

Malaysians to receive UK Honours for services towards fighting cancer and preserving history

Two Malaysians, retired dentist Dr Vinod Kumar Joshi and adventure guide Tham Yau Kong will receive Honorary Awards from the UK, according to the Honorary Awards List which was announced in the UK today.

Dr Joshi, founder of the Mouth Cancer Foundation in the UK and formerly a National Health Service (NHS) Consultant in Restorative Dentistry, will be awarded the Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for exceptional services to fighting cancer.

Dr Joshi established the Mouth Cancer Foundation in 2004 to provide professional support to patients, carers and survivors of mouth cancer as well as head and neck cancers. Apart from connecting patients through a community forum and website, he also started his long-running campaign to encourage all dentists to be alert to the risk of mouth cancer through screening; and created a hugely successful self-examination programme where the general public can check themselves for mouth cancer at home.

Dr Joshi retired from the NHS in 2011 to join the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur as a consultant where he helped set up a restorative dentistry oncology clinic for head and neck cancer. He remains in the Mouth Cancer Foundation's Board of Trustees.

Tham, a Sabah-based adventure guide and military historian will receive the Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for outstanding services in environmental, historical and cultural conservation.

Tham was the first person to research, trace and walk the exact route of the infamous 160-mile long Sandakan to Ranau Death Marches of 1945, during which some 2000 British and Australian Prisoners of War died. Tham has been sharing his knowledge and experiences for the benefit of others including hundreds of visiting UK schools groups and in support of wartime history-focussed expeditions by contingents of the UK Armed Forces.

His Excellency Charles Hay, the British High Commissioner to Malaysia, said that the UK recognises the important contribution of Dr Joshi and Tham.

He said:

Throughout his successful career in the UK and Malaysia, Dr Joshi's dedication and service to fighting cancer has simply been exemplary. On realising the huge psychological impact of mouth cancer on patients, carers and survivors, Dr Joshi created the much needed support network to connect like-minded patients, which evolved into a charity. As well as sharing a wealth of resources on

mouth cancer, Dr Joshi and his Foundation have also been instrumental in encouraging screening as early diagnosis saves lives.

Hay also congratulated Tham on his well-deserving MBE award:

Tham's passion has led him to rediscovering and conserving the Sandakan-Ranau Death March route, a piece of history that is important to both the UK and Malaysia. He has also been generous in sharing his knowledge and research with students groups and the UK Armed Forces, as well as connecting people including with descendants of the Prisoners of War.

Responding to news of his OBE award, Dr Joshi said:

This award means a lot to me and to the charity. It is a recognition of the perseverance of all those patients, carers and the many supporters who have sustained the vision I had for the charity from its inception and over the years. It is a big tribute to them. Without them, we would not have got this far. Sadly, some are no longer here. God bless them.

Tham was very pleased with his award. He said:

I had the greatest feeling and utmost gratitude when I heard about the MBE award. The Sandakan Ranau Death March route was lost for 60 years and tracing it in 2005 was an accomplishment in itself. It also meant a lot to me being able to see and to guide the relatives of the Prisoners of Wars when they walked through the route and visited the memorials. I helped keep the history alive, I am glad my effort is acknowledged through this award.

Dr Joshi and Tham will be receiving their respective awards later in the year.