

When the IGP let a man in handcuffs loose on the streets

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PETALING JAYA: In 1981, an escaped “convict” roamed the streets of Kuala Lumpur, with one handcuff dangling from his wrist.

He even went to a locksmith along Jalan Masjid India and requested that the latter pick the handcuffs.

From there he walked to Jalan Pasar where he boarded a mini-bus. During that period, many people had an opportunity to pounce on the “escapee”.

On the bus, no one dared to look at him, turning their eyes elsewhere. One concerned “passenger” asked those in the bus to jointly apprehend the man, but they were reluctant.

The mini-bus driver was asked to drive directly to the Jalan Travers police station, but he refused. The “convict” got off at the railway station and walked away.

That “criminal” was The Malay Mail reporter R Nadeswaran, who carried out a social experiment with the help of the then inspector-general of police (IGP) Hanif Omar.

The police chief had suggested that the newspaper conduct the test, lamenting public apathy and the lack of cooperation in fighting crime.

Hanif, who died on Saturday, aged 85, led the way to mend broken trust between the police and the communities they serve.

He once said in jest that during his time, the uniform was khaki and after he left, it was dark blue, and now, it will become orange (many of them going to jail).

If we talk about pivotal moments in the evolution of the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), Hanif, Malaysia's fourth IGP, holds a defining place.

Under him, PDRM gained a reputation for tough policing, creative crime prevention programmes and the establishment of elite squads.

His negotiating skills and deep knowledge of insurgency also characterised his 20 years as IGP.

Averting a bloody tragedy

Hanif was the district police chief (OCPD) in Ipoh when the communal riots broke out on May 13, 1969.

The then prime minister Abdul Razak Hussein instructed Hanif to report immediately to the National Operations Council (Mageran) in Kuala Lumpur as principal staff officer.

Hanif asked Razak to give him two days as he felt it was important to defuse the tense situation in Chinese-majority Ipoh.

His son, Abdul Rahmat, recalled: "With three of his men, my father went to a sawmill in Lahat where hundreds of Chinese, armed to the teeth, had gathered.

"The Chinese representatives told him that Malays from the surrounding areas were preparing to attack them and had sent their families to seek protection at police stations – an advantage the Chinese did not have.

“My father immediately called the police stations under his charge to evict the Malay families seeking refuge there.

“As a result, the Malays did not attack the Chinese community in Lahat and a potentially bloody tragedy was averted.”

Razak’s shadow

A year into his tenure as IGP, Hanif established the elite counter-terrorism unit, and played a key role in the AIA building hostage crisis the same year.

As a young officer, he had first-hand information on terrorist activities such as the Kalabakan incident in Sabah in 1963, and that knowledge became useful during negotiations regarding national security.

The incident in Kalabakan, situated at the border of East Kalimantan, was triggered by Indonesia’s dissatisfaction with Sabah and Sarawak joining the Federation of Malaysia.

Hanif was known as Razak’s “shadow”. Wherever the second prime minister went, Hanif was not too far behind.

He was 23 years old when he first served as Razak’s security detail in 1962, going to Bangkok to meet the then Thai foreign minister Thanat Khoman to explain about Maphilindo, the proposed nonpolitical confederation of Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia.

A year later, he was in the delegation of the first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman at the Manila Conference in relation to the establishment of Maphilindo.

In 1989, he was among the representatives of the Malaysian government at the peace agreement of Hat Yai, signed by the Communist Party of Malaya with the governments of Malaysia and Thailand.

In 2012, Hanif, who had a basic degree in law, was conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws by the University of Buckingham in the UK for guiding the Malaysian government in achieving peace with the CPM and the communists in Sarawak.

Cheongsam-clad crime buster

In 1966, Albert Mah, the then Kuala Lumpur OCPD district proposed that Blossom Wong, born Wong Kooi Fong, join the criminal investigation department.

He believed the unit dealing with vice, gambling and the black market, could use Wong's undercover skills to curb illegal activities in the federal capital.

Wong then worked with the "Black Cats" in covert operations, often donning a cheongsam, to swoop down on prostitution centres filled with local girls, some of whom were underage.

Impressed with the operations, Hanif drafted Wong to head PDRM's first rape investigation unit.

He made sure Wong and her team received training on the use of DNA technology from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, thereby pioneering the use of DNA evidence in local crime investigations.

Wong went on to head the sexual violence, child abuse and domestic violence division in Bukit Aman, and after spending over 36 years in the force retired in 1993 as superintendent.

About handsome Hanif

Hanif's daughter Norazza said: "When he was IGP, he used to receive so many letters from schoolgirls, young ladies, married ladies.

“One school girl even managed to lie her way and found herself up on his floor, only to be stopped by the people up there.

“But he had a rule. If someone wanted to meet him and it was a woman, he would inform my mother first and bring his officer along to prevent any scandal.”

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