

ABU  
ZAHAR  
UJANG

GUIDED *by*  
INTEGRITY

*A Life of Honour and Wisdom*



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ROKIAH ABDUL TALIB | NOOR HASILAH ISMAIL



Kepada:

617

Tun Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad  
yang saya kasahi

Sukaitez saya hadiahkan 2 naskah  
Buku Biography Saya, mengandungi  
Sejarah hidup saya sebenarnya  
daripada kecil hingga sekarang  
ini.

Selamat membacanya

Daripada: Abu Zahar Bin Ujang

Salam hormat.  
Abu Ujang

Dengan Ingatan  
Tulus Ikhlas Daripada  
Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang

20/11/2025



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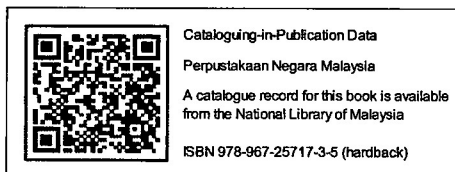
ROKIAH ABDUL TALIB | NOOR HASILAH ISMAIL



Abu Zahar Ujang: Guided by Integrity – A life of Honour and Wisdom

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## FOREWORD

**M**y career path and Tan Sri Abu Zahar's share striking similarities - a journey that began in the police force, led us to law, and eventually into politics. We both served as Members of Parliament and later as Presidents of the Dewan Negara, Malaysia's Senate. I joined the police force in 1964 and was transferred to the Police Field Force serving in Sarawak in 1968.

Our paths first crossed when we became members of the Police Inspectors' Association between 1974 and 1977. Abu Zahar pursued his law studies ahead of me, leaving for London in mid-1974 and returning in 1977. I followed in 1978, earning my Law Degree from Buckingham University in 1981. I then continued to get my professional degree of Utter Barrister from the Council of Legal Education in London and was called to the English Bar in 1982, followed by a Doctor in Business Administration from the University of Southern California for Professional Studies, California, United States of America in 2001.

In 1979, while still studying in England, I learned that Abu Zahar had left the police force to open his own legal practice. We were reunited in 1995 - this time as colleagues in Parliament. I retained my Batang Lupar seat, which I had won five years earlier, while Abu Zahar became a first-time MP for Kuala Pilah.

It was remarkable how our careers had brought us back to the same space, decades after we first met in the police force. Abu Zahar became Dewan Negara President (2010-2016), while I assumed the same role from April 2023 to January 2024, before being appointed as Yang Di-Pertua Negeri Sarawak.

I am truly pleased that this book is titled *Guided by Integrity: A Life of Honour and Wisdom* - a fitting tribute to Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang. This biography not only traces his life's journey but also reveals the trials and triumphs that shaped him.

As a fellow politician, I understand the challenges of envy and malice that come with public service. And as former police officers and lawyers, we share an unwavering disdain for corruption - both the corrupt and those who enable it. I have always known Abu Zahar as a man of honesty and integrity, and his life's philosophy reflects these values.

His story is one of exemplary leadership, offering lessons for future generations. If embraced, these principles - honesty, equity, and justice - can guide Malaysia's economic, social, and political progress. I count myself blessed to call Tan Sri Abu Zahar a friend. His life is not just an inspiration but a blueprint for principled leadership.

***Tun Pehin Sri Dr. Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar***

## PREFACE

*Do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know it – Surah Al-Baqarah 2:42*

The message of Surah Al-Baqarah 2:42 is a clear shout-out to honesty and integrity. The verse reminds us to be genuine in everything we do in life. Since I was young, I was taught by my parents to practise honesty and trustworthiness. This has been my life principle until now. No matter what obstacles are faced or trials that come, this principle must never be let go.

I still remember when I was in Standard One, on my way to school, I came across a gold chain. My school was not far from the police station, so I decided to take the chain I found there. The police personnel at the front enquiry office attended to me. He took and kept the chain. After that he bought me a cup of coffee and a piece of bread. In my heart, I thought this must be how he appreciates my trustworthiness. However, I did this not to receive a reward, recognition or praise. That thought never crossed my mind. What I remembered at that time was my mother's advice – If you find something and it doesn't belong to you, don't take it.

I have been blessed to live longer than four score and one year as I touched 81 years old of life on this earth. Throughout these years, my beliefs and life philosophy have never changed. However, I did not expect that these principles would be challenged along my life's journey. Nevertheless, I am very grateful to Allah because despite the winding and turbulent journey of life, I have also been able to enjoy sweet and valuable memories, I feel that the time has come for me to share my life story and experiences, hoping that it can serve as a reminder and guide for future generations.

Growing up with a father who held the esteemed title of Dato Lembaga, a traditional leader in the state of Negeri Sembilan that upholds the *Adat Perpatih*, I was instilled with values of honesty, responsibility, and a strong sense of duty to help others from a young age. Since I was young, my ambition was to become a pilot. However, fate determined the course of my career to become a police officer before becoming a lawyer. I never once imagined or dreamed of becoming a member of the State Legislative Assembly, a Member of Parliament, and eventually the President of the Senate. Nevertheless,

politics has given me the opportunity to view the whole situation from the perspectives of religion, ethnicity and the nation.

It is my sincere hope that anyone who reads this book can benefit from my life experiences, using them as lessons and guidance, especially when facing difficult challenges. Let the good be a role model and the hardships serve as a boundary.

My life journey is not a bed of roses. Envy and jealousy are a natural part of life. I have been criticised and slandered, but I managed to overcome all the challenges of life and share my story in this book. However, it would not have become a reality without the support of my loved ones. I am grateful to have been raised and well educated by my parents who indirectly shaped my personality. I am also thankful for the encouragement and support from my wife, children and other family members. Lastly, I would also like to thank those who have worked tirelessly to make the publication of this book a success.

***Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang***

## CHAPTER 1 GROWING UP DAYS

**M**y late father was everything to me: very courageous, farsighted and very concerned of his children’s welfare and education.” **Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang**

There is a Malay saying, “throw a good seed into the ocean it will become an island”. The case with Abu Zahar seems to adhere to this Malay proverb, as his life’s journey has seen him casted or “thrown” providently directed into two professions reportedly mired with prevalence of corruption, viz, police and politics. Abu Zahar however went through them unscathed and has remained clean with his integrity intact. In a normal family, the parents are the role models. For a son its usually the father. There is also a Malay proverb, “*Bapak borek, anak rintik*”, like father like son, meaning somehow the child (usually son), especially if he has great respect for his father, will somehow takes up the father’s character and values. For example, how the father relates to his mother will be much observed and followed by his son later, on how he relates with women in general and his wife especially. Cases of women or wife abuser it seems always has a history of the father abusing the mother. Likewise, the father’s positive persona or temperament often become that of the son. In Abu Zahar’s case, his recognition of his father’s profound influence served as a guiding principle throughout his life. Abu Zahar admitted that he would always abide his father’s advice and try to please him. He invariably also observed and acquired his father’s leadership traits, as well as his commitment to serve the community and to help the people.

His father Dato’ Nika Ujang Haji Latif, was one of the *Ahli Lembaga Adat Perpatih* from Negeri Sembilan<sup>1</sup> It seems the *Ahli Lembaga* deals mainly with ceremonies. The most powerful positions in Negeri Sembilan are the *Undang* (Territorial Chief) from each of the *Luak* or district. Currently there are only four *Luak* and thus four *Undang*. They are *Undang* for *Luak Sg Ujong*, *Undang Jelebu*, *Undang Rembau* and *Undang Joho*<sup>2</sup>. They are the most powerful in matters of election of the Yang di-Pertuan Besar, who is somewhat equivalent to the Sultan in the other Malay states.

1 Negeri Sembilan is the only state in Tanah Melayu practising Adat Perpatih, a Matrilineal system. The rest of the Malay states practice a Patrilineal system.

2 Originally there were 9 Districts in Negeri Sembilan, thus the name Negeri Sembilan or 9. Over the years only 4 are left and recognized.

The person holding the title of *Dato Lembaga* is also much respected within the Negeri Sembilan society as he is part of the State's dignitaries and a member of the royal court. Given that honour within the royal court the person holding the post of *Ahli Lembaga* must be of high morality and show good example to the community. That being the case his family also must show the approved behaviour and never bring disrepute to the family. In the *Adat Perpatih* culture the members of the society are also guided by a code of conduct, normally expressed in poetic axioms and proverbial lyrics. These are often used as effective references not only for the accepted norms in the society, but also as basis for resolving conflicts and at times even to redress any infraction of the "*adat*" and misdemeanours committed.

Having a father who is the traditional leader in the community and much respected, meant not only Abu Zahar had to be well behaved, but also to be more circumspect in adhering to the Adat. That was the standard and code of ethics impacting and imprinted on Abu Zahar while growing up in his childhood and youth. The fact that he said his father "was everything to me" implied that he followed the code of ethics that he was trained in by his father of being honest and responsible and helpful to the people. The seed of his cardinal rule in life, especially in politics, "to be of service to the people" must have been sown while still young by his father. Since he truly admired his father, the imprinted values remained with him in whatever professions he took in life, no matter if the opportunities for self-benefits were there, it has always been propriety and trustworthiness first.

According to Abu Zahar, before the introduction of piped water to his village, his house had a well with very good clear flowing water which flows endlessly. His parents allowed all the relatives and neighbours nearby to collect the water daily because the water was crystal clear compared to other wells in the vicinity. The family believed since the water came from the ground and the supply was endless, the Almighty Allah meant it to be shared. This was perhaps among the first big lesson Abu Zahar learnt about sharing and helping those in need. If water supply came from the well, lights came from kerosene lamps, and this was admitted by Abu Zahar who studied using such lamps at night. Later his father bought the lamp using gasoline which was much brighter and no soot going into the nostrils, as usually suffered by rural students who had to study using kerosene lamps.

## **Going to English Medium School**

Abu Zahar's father was exposed to the process of modern education in the country, including the benefits of English-medium schools. Thus, one of the

early decisions his father made was to transfer Abu Zahar from the Malay Medium school to the English-medium *Tuanku Munawir School* in Kuala Pilah. Abu Zahar studied at a Malay Medium School for only one year, which was quite usual in those early days of pre-independence. He picked up the English language very fast and adjusted very well in the new school environment. He was quite happy in the new school and made many new friends. Then for his Secondary education he joined the *Sekolah Menengah Inggeris Tuanku Mohammad*, also in Kuala Pilah, up to his Form 3 when he sat for his Lower Certificate of Education (LCE) exam.

Abu Zahar had an inclination for technical subjects, Mathematics and Science. Thus, after taking his LCE, and getting high marks in Science and Mathematics, Abu Zahar applied and was accepted into the Technical Institute Kuala Lumpur. He also was allotted a place at the hostel, and was away from home<sup>3</sup>, during term time. It was while staying at the hostel that Abu Zahar began mixing with the non-Malay students, especially Chinese. Abu Zahar said that the Hostel Master was a Mr Wong, also Chinese and the food was catered by an Indian Muslim (*Mamak*). That was the first initiation of the “*kampung boy*” mixing with the non-Malays and Non-Muslims on daily basis. This experience was to be his early exposure of mixing with a multiracial community which later proved very useful in his political career.

It was at the Technical Institute (presently known as Sekolah Menengah Teknik Kuala Lumpur) that he became very active in sports, especially Rugby. One must possess the physical ability and courage to be in this very rough and tumble game. Certainly, it is not meant for the faint hearted. He must have been good at the game as he made it to be a member of the school team and was also selected to represent the school in the *Majlis Sukan Sekolah-Sekolah Negeri Selangor*, playing as three quarters position, He was also good in athletics. He was able to combine his studies very well with his sports activities. For Abu Zahar, his father was his inspiration and to him it was important to do well in both his studies as well as sports, so, as to be a well-rounded student and the pride of his father.

### **Dream of being a Pilot**

Somewhere during his study at the Technical Institute, possibly through exchanges of ideas and interests with the course-mates, especially the Chinese students, Abu Zahar became fascinated by the zooming jet fighters in the sky, resulting in his interest to be a pilot in the newly-formed Royal Malaysian

3 It must be pointed out that the Technical Institute KL was initiated by Aminuddin Baki, another Malay Academic and a patriot.

Air Force, known as *Tentera Udara Diraja Malaysia* (TUDM), and for jet-fighters at that.

When he told his mother that he wanted to be a pilot, his mother was horrified and apparently was dead against it. In no uncertain terms she literally grounded his idea and said, “Find a job on the ground”. Abu Zahar has always been very respectful of his mother, but in this case, he was a bit coy. He did not reply with the usual, “Yes *Mak*”. He was still toying with the idea of becoming a pilot. When his father found out about it, he neither said “yes” nor “no”.

However, from his body language Abu Zahar knew he too was not too happy about the choice. Maybe the father was delighted at the apparent bravery of his son, but he dared not openly support him since his wife was against it. To be on the safe side he left it open for Abu Zahar to decide, since he was by then a young man, having passed his Form V, and at a stage possibly capable of making career plans. In all probabilities, his father, who was more knowledgeable of the world, surmised that Abu Zahar would be able to decide what is good for his future. In a sort of contrary stand to his mother’s words, Abu Zahar went for the interview, at the old Sungai Besi Airport. Recalling the decision he made, Abu Zahar said it was based not merely by his personal interest, but he thought that since the formation of Malaysia, he correctly conjectured that there was a need for more trained pilots and hence he was convinced that there were excellent prospects for such personnel. Rightly the formation of Malaysia called for a more complete defence system, including air-borne, for the new enlarged nation. So that could be the reason for the invitation for candidates by the Government.

The event that unfolded, as related by Abu Zahar, saw six candidates, from Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, apart from himself, who came for the interview. He recalled that, apart from having to appear for an interview, there were various other evaluations, including physical, academic and Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests. Candidates obtaining relatively high marks, were made to undergo aptitude test for flying two-seater training plane, the *provost*, this being the ultimate appraisal for selection. Abu Zahar was very proud being the only Malay in the batch of candidates, and who made it for the final flying test. Having gone through an English education he could master the test very well. Neither was he worried that the instructions for the flying test would be in English. That says a lot of his confidence, if not also courage. The others who made it for the final test were mainly Chinese from Singapore and Ipoh, Perak and most of them had experience in flying. These Chinese boys were from urban well-to do families who could afford to be members

of the Flying Clubs in Singapore or Ipoh thus they had an advantage over Abu Zahar. That fact made Abu Zahar the odd one out, being the *Kampung* boy who was without any flying experience possibly only seeing planes in the air. Still, that did not deter this ambitious young man! He must have told himself, “I can do it”.

During those early days, TUDM had only two Malaysian Pilot Trainers, Squadron Leader Sam Welch, an Indian, and Squadron Leader Fong. The other trainers were from the Commonwealth Countries of UK, Canada and Australia. By ballot Abu Zahar was assigned to be under Squadron Leader Woodard and Squadron Hodge, both Caucasians. The training was using a two-seater small plane, the *provost*, and communication between Trainer and student pilot was through the Pilot Flying Kit Earphone, that was inserted into the ears of the student. The problem according to Abu Zahar, is that he could not quite comprehend the commands from the Testers. The simple reason was that the trainer being a “*Mat Salleh*” who spoke using typically the “*Mat Salleh’s*” slang or colloquialism, which many average Asians find it difficult to understand. Thus, although Abu Zahar understands English, he could not understand the typical English dialect. This resulted in him having had to say “beg your pardon, sir” many times which must have irritated the trainer. Inevitably Abu Zahar failed the Aptitude Test, i.e., the flying, although he scored very high marks for the other tests.

Having failed the flying test but scoring very high on the other tests, he was recommended a job as Traffic Control Officer or Administrative Officer under TUDM. Abu Zahar declined the offer politely as all he wanted was to be a pilot, not an administrative job. Perhaps the top boss of TUDM wanted to know why a very intelligent candidate could not pass the flying test. The Chief of the TUDM then was a “*Mat Salleh*” Field Marshall, requested that Abu Zahar to appear before a Special Committee. The committee was made up of two Malay Officers, Tuan Ariff and Tuan Jimmy Ismail. The Board wanted to know how and why he failed the flying test. It was a very noble gesture on the part of the Interview Board wanting to find out from a *kampung* boy as to why he did not make the grade. Abu Zahar willingly went for the enquiry session.

What transpired at the interview reflected Abu Zahar’s character, always firm once he has made up his mind. He always speaks the truth no matter what the occasion was or is. The fact that Abu Zahar agreed to go and face the Board Chaired by the General says a lot of his nerve and boldness. He could have just gone home since he knew he failed anyway. For an 18-year-old boy to agree to meet a committee chaired by a General possibly made him sort

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*A Life of Honour and Wisdom*

Guided by Integrity, A Life of Honour and Wisdom. This inspiring biography of Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang traces the remarkable journey of a man who began his career as a police officer, driven by a deep sense of justice. His path led him to the legal profession, and eventually into the complex world of politics. Through every chapter of his life — from the lockup cell to the courtroom to the hallowed halls of Parliament, and later as chairman of several government-linked companies - Abu Zahar remained a steadfast advocate for integrity and a tireless fighter against corruption.

Culminating in his election as President of the Senate, his story is one of resilience, principle, and public service. Now retired from public office, he devotes his days to what he cherishes most: being a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. This is the story of a life dedicated to doing what's right, no matter the cost.

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