

THE PERANAKAN

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATION

JULY - SEPTEMBER 1998

MITA (P) 017/08/98

DISTRIBUTED FREE

www.peranakan.org.sg LAUNCH OF THE ASSOCIATION'S OWN WEBSITE

A Report By Isaac Chan

www.peranakan.org.sg versus www.peranakan.com.sg

What is the difference?

The difference is that The Peranakan Association owns and runs the former which is www.peranakan.org.sg. Yes! We now have our very own web site. Something we can boast about as we are probably one of the few Singapore heritage associations to own a web site.

The Peranakan Association, Youth Group, with the support of the The Peranakan Association Singapore, launched the web site on the Internet on 7 June 1998. The web site was made possible with the help of our youth group member, Ms Faith Png. After several sleepless nights she managed to meet the launching date without sacrificing the quality of the web site. It covers a wide scope of matters pertaining to the Peranakan culture. It touches on our history and background, on places to eat and shop, current activities, our newsletter, a guide to further reading on Peranakan culture and many more. If you are connected to the Internet then you will see what I mean.

The objective of the our web site is to create awareness, to generate interest, to inform and to ensure continuity of our rich culture in a more advanced media. This is a first step in creating a vehicle for our culture to move into the next millennium.

Our web site on the Internet serves as a great tool to create awareness as it is a media that many people use to search for information. It is somewhat like an encyclopaedia but even better as it can keep being updated every time. This also means that people all around the world are able to learn about our culture, hence, enabling global dissemination of information of our culture. Although international interest may be minimal, we are able to reach our region in a big way

thus enhancing awareness of our culture regionally.

Generating interest is important as it is one of the ways to revive a gradually dwindling culture like ours. Both Peranakans and non-Peranakans can play a part in keeping the culture alive. Therefore, a media such as this is a great tool for people to know more about us and perhaps generate interest in our culture. This hopefully will bring people interested in our culture forward to actively be involved in our activities.

Our web site also acts as a tool to inform people about our culture. As mentioned earlier regarding the Internet being somewhat an encyclopaedia, people will look up the Internet for information. As our site is becoming one that provides comprehensive information on Peranakan culture, the site aims towards informing people about us not only regionally but also globally.

The Internet being a tool of this century and the next, will definitely be a vehicle to ensure continuity of our culture into the next millennium. Our web site on the Internet acts like a net waiting for a catch in the sea. As our generation (and even the very young) is using the Internet more and more, it will not be difficult for them to get 'caught' in this 'net' of ours. This enables us to promote awareness of our culture more efficiently for many years to come and thus ensuring continuity of our culture.

With creating awareness, generating interest, aiming to inform and ensuring continuity, we will place ourselves at the forefront and perhaps become an authority on Peranakan culture. This definitely makes a great impact on our goals to become a heritage association.

To maintain survival of our culture requires great effort. All great efforts require time. With time, we will survive. •

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Boom BABA Boom

The Peranakan Youth Group held their first event and launched the Association's website at a fun-filled event at Boom Boom Room on Sunday 7 June 1998. The event, organised by Heather Ong, Isaac Chan and Chrstopher Chua of the Youth Group, was attended by many new young members, as well as many older 'gatecrashers', who all enjoyed an evening of dance lessons, singing and feasting. The website was also officially launched by Association President Lee Kip Lee.



PERANAKAN

— The Youth Group —

The youth have often been told that the future of the peranakans lies in their hands. As we have been entrusted to bear this torch, we need to build upon the solid foundation of our heritage, and recruit enough people to keep the flames of the culture alive. We would like more young peranakans to contribute to the culture, even as we live and work in modern Singapore

What is it that sets a peranakan apart from every one else? It is his heritage—a colourful history of customs, dress, language, art and food, a unique blend of Chinese and Malay cultures. Of what consequence is it to be peranakan today? In practical terms, the answer would be “It is of no consequence, because life goes on regardless of who we are.” We would, however, be so much poorer in history, culture and legacy if we disregarded our roots, or ignored our heritage.

Here are some sentiments and hopes expressed by young peranakans.

“Although we no longer adopt the opulent pre-war lifestyle of the peranakans, we can still retain the *patois*, simplify the customs, enjoy the food and appreciate the artifacts of our forefathers. I hope that we will make an effort to integrate these into our daily lives.”

Heather, 30+

“We young Peranakans have to keep up with today's fast pace. Sometimes we get so tied up with our hectic schedules that we tend to forget our culture and tradition. It is good to know that there is a youth group that has not forgotten our past, and wants to keep the culture and tradition alive.”

Robert Jr Chan, 24

“Being a bored youth in today's boom society, and suffering from an identity crisis, (being 30% Baba, 20% Eurasian, 50% Chinese) I have lost my culture of all the mixes. I was persuaded by Isaac, and thought it was a good idea to give some contribution to Peranakan during my free time, besides flying the skies. I can't say that I will be actively involved because of my irregular schedule, but nevertheless I shall give 100% to the association and heritage.”

Gavin Chan, 29

“Just as everything is impermanent, so is the peranakan culture. But, as everything evolves to ensure continued existence, so can the peranakan culture. As the leader of the peranakan association youth group I will undertake this task of evolving the culture and carry the culture into the 21st century. This objective has already had its foundation laid, namely the launching of the Peranakan Association Youth Group and the Peranakan Association's very own website, www.peranakan.org.sg. The next step is to ensure growth and awareness of the unique peranakan culture. To further materialize the objective, a centre is needed in order to have a continuous growing awareness. The centre can probably replicate a typical peranakan house and function as a showcase of peranakan periphenilia and even perhaps stage the peranakan performing arts. I strongly believe the existence of the youth group is a strong element in the modification factor for the steep downturn of the diminishing bell curve of the peranakan culture.”

Isaac chan, 28

“As inheritors of the Peranakan culture, I feel that the hallmark of a culture tradition is manifested in its members being able to live life with its intrinsic uniqueness, and yet able to reach out to the wider circle of other cultural traditions in ways that we understand as in living in the brotherhood of man.”

Dennis Kweh, 30+

CATCH THE DANCE FEVER !

Learn all the right moves in time for our Dinner & Dance.

Come to Peranakan's fun-filled social dance weekends,
held at Dance Circle Studios.

Classes begin on 23 August, teaching Cha-cha, Rock n' roll, Ronggeng and more!
Sign up early! There is NO age limit, and you do not need to bring a partner

Venue : Dance Circle Studio

370 Alexandra Road, # B1-32

Anchorpoint, S'pore 159953.

Time : 3 pm – 4 pm

Dates : Sundays, Aug 23, 30, Sept 6, 13, 20, 27
Oct 4, 11, 18, 25, Nov 1

Cost : \$100 for the whole package of 10 lessons or
\$ 15 per session if you're attending some classes

As class size is limited, please call

Dance Circle Studios at 4728143 to register now.

Please make cheques payable to Dance Circle Studios, and send payment,
in an envelope marked “Peranakan Association Social Dance”
to the above address.

PERANAKAN

— Youth Performers —

(Singers, Actors, Dancers, &
Musicians Wanted)

We are looking for members of all ages who
are interested in joining our
performance group.

Free training in traditional and modern styles
will be provided to groom
a group of Peranakan youth, to perform at this
year's D&D (Nov), and
Melaka Convention (Dec).

Stage experience is NOT necessary, but
would be a bonus.

Bring your enthusiasm, and commitment. Do
your part to revitalise the
Peranakan heritage!

For more information, contact Isaac at
anakbaba@singnet.com.sg, or call
731 4502 (o).

PERANAKAN STREET NAMES

Lee Kip Lee

KIM TIAN ROAD

Kim Tian Road is between Tiong Bahru Road and Jalan Bukit Merah and in the vicinity of Moh Guan Terrace and Seng Poh Road.

Tan Kim Tian was born in 1832 and came to Singapore at the age of 15 in 1847. Soon after, he joined the firm of Paterson Simons as a boy. He taught himself to read and write English and eventually became a first class Raffles School boy who worked his way up until he became chief store-keeper as well as compradore in the course of which he was responsible for chartering sailing ships trading in gutta-percha, rattan and pepper on behalf of the company.

At the age of 33 he retired from Paterson Simons and with his eldest son Tan Beng Wan went into the shipping business when he founded Tan Kim Tian & Sons Steamship Co Ltd. in 1865. He was one of the first in the coasting trade to replace sailing vessels with steamships.

Just before the turn of the century Tan Kim Tian Steamship Co Ltd entered into a partnership with the Straits Steamship Co Ltd to engage in the water transport trade covering the east and west coasts of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Southern Siam.

Tan Kim Tian was the President of the Tan Clan Association - **Po Chek Kiong** - in Magazine Road (Kampong Malacca). One portion of its premises was used as the repository of the **sinchew** or ancestral tablets of men of the clan while another part of the building was used as a Chinese school.

His love of and dedication to his old school was evidenced by his gift of a tiffin shed built at his expense in 1888. A stone plaque, commemorating the event, was shifted from its original site in the Beach Road school building to its new premises in Grange Road. The plaque, dated 1888, had this inscription on it 'This building was erected by Tan Kim Tian - an old Raffles Boy.'

He lived in his mansion - **Botan House** - at 83 Neil Road at its junction with Craig Road. The house which was built in 1883 was sold in 1978 and has since been demolished.

BENG WAN ROAD

Beng Wan Road is a cul-de-sac off Serangoon Road and diagonally opposite St Michael's Road.

Tan Beng Wan, the son of Tan Kim Tian, was born in 1851. He was educated at Raffles School and, at the age of 15 joined his father's firm of which he became the managing partner when his father died. He public-spiritedness led him to participate in the Municipal elections when in 1888 he was elected as Municipal Commissioner for Central Ward. In December 1889 he was re-elected for a further term of three years but was unfortunately unable to serve the full period when he died in 1891.

His son is Mr Tan Choon Keng, a former Vice-President of The Peranakan Association. •

NEW 3-MUSEUM SEASON PASS OFFER

from the National Heritage Board

The National Heritage Board has sought our assistance to publicise amongst our members their offer of a Season Pass for museum visits at a most affordable introductory charge of only \$18 a year for individual subscribers and \$48 a year for families.

In addition to unlimited free entry to the Singapore History Museum (at the National Museum building), Singapore Art Museum and Asian Civilisations Museum, the pass also offers a 10% discount on purchases at the National Museum Shop and half-price admission to the nearby Singapore Philatelic Museum.

One notable attraction of interest to members is of course the exhibition *Rumah Baba — Life in a Peranakan House* at the Singapore History Museum. The association was deeply involved with the exhibition's conception and planning, and is also behind the creation of a related publication for the museum, which is scheduled to be launched in September. •

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for William Tan

life is a song



He was born William Tan Yew Liam in December 1928. (Hard to believe, judging from his unlined face) His mother was Ee Chin Neo. His father was Tan Cheng Tin, nephew of Tan Keong Saik and grandson of Tan Choon Sian. William therefore shares a common ancestor with Peter Wee of Katong Antique House - William's father and Peter's grandfather were cousins.

With his brothers and sister, William grew up in Kampong Amber, which occupied a sprawling area bordered by Amber Road, Tanjong Katong Road and Mountbatten Road, then known as Grove Road. (I didn't know that, did you?) Later, the family moved to Pennefather Road.

He attended Geylang English School, but his education was interrupted by the Japanese invasion of Singapore. During those years, the family, like many others at the time, had to move from place to place. William had to work as a coolie for the Japanese forces, planting *ubi kayu* for the soldiers on empty land where Frankel estate now stands.

After the Japanese surrender, he worked as a dispenser in a private clinic. This lasted about twenty years, until the clinic doctor passed away. Some other jobs followed, until William decided to 'close shop' and to spend time doing the

things he enjoys - participating in and promoting the Baba culture.

Although he has remained a bachelor, he is able to enjoy a close family life with his siblings and their children. (A family gathering means about thirty people - brothers, sisters, grand-nephews and grand-neices, and their off-spring) In fact, for the last 2 years, he has shared a Bedok North apartment with a grand-nephew.

Casting his mind back, he remembers accompanying his father on Sundays for musical sessions at Peranakan homes. It was the period just after the war, during the British Military Administration. There were several such associations meeting regularly even during the pre-war period. Membership was open only to Babas. No woman was allowed to be present at the gatherings. The *Oleh Oleh Party* was led by former Peranakan Association President, Mr. TW Ong. Another group, *The Merrilads* met at the Sea Avenue home of its President, Dr. Chia Keng Hoe. Then there was the *Wales Minstrel Party* (The last specialised in variety shows in which singers would have blackened faces, as in *The Black and White Minstrel Show* over Singapore TV way back in the early sixties).

Regularly, at their week-end get-togethers, 8 or 9 persons would sit around a table sharpening their wits in *dondang sayang*. One person would start with the first verse, and the second would answer him, and then the third would follow, and so on. If one was not able to come in on his turn, the next person would take over.

The Peranakans have always enjoyed singing, dancing and acting. Despite having little or no formal musical training, practically everyone could play either the guitar, the ukulele, or the mandolin. So it is not surprising that plays and musical concerts for the public were regular events, usually to raise funds for some cause. As these associations were male bastions, the female roles were played by men, with the help of wigs and plenty of make-up.

And while all this was going on, young William was taking it all in.

In 1957, he performed for the first time in a play produced by the *Kempulan Peranakan Singapura* (now disbanded). Since then, he has done his part to keep our Peranakan heritage not only alive but something to be enjoyed by young and old alike. He has written original compositions and sung them at Peranakan stage performances. He directed *Buang Keroh Pungot Jernih* in 1985, *Biji Mata Mak* in 1989, and *Tak Sangka* in 1990.

He bemoans the fact that the younger generation, by and large, can neither speak nor comprehend the Baba patois. He strongly feels that parents should actively use the language and encourage their children to use it too. Otherwise, the patois, together with the costume, manners and food will all vanish.

I was curious to know whether his Peranakan background had prepared him for an encounter with his roots during his recent visit to Beijing, China. His views were very positive. 'It was worth the trip!' He was glad to have had the opportunity to walk along the Great Wall ('but there is a lot of climbing to do!'), and to actually be at places which he had read about not only in geography books but also in the *Cherita Dulu Kala*, a rare and unique collection of Chinese literary classics written in Baba patois.

But his first love remains the *dondang sayang*. Is it any wonder that within the Peranakan community in Singapore, *dondang sayang* and *William Tan* are practically synonymous. For many years, he has been promoting this unique but fast-disappearing form of Baba entertainment. Not only does he sing when Peranakan plays are performed, but he presently conducts weekly classes at the Association's premises.

In his own words, he is 'trying his level best to interest the younger generation in this art!' Every Friday night, from 8 - 10.30 pm, with his guidance and expertise, the traditional and classical *pantuns* are memorised and sung. William admits that his is not an easy task. The students have difficulty memorising the *pantuns*; sometimes, they drop out after a few sessions. This is not surprising, as these young folk have not grown up steeped in the culture, as he has been.

Friends have urged him to produce a book on *pantuns* in *dondang sayang*. They know how extensive is his knowledge and experience. And he shared some of it during

the interview.

The *lagu asli* (Malay folk songs) are easier to learn, but the *dondang sayang* presents different challenges. The first thing that is needed is an interest in the craft. Next is having to memorise the *pantuns* previously composed. Then comes the hardest part — the on-the-spot rebuttal by the singer. It is obvious that this requires a keen mind, a quick tongue and mastery of the language, including the proverbs and idiomatic terms. And this is what makes the *dondang sayang* so entertaining, surprising and always fresh.

Those of you still in the dark will have gathered by now that it is a kind of musical debate, usually performed by two groups or two individuals so that repartee is possible. Subjects, initiated by the first performer, can be any topic under the sun, but is usually about gratitude, love, kinship, human relationships and nature.

William recalls that in the old days, the singers used Baba patois, which is not the same as the Malay Language. But when Singapore became part of Malaysia, everyone was urged to learn Bahasa Kebangsaan. This caused many Peranakans to lose their unique pronunciation. e.g. replacing *panteh* with *pantai*. Happily, in Malacca, the patois is alive and well, still retaining its colourful flavour.

In *dondang sayang*, there are three tempos that one can sing to - *Asli*, *Mambo* and *Innang*. Traditionally, musical accompaniment is provided by a three-piece band of violin, gong and *rebana*. Today, there is usually a whole band in accompaniment, and made up of Malay musicians.

What this performer would really like to see happen is an all-Peranakan band. He is confident that the talent is out there. What is needed is for these musicians to come forward and get going! So, readers, what about it?

Until that band materialises, William has plenty to keep him busy.

Besides supporting Peranakan Association activities, and conducting the *dondang sayang* classes on Friday nights, he is very much involved in the Gunong Sayang Choir (times have changed and nonyas are most welcome)

He also arranges for entertainment at private functions, providing the band, the skits and of course, his ever-popular *dondang sayang* numbers. He is especially sought-after at birthdays and anniversaries where a great many guests are senior citizens; his brand of music and singing are just right for recreating that special nostalgic mood.

This is not surprising, as anyone who has heard his renditions would agree that he has a natural talent and a mellifluous voice. Besides, the Babas and Bibiks not only relish *dondang sayang*, but will invariably request for *nineteen-nought-belum* songs which few bands and singers can render. But William's team can! No wonder he is so sought after, and fulfils more than six to seven engagements a year. Some bookings are made a year in advance!

All this leads me to but one conclusion.

It is clear that William Tan, although turning seventy this year, has no intention of slowing down.

Maureen Lim

MARI JOLLY VOLLEY!

Come join us for our first sports event MARI JOLLY VOLLEY! We will be having a volleyball game at Sunset Beach, Sentosa. The event will be held on Friday, 14 August '98. We will be at Sunset Beach from 6.30pm till late. Come down and join us for drinks and dinner. What's the cost! Well just come down and we will have the game free! Then we will go for dinner somewherewhere ever our budget suits us! So let your hair down after a weeks work and join us on the mid August Friday to have fun by the beach!

How to get there....
Take the Sentosa bus from along Orchard Rd or Tiong Bahru and it will bring you into Sentosa. Please ask the driver for directions....they will be more and happy to direct you there. Sosee you there!

Any inquiries please contact
Robert Jr. Chan at 9493 6228

or

Isaac Chan, his brother, at 96427769.

DO NOT HESITATE
to call us!

World Cup part 2!

Demam Bola (Football Fever)?

You Bet! The association is looking for passionate football enthusiasts to form a team. The first match would be against the Eurasian Association. Kalu interested, please page for Chris Chua at 92325629, pronto!

NIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

Sunday, 4 October 1998
Boom Boom Room
7.00 pm to 11.00 pm
\$22.00 Members
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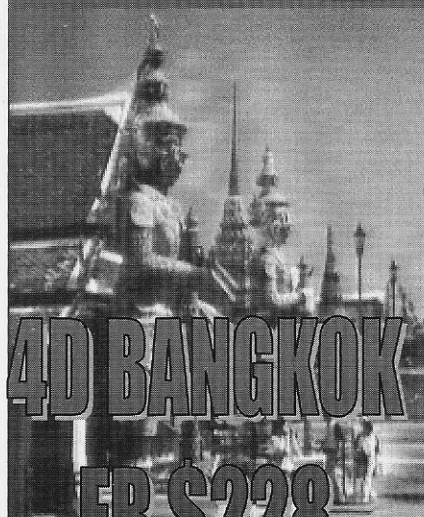
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in Singapore
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Dr Rudolph will also introduce his newly published book

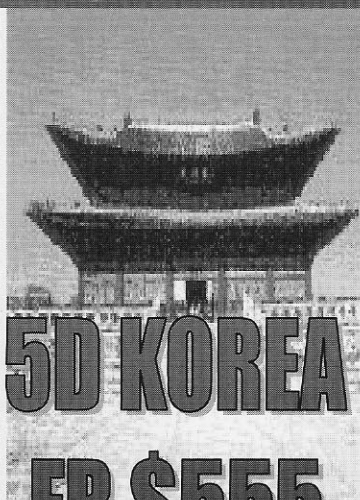
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Rasa Peranakan

MUSICATHON, FOOD & CRAFT FAIR

SATURDAY 14th NOVEMBER 1998

11 A.M. TO 9 P.M.

GREAT WORLD CITY ATRIUM

IN AID OF

THE APEX HARMONY LODGE BUILDING FUND

By Shia Ailee & Marlene Foo

As a result of the determination of Mrs Elizabeth Lee Kip Lee the idea of holding a Peranakan Association Fund-Raising Food Fair has materialised.

The *Rasa Peranakan Musicathon, Food & Craft Fair* will be held at the Atrium of the Great World City whose management have kindly agreed to waive rental charges for our use of their premises. The Fair will be in aid of the Apex Harmony Lodge Building Fund and will be declared open by Former President Mr Wee Kim Wee.

The Apex Harmony Lodge is a 150-Bed Home for Senile Dementia Patients at Pasir Ris Drive 3. The building is nearing completion and the Home expects to admit residents in April 1999.

Besides the Food & Craft stalls we are also having a Musicathon which is an ongoing musical event with musicians on stage accepting requests for songs and music. There will also be a mock-up of a photographic studio with a Peranakan backdrop for those who wish to have their pictures taken with celebrities like Ms Sally Gan and Mr G T Lye.

Donation Cards, for donations to the Apex Harmony Lodge Building Fund, and Food Coupons will be printed and we appeal to members to come forward to assist us in selling them, and also to volunteer to man the food and craft stalls, to donate food and *kueh kueh* for sale, and to encourage people to participate in the Musicathon.

You will find enclosed with this issue of *The Peranakan* APPEAL FORM for assisting in the collection of funds through Donation Cards, purchase of Food Coupons, and sponsorship of stalls, and a VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED FORM for contributions of food and/or services. for you to respond to.

Mr Peter Wee will be setting up a Jumble Sale Stall and would welcome donations of all sorts of as-good-as-new articles. Please contact him directly at Tel 3458544.

For other offers of help please call Ms Shia Ailee - Tel No.96355276.

Organising Committee

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Mrs Irene Ooi	Treasurer
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Mrs Helen Tan	Publicity/Public Relations
Mr G T Lye	Entertainment
Ms Sally Gan	Entertainment
Ms Bebe Seet	Crafts Logistics
Mr Andrew Lian	Food Logistics
Mrs Lucia Lim	Food Logistics
Ms Marlene Foo	Food Logistics

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome aboard the following 61 new ordinary members whose addition increases our roll to 1075 members.

Mr Ang Kwong Hee Eric
 Ms Ang Lian Ai Michelle
 Mrs Ang Mei Lee Maureen
 Mr Ang Soon Lee Stephen
 Mrs Chan Elizabeth
 Mdm Chan Margaret
 Mdm Chan Nyuk Leng Lisa
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 Mr Tan John
 Ms Tan Joo Kee Esther
 Mr Tan Kim Chwee Lawrence
 Mdm Tan Kim Neo Lucy
 Mr Tan Tiang Thong Fred
 Ms Tye Yolande
 Mr Wong Joel
 Ms Yap Buong Neo
 Ms Yap Lay Khim Sally
 Ms Yap Lian Khim Gracy
 Ms Yee Yin Leng Eugenia
 Mr Yeo Sin Hock
 Mr Yeong Tuck Seng
 Mdm Yew Ah Hoy Gaye

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INCREASE IN LIFE MEMBERSHIP FEE TO \$150.00

**WITH EFFECT FROM
1 SEPTEMBER 1998**

In view of our increased activities and consequent rise in the Association's administration costs, the Committee has decided that the unrealistic Life Membership Fee of \$50.00 will be revised upwards to \$150.00 with effect from 1 September 1998.

NOTICEBOARD

OBITUARIES

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of

Mr Edward Kang Cheng Lim
Ms Tina Quake Siew Tin
Mr Seet Sian Tiang
Mr Seow Siew Hock

on their recent bereavement.

FRIENDLY GOLF MEET

The Organising Committee – Chairman Mr Patrick Ng, Hon Secretary Ms Doreen Yeo Seok Hean and Committee Members Messrs Milton Tan And H K Lim – have the pleasure to invite you to participate in our first Golf Meet at Raffles Country Club on Thursday 6 August 1998 at 12.00 noon. The charges are: Association Member \$180.00; Raffles Country Club Member \$150.00; and Non-Golfer - Dinner Only \$36.00. For more information please contact Mrs Lim Geok Huay Tel 2550704.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Thursday 6 August 1998
FRIENDLY GOLF MEET**
Raffles Country Club, 12.00 noon

**Friday 14 August 1998
MARI JOLLY VOLLEY**
Sunset Beach, Sentosa, 6.30 pm onwards

**Sunday 27 September 1998
BOWLING**
Jackie's Bowl, East Coast, 2.00 pm

**Sunday 4 October 1998
NIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON**
Boom Boom Room, 7.00 pm to 11.00 pm

**Friday 9 October 1998
DINNER TALK BY DR JÜRGEN RUDOLPH**
Pin Hisaing Restaurant, RELC Building, 7.30 pm

**Saturday 14 November 1998
RASA PERANAKAN MUSICATHON, FOOD & CRAFT FAIR**
Great World City, 11 am. TO 9 Ppm
In aid of the Apex Harmony Lodge Building Fund

**Saturday 21 November 1998
98th ANNUAL DINNER & DANCE**
Hyatt Regency Hotel, 7.30 pm

**Friday 4 December to Sunday 6 December 1998
11th BABA CONVENTION**
Malacca

More information on the Annual Dinner & Dance and the 11th Baba Convention will be available in due course.