

## Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan Reminisces

**I** SIS Chairman **Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan**, in reminiscing about Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, said that he was everything the ideal diplomat should be – seasoned, polished, suave, gentlemanly

I first met Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong when I arrived in Jakarta in May 1977 as Counsellor in the Malaysian Embassy. I had heard much about him when I was preparing for my assignment while in Kuala Lumpur, and considered myself fortunate that I would be serving under him. He was reputed to be one of the very few Malaysians — among them Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie (later Tun) and Tan Sri Ahmad Yusof — who knew Indonesia like the back of their hands. This was no mean reputation, for the vast archipelago was very much 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma,' to quote the phrase Churchill used to describe then Soviet Union.

Tan Sri Zainal had already been in Jakarta for five years, and I could never have had a better role model. He was everything the ideal diplomat should be – seasoned, polished, suave, gentlemanly, with impeccable language skills (English), great command of the host nation's language, and above all, exceptional diplomatic skills and a deep knowledge of Indonesia's history, culture and politics. He had a clear understanding of how critical and strategic Malaysia's relations with Indonesia were, especially after *konfrontasi* and in a challenging regional environment marked by the Cold War.

He was held in high regard not only by the Indonesian elite but also among the diplomatic corps.

Within a few months of my arrival however Tan Sri Zainal was posted as Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. However, the memory of his personality, skills and ever present smile, and that of his charming wife Puan Sri Maznah, remained with me. They made a wonderful couple.

I was particularly happy therefore when Prime Minister Dato' Sri Dr Mahathir Mohamad (now Tun) appointed Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong Chairman of ISIS Malaysia in June 1990, after the demise of Tun Hussein Onn. I had then just joined ISIS Malaysia as Deputy Director General. He remained our Chairman until February 1997 when the late Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee assumed the post.

ISIS benefited much from Tan Sri Zainal's expertise and experience during the seven years he served as Chairman. His distinguished career in the Foreign Service, culminating as Secretary General of the Ministry, as well as his concurrent position as Chairman of the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA) was a great asset to ISIS Malaysia and its Board of Directors. His Foreign Ministry background also came in handy for bridging ISIS and Wisma Putra.

Tan Sri Zainal retained a keen interest in the Institute after he relinquished his chairmanship and continued to participate in many of its activities. As the years passed his frail health constrained him somewhat, but he made a valiant effort to attend, and occasionally address, key functions especially those organised by Wisma Putra and the Association of Former Malaysian Ambassadors (AFMA), where I am honoured to be always welcome as a guest.

The news of his passing away was greeted with sadness by his friends and former colleagues, not least in ISIS Malaysia. A painted profile of him graces a wall of the Institute, and his portrait hangs alongside those of others who had served as Chairman of ISIS Malaysia.

Tan Sri Zainal is sadly missed, but deeply appreciated, and never forgotten.