

## **(JUST A MINUTE)**

### **George Town goes dark for Earth Hour 2014**

**By Daniel Lee**

*Standfirst: Earth Hour is a global initiative where individuals and businesses switched off their lights for an hour from 8:30pm to take a symbolic stand against climate change. And on March 29, George Town went dark.*

Town Hall was buzzing with activity. Music and performances captivated the crowd, many of whom were visiting the various booths, sampling food. Squeals of delight broke through the air when a panda, WWF's adorable mascot, made an appearance.

It was Earth Hour 2014 at the Esplanade, the first collaborative event between WWF and the Penang State Government. The event, which included an inaugural 3.5km night walk, was aimed at engaging thousands of Penangites to, in the words of WWF-Malaysia's conservation director Dr Ramakrishna, "Raise greater awareness of green living among Penangites and tourists in the city today and beyond".

Many were pleasantly surprised when Penang State Executive Councillor for Local Government, Traffic Management and Flood Mitigation Chow Kon Yeow joined the main event. He was there to fulfil the pledge he made to walk the entire 3.5km with us that night if the number of registered participants reached 1,000.

And we were 2,000 strong.

Not only did he have to finish the walk, but in line with the Earth Hour celebrations and the "Cleaner, Greener, Safer & Healthier Penang" initiative, he would also, on behalf of the Penang Municipal Council, plant 60 trees of four types of endangered indigenous species at the Queensbay interchange.

The countdown began at 8.29pm. At the end of the countdown, the lights that illuminated Town Hall were switched off, signalling the start of Earth Hour 2014 and the night walk along George Town's heritage trail.

But first, as before any strenuous activity, a short warm-up exercise was required. Led by sculpted individuals, the crowd, including Chow, copied the moves of the instructors with much enthusiasm.

Soon, we were walking, spilling into Light Street, veering into Farquhar Street, and then to Penang Street. Along the trail, the usually well-lit heritage buildings were dark but still easily visible from adjacent light sources. Halfway through Chulia Street, a steady shower began, but Chow and Dr. Ramakrishna walked on to finish and complete their pledge. It is always nice to see leaders walking the talk, pun intended!

By the time many of us reached Beach Street, back to where the night's event began, those without umbrellas or rain jackets were soaked to the skin. Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng arrived to end the night with a lights-on ceremony and an indicative speech on Penang's lead in green environmentally-

sound habits. Turns out our recycling rate was 24% this year alone, which is well above the national target of 22% by the year 2020.

Judging by the crowd, there is hope for more to come and for WWF to have a greater presence in Penang – sentiments that Dr. Ramakrishna shares. She hinted at her desire to see George Town and other Malaysian cities take up Earth Hour's year-long City Challenge competition to reduce carbon footprints, promote renewable energy and prepare for climate change. It is a challenging endeavour that has already been accepted by some of our South-East Asian neighbours.

Motivated by the events that transpired that night, it isn't wrong to dream of a truly cleaner and greener Penang.