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King Ghaz, Malaysia's premier statesman

Tun Muhammad Ghazali Shafie's achievements over four decades of public service were many and varied, writes DEVA RIDZAM

MALAYSIA has lost an illustrious son. Tun Muhammad Ghazali Shafie was among a distinguished few great Malaysians who thought far and left a legacy. He was an institution; a man with a great passion for his country. And he always had a vision of a united Malaysia.

Fondly known as "King Ghaz" (and "Jak" to the second prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein), he hailed from Kuala Lipis, Pahang, and read law at the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth and international studies at the University of London.

In 1944, Ghazali entered public service as a probationary officer, and in 1947, was appointed acting district officer of his own hometown. He went on to serve four prime ministers.

His achievements over four decades of public service were many and varied. He was the longest-serving permanent secretary-general of the Ministry of External Affairs, a senator, Minister for Special Functions and Information, Minister of Home Affairs and, finally, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Under our first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, Ghazali helped shape the country's foreign policy and was intimately involved in the formation of Malaysia, the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the International Islamic University Malaysia and more.

He helped bring an end to Indonesia's Confrontation and restore diplomatic relations with this important neighbour, as well as negotiate the eventual surrender of the Communist Party of Malaya.

As a member of the National Consultative Council, he spearheaded efforts to draft the Rukun Negara and formulate the New Economic Policy.

But he is best known as a diplomat of international stature, and one of the outstanding Asian foreign policy minds of his generation.

Many a regional head of state or government knew Ghazali on a first-name basis. He had a solid reputation, and the credibility not just to talk about the future but to do something about it.



Tun Muhammad Ghazali Shafie (1922-2010): a towering personality in Malaysia's foreign policy

He was the dynamo behind the all-Malaysian team under Tunku Abdul Rahman, helping to conceptualise the OIC, establish its organisational structure and write its charter.

As permanent secretary (1959-70) and later as minister of external affairs (1981-84), Ghazali accomplished much with limited resources. In foreign affairs, the country punched above its weight. During his time and for many years after, Wisma Putra was a brand name not only within our own civil service but in the region as well.

Ghazali was genuinely concerned for the self-determination of peoples. As foreign minister, he convened the first United Nations Asia-Pacific Conference on the Question of Palestine in Kuala Lumpur in 1983.

He was a progressive Muslim. While he did not wear faith on his sleeve, he was always concerned for the dignity, welfare and solidarity of the ummah. He travelled widely to many Muslim countries to gain acceptance of the importance of education for the Muslim world. The establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia was largely due to his efforts.

He conceived of HUM as an institution of higher learning to embody, in his own words, "Islamic purposefulness in education". To this end, he insisted that HUM produce Muslim professionals such as doctors, en-

gineers, economists, lawyers and architects upholding the highest ethical standards of Islam.

Ghazali is best known for his contributions to Malaysian foreign policy and diplomacy. Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his farewell speech as foreign minister to Wisma Putra officials in 1989, imparted Ghazali's advice to him on foreign policy: "It has to be credible."

This meant two things. First, we must have an accurate sense of self in terms of our interests as we relate to the world, our capacities and our challenges. Second, our foreign policy must reflect the reality of Malaysia as a country open to the world and outward-looking.

Indeed, Ghazali was the foreign policy guru for a whole generation of Malaysian and Asean diplomats. Malaysian diplomats under his demanding tutelage were schooled as realists. One of his recommended books for budding diplomats was Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

He stressed that civil servants should be required to read widely and be trained to be thorough, attentive and articulate. Above all, they should uphold and defend the national interests.

Ghazali always insisted that our diplomats be courageous and eloquent, and to seek knowledge. In his recollections in *Number One Wisma Putra*, he emphasised that our diplomats "must be intelligent, must

analyse things... must be accurate and up-to-date... they must be fighters..."

At least once a week he made it a point to meet heads of department — the infamous "Prayer Meeting". Every officer prayed not to be singled out for intense questioning. Officers were required to think on their feet and win arguments, not raise voices.

Ghazali wanted Malaysians to play in a different and bigger league. He did his job with formidable intellectual powers and a strategic vision of Malaysia and Asean's future and their place in the world. He often saw more than others could, and was able to perceive complex issues with clarity.

He was praised for his energy and eloquence, wit and clarity. He remained an internationalist (what we would call a "multilateralist" today) throughout his career and even in retirement.

He inspired awe and resentment in equal measure. He certainly did not suffer fools gladly. Indeed, he rarely suffered them at all. Yet he was always respected. Those who thought him pompous and elitist nonetheless recognised him as a man of vision and integrity, consistent on important issues.

Some resented his popularity and independence, and his skill in dealing with the outside world and the media. Ultimately, Ghazali had to go. His departure from public service was a loss to the country. It is time to revive the tradition and brand he left behind in foreign policy and diplomacy.

For starters, perhaps the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations could be renamed the "Ghazali Shafie School of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations" and turned into a full-fledged independent academic institution, where the best minds from our country, the region and the world can come to teach, study and do research.

Ghazali was among our premier statesmen and nation-builders. The nation owes him a debt of gratitude.

• **The writer is a former diplomat**

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