

## **YOUNG LEADERS: Agents for change**

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**YOUTH:** Four local undergraduates who are representing Malaysia at the 11th Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative in Hanoi, Vietnam in January want to make the most of it

**HENG** Jing Yi received her earliest lesson in environmentalism when she was growing up in Sekinchan, Selangor.

For generations padi farmers at the scenic small-town in the Sabak Bernam district — which is dubbed the rice bowl of Selangor — burn padi stubbles after harvesting as a matter of routine.

Heng is fully aware that open burning poses serious environmental hazards.

“I was inspired to study Environmental Engineering to find a better solution to the problem after realising its harmful effects,” says Heng, 22.

The University of Malaya (UM) undergraduate shared her ambition to be an agent for change in her hometown with the Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative (HYLI) selection committee recently.

“I told them about some of the things that have inspired me and how they have shaped my life during the interview,” she adds.

Heng’s determination impressed the panel of judges, who picked her as one of the four young Malaysians to represent Malaysia at the 11th HYLI in Hanoi, Vietnam in January.

Joining Heng at the event are computer and communication systems student Choo Hong Ning from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM); aspiring cognitive scientist Donald Stephen from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) and law major Ong Kit Wee from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).



*(From left) Donald Stephen, Heng Jing Yi, Ong Kit Wee and Choo Hong Ning display the same insatiable curiosity and keen awareness of regional concerns.*

HYLI is a corporate social responsibility project which seeks to identify and groom potential Asian leaders to be enterprising, innovative and global-minded.

The leadership programme has had a profound effect on bright young minds in the region over the last 15 years. It gives young Malaysians access to top speakers and leaders in addition to the chance to network with like-minded peers from Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The selection panel in Malaysia received 19 applications from candidates in five local public universities namely UKM, Unimas, UM, UPM and Universiti Sains Malaysia after calls for applications were made earlier this year.

Only those who fulfil the minimum requirement such as a Cumulative Grade Point Average of 3.5 and active participation in social work or extra-curricular activities were eligible to apply.

All applicants were interviewed via telephone. Some 10 candidates were shortlisted for a presentation and a face-to-face interview with the selection panel.

The list was trimmed down to the final four names based on the interviews and group presentations, which the participants had less than a day to prepare for.

Judges sought for young Malaysians who demonstrate “the ability to think critically, have a good grasp of local and regional issues as well as the aptitude for conveying their ideas and thoughts on specific topics“.

They believe they have found these qualities in the foursome.

Although Heng, Choo, Ong and Donald come from different disciplines, they display the same insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge, humility, team spirit and keen awareness of regional concerns.

More importantly, they have wide interests outside of their academic life.

Heng, a track and field athlete at UM, enjoys hiking, jogging and jungle trekking. She counts climbing Mount Kinabalu recently as one of her best achievements to date.

Choo plays the piano, guitar and ukulele in his spare time and secretly dreams of “being a rock star“.

The 22-year-old recently took up swimming “to conquer (my) fear of water and (to) push (myself) to the limits“.

Donald, 22, recently joined a research team from Unimas to rural Bario, Sarawak to better understand the learning needs of the villagers in order to set up an e-learning centre for them.

Meanwhile, Ong, 23, often attends forums and participates in research groups as they enable him to “share ideas and understand others’ viewpoints“.



*Participants are expected to discuss and produce viable solutions to regional issues at the 11th HYLI.*

Judges say their personality traits reflect their leadership potential and will stand them in good stead when they represent Malaysia next year.

Participants are expected to discuss and produce viable solutions to issues such as sustainable energy options, security, transportation and regional economic integration at the 11th HYLI, which carries the theme The New Stage for

Asia — An Asian Perspective Managing Sustainable Development and Economic Integration.

Hitachi Asia (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd managing director Seiji Yoshimura, who is in the selection committee, says: “They will have a chance to participate in panel discussions apart from working in groups to produce workshop summaries and a white paper of the proceedings of the meeting.”

The Malaysian delegates seem set for the 11th HYLI.

“I am reading up on the economical partnerships and agreements across the region, paying close attention to the key outcomes of the Asia-Pacific Economic Corporation 2011 and the recent Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ summits,” says Choo.

Heng is busy refining her public speaking skills.

Meanwhile, Ong is keen to present “the Malaysian perspective on regional issues” during the forum.

Danny feels his experience in Bario and Salak Island in Sarawak will benefit his team.

“I now have first-hand information on the transportation and mobility issues in remote villages, as well as alternative energy options for areas that are not covered by an electricity grid. I got to see sustainable energy projects being carried out in the real world,” he says.

As far as Donald is concerned, the four of them make a dynamic team.

“The blend of a computer and communication systems engineer, an environmental engineer, a lawyer and a cognitive scientist makes us a strong group,” says the native of Kuching.

The others agree. They want to make the most of the opportunity to participate in the 11th HYLI and promise not to disappoint Malaysia.

“I hope that we can offer real solutions to issues affecting the region such as sustainable energy and poverty. Hopefully, the result of our discussion will have a direct bearing on the political decisions made in this region,” says Choo.

Extracted from [NewStraitsTimes](#).