



Tunku Abdul Rahman (right) made Muhamad Ghazali Shafie project officer for the formation of Malaysia in 1961.

Grizzly's presence was felt on every occasion

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He helped form Malaysia and made his mark on its foreign and economic policies in the early years. But Tun Muhamad Ghazali Shafie tells **SANTHA OORJITHAM** the challenges are greater today

"GRIZZLY, get on with Malaysia!" was Tunku Abdul Rahman's command to the young Muhamad Ghazali Shafie (now a Tun).

The prime minister appointed the permanent secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs (and later the pioneer secretary-general of what is now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) as project officer for the formation of Malaysia in 1961 and, in 1962, to the Cobbold Commission tasked with gathering public opinion in Sabah and Sarawak on the "Malaysia Plan".

It was entirely due to Ghazali "that we managed to get the support of the leaders in Sabah and Sarawak to agree to Malaysia," recalled former Wisma Putra secretary-general Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong (at a recent high tea last month to celebrate Ghazali's 85th birthday in March).

"His presence at the many meetings we organised was crucial to ensure that the outcome would be in our favour."

During World War Two, Ghazali had fought with the Malayan Volunteer Force and Force 136, and he later became Southeast Asia command officer with the anti-Japanese resistance movement, Wataniah.

He played a key role during the confrontation with Indonesia over the formation of Malaysia, recalled another former Wisma Putra secretary-general Tan Sri Zakaria Mohd Ali (also at the high tea).



"It was a tough campaign by a small fledgling diplomatic machinery against the far bigger and more experienced Indonesian adversary. 'King Ghaz' turned the campaign into a baptism of fire for the young officers under his command."

And he helped to reconcile both countries, said Zakaria.

"As a secret emissary, he enjoyed the trust not only of his political masters at home, but of the Indonesian leadership as well, to whom he had access at the highest level, a feat rarely achieved, if ever, by a civil servant."

Ghazali said in written reply to questions from the *New Sunday Times*. "My vision of Malaysia was Tanah Persekutuan, Sabah and Sarawak, Brunei as well as Singapore."

"However, I am happy with what we are today. I always regard Brunei and Singapore as family. Lee Kuan Yew (Singapore's minister mentor) and I remain good friends till today and the Sultan of Brunei is like a son."



Tun Muhamad Ghazali Shafie says his vision of Malaysia was Tanah Persekutuan, Sabah and Sarawak, Brunei as well as Singapore

Both Brunei and Singapore are members of Asean, which Ghazali helped to form in 1967. "Asean rose from the ashes of confrontation," he told *Asiaweek* in 1997.

"Tun Abdul Razak was the deputy prime minister and he instructed me to find a way to solve the problem. (Indonesian president) Suharto agreed.

"He said not only must we end this Confrontation but we must prepare a mechanism so that in future, nobody would try to solve

their problems by confrontation."

Suharto's adviser, Gen Ali Murtopo, and Ghazali "were the workers and we stumbled on the idea of creating Asean. It took two years to talk to the others, with the backroom boys doing the talking. It didn't happen overnight."

In 1990, he chaired the commission tasked with making recommendations to revamp and strengthen Asean's secretariat. And in 1997, he suggested a new model as the regional grouping expanded its membership to 10.

"While most people think of the Malay world in a very narrow nationalistic viewpoint, we should not think (that way)," he told *Asiaweek*. "Right now, we're still using the same model but you are faced with these two groups inside Asean. They are not anti each other."

Ghazali was a member of Umno's supreme council from 1971 to 1984, the MP for Lipis (Pahang) and served in the cabinet under four prime ministers — as minister of special functions, information, home affairs and foreign affairs.

"Whatever I did for the country was with the great help and assistance of my 'Wisma Putra boys'," he said. Former envoys called him their "guru, trainer, taskmaster and even slave driver" at his recent birthday celebrations.

"I call them 'my family'," he responded.

He was home affairs minister when Razak made the groundbreaking visit to China in 1974, affecting the geopolitics of the region and affecting China's thinking about relations with Southeast Asia.

"We always knew that China would one day be one of the economic powers of the world, as it is today," he said. "I'm glad that Malaysia has continued to maintain close ties with China. It's amazing to see (Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri) Najib Razak follow in his father's footsteps."

Ghazali also influenced national and economic policies, serving on the National Operations Council, the National Consultative Council that formulated the New Economic Policy, and the National Unity Advisory Panel, as well as drawing up the Rukun Negara.

Power-sharing was the key to long-term stability, he believed. "The New Economic Policy was formulated to overcome poverty," he said, while "the Rukun Negara was to create a more wholesome, well-balanced, holistic nation".

The aim was for Malaysia to be rich both economically and in "learned people".

After leaving government, he taught at Universiti Kebangsaan

Malaysia and wrote *Ghazali Shafie's Memoir on the Formation of Malaysia*.

Today, said Ghazali, "it is more difficult for the government to manage the country well because of globalisation. More of our people are educated abroad; children ask more questions; we have Astro, the Internet and more foreigners in the country. Achieving balance between tight control and just enough freedom is difficult."

Looking back, he said, "I share a very good relationship with all our prime ministers. Tunku and Razak were good friends and mentors. (Tun Dr) Mahathir (Mohamad) and I are good friends till today. (Datuk Seri) Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is like a son, although he calls me 'Abang' and I call him 'Pak Lah'."

And why did Tunku call him Grizzly? "He thought of me as 'The Big Bear' whose presence was felt at every occasion," Ghazali recalled. Or was it because "I had very messy hair at that time"?

Whatever the reason, it was an apt nickname for the man who helped craft Malaysia's foreign policy for almost 20 years.

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Home affairs minister Tan Sri (now Tun) Ghazali Shafie announcing the death of six communists in 1974.

> 50 YEARS AGO TODAY



Petaling Jaya post office

MAY I appeal to the postal authorities to observe a few points regarding the efficiency of their services in Petaling Jaya:

A letter from Kuala Lumpur postmarked May 29 was delivered on June 1.

Will they recruit one more clerk to enable the other clerk to gossip peacefully.

"First come first serve" rule has been ignored.
Y.H.K.

Petaling Jaya