of the world, Borneo has been subject to the ideology of neoliberalism in the past decades, seeking to prioritise economic growth above all else. This has led to the exploitation of Borneo's forests, minerals, and wildlife, contributed to various social



Bapak Wally (left) from Indonesia and the writer at the border.

issues, and exacerbated the challenges of climate change.

There has been a growing call to redefine prevailing notions of economic growth and embrace a new ecological-social model. The alternative would prioritise the well-being of both people and the environment, shifting the focus away from the interests of corporations and investors.

However, the drive for material expansion remains

deeply ingrained in society and cannot be easily disregarded.

The individuals we spoke to throughout the journey revealed that they had displayed adaptability in the face of rapid changes and eagerly anticipated even more significant and faster transformations brought about by the ongoing and upcoming mega projects.

They expressed a positive, and even excited, outlook regarding

these new developments, especially the Nusantara project. I have heard honest confessions that people are prepared to accept the potential negative impacts that may arise from development as long as the country progresses and aligns with global trends, ultimately leading to improved livelihoods for them.

I constantly reminded myself that these viewpoints do not necessarily reflect the opinions of every individual in the province, especially those who were victimised by these 'global trends'.

Nevertheless, I do believe there is a strong desire among the local people to be actively involved in decision-making processes, especially in matters directly affecting them, such as roads, land rights, and education – "We want a seat at the table, and we will fight hard for it".

This creates a paradoxical situation. On one hand, local communities are strongly committed to defending their rights, lands, and culture. But on the other hand, their thirst for development has fuelled an obsession with economic growth, even at a cost.

Particularly emphasised is the importance of leveraging relationships with neighbouring countries. Aligned with the policy of 'development from the periphery', it appears that people believe Indonesia should and will continue to proactively pursue cooperation with its neighbours.

However, I have also observed that this approach is being implemented without regard for whether the neighbours are ready or not. The completed but non-operational Pos Lintas Batas Negara (PLBN) on the Indonesian side of Sebatik Island serves as a vivid example of this situation.

**'The unquenchable thirst'**  
Before bidding farewell to North Kalimantan, we

returned to Tawau aboard the same express boat that had initially brought us to this restless land. We travelled to the Nunukan jetty in a small van.

Our driver, originally from Timor, had previously worked at SFI in Sipitang before settling in Nunukan. He moved back to Indonesia to ensure his three children could attend university.

As we navigated the narrow roads of this charming town, we arrived at the jetty before 8am. The process of purchasing tickets and going through immigration clearance went smoothly.

While waiting for the boat to depart, I suddenly felt a strong thirst, likely due to the overly salty food that I had consumed in the past few days. The guy carrying bottled drinks walked back and forth, but his sugary beverages could not quench my thirst.

I noticed a large ferry in the distance, which we learned had travelled from Sulawesi, carrying thousands of passengers over a two-night journey to Nunukan. Within an hour, our boat filled up with people disembarking from the ferry – young and old, in groups or alone, adorned in stylish attire or maintaining a low profile.

I could not help but wonder what their purpose was in Sabah. However, one thing was certain for me – they all carried a deep longing for a better life, whether it was to send their children to universities, or just to buy the latest iPhones.

>Dr Goh Chun Sheng is a researcher at Harvard University. He is interested in exploring sustainable development in both Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo. His book *Transforming Borneo: From Land Exploitation to Sustainable Development* was recently published by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore.

## Childhood cancer patient's mum emphasises importance of having and giving hope

Cindy Lal

THE lives of Marylene Placid and her family changed forever the day her daughter, Adela Ivy, was diagnosed with Pre-T-cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL). It was December 2013 when Adela received the diagnosis, days after she was down with fever and high chills, abdominal distension with pain and constipations – among other symptoms.

Worrying about her daughter's continuous sickness, Marylene rushed her girl to Sarawak General Hospital (SGH) for a check-up.

"Her initial admission was on Dec 18, 2013. The doctor's diagnosis came quite quickly after Adela was examined. On Dec 20, she was put under T-cell ALL protocol.

"Everything happened too fast for us to process it properly. My husband and I were very vulnerable at that time because never would I ever think that my family, in particular Adela, would be diagnosed with cancer.

"I was devastated upon receiving the news, feeling that my whole world had collapsed. Being in a state of disbelief, I found myself googling while sobbing, searching and learning about all types of leukaemia and the causes.

"We were in dire need of support, the despair and disbelief



Adela (third left) with her family during a trip to Damai Beach Resort in Kuching, under a 'Wishing Star' project arranged by the SCCS after the girl was pronounced palliative.

"I was able to light up a bit when other caretakers were smiling and their kind gestures were able to envelope my sanity to care for Adela."

As her daughter's chemotherapy treatment began, Marylene knew that the only way she could properly take care of her daughter was by putting her full trust on the doctors.

The idea of seeking other alternatives like faith and spiritual treatment was tempting as it was suggested by her spiritual, priest-based

hospital appointments would not be disrupted.

"We were even more thankful to doctors-in-charge and nurses who were very helpful in explaining the medicines, the treatments and the protocols. The nurses trained me and my husband on the proper way to care for Adela such as on the medication procedures, central venous line (CVL) dressings, the recording of food and beverage consumptions, as well as procedures to attend chemotherapy and radiotherapy."

The pain of losing Adela brought changes in Marylene, her husband and the rest of the

Dec 19.

Marylene said all symptoms were showing signs of relapse and Adela was put under Relapsed Pre-T-cell Lymphoblastic Leukaemia protocol. The girl was admitted again to hospital on Nov 19, 2015, and was pronounced to be in palliative care after all effective treatments had been exhausted.

Adela passed away in December that year.

The pain of losing Adela brought changes in Marylene, her husband and the rest of the



Photo of Adela when she was receiving treatment at the SGH.

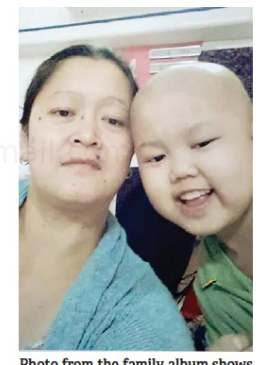


Photo from the family album shows Marylene and Adela. As a mother, Marylene goes all out to ensure that her other children are able to reflect their pain and journey forward, instead of leaving them in darkness.

which I would be proud of it. It is evidently a long process that requires patience, determination and perseverance," said Marylene, now a SCCS volunteer.

Grieving the loss, she felt, was a pivotal development for her and her children.

"It wasn't easy dealing with grief and bereft, but I assured them (her children) that it was OK to cry and feel the loss. As parents, I observed them, and went out to ensure that they're able to reflect their pain and journey forward, instead of leaving them in darkness.

"All in all, acceptance of the loss is important, as not to fall

of giving hope. The fight against childhood cancer must go on, with every support being crucial towards continuing that fight.

Marylene, also a committee member of SCCS, called upon the support from members of the public from near and far to come together and help children fight cancer.

To date, the online donation channelled via <https://gobald.my/event-detail-page/4/main/gobald-2023> has surpassed one-third of the RM1-million target.

The first in-person event



support, the despair and insanity crept in to fail my whole being, she told her story.

Amid the helplessness, Marylene had paediatric oncology specialist Dr Ong Gek Bee to thank for, though initially she was ready to confront her for what she thought was a misdiagnosis of cancer.

It was Dr Ong who reassured her that she and her family were not alone in this fight.

"She encouraged me to go around, and have a talk with Sarawak Children's Cancer Society (SCCS) support services officer, Puan Dayang Juliana at the time, telling me that I could get help dealing with this.

by her spiritual priest based on trustworthy testimonies, but Marylene rejected it after thorough discussion with her husband.

Living in Kuching provided convenience for them to go back and forth between home and hospital, so travelling was not much of a challenge for them. The commutes were exhaustible, but her focus was to ensure that Adela could complete her cycle of chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments.

"Though our daily routine changed and diligent time management were pivotal in order to ensure our work, family routine, Adela treatments and

chemotherapy and radiotherapy, said Marylene.

Over the next eight months, Marylene had to struggle watching her daughter in pain while receiving treatment – she always had that urge to pull her out from the procedure.

Yet, she endured as much mental pain as her daughter's physical pain, because they were counting the chances of surviving each treatment as pivotal.

On Aug 12, 2014, Adela finally completed the ALL Protocol II cranial irradiation. However, six days later, she was readmitted into hospital due to fever. She was discharged the next day on

her husband and the rest of the family.

"Before all this, I always felt that relationship could be broken easily and would not be mended by patching, as patching meant putting or giving an empty assurance that would not guarantee a lasting effect on the patch itself.

"Because I know that eventually, it would leak and break, and the aftermaths would often be unbearable.

"Yet, somehow the loss changed my perspective. I'm weaving my relationship – as the movement of weaving clearly states going up and down crafting a masterpiece artwork,

loss is important, as not to fall into depression. In my situation, I was able to manoeuvre my pain and struggle into hope; I was rest assured that my children and my husband were on the same board."

To her, losing Adela left her countless sweet memories and also chunks of bitter one. The memories, she said, had played a key role in helping them move forward by embracing hope to people around them.

"As the idiom goes: 'Every cloud has a silver lining', despite the despair."

As a parent of childhood cancer patient, Marylene could not stress enough the importance

The "mist in person" event will be held in Miri this June 11, followed by Kuching on June 18, which will take place on the ground floor of the East Atrium, Vivacity Megamall.

Those in Miri, Kuching, Bintulu and Sibu wishing to raise funds and go bald at their own time, can do so between now until June 30 at these designated salons – Paul & Jennifer Salon (Miri); Ray's Salon (Kuching); T2H Academy (Bintulu); and Danny Hair Academy (Sibu).

"SCCS' Go Bald 2023 campaign is back, taking place at Permaisuri Imperial City Mall in Miri this June 11, running from 1.30pm to 7.20pm.

