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This picture shows a general view of the Jemaph Pizza Kayu Api restaurant-started by a Malaysian family to make ends meet during the economic downturn due to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic-in Jemaph. — AFP photos



A worker preparing pizza ingredients at the Jemaph Pizza Kayu Api restaurant.



This picture shows pizzas being bake inside a wood-fired oven.



This picture shows customers eating pizzas at the Jemaph Pizza Kayu Api restaurant.



Workers preparing pizzas at the Jemaph Pizza Kayu Api restaurant.

PANDEMIC PIZZA: MALAYSIAN FAMILY COOKS UP SOLUTION TO VIRUS WOES

A Malaysian family have cooked up a tasty solution to their economic woes during the pandemic by opening a backyard pizzeria that has proved a hit in their sleepy village. Millions of people around the world lost their jobs this year as governments introduced economically damaging lockdowns to curb the spread of the coronavirus. But one family in a Malaysian village managed to turn a bumper profit during the downturn by opening up an eatery serving wood-fired pizzas from their home. Based in Jemaph, 120 kilometers (75 miles) south of the capital Kuala Lumpur, the business offers pizzas with herbs and spices, and cut pineapples mixed with meat or tuna, along with a heavy layer of mozzarella and cheddar cheese.

"We did this to get some pocket money," said Raudhah Hassan, 35, the eldest of several siblings and mastermind behind the business. "But-praise be to God-what we did has become the talk of the town." Pizzas have been flying out of the family's makeshift kitchen since late April, a month after authorities implemented curbs that confined people to their homes and saw the closure of most businesses. Restaurants were allowed to keep operating and, after Raudhah's shop selling headscarves saw a fall in business and some of her siblings had their pay cut, the family decided to open the pizzeria. "We were stranded here. We said, we have to do something," explained Raudhah, who runs the business at her parent's house with the help of other family members. The family built a stone oven in their backyard to roll out a few dozen pizzas in time for the holy month of Ramadan in the Muslim-majority country, when the faithful typically enjoy lavish meals to break their fast. The business quickly



Photo shows a pepperoni pizza at the Jemaph Pizza Kayu Api restaurant.

became a hit. "Some pizzas are too salty, but these are really nice," said first-time customer Nurliyana Hidayah. "I will come here again."

The family have now added a shop to their home and hired about 20 people from the village to make up to 800 wood-fired pizzas daily, five days a week. More than 800,000 people have lost their jobs in Malaysia this year as the virus pushed the country into recession, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said in October. Malaysia has largely lifted the toughest of its restrictions and most businesses are operating again, although it has been a battling a virus resurgence in recent weeks.— AFP



This picture shows pizzas being baked inside a wood-fired oven.

The Vietnamese designer convincing the young to choose tradition

Made from delicate silk, intricately embroidered and with vast, flared sleeves: Vietnamese 19th-century outfits do not seem a perfect fit for life in the country's hectic modern cities. But Nguyen Duc Loc, a 28-year-old entrepreneur, together with his 11-strong production team in Hanoi, is convinced the attire of their ancestors can make a return to modern-day living. "My ambition is that in any Vietnamese wardrobe, as well as suits, trousers, dresses, there will be at least one outfit based on an ancient style to wear on important occasions," like festivals and weddings, he told AFP.

Based on his own research, Loc and his company Y Van Hien reproduce outfits largely from the Nguyen dynasty that spanned close to a century and a half from 1802 — a time when the ruling class wore extravagant, brightly coloured designs embellished with symbols of power, such as dragons. He wants everyone, both men and women, to appreciate the "astounding beauty" of ancient imperial-style dress, he says, and understand the part this clothing plays in Vietnam's cultural history.

In one of their first major commissions, Y Van Hien was asked to produce costumes for Phuong Khau, an 18-episode YouTube drama about the emperor and empress of the Nguyen Dynasty. The company—which was set up in 2018 — has also designed costumes for singers, music videos and fashion shows.

Preserving culture

Despite some criticism that the designs have strayed too far from the originals, they are also seeing a growing interest among young people. Many choose to rent an outfit for a photoshoot, with prices starting at \$17. "I think ancient-style costumes... are part of Vietnamese culture that we need to preserve," said Pham Trang Nhung, a 22-year-old student who had come to see Loc's designs. "I think young people today know more about Western dress." Blossoming curiosity over outfits worn by generations past comes as officials from the sports and culture department in the central province of Thua Thien-Hue began wearing the traditional "ao dai"—a long tunic worn over trousers—one day a



Nguyen Duc Loc, founder of the Y Van Hien company, speaking during an interview.

month as a way to promote and preserve cultural values.

Although a far more comfortable and modern prospect than royal 19th-century clothing, some say they are too restrictive and impractical in today's world. Nevertheless, a simplified version of a woman's ao dai still forms part of some school uniforms in the south and central regions, is worn by flight attendants on flag carrier Vietnam Airlines and is

embraced by many on special occasions.

Social media shows plenty of pictures of young women posing in traditional dress—and with more than a dozen Facebook groups catering to those interested in ancient designs, some aficionados have even banded together to create a rival design company to Loc's. Nguyen Duc Binh, an editor of an arts magazine and an expert on traditional culture, said the attraction among the young stems from a desire to assert themselves, and their pride in their country, in a similar way to the youth of other Asian nations. "In some more developed countries such as Japan and South Korea, traditional costumes can be seen as icons for the young people to look at," he said. Young Vietnamese "admire those countries' development" and "they have tried to find some traditional things" from their own country's past to celebrate.— AFP

'Migration corridor'

Fanle, aged in her 30s, is the last fertile female. The father of the baby is believed to be Fouaf, the group's dominant male, or another chimp called Jeje. Both are in their forties. Soumah said females aged between eight and 12 have been recorded leaving Bossou to join other groups—a trek that requires them to cross the open savannah—but "this migration is one way," as chimps are usually loath to venture out into the open. Female chimps are capable of having offspring every four or five years, which means that Fanle "by herself will not be able to reproduce the social dynamic of the group," in terms of numbers and genetic diversity, Soumah cautioned.

But other means are available to buttress the Bossou population after the unexpected birth. The reserve is looking at ways of creating, with foreign help, a "migration corridor" to enable two-way traffic between the isolated community and their cousins in the hills. Eleven hectares of forest have been planted in 2020, and 26 hectares are scheduled for 2021. Another possibility is to introduce young females into the tribe—an idea that has its critics, "who contend that this is a group living in the wild, which should deal with its own natural destiny," Soumah said. The big question now is about what to name her baby. "We are going to invite prominent figures, the local authorities, partners we work with, to find one for her," Soumah said.— AFP



This photograph shows student Pham Trang Nhung (right) posing next to an outfit based on traditional patterns and styles at the Y Van Hien company studio in Hanoi.



Student Pham Trang Nhung posing for a photograph in an outfit based on traditional patterns and styles at the Y Van Hien company studio.



Nguyen Duc Loc, founder of the Y Van Hien company, checking an outfit based on traditional patterns and styles at his workshop in Hanoi.— AFP photos

Baby chimp gives hope for Guinea's famous ape tribe

A dwindling tribe of chimpanzees in Guinea that gained global fame for uncanny abilities to use tools has a glimmer of hope after its last fertile female gave birth. The tiny community of apes lives in a forest around the village of Bossou, in the far southeastern corner of the country. Scientists have trekked to the remote location for decades to study the chimps' remarkable use of tools. They include the use of a stone hammer and anvil to crack open nuts—the most sophisticated act ever observed of humanity's genetically closest relative. But the number of chimps at Bossou has slumped to single figures. The tribe is dying off and cannot be replenished by neighboring chimp communities because forest destruction has left it isolated.

But after years of sad decline, there has been good news, said Aly Gaspard Soumah, director of the Bossou Environmental Research Institute. Guides last week spotted the group's last fertile female, Fanle, clutching a tiny baby on her belly, Soumah told AFP. "There's no doubt about it," he said by phone. "Three days ago we were able to confirm the (baby's) sex using binoculars, because they were in the trees at the time—it's a female."

Villagers 'erupted in joy'

The Bossou apes have a unique relationship with the village population. The animals live in the wild but share the territory and its resources with the locals, who protect the chimps, believing them to be the reincarnation of their ancestors. The villagers were jubilant when they heard about the birth, Soumah said. "Everyone, young and old, men and women, erupted in joy—the atmosphere was incredible." Bossou is part of the Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve, a UNESCO-listed site located on the borders with Ivory Coast and Liberia that rises above the surrounding savannah. The famous apes live in forest of 320 hectares (790 acres).

But they are cut off from other chimps, which live on the slopes of Mount Nimba, because of deforestation. Locals practice a traditional slash-and-burn form of agriculture that leaves forest cover fragmented. "It's a geographical and genetic isolation," Soumah explained. Until 2003, the number of Bossou chimps was relatively stable, with around 21 individuals, Soumah said. But seven died of influenza in 2003, and others passed away in the following years, leaving just three adult males and four adult females before the latest birth. Of these, three are aged over 60, while the youngest is an eight-year-old male.