

VAITHI

A Life of Service

by a.kathirasen





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Dear Tun Mahathir,

My experiences with your leadership has been most memorable. My expressions have been always respectful with a complete understanding of the challenges of a leader.

VAITHI

A Life of Service

At true experience indeed,
With Best Wishes to
youm family,


12.8.25



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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This book is a heartfelt collection of personal memories and shared recollections. While every effort has been made to present the content with care and sincerity, some details may not reflect precise historical accuracy. The images and illustrations are intended to evoke reflection and remembrance some are symbolic rather than literal. We acknowledge the subjectivity of memory. If any part unintentionally misrepresents facts or individuals, we offer our sincere apologies. Our sole intention is to honour Vaithilingam's legacy with deep respect and devotion.

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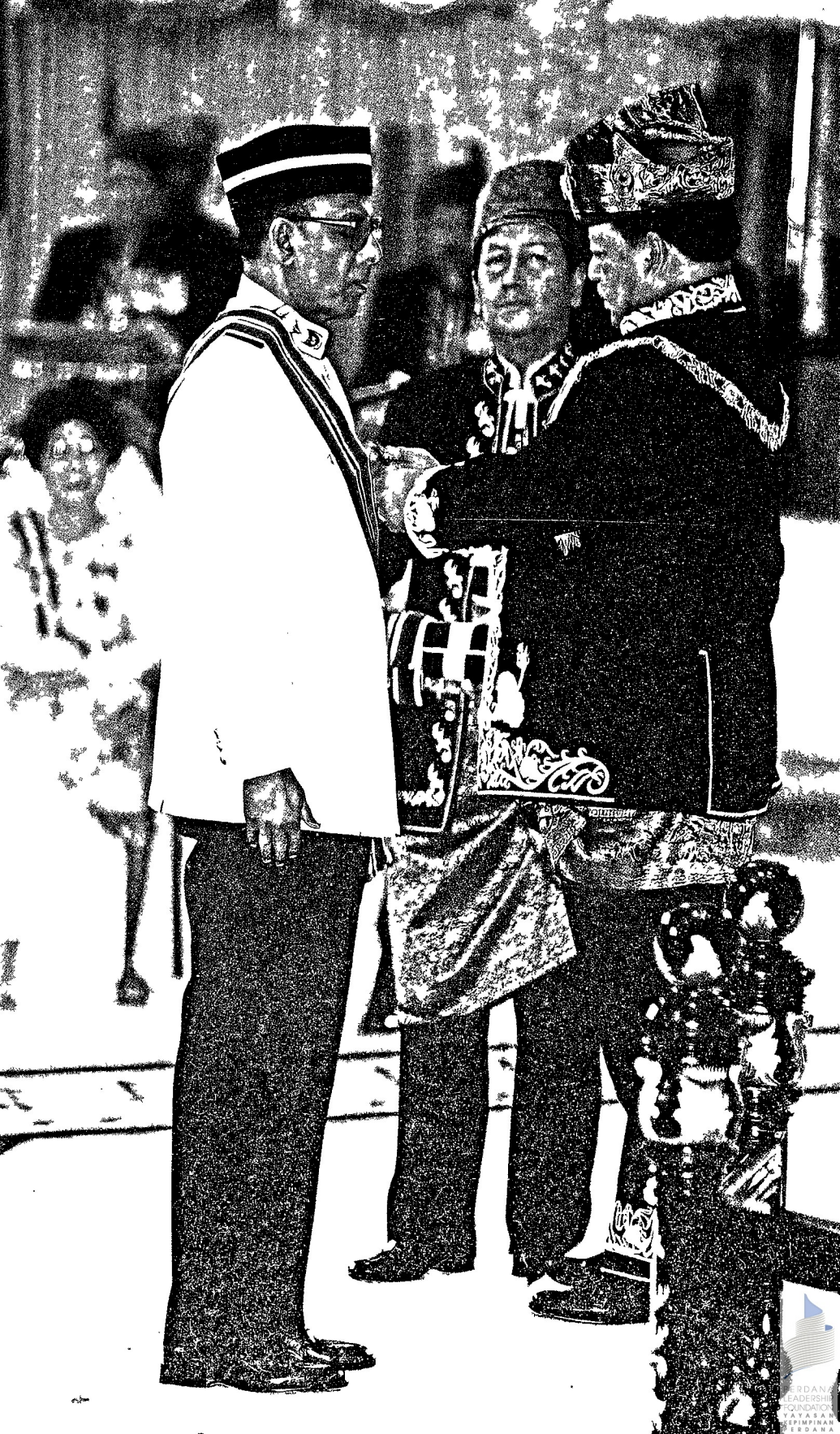
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FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in writing this foreword for the biography of Datuk A. Vaithilingam. Datuk Vaithi is a Malaysian luminary who has dedicated himself in more than one way to enhance the lives of Malaysians in the educational, sporting, social and religious fields.

My association with him started with my involvement initially in the Malaysian Hindu Youth organisation and subsequently in the Malaysian Hindu Sangam. Datuk Vaithi started his social life by being involved in the Hindu Youth Organisation. During our mutual involvement in both the Hindu Youth Organisation and the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, we had great opportunities to discuss and implement strategies for the overall betterment of Malaysian youths and strengthen their religious knowledge and involvement in the Malaysian Hindu community.

During his tenure as the president of the Malaysian Hindu Youth Council, Datuk Vaithi was responsible for the setting up of branches in various parts of the country and streamlining the Hindu Youth Organisation, enabling it to become a strong and powerful organisation. It had good grassroots connectivity and helped ignite the desire for social service amongst the youths. Even after giving up his post as the leader of the Hindu Youth Council, he remained as an adviser to multiple subsequent generations of leaders and guided them so that they could perform their duties and tasks in an effective and successful manner.

As the president of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, he became an icon of the Malaysian Hindu community and it's very vocal custodian and protector. He was adept at navigating sensitive religious issues and was effective in protecting our rights in some very complex situations in Malaysia.

The border between what is allowed and what is not allowed is a fragile line in our country. Given those difficult situations, Datuk Vaithi navigated his pathway in a very skilful manner to continuously remain relevant and respected by the leaders of the nation. His role went beyond the borders of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam and he was actively involved in the inter-religious Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism.

In that body, Datuk Vaithi played a vital role in ensuring the temper and mood within the council created a suitable ecosystem for continuous engagement with the government so as to enhance and preserve inter-religious harmony.

Malaysians are able to preserve religious harmony and practise their religions freely in an unhindered environment due to the relentless and responsible work of those such as Datuk Vaithi.

During my time as a Minister, I had great opportunities to interact with Datuk Vaithi in many community-related issues. I'm thankful for his good suggestions, wisdom and level-headedness which enabled us to mutually resolve many tricky issues. In our multi-religious environment, there's never a day which passes without some event that causes some friction.

We need highly respectable, outspoken personalities who, with a calm and emotionally balanced demeanour, can ensure such tricky issues are managed in an amicable manner so as not to endanger our fragile multi-racial and multi-religious fabric.

Despite his age and ill health, Datuk Vaithi still continues to play an effective role as a much needed adviser to the Malaysia Hindu Sangam. He still attends their functions and continuously provides moral support to all activities organised by the Malaysia Hindu Sangam.

I deeply appreciate the undaunted spirit which continues to drive Datuk Vaithi to continue serving the Malaysian Hindu community and the country as a whole.

I am grateful to be asked to write this foreword for a book about a remarkable man. I take it as a great honour.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish Datuk Vaithi all the best in his life and may the Almighty bless him with great health, happiness and joy as he spends his retirement with his family.

Hari Om. Om Namashivaya

Tan Sri Dr S.Subramaniam

*Former Minister of Health, former President of MIC,
and Patron of Malaysia Hindu Sangam.*



FOREWORD

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be asked to contribute a foreword to this book by our friend, colleague and mentor Datuk A. Vaithilingam.

Vaithi's life story is an integral part of the history and development of sports in our beloved country. His involvement and contributions span across the transition and growth of Malaysia from a colony of the British empire to its status as a developed and appreciated member of the Asian and global community of nations.

On a personal note, Vaithi has had a close relationship with my family, initially through my father N.M. Vasagam who, in addition to being a career-long civil servant in the British colonial government running the country known then as the Federation of Malaya, was also the founding secretary of the federation's Athletics Association and the country's Olympic Committee. Even as a youth, Vaithi was exposed to the presence of my father as a sports official and community elder and perhaps this did play a role in raising his consciousness and interest in sports.

Having finished secondary school, Vaithi applied to become a trainee teacher in 1954 as a 20-year-old and, interestingly enough, he encountered my elder brother's (post war national 880 yards champion Balakrishnan) wife Sakunthala who was teaching in the school that he was posted to, further enhancing the history of our family connection.

It was not surprising that even during his teacher-training period, Vaithi showed interest in sports management and was assigned duties in school by the then sports secretary, his mentor Wan Ariffin Pawanteh. Later, Vaithi was appointed as the assistant sports secretary and was assigned often to attend Selangor Schools Sports Council as well as Malaysian School Sports Council meetings. Thus began Vaithi's entry into the domain of sports administration.

From his involvement in the Selangor Schools Sports Council, Vaithi moved into the state and national sports associations such as

the Selangor AAA and the Malayan Amateur Athletic Union (MAAU) where he focused on creating state and nationwide training courses and examinations for qualified sports officials for the first time - a historical achievement.

This was much appreciated and in the mid-60s, the MAAU president Ghazali Shafie appointed Vaithi as the honorary secretary of its 5-year National Athletics Development Plan, which was chaired by Lee Kwan Yew, who was also the chair of the Technical Officials Development Committee. The main targets of the development plan were to have qualified technical officials, coaches and bitumen tracks in all the states of Malaysia. This was successfully achieved in 1973.

Vaithi's contributions then moved onto the international arena when the country hosted the 1971 & 1977 SEA Games in KL. Vaithi took on the post of the secretary of the Technical Facilities, Venues and Competitions Committee with Dato Sulaiman Amin as chairman. This was a personal landmark achievement for him!

In 1978 Vaithi became a founder member of the ASEAN Schools Sports Council which he served in various capacities, including initially as secretary and later as chairman of the Technical Committee until he retired from government service in 1989.

In the meantime, Vaithi's service with the MAAU was further developed when he took over as the chair of the Race-Walking Committee; his period of leadership was an era of many golds in the SEA Games! Vaithi's final duty in the MAAU was as chairman of the Jury of Appeal during the 1998 Commonwealth Games which Malaysia was given the honour to host.

I personally have worked with Vaithi in many athletics events, including the organising of the Asian Track and Field Championships for the first time in Malaysia at the Merdeka Stadium, Kuala Lumpur, in 1991. As the manager of the meet, Vaithi successfully ensured that all timings and measurements were electronically done for the first time in Malaysia!

Vaithi has also been involved in many other sports activities such as gymnastics, football, softball, hockey, etc, by assisting state and national bodies in their respective development events.



Vaithi had a very good relationship with the Olympic Council of Malaysia and the National Sports Council. The secretaries general of both organisations, Sieh Kok Chi and Thong Poh Nyen respectively, would regularly engage with him to discuss various technical matters.

Many of the previous directors general of the NSC, particularly Dato Wira Mazlan Ahmad, had close discussions with him on technical organisational issues. The development of gymnastics was a matter that was regularly discussed, especially after Dato Wira Mazlan took over, resulting in Malaysia attaining several gold medals from gymnastics.

In Selangor, Vaithi was the longest serving State Sports Council management committee member, having served from its founding year in 1971 to 2006 when he voluntarily retired as the main technical member for the council.

The Olympic Council of Malaysia, in recognising Vaithi's administrative abilities, inducted him into its Hall of Fame in 2012.

With such a colourful journey in sports, and especially sports management, his experiences detailed in this book will certainly be rewarding to read. And there will be much that today's sportsmen and officials can learn from his story.

Happy reading.

Tan Sri Dr M. Jegathesan

Former deputy president OCM and former deputy president MAAU

PREFACE

As I sit down to reflect on the journey that led to the creation of this book, I am filled with gratitude for the people, experiences and the many moments that have shaped my life. It is not easy to encapsulate a lifetime in a few pages, yet, I hope, this preface will offer some insight into the key milestones that defined me, and the influences that guided me along the way.

The idea for this book was born during a surprise party organised by my children in 2012 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of married life together with my wife Pooranajothi. The event was a grand occasion, bringing together personalities from various walks of life – national figures, community leaders, sports personalities and religious representatives – along with family and friends. After the event, many people approached me and expressed a desire to learn more about my life, to understand the journey I had taken, and perhaps even to read my story. My wife and I, though touched, initially brushed off the suggestion. We felt there was little to share, that our lives were simple and nothing extraordinary.

However, my children, with their persistent encouragement, reminded me that time was passing and that my story held value. It wasn't just about the successes or the challenges I faced, but about the experiences that shaped my character and outlook on life. It was their belief that these stories, no matter how simple they seemed to me, were worth telling. Over the years, I came to realise that a simple life, lived with honesty, integrity and the support of good family and friends, could indeed inspire others.

As I think back on my life, what stands out most clearly is the way tragedy and success intertwined, each shaping me in different ways. From the loss of loved ones to the many victories, both personal and professional, these experiences have contributed to the foundation of my character.

But it was not until two or three years later, when my children again encouraged me, that I finally agreed to share my story in a more organised manner. I had always been in touch with A.Kathirasan, a journalist who had retired from the New Straits Times, and he seemed the ideal person

to write this book. I had known Kathirasen since my days in the Hindu Youth Organisation (HYO) in the 1970s, and we had exchanged ideas on various matters related to Hindu festivals and cultural issues. My children reached out to him in 2016 and with that the process of writing this book began.

Reflecting on my early life, I come from humble beginnings, and it was the values instilled by my parents that laid the foundation for everything I am today. My father was a quiet and soft-spoken man, deeply disciplined and a strong believer in moral values. Though he never spoke much about his beliefs, his actions spoke volumes. It was through his example that I learned the importance of being steadfast, responsible, and honest in all things. He also taught me that respect for all religions was essential and that our connection to the divine is singular, no matter the form it takes. My mother, on the other hand, had a wealth of knowledge on Hinduism, and her teachings shaped my understanding of our religion and culture. From her, I learned the deep reverence for our culture, from the ancient teachings of the Puranas, stories of the Ramayana to the lessons of the Bhagavad Gita. She had on many occasions reminded me to be compassionate to the defeated and suffering, quoting the Mahabaratha.

Growing up, I was raised in an environment where life was simple, but not without its challenges. My father, despite being a man of few words, ensured that I understood the value of education, discipline and hard work. I still remember many of the basic lessons imparted by him. These lessons truly helped to shape my approach to life, and I carried them with me throughout my career and personal endeavours.

I had my fair share of challenges as a young boy. I was born in Singapore and grew up in a modest middle-income family. My parents prioritised education, and I was sent to a Tamil kindergarten where I also learned the basics of English. In 1941, at the age of six, I was eligible for primary school, and I attended the well-known Teluk Kurau Primary School. But fate had other plans. The Japanese occupation of Singapore in December 1941 changed everything, and I witnessed firsthand the chaos and fear of war. The Japanese soldiers, armed with bayonets and rifles, took control of the area, searching homes. We were forced to take shelter with a relative, and my family lived under constant threat.

During these hardships, my parents taught me resilience. In 1943, life was still challenging when my father was transferred to Peninsular Malaya and my mother, brother and I were left in Seremban under

the care of my grand uncle, Selladurai who had guided me through the difficult times of the Japanese Occupation.

We learned to live simply, working together to maintain the household. We had chickens under the house, a cow for milk, and a vegetable garden that required constant care. These were formative years, and they instilled in me a sense of responsibility and the value of hard work. Sports, too, played an important role in my life during these years. Football, hockey, athletics and cricket became not only a source of joy but also a way to build friendships and a sense of community with our neighbours.

Through these early experiences, I developed a strong sense of independence. After the Japanese surrendered in late 1945, I was enrolled at the King George V School in Seremban and was schooling there until December 1946. When we moved to Kuala Lumpur, I faced new challenges, particularly in school. I was enrolled in Batu Road School and later in the Victoria Institution, where I learned the importance of discipline and teamwork. The lessons I learned there, along with the support of my teachers, shaped my outlook on education and leadership.

Throughout my professional life, I was guided by the principles of honesty, integrity, and service. Whether I was working as an educationist or in sports administration, I always sought to do my best, to serve others and to lead by example. As I advanced in my career, I made it a point to help those who were less fortunate, such as volunteering to help the needy or ensuring that teachers received the proper support.

I also worked to improve the sports system in Malaysia by trying to develop interest in various sports. Early in my career, I had been involved with organising the first national football meet for the under-13 age group in Kuala Lumpur in 1957. Much later, I was also involved in helping to guide teachers who were interested in promoting rhythmic gymnastics in schools, which eventually led to our national team winning multiple gold medals at the SEA Games.

As former president of both the Malaysia Hindu Sangam and the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism, I have been directly involved in dealing with and mitigating the effects of inter-religious controversies and tensions.

I must stress that the chapters that touch on these matters are aimed at giving Malaysians an understanding of what transpired so that lessons



can be learned in our collective journey towards enhancing inter-religious understanding. The aim is not to create controversy but to inform and educate, and ultimately seek unity in this great land of ours.

My message to Malaysians is that racial and religious obstacles can always be overcome by approaching any challenges faced in a confident and positive yet respectful and polite manner.

To the youths of today, I offer this advice: Whatever path you choose in life, whether in service or in learning, be brave. Don't shy away from challenges; and never surrender in the face of adversity. Bravery does not mean rash action; it means facing difficulties head-on with thoughtfulness and courage. And remember: follow the law, act with integrity, and always aim to improve the lives of others.

I am proud of my heritage as a third-generation Malaysian through my mother who was born in Serendah, and I have always considered Malaysia my home. Through the years, I have dedicated my life to serving this country, learning from each experience, and striving to make a positive impact. As I look back, I realise that nothing I achieved was accomplished overnight. Each success came from a willingness to learn, to grow and to persist through challenges.

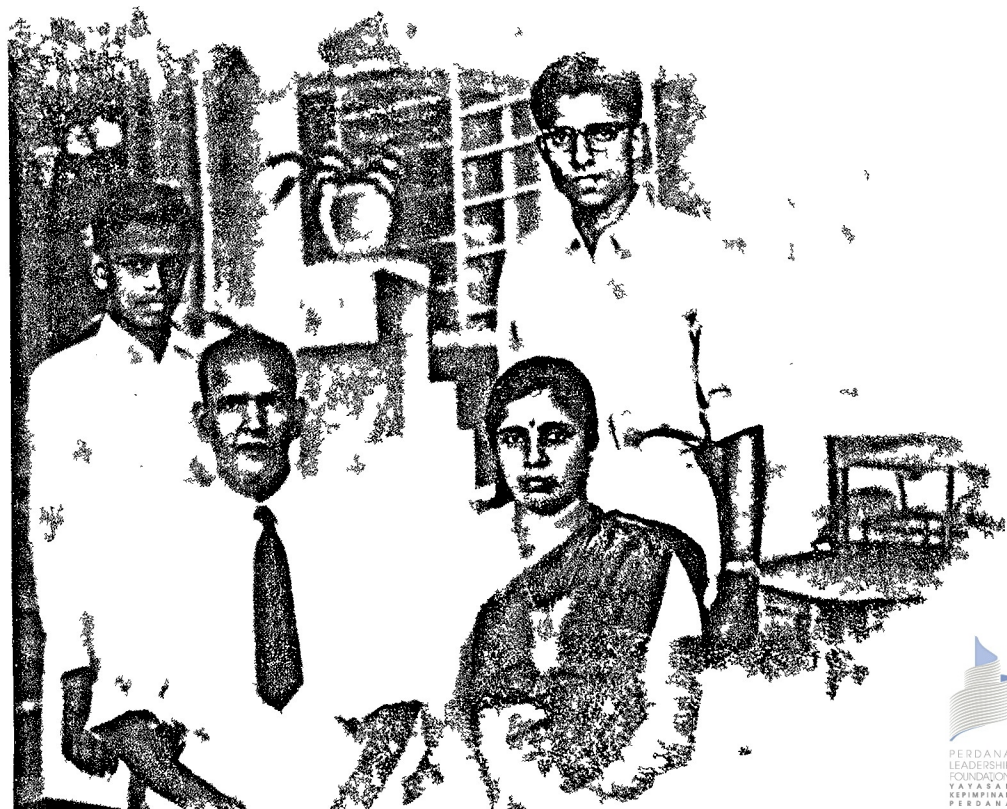
This book is a testament to the simple yet fulfilling life I have led. It is a collection of memories, lessons and experiences that I hope will inspire others to live with purpose, humility, and a commitment to making a difference in the world around them.

Finally, I would like to recognise my late wife, Pooranajothi, who had been a constant pillar of strength and support throughout my life journey since our marriage and without whom I would not have attained many of my life's achievements. Her care and love for me and our family will always be cherished.

Datuk A. Vaithilingam
PJN, SSA, ASA, AMN, PJK

CHAPTER 1

Life Begins



About the Author

a.kathirasen is an editor and columnist. Starting his career in journalism at The Star in 1976, he moved to the New Straits Times in 1980. After serving in various capacities, including as chief news editor, kathirasen retired as associate editor in 2008. He has since served as an editor at The Edge Review and executive editor at Free Malaysia Today. Currently he has a column in Free Malaysia Today. kathirasen believes that everyone is an expression of the divine.

"The border between what is allowed and what is not allowed is a fragile line in our country. Given those difficult situations, Datuk Vaithi navigated his pathway in a very skilful manner to continuously remain relevant and respected by the leaders of the nation."

Tan Sri Dr. S. Subramaniam

Former Minister of Health, Malaysia

"With such a colourful journey in sports, and especially sports management, his experiences detailed in this book will certainly be rewarding to read. And there will be much that today's sportsmen and officials can learn from his story."

Tan Sri Dr. Mani Jegathesan

Former Deputy President Olympic Council of Malaysia

a.kathirasen's biography of Datuk Vaithi's "Life of Service" in the fields of education, sport, and promoting inter-religious understanding over the past decades is an inspiration to many Malaysians across different generations. This biography, covering his 91 years, is a valuable reminder of how the ethos of public service in one person can make a positive difference in the lives of many others, both directly, through personal interventions, and indirectly, through structural and policy changes. The key moments of activism in Datuk Vaithi's life also provide important reference points in the country's political history including Indira Gandhi's case involving the conversion of her children. A life well led in a story well told that should be read by all Malaysians interested in public service and nation building.

Dr. Ong Kian Ming,

Former Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Malaysia



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