

## Against all odds

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# Tormented by gas blast

➤ Burn survivor recounts harrowing ordeal and long, painful road to recovery

IT was not exactly a cliché dark and stormy night, but for Eilyen Chua (pic), what struck her felt like a bolt of lightning.

She had smelt the odour of cooking gas and had gone to the kitchen to check when suddenly, there was a spark followed by a “bang”, which left her with 80% burns on her body.

The incident six years ago changed her life forever, Chua told *theSun*.

Recounting that fateful morning, Chua said she was in her room at her home in Penang. “It was about 1am when I got a whiff of gas odour. To make sure everything was in order, I went to the kitchen to check the knob on the gas stove.”

Unfortunately, there was a spark and before she knew it, there was an explosion that rocked her home. “I was flung backwards. Through the smoke, blurry-eyed, I could vaguely see things melting, plastic turning into wax and plates being smashed as

my clothes caught fire,” she said. “I was in a lot of pain but I was still conscious of what was happening around me.”

Chua said she managed to crawl out of the rubble, trudged upstairs and changed her clothes, before stepping outside her house.

“The neighbours were already gathered in front of my house and some were taking photographs of me. It made me angry,” she said.

The ambulance arrived shortly after and Chua was taken to hospital where she was warded. “Only then did I fall asleep. I was so tired that I lost consciousness.”

But the worst had yet to come. The doctors at the Penang Hospital told

her that she would not only need surgery but would also have to be put in an induced coma.

“They said this was necessary because the treatment would be painful,” she recounted.

Chua spent the next two and a half months relieving the nightmare, always feeling that someone was torturing her. “I was confused and lost. It was a difficult time.”

To make matters worse, she could not move nor was she in control of her bodily functions.

Even the doctors were not sure if she would survive. “It’s a miracle I am still alive today.”

Even after being discharged from the hospital, Chua’s battle would

continue for another four years. “It was a period of frequent visits to the hospital for skin grafting, and even learning how to walk again.”

“The burns had taken away most of my skin, and the doctors had to take some of the skin from my head to graft onto my hands,” she said, as she unconsciously touched her head that was covered with a scarf.

Chua said her sister Juliana had even offered her skin but the physicians said it would not work.

It took Chua seven months after the incident before she could walk, albeit with a cane. “That was a major breakthrough, given that my chances of survival was initially regarded as slim,” she said.

It took two years before she could walk without a cane. All in, she was in

the hospital for a year and three months. Chua attributed her recovery to a lot of encouragement from like-minded friends from the United States, and the books by motivational speaker and Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl.



“He had described the experience of prisoners and that struck a chord with me, given that I too felt like a prisoner. I was just a number in a room.”

Chua said it was during her time in intensive care when she realised that she was no longer the same person, and that she had to accept it.

Today, she is an advocate for burn survivors, often sharing her thoughts on the Facebook page called “Rising From The Ashes”, and giving motivational talks.

She is also in the midst of writing her memoir, while she continues her law practice.

Her wish now is to see schools create programmes that teach children to effectively extinguish flames if their clothes catch fire.



Conservation activist Rani Awang (second from left) and his colleagues collecting turtle eggs at Batu Burok beach in Kuala Terengganu. — BERNAMAPIX

## Call to make Terengganu beaches turtle friendly

**KUALA TERENGGANU:** A turtle landing on Batu Burok beach here on Monday night gives the message that the reptile is ready to lay their eggs along the 244km coast, stretching from Kemaman to Besut, as well as on the resort island beaches, which have been their favourite spots.

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu’s Institute of Oceanography and Environment external research laboratory head Dr Mohd Uzair Rusli said turtles are very sensitive and careful in choosing a landing to lay their eggs.

“With the rapid development and its close location to the city, Batu Burok beach is no longer a popular turtle landing location.

“When laying their eggs, the turtles will

look out for a beach as early as 3pm and as such, noises and activities on the beach in the afternoon will affect the turtle landing.

“The presence of the turtle last night was probably because there was no public activity to distract it,” he said in a statement yesterday.

He also said that it was time for all parties to work together to make the Terengganu coastline a safe and friendly environment for turtles. “There are a few things to take into account if we want to see turtles laying eggs on nearby beaches, among them is to reduce the lighting along the beach.

“Turtles are very sensitive to light. Do not place lights at high positions, and make sure the lights cannot be seen from the beach. Red

lighting is highly recommended because turtles are less sensitive to the light waves.”

On Monday, a turtle was reported to have landed on Batu Burok beach, near Primula Hotel, at 6.50pm and laid about 50 eggs.

Terengganu Fisheries Department director Ruzaidi Mamat said the weight and size of the turtle could not be ascertained as the turtle had returned to sea when officers arrived at the location.

“However, the turtle is estimated to be between 15 and 18 years old, based on the size of the track and the number of eggs laid. The turtle eggs were taken to the Turtle Conservation and Information Centre in Rantau Abang for incubation. — Bernama

## 4 claim trial to charge of posting insults

**MALACCA:** Four individuals pleaded not guilty at the Ayer Keroh sessions court yesterday for posting insulting comments against the Yang di-Pertua Negri of Malacca Tun Mohd Ali Rustam last month.

Muhamad Ali Aswad Asngadu, 28; Mohd Hermy Rahim, 34; Ahmad Zaki Yamani Zainon, 45; and Mohd Hafizuddin Rahmad, 36, claimed trial after the charges were read out separately before justice Maziah Joary Mohd Tajudin.

According to the charge, all the accused had consciously made and initiated the transmission of offensive communications on Mohd Ali on their respective Twitter accounts on July 28, which were read around 1.07am at Ujong Pasir in Kampung Atap on July 29.

All the accused were charged under Section 233(1)(a) of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 and are punishable under Section 233(3) of the same Act. If found guilty, the four could face a fine of not more than RM50,000 or imprisonment for not more than one year, or both, and shall also be liable for a further fine of RM1,000 for every day the offence is continued after conviction.

The court allowed the four bail of RM5,000 in one surety, and to report to the nearest police station every month. The case will be re-mentioned on Sept 22. — Bernama

## Killers’ car found

**SHAH ALAM:** A vehicle, believed to be used by the killers of a 42-year-old man, was found razed not far from the crime scene hours later.

The victim was gunned down at Ascort Hill Golf Course, Bukit Rahman Putra in Sungai Buloh on Monday.

Selangor police chief Comm Datuk Arjunaidi Mohamed said yesterday the burnt four-wheel drive, which was found about 1.5km away, was reported stolen in Klang about two years ago.

He said checks also showed that the victim had six criminal records, including for robbery and criminal intimidation.

On Monday, a man who was driving a Range Rover died of four gunshot wounds less than an hour after being set upon by his killers at about 1.30pm at Jalan BRP 2/1 in Bukit Rahman Putra.

The motive behind the killing is being investigated but it is suspected to be linked to underworld activities.

Separately, Arjunaidi said police seized about 109kg of methamphetamines, worth RM3.9 million, after busting two drug syndicates earlier this month in Gombak and Ampang.

He said 14 men and three women were nabbed in the raids on Aug 6 and Aug 8.

Arjunaidi said police seized cash, jewellery and vehicles worth about RM1 million.

## Wily women held for duping old folk

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Three women who preyed on senior citizens and stole their valuables after posing as welfare workers were arrested yesterday.

A 43-year-old woman, with her daughter-in-law and their friend, both aged 23, posed as members of a non-governmental organisation offering food aid when they pulled off crimes on old folks.

Sentul police chief ACP Beh Eng Lai said the suspects pulled off a case on Aug 9, where an 82-year-old woman lost RM8,000 at her

house in Intan Baiduri flats here.

He said the women approached the victim on the pretext of contributing food items, and while one of them was dealing with her, the other suspect sneaked into the woman’s house and stole the cash.

Beh said a criminal investigation team had traced and arrested the older woman and her daughter-in-law after a police report was lodged by the victim.

He said police also seized 17 packages of food, which the suspects are believed to have used when pulling off crimes.

Beh said the third suspect was arrested yesterday. He said investigations showed that

the older woman was the mastermind of the group and has 12 criminal records, while the third suspect has three for burglary.

“They mainly prey on senior citizens who live alone. The suspects have confessed to their crimes. With the arrests, we have solved three cases of break-ins that were reported in Jinjang this year.

“We urge the public to be cautious and to take necessary safety precautions when they are approached by individuals who pose as welfare workers.

“Those with information of such activities carried out by any party can call the Sentul police at 03-4048 2222,” he said.