

Visit by Professor Nobuo Shuto and Lecture in Penang Between 27-04-05 to 01-05-05

Reported by: Ir. Dr Ooi Teik Aun

The Tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean on 26 December was a global catastrophe that caught many in the world by surprise. The destruction caused by tsunami also affected Malaysia in Langkawi, Penang and Kuala Muda in Kedah. The actual death toll must necessarily exceeded that reported figure of 280,000 people. Prof. A. S. Balasubramaniam and Ir. Dr Ting Wen Hui mooted the idea of an IEM Public Lecture on Tsunami in Kuala Lumpur so as to create an understanding and interest in the study of Tsunami by local engineers and others. Prof. Bala is responsible for identifying and committing Prof. Shuto into agreeing to come to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok to give this very important series of lecture on Tsunami. Prof. Shuto is an international authority on tsunami and coastal engineering and has more than forty years of research and practice in the field of Tsunami. The term tsunami is derived from the Japanese words for 'harbour'(tsu) and 'wave'(nami).

The Geotechnical Engineering Technical Division of IEM was identified as the suitable Technical Division of IEM to underwrite and organise this event and a Committee consisting of Chair-man of Geotechnical Engineering Technical Division, Ir. Tan Yean Chin, Prof. Balasubramaniam, Ir. Dr Ting Wen Hui and Ir. Dr Ooi Teik Aun was set up to organise this Public Lecture. The Public Lectures were to be held in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Bangkok starting from 28 April 2005. Dr Ooi was entrusted to take care of Prof. Shuto's trip to Penang. This report covers the itinerary of the Penang visit by Prof. Shuto who was accompanied by his wife, Ir. Peter Chiam Teong Tee and Ir. Dr Ooi Teik Aun. The Penang visit covers the visit to the Tsunami sites at Kuala Muda in Kedah and Batu Ferringgi and Balik Pulau in Penang. The evening lecture was held at 6.00 to 8.00 p.m. on 28 April, 2005 at the Komplek Masyarakat Penyayang Hall. The people actively involved in the organisation of the lecture were IEM Penang Chairman, Ir. Vincent Tan Huai Meng, Ir. Ng T. Y., Ir. Ng Sin Chie, Ir. Ooi Chin Aun and others from the IEM Secretariat, without their dedicated support and effort, the visit would not had been possible.

We left Kuala Lumpur at 7.30 a.m. by car, an old Mercedes but comfortable enough for four of us. Ir. Peter Chiam decided to come along after some persuasion. The visit to Penang is timely for Peter as he has not been back to Penang for the last ten years. For a Penangite, a visit to Penang is often nostalgic and brings back fond memories. It is nice to be in Penang again. We had a very tight programme for our visit to Penang. We arrived at Sungei Petani in Kedah at about 11.30 a.m., half an hour ahead of schedule. We were given a briefing with video presentation by the Assistant District Officer and later visited the Tsunami site at Kuala Muda. Photo 1 shows briefing in progress and Photos 2a to 2c show the scenes of damage to properties. The last



Photo 2a: Damage to houses at Kuala Muda



Photo 2b: View of damage to car at Kuala Muda



Photo 2c: Another view of damage to property at Kuala Muda

time that tsunami struck Kuala Muda was in 1880s according to record passed down by words of mouth. The briefing was arranged by the Penang IEM through the Chief Minister's office in Penang. We were informed that there were about 1000 houses damaged by Tsunami with about



Photo 1: Briefing by Asst. D. O. Kuala Muda



Photo 3: Temporary accommodation for tsunami victims



Photo 4: Prof. Shuto's lecture in progress

4000 people directly affected. The victims were housed in longhouse type temporary accommodation some few kilometers from the site (see Photo 3). We were lucky to have Ir. Ooi Choon Aun, an ex-D.I.D. senior engineer now working on the Muda Dam project as a Chief Resident Engineer to accompany us on the visit to the Tsunami affected sites in Kuala Muda. In fact on 26 December 2004, Ir. Ooi felt the tremor in Sungei Petani at about 9.00 a.m. but did not expect anything unusual had happened and later in the morning sent his friend to Penang airport to catch a flight. As he was early for the flight he took his friend for a tour of Penang in Balik Pulau and witnessed for himself the horror that happened at that time in the streets of Balik Pulau at about 1.30 p.m. that day. People were dashing around in panic and there were police with dead bodies laid by the roadside. Ir. Ooi took some pictures of the damages caused by the Tsunami. These pictures were given to Prof. Shuto in a CD-Rom.

We left Kuala Muda at about 2.30 p.m. and went straight to the place of lecture to test out the projection facilities in Penang at about 4.00 p.m. By the time we checked in at Parkroyal at Batu Ferringhi, it was already 4.45 p.m. Poor Professor Shuto, he only had 30 minutes at the hotel to freshen up before we had to leave for the evening lecture scheduled for 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. The lecture was well attended by more than sixty people and there were a lot of interesting discussions from the floor. Photo 4 shows the lecture in progress. An important message from Prof. Shuto at the lecture is education and timely information for the people so that they know how to deal with the arrival of Tsunami. It was a pity that the Chief Minister of Penang and his team had to be in Kuala Lumpur for the Biotechnological Week that was opened by the Prime Minister.

The Chairman IEM Penang Branch, Ir. Vincent Tan Huei Meng and his committee hosted a dinner at a seaside seafood restaurant near the Esplanade. By the time we got back to the hotel, it was nearly 11.00 p.m. It must have been a very tiring day for Prof. and Mrs. Shuto. The only consolation was everything went well.

The next morning, the IEM Penang Branch arranged for us to visit the Tsunami sites at Batu Ferringhi and Balik Pulau. We met the Assistant District Officer and the welfare officer from the Batu Ferringhi District office at the site of the worst hit area in Batu Ferringhi. The highlight of the visit was the floating Mosque at Tanjung Bungah. The Mosque

was virtually untouched while the adjacent buildings suffered severe damages from the effect of Tsunami (see photos 5 and 6). The victims of the Tsunami were housed in long houses nearby while plans for more permanent accommodation are being drawn up. The Batu Ferringhi site faces the Andaman Sea and therefore has the most direct effect from Tsunami.

We left Batu Ferringhi at about 10.00 a.m. for an appointment with the district office at about 11.00 a.m. in Balik Pulau where we were given a video briefing on the disaster and later visited the Tsunami site at Pasir Panjang. The tragedy at Pasir Panjang involved mostly people who were there for picnic. The site faces the Malacca Straits and when seawater receded very far from the shorelines, a lot of picnickers went after the fish. When



Photo 5: Floating mosque untouched by Tsunami Batu Feringghi



Photo 6: Severe damages from Tsunami Batu Feringghi



Photo 7: Damaged wall and loss of lives at Pasir Panjang beach

the seawater rose again many were swept away with serious injuries resulting in numerous casualties. We left Balik Pulau at about 1.00 p.m. It was a Friday and our Muslim friends had to go to the Mosque. They were deed very helpful.

We arrived at Macalister Road to have our late lunch at the 3 sisters' coffee shop that Ir. Peter Chiam used to frequent in his young days. The Shutos were treated to the Penang Char Kueh Teow and Loh Bak by Peter and they thoroughly enjoyed the Penang delicacies. We then proceeded to Church Street in the waterfront area of old town Penang to visit the Peranakan House that was arranged specially by Ir. Vincent Tan. The cultural heritage of the Penang Baba going back to the 1890s was so well preserved and worth visiting that I could see that the Shutos were very impressed and pleased. The visit to Penang was indeed very hectic and strenuous even for my old car that the power steering hose started too leak and had to be repaired. The car breakdown had given us a chance to have dinner with my brother-in-law and my sister in Butterworth. We left Butterworth at 7.00 p.m. and arrived at the PJ Hilton at 11.15 p.m. It was indeed a very tiring trip for the Shutos and I offer my sincere apology for this happy mess.

On 30 April, the lecture at the PJ Hilton went on exceedingly well with an audience of well over 170. It was full house with absolutely no free seats available. There was active participation from the floor and press interest as published in the Star Paper on the following morning. The visit has put IEM as well as Prof. Shuto in the News on the subject of Tsunami. Thanks to Prof. Bala and Dr Ting for their initiatives in making all the arrangement for the lecture.

In the evening, my wife and I had a Japanese dinner with the Shutos followed by a night tour of Kuala Lumpur City Centre including the Twin Towers. At the dinner, I asked Prof. Shuto whether he would like to travel to KLIA by ERL and have a glimpse of Putra Jaya and he agreed.

On 1 May, my wife and I picked up Prof. Shuto and his wife from the PJ Hilton at 6.00 a.m. and checked in at KL Sentral for their flight to Singapore after which I accompanied them to KLIA by ERL and we parted only at the international departure gate of the KLIA. I considered the visit by Prof. Shuto a success and the lecture well received by the audience and the Press. ■