

Daim: From M'sia's economic steward to Aceh's silent benefactor

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Bernamea

The late former finance minister Daim Zainuddin is remembered not only for his leadership in steering the nation's economy through challenging times but also for his charitable work, particularly in Aceh, Indonesia.

While many are familiar with Daim's role during Malaysia's navigation of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, few are aware of his behind-the-scenes contributions in Aceh, a region at the northern tip of Sumatra - and his initiatives have left a lasting impact.

Through two foundations focused on education and community support - areas he believed could drive positive change in the region - Daim made significant contributions.

"Daim has long supported Aceh through philanthropic work carried out via the Zainuddin Foundation and the Pok Rafeah Foundation (named after his mother)," said Fahmi M Nasir, author of the Indonesian-language book "Isu-Isu Kontemporer Wakaf Indonesia" (Contemporary Waqf Issues in Indonesia).

In an article titled “Selamat Jalan Tun Daim: Biar Jasa Jadi Kenangan” (Farewell Tun Daim: Let Your Deeds Be Remembered), Fahmi explained that Daim’s contributions were largely unknown to the public, except for those close to him or who visited Aceh during his trips to educational centres he supported.

Engaging local communities

Daim, whose full name was Che Abdul Daim Zainuddin, passed away last Wednesday at the age of 86.

Fahmi, who was in Malaysia at the time to meet staff from Dr Mahathir Mohamad’s Perdana Leadership Foundation in Putrajaya for a book project, highlighted Daim’s active engagement with local communities.

According to Fahmi, Daim was not only a philanthropist but also actively involved with individuals from Aceh, providing guidance to those in need, including Zainal Arifin, editor-in-chief of Serambi Indonesia.

“Despite his declining health, Daim willingly gave an exclusive interview to Harian Serambi Indonesia,” he said.

Daim’s connection to Indonesia and its top leaders including Professor Yusril Ihza Mahendra, particularly during the financial crisis, was another significant

aspect of his legacy.

Fahmi noted that Daim advised then-president Soeharto to reject loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), arguing that they would have adverse effects on the majority of Indonesians.

This advice was relayed to Yusril, who was sent by Soeharto along with then-finance minister Mar'ie Muhammad to seek Malaysia's perspective and understand its approach to managing the crisis.

Fahmi added that Daim also wrote a foreword for the English-language book "Contemporary Waqf Issues in Indonesia". He urged Fahmi to ensure the book reached Yusril, now the Coordinating Minister for Law, Human Rights, Immigration, and Corrections, as well as another key figure whom Daim believed could aid Aceh's future development.

Deeply personal ties

Fahmi believes Daim's connections were not purely political or economic but deeply personal.

"Daim worked tirelessly to strengthen ties between the two nations, offering advice and expressing a keen interest in addressing major challenges in

Indonesia, particularly in Aceh.”

At one point, Daim mentioned that he was working on his memoir. “The memoir spans thousands of pages and requires further editing before it can be published,” Fahmi said.

Fahmi often accompanied the late Sanusi Junid, former Kedah menteri besar whose parents hailed from Aceh, during meetings with Daim.

Over time, these interactions with Daim grew more frequent, especially when discussing issues related to Aceh and Indonesia. Fahmi, in turn, sought advice on waqf matters.

“Daim was like a mentor, offering suggestions, critiques, and insights into waqf based on his observations as a business and banking figure, as well as his experience serving as finance minister twice,” he added.

- Bernama

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