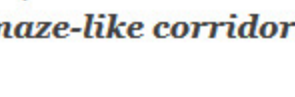


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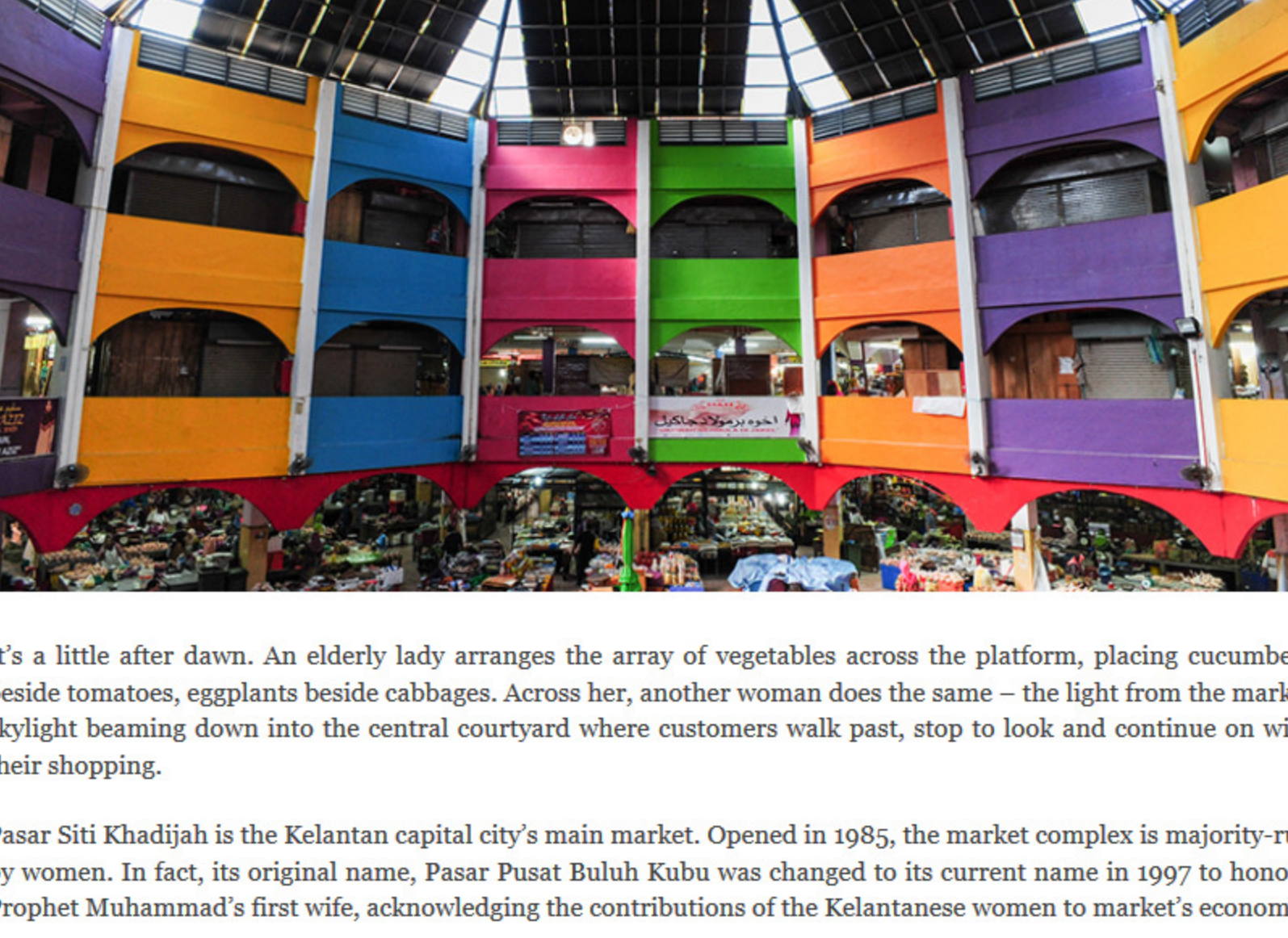
# MATRIARCHAL MARKETPLACE

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31 May 2016



*In Kota Bharu, there is a central market that is run by a majority of women traders. We walk through the maze-like corridors and bargain for stories.*



It's a little after dawn. An elderly lady arranges the array of vegetables across the platform, placing cucumbers beside tomatoes, eggplants beside cabbages. Across her, another woman does the same – the light from the market skylight beaming down into the central courtyard where customers walk past, stop to look and continue on with their shopping.

Pasar Siti Khadijah is the Kelantan capital city's main market. Opened in 1985, the market complex is majority-run by women. In fact, its original name, Pasar Pusat Buluh Kubu was changed to its current name in 1997 to honour Prophet Muhammad's first wife, acknowledging the contributions of the Kelantanese women to market's economy.

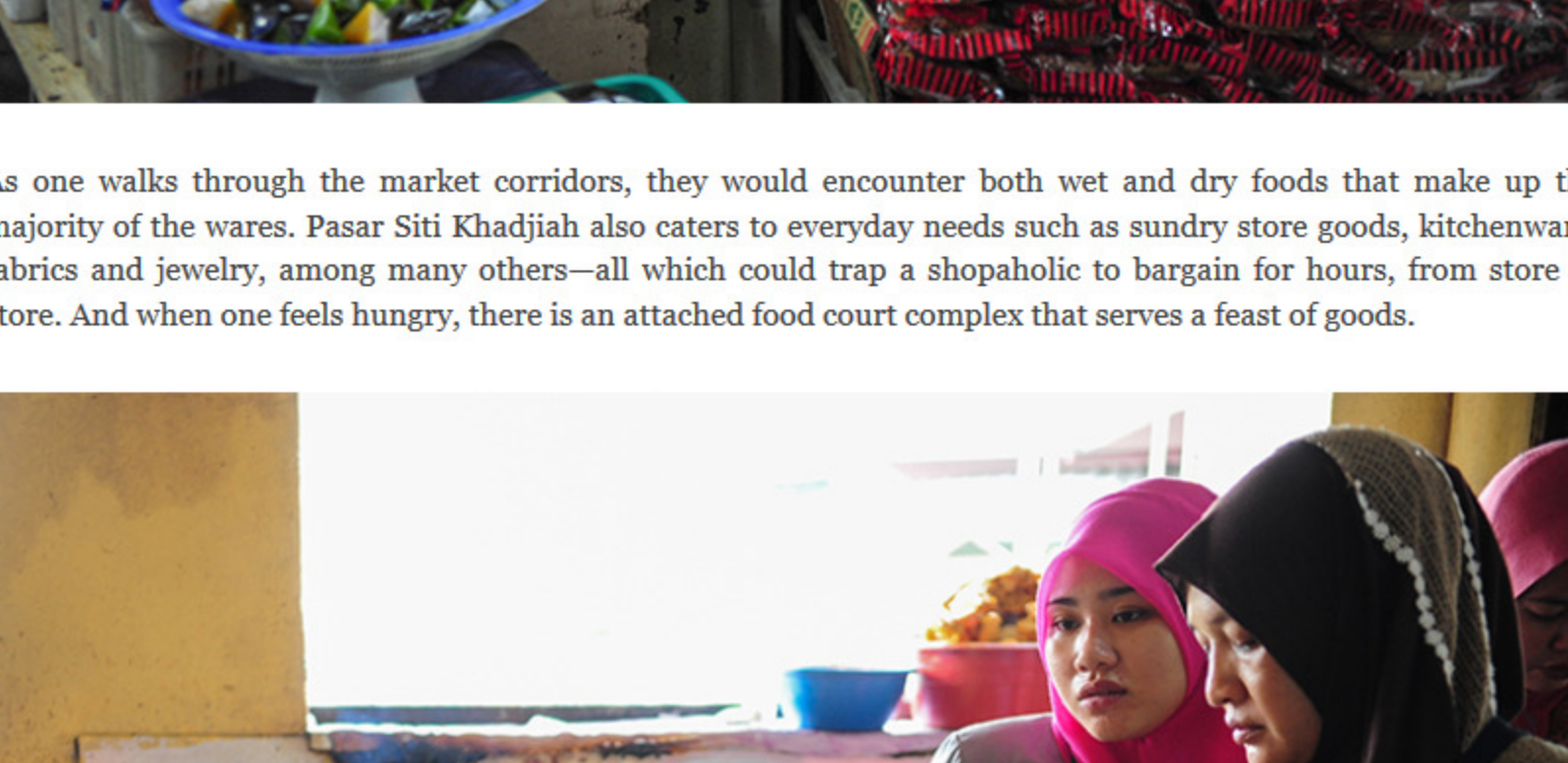


Pasar Siti Khadijah is sprawling with life and goods for just about anyone. Locals would flock to the market early in the morning to get their fresh supplies of vegetables, poultry and seafood, all found in the ground floor of the market. Upon entry, one would be greeted by an aroma familiar to a market: wet, sharp and entirely enticing to those familiar to the kitchen.

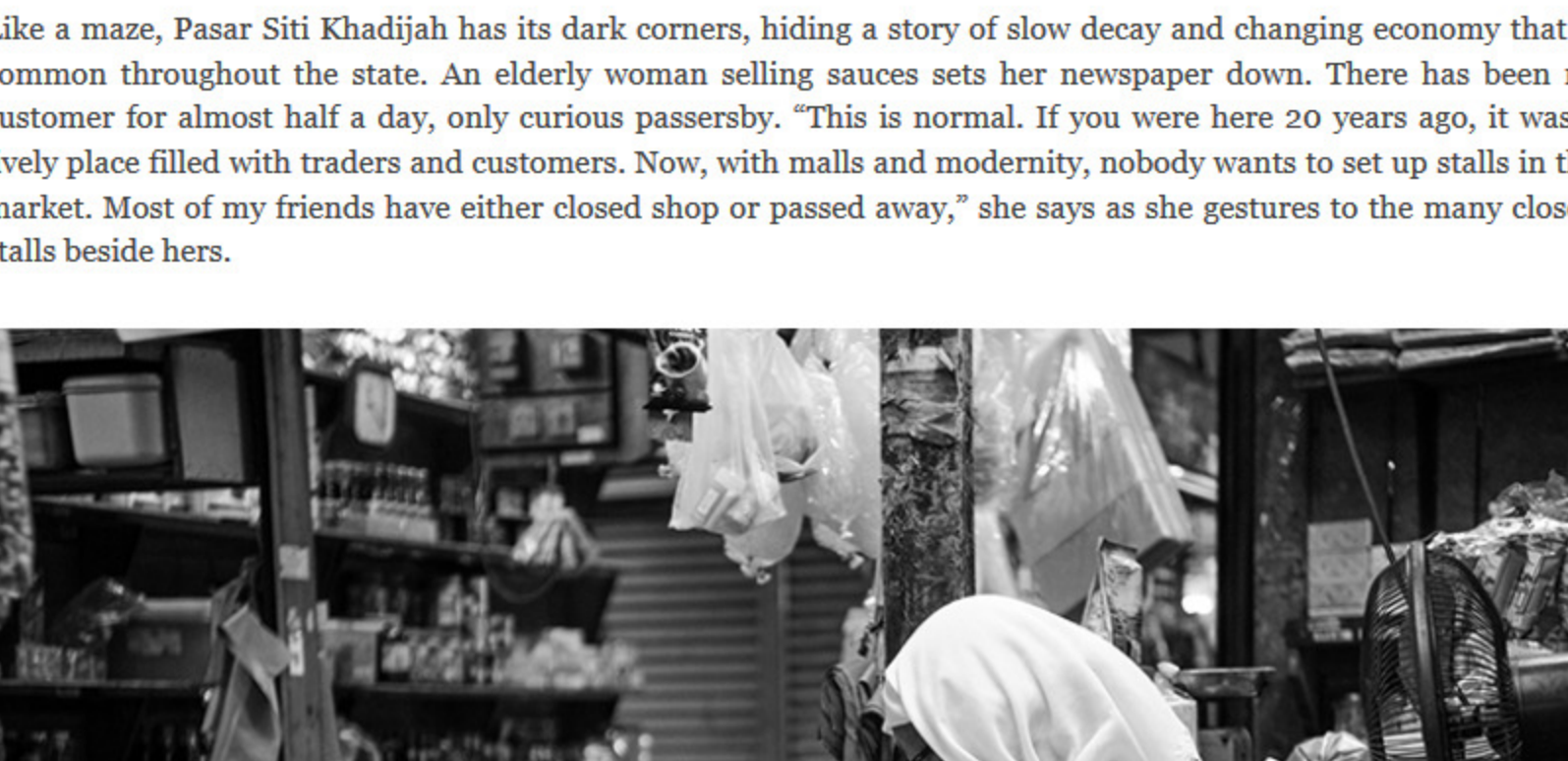
"It's all about rezeki. We lay out the goods and hope that the customers would feel compelled to buy from us. Of course, a little bit of bargaining and a good deal helps," a middle-aged woman says as she completes a transaction of *keropak lekor* and *serunding*. As one walks past the stalls, the traders would call out to them, offering samples. The moment one makes eye contact – that's when the sales pitch begins. Kelantanese women possess a strong entrepreneurial spirit; one that takes form when they're in their element of business.



As one walks through the market corridors, they would encounter both wet and dry foods that make up the majority of the wares. Pasar Siti Khadijah also caters to everyday needs such as sundry store goods, kitchenware, fabrics and jewelry, among many others—all which could trap a shopaholic to bargain for hours, from store to store. And when one feels hungry, there is an attached food court complex that serves a feast of goods.



Like a maze, Pasar Siti Khadijah has its dark corners, hiding a story of slow decay and changing economy that is common throughout the state. An elderly woman selling sauces gets her newspaper down. There has been no customer for almost half a day, only customers. "This is normal. If you were here 20 years ago, it was a lively place filled with traders and customers. Now, with malls and modernity, nobody wants to set up stalls in the market. Most of my friends have either closed shop or passed away," she says as she gestures to the many closed stalls beside hers.



In recent years, the Kelantan state government has been renovating the market. The central courtyard walls that used to be pale green are now painted in a series of bright colours. The decades-old structure is being rebuilt and the old concrete floor changed. But there is little promise that this facility would rejuvenate Pasar Siti Khadijah. As one walks past the women traders, the market is a reminder of the silent strength of women, their place in the economy and a society that is built by their resilience.

By Aziff Azuddin  
Photos by Aziff Azuddin

NO REST FOR THE WKND HAIRITAGE



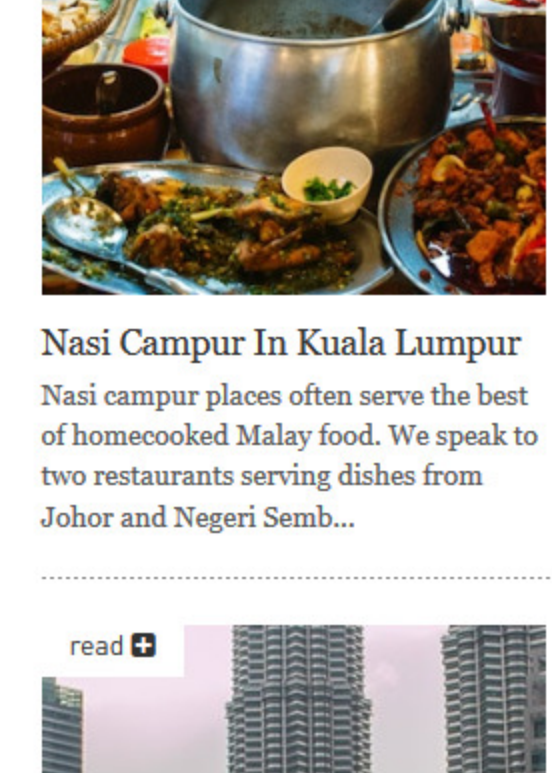
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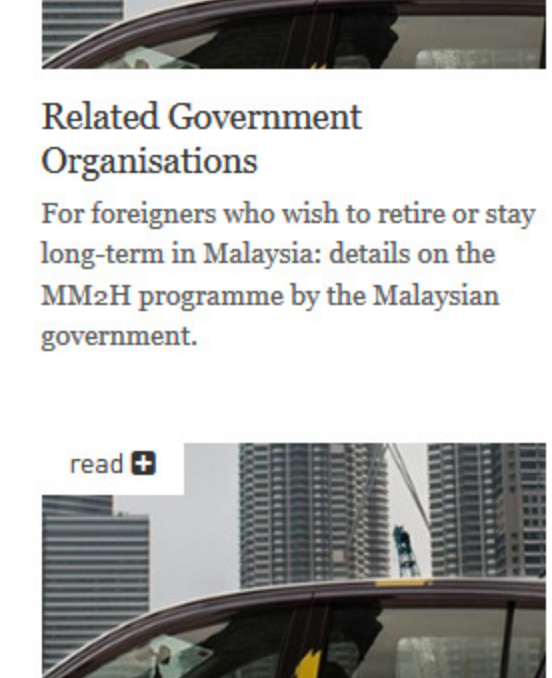
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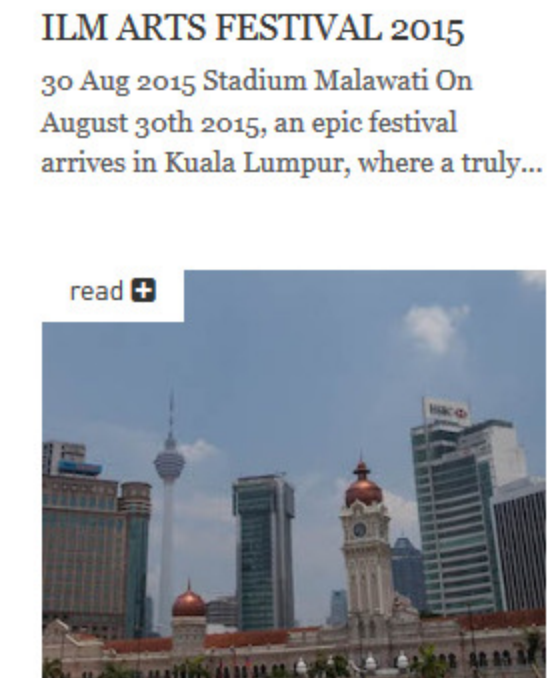
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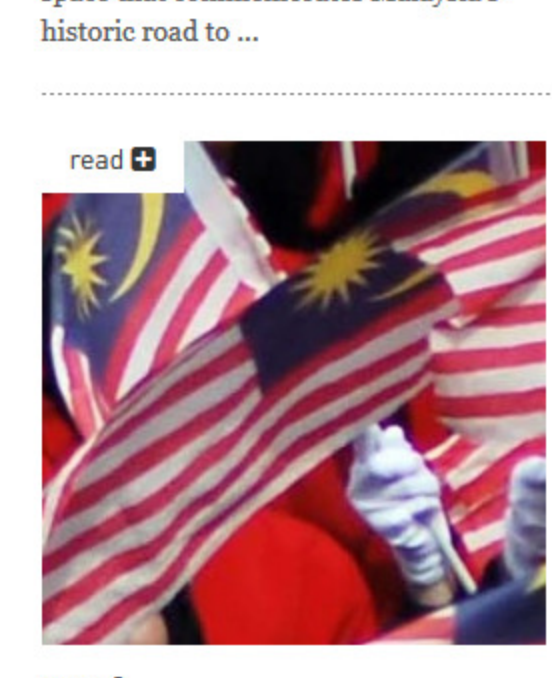
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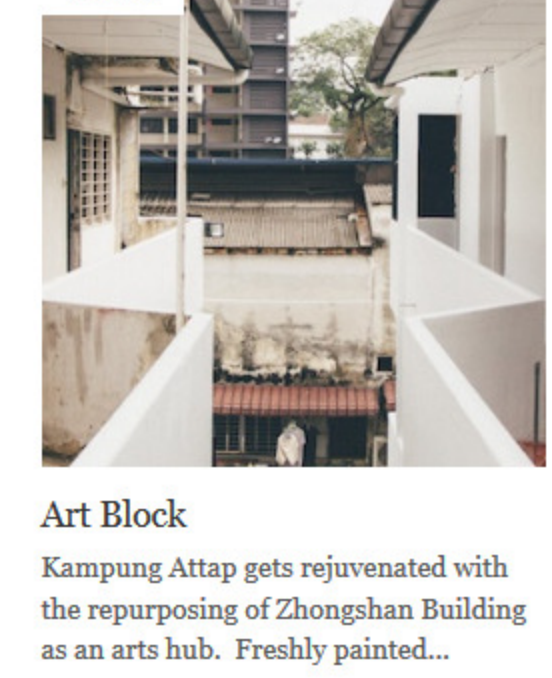
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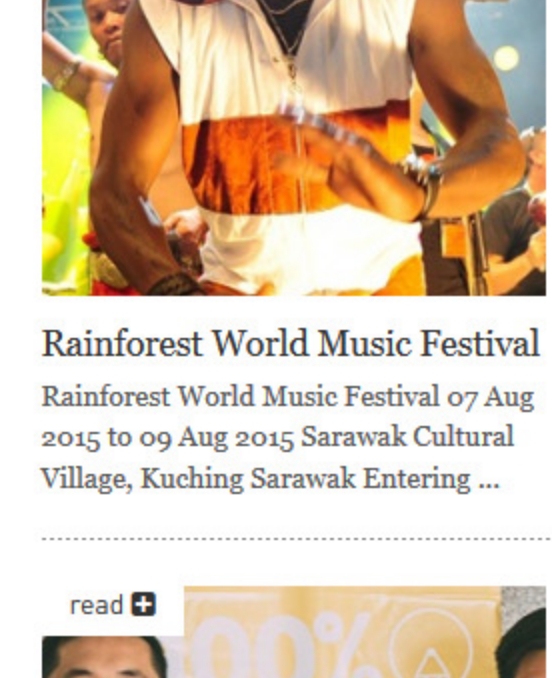
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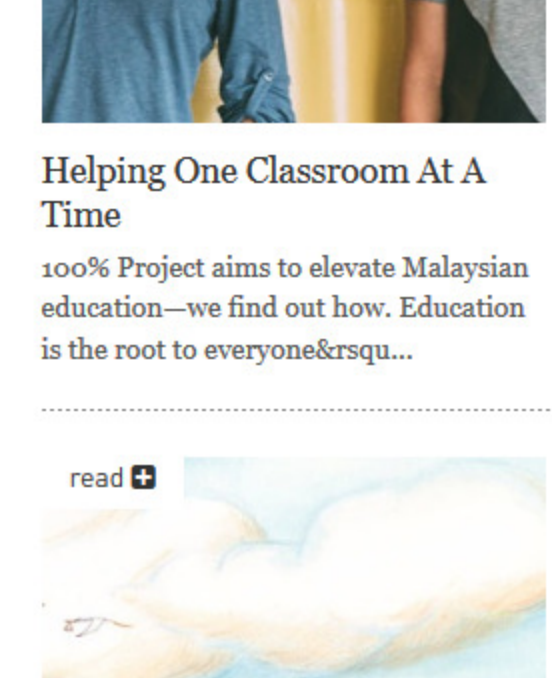
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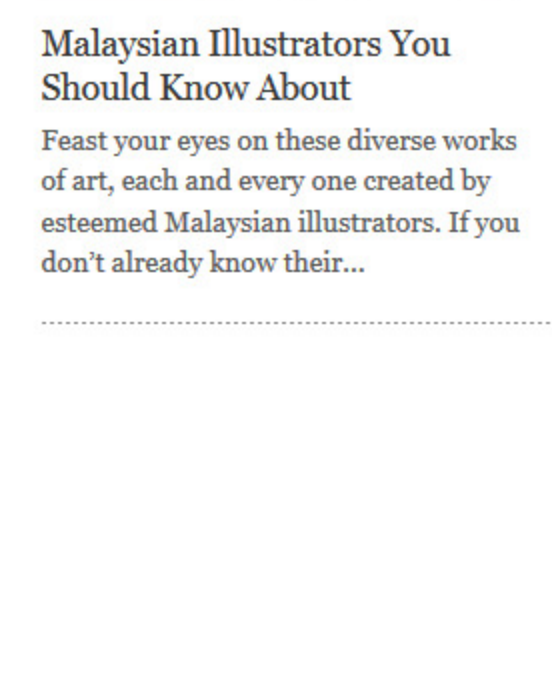
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