

SPECIAL EDITION

ISIS FOCUS



• PP 5054/11/2012 (031098)

• Issue No. 3 • March 2012

A Tribute to Tun Hussein Onn

*in Conjunction with the Launch of the
Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies
at ISIS Malaysia*



- ◆ *Biography: Tun Hussein Onn 1*
- ◆ *The Inside Story 2*
- ◆ *Tun Hussein Onn: A Most Personal Appreciation 6*
- ◆ *The Interview that never was 9*
- ◆ *Reflections on Tun Hussein Onn 14*
- ◆ *Reminiscing on Tun Hussein Onn : A Book Lover..... 15*
- ◆ *South-South Cooperation has a Viable Future 16*
- ◆ *Domestic Problems Loom larger than External Threats 19*



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA

www.isis.org.my

Limited Circulation



ABOUT ISIS MALAYSIA

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983, in realization of a decision made by the Malaysian Government to set up an autonomous, not-for-profit research organization, to act as the nation's think-tank. ISIS Malaysia was envisioned to contribute towards sound public policy formulation and discourse.

The research mandate of ISIS therefore spans a wide area. It includes economics, foreign policy, strategic studies, nation building, social policy, technology, innovation and the environment.

ISIS Malaysia today fosters dialogue and promotes the exchange of views and opinions at both national and international levels. It undertakes research in collaboration with national and international organizations, in important areas such as national development and international affairs.

ISIS Malaysia also engages actively in Track Two diplomacy, fostering high-level dialogues at national, bilateral and regional levels, through discussions with influential policymakers and thought leaders.

RESEARCH

Economics

Research in this area is generally aimed at promoting rapid and sustained economic growth and equitable development in the nation. We study specific (rather than generic) issues that concern the nation's competitiveness, productivity, growth and income. Areas of research include macroeconomic policy, trade and investment, banking and finance, industrial and infrastructure development and human capital and labour market development. The objective of all our research is to develop actionable policies and to spur institutional change.

Foreign Policy and Security Studies

The primary aim of this programme is to provide relevant policy analyses on matters pertaining to Malaysia's strategic interests as well as regional and international issues, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific Region. These include security studies, foreign policy, Southeast Asian politics and military affairs.

Social policy

Demographic and socio-cultural trends are changing Malaysian society and the social policy programme was established to respond to these developments. Research in this area is concerned with effective nation building, and fostering greater national unity. In particular, we look at issues involving the youth, women and underprivileged communities. In conducting its research, ISIS Malaysia networks with non-governmental organizations and civil society groups.

Technology, Innovation, Environment & Sustainability (TIES)

The TIES programme provides strategic foresight, collaborative research and policy advice to the public sector, businesses and policy audiences, on technology, innovation, environment and sustainable development. Its focus includes green growth as well as energy, water and food security. Towards this end, TIES has been active in organizing dialogues, forums, policy briefs and consultancies.

HIGHLIGHTS

ISIS Malaysia has, among others, researched and provided concrete policy recommendations for:

- Greater empowerment and revitalization of a national investment promotion agency;
- A strategic plan of action to capitalize on the rapid growth and development of a vibrant Southeast Asian emerging economy;
- A Master Plan to move the Malaysian economy towards knowledge-based sources of output growth;
- The conceptualization of a national vision statement;
- Effective management and right-sizing of the public sector; and
- Strengthening of ASEAN institutions and co-operation processes.

ISIS Malaysia has organized the highly regarded Asia-Pacific Roundtable, an annual conference of high-level security policymakers, implementers and thinkers, since 1986.

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING

As a member of the Track Two community, ISIS Malaysia participates in the following networks:

- ASEAN-ISIS network of policy research institutes;
- Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific (CSCAP);
- Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT); and
- Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC).

It is also a partner institute of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Editorial Team

Mahani Zainal Abidin
Steven Wong
Susan Teoh
Thangam K Ramnath

Design

Razak Ismail
Jefri Hambali

Photography

Jefri Hambali / Halil Musa

Published by

Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

No. 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin

P.O. Box 12424, 50778 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

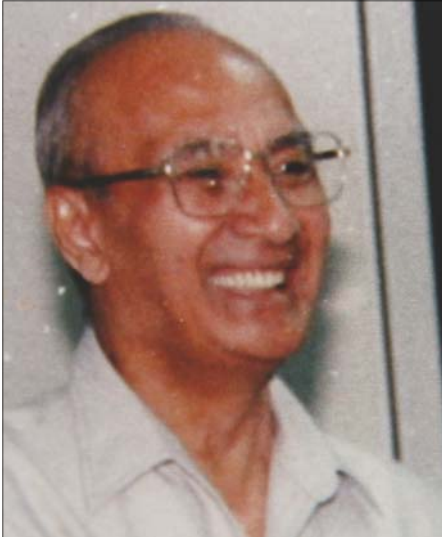
Tel: +603 2693 9366

Fax: +603 2691 5435

Email: info@isis.org.my

Website: www.isis.org.my

Biography: Tun Hussein Onn



Tun Hussein Onn
12 February 1922 - 29 May 1990

Tun Hussein bin Dato' Onn was Chairman of ISIS from April 1984 till May 1990. He accepted the appointment a few years after his resignation as Malaysia's third Prime Minister (1976 to 1981).

After his Prime Ministership, Tun Hussein continued to contribute to welfare organizations. He was instrumental in the setting up of the Tun Hussein Onn Eye Hospital. He was also an advisor to Petronas, the country's oil corporation.

Tun Hussein Onn was looked upon as being very sincere in his struggle for racial unity and had a reputation for being firm against anyone who tried to create racial unrest in the county and it was due to this, that he was known as 'Father of Unity'.

Born in Johor Bahru, Johor on February 12, 1922 to Dato Onn Jaafar and Datin Halimah Hussein, Tun Hussein received his early education in Singapore and at the English College in Johor Bahru.

After leaving school, he joined the Johor Military Forces as a cadet in 1940 and was sent a year later to the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun, India. Upon completion of his training, he was absorbed into the Indian Army and served in the Middle East when the Second World War broke out. His vast experience prompted the British to employ him as an instructor at the Malayan Police Recruiting and Training Centre in Rawalpindi after the war.

Prior to entering politics, Tun Hussein studied law in London, qualifying as a Barrister-at-Law and setting up legal practice in Malaysia.

Tun Hussein was renowned for stressing the issue of unity through policies aimed at rectifying economic imbalances between the different communities in Malaysia. For instance, April 20, 1981 saw the National Unit Trust Scheme being launched. He also gave serious consideration to the concept of Rukun Tetangga and the war against the drug menace.

Tun Hussein, who was married to Toh Puan Suhaila Tan Sri Haji Mohd Noah, underwent a coronary bypass in early 1981. On July 17 the same year, he stepped down as Prime Minister and retired from active politics due to health concerns. He passed away on May 29, 1990 at the age of 68.

The Inside Story

When 'Hussein - The Inside Story' was first published in *The New Straits Times* on July 14 1981, it was hailed as an exposé. For the article by **Zainah Anwar**, former ISIS Analyst and currently Project Director (Musawah), *Sisters in Islam*, revealed many things that only a few were privy to; and it dealt with a man we are all very familiar with but did not really know or understand. It was a remarkable insight into a man whose consistency in personality and principles gives this story an uncanny timelessness. It is no accident that the many tributes published when the Tun passed away on May 29 drew heavily from this article. The following is an edited version of the article.

They say he is slow. Nonsense, say those close to him. He is thorough. It is his sense of fairness, of justice, of the grave responsibility of the office of Prime Minister that make him the meticulous and cautious man he's known to be.

'How can you be anything but cautious when an error in judgment may cause misery to thousands?' he said in an interview.

To understand Hussein Onn, you have to understand the military and legal background that shaped the man, said an aide. He has a no-nonsense approach to the task at hand.

Tan Sri Kadir Yusof, an old friend and former Attorney-General remembered his first encounter with Tun Hussein and his meticulousness during their student days in London in the Fifties. They had lived in the same block of flats and Tun Hussein had one day invited Tan Sri Kadir home to cook chicken curry with him. There, Tan Sri Kadir picked up a pip of garlic, and as he would usually, just smashed it on the table.

'Hussein saw this and exclaimed: What! He then took the garlic from me and started slicing it neatly into small pieces. Then when we were doing the dishes, I noticed how he washed everything thoroughly: the knives and the spoons, and how he would then arrange them neatly on a rack and cover them all with a cloth.'

And then again in Parliament, for two years Tan Sri Kadir sat on Tun Hussein's left when the latter was Minister of Education and Kadir saw the same neatness and sense of order. 'All his papers were



Tun Hussein Onn

neatly stacked in front of him, while mine were a mess. And he always had this box with him in which he carried a short ruler, paper clips, eraser and pencils of different colours. He would use the ruler to underline his notes in various colours, according to the importance of the issues involved.'

'I used to borrow his notes and pencils and would just leave them scattered on his table. He didn't like that. He'd immediately arrange everything in order again. That's Hussein, very thorough in everything he does.'

Those who have worked with the Prime Minister knew how carefully he weighed the pros and cons of a matter before making a final decision, be it on

the appointment of a Minister or Menteri Besar, or on a policy. And the pros and cons were not just in his mind. They would be written on pieces of paper to be studied thoroughly, said an aide.

Once a decision was made, it meant he was convinced that all facts available had been considered fairly. And that decision was final.

Said Tan Sri Kadir: 'Be it a Cabinet or Umno Supreme Council meeting, Hussein would hear out everybody whenever there was a difference of opinion. He would ask everyone to speak out. If there was no consensus, he would postpone the decision. At the next session he would try and get as close a consensus as possible. Then he would decide. 'Once he's made that decision, it's hard to change his mind.'

That is the meticulous Hussein Onn. It was common knowledge that he went through all his speeches and important papers with a six-inch ruler to ensure that he did not miss out the important points, which he then proceeded to underline with a red pen.

His aides tried to cut down his speaking engagements because they knew how much time and trouble he took for every speech. 'He has never accepted a draft without making corrections to them. Any speech that he gives is his speech,' they said.

Once, said an aide, they had worked from 8pm to 1am on a speech for an important conference. 'Five hours for a 10-minute speech,' said the aide. 'He wants to make sure that everything he says is worth saying,' he continued.

'He goes over the choice of words, the structure of a sentence. He'll ask you what's the significance of this, what's the significance of that. He'll ask if you're clear about this sentence because he is not. And we would reconstruct the sentence.'

He'll call you at night to clarify the figures used. 'Where did you get them?' he would ask. His

meticulousness, said this aide, even went to the extent that he would spell out complicated words phonetically. He would write out the phonetic spelling neatly above the word.

Another aide recalled how they had laboured for 15 minutes over a single sentence of a speech for an important visit by a foreign head of state.

'Things, he would say, have implications,' said this aide, 'So he looks at all the possible interpretations to make sure what he says is what is really intended. As a result, Datuk (as he was then) Hussein has never had to retract anything that he has said.'

The Prime Minister's reluctance to speak off-the-cuff with the Press was also due to this sense of responsibility: whatever he said would affect many and would be considered by many more.

'If he speaks off-the-cuff,' said the aide, 'he would have no time to see the implications of what he has said.' Tun Hussein often said that it was all right for his Ministers to speak because if they made any mistake, he being at the top, could clarify them. But if he were to make the mistake, there would be no one above him to repair the damage.

Another general misconception of Tun Hussein was that he was closed, and aloof, very unlike the Tunku with his breezy, carefree style, or the Tun [Razak] with his close network of loyal friends. As Prime Minister, said Tan Sri Kadir, Tun Hussein was careful to treat everyone under him equally so that no one could say he favoured any particular person.

'He did not want any Hussein clique.... Everyone under him was equal.' As Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Shahrir Samad, who was Tun Hussein's Parliamentary Secretary from 1976 to 1980, said: 'The rapport was based on respect and trust, not based on closeness.'

He said it was at first upsetting for the Ministers, who were used to seeing Tun Razak so often, to suddenly find that they couldn't do likewise with the new Prime Minister.

Many accused him of doing all the work alone, saying he was not a delegator, and that that was why he was slow. But to those who knew him, Tun Hussein was the greatest delegator of all.

The day-to-day running of the Ministries, the implementation of projects, the petty squabbles over portfolios were not his concern.

He would make the major decisions and policies, and he always took responsibility for these. He had said, 'you can delegate work, but you cannot delegate responsibility.' He was irritated by the petty problems and squabbles brought before him. 'He does not want to interfere in them,' said an aide. He does not like people to pop in and out of his office.'

Within a few months of taking office, Tun Hussein made a ruling that anyone who wanted to see him had to send a note to him first indicating the matter to be discussed so that he could prepare himself for the meeting.

'He considers "I'll think about it", and "I'll look into it" meetings useless and a waste of time,' said the aide.

'He doesn't like people to come over and discuss matters over which he has no authority and he does not like to be caught by people who bring up problems for him to solve on the spot. He does not like to get involved in the petty squabbles and rivalries between Ministries.'

It's just not his style to indulge in small talk, not even on long flights to foreign destinations

Time was too valuable for him to waste over matters that could be solved without his interference. He also had no time to *borak-borak* (engage in idle chat), as an aide put it. 'Maybe that is why people say he is aloof. It's just not his style to indulge in small talk, not even on long flights to foreign destinations. But once you get to see him, he'll give you all the time you want. 'Sometimes too much time,' says the aide. 'Because he is too polite to shoo you out of his office. It's not his style to grab your hand, shake it and walk you to the door.'

So precious was time for Tun Hussein that he often got his wife, Tun Suhaila, to read the morning papers to him even while he was shaving, said a close family friend. An introvert, Tun Hussein was also an early riser. He did all his reading at home, taking back with him all the papers that he had to read and study for the next day's series of meetings and work.

What he had for breakfast was enough to last him the whole day, said his aides. He worked through lunch. It was only when he knew he would be working late that he would send his driver back home for his lunch, which he would take in his office, alone and probably reading at the same time. Otherwise the tidbits that he would munch on at meetings were enough to see him to the end of the day. There was also the big flask of coffee that he would take to work. He would sip his coffee, rather than drink it. So the coffee usually became cold. But that did not seem to bother him.

What would strike one most about his office was its simplicity, from the plain brown wood panelling to the thin, worn green carpet. But it was his chair that said it all. No high-backed shiny leather swivel chair for this Prime Minister. It was just a plain black vinyl low-backed swivel chair with an old cushion crushed askew at its back.

There were no trappings of power.

Nothing plush, nothing ostentatious. His table, his chair and the four equally plain ones opposite him were all from his Deputy Prime Minister days. The

carpet in his office was to be changed when he took over, but he said, never mind, it still looked ok. And so it remained.

On his long, narrow table are arranged, neatly and in order, a small travelling clock, an electric calendar, an ashtray (he used to smoke heavily until his operation), two jars, one filled with pens, the other pencils, another glass ashtray filled with paper pegs, clips and pins, a stapler and a long wooden ruler — all arranged in a neat line.

But his important tools would sit just by his right arm — a plain yellow plastic box that held a short but sharp pencil, an eraser, an old penknife to open his private mail, a simple soft pen to sign letters with and his famous six-inch ruler -- a well-used white plastic ruler now covered with red ink on both sides from all the underlining that he has done.

On the walls hung the three valued mottos of his life. One in bold black print said simply: 'My job and yours are to build the country's future'. This hung on the pillar facing the long table where he conducted his meetings with Cabinet colleagues and his aides.

On another pillar hung a saying from his military academy days in India, in the early forties. 'The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time; the safety, comfort and welfare of the men under your command come next; your own safety, comfort and welfare come last, always and every time. '

On the wall next to the seats where he entertained his guests hung a motto reflecting his legal training. 'The advocate ... reconciles his interests with the eternal interests of truth and justice.' There is not a shred of doubt in the mind of anyone of Tun Hussein's integrity, honesty and dedication. Said one aide who has worked for several other Ministers: 'I've never worked for a man more dedicated and sincere than Datuk Hussein. All he does is in the interest of the nation. That man's integrity is unquestionable. It's unbelievable.'

It is Tun Hussein's disinterest in personal glory or in power per se that made him state clearly to his aides that he does not ask them for personal loyalty, but loyalty to the office of the Prime Minister. 'This is a rare quality in a leader,' said Datuk Shahrir (who once served as Tun Hussein's political secretary).

'This means we don't pamper him, we don't hero-worship him. His concept of loyalty means you don't hide anything from him. We tell him everything and he makes us maintain our objectivity.'

'We don't hide the bad news just because we don't want to hurt his feelings or we don't want him to lose sleep. That's what personal loyalty means and it leads to feeding your leader with wrong information.' But not for Tun Hussein. 'Even when he makes an appointment, he never asks whether the person he is to meet would support him or work against him?'

He never exacted personal loyalty. He stressed integrity and honesty. 'The moment he catches somebody abusing his trust, that would be the end of the relationship. He believes that without your integrity and honesty, you're nothing but an opportunist.'

And now true to his word, this man, who has said that he would resign if he cannot give 100 per cent to his office, was truly leaving.

A lesser person would want to hang on to power and let his deputy do the work. But not Tun Hussein Onn, the disciplined soldier, the just lawyer and above all a statesman of unquestionable integrity.

When he was asked what he was doing back at work when he was supposed to be taking a three-month complete rest, he had said: 'But how can I? I am the Prime Minister, I cannot sit at home and rest.'

Tun Hussein Onn: A Most Personal Appreciation

*I*t is a trade secret that in newspaper offices, the obituaries of important personalities are written well before their demise. The all-important deadline necessitates such a cold and clinical approach. But while such an obituary has its function, it is the tribute from the heart that will always be remembered. And the very personal appreciation that pulls at the heartstrings can only be written by those close to the man himself. Such was the situation former ISIS Chairman and CEO **Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee** found himself in when he wrote this tribute for Tun. It was published in *The New Straits Times* on June 1, the day when Tun was finally laid to rest. The article was reproduced in *ISIS Focus Issue No. 64*, July 1990. The following is an edited version.

I WRITE this article in the quiet of midnight in a secluded San Francisco hotel on the day Tun Hussein Onn passed away (in a hospital in San Francisco) – reflecting on what this man of Malaysia had been to his family, to his friends ... and to the country that he so dearly loved and so earnestly tried to serve.

It might seem out of place to say it of a statesman, but the Tun was probably above all a family man. He was devoted to his home, to his wife Toh Puan Suhaila with whom he shared a rich and full 42 years and to his four daughters and two sons. That bond of love was deeply moving as the family crowded around his death bed in the last critical hours of his life.

And each time a member of the family spoke to the Tun through his unconscious state, his graph beeped back to life, as if he heard — and wanted to reply.

But he could not. In the end, a series of post operation complications took their toll and the Tun could fight no more. He went away peacefully — in serenity -- with the trace of a smile on his face, the slightly upturned lips that his friends knew only too well.

The last few hours of the Tun bring back to me my first recollections of those days when the Tun was a law student in London and his wife was a



(From Left) Noordin Sopiee and Tun Hussein Onn

radiant, vivacious young woman, sometimes appreciative of a young boy's help in pushing the pram.

I remember most vividly a particular Friday in August 1973 when I received a phone call from Tun Razak's office asking me to write a quick article 'introducing' the man Razak had decided would be his deputy. 'We're going to appoint him Deputy Prime Minister in three days' time, on Monday. The people hardly know him. 'But it's ok, I was told, though I was hardly assured.' 'We have arranged for you to meet him for dinner tomorrow'.

I vividly remember the simple dinner at Tun Hussein's house that long Saturday night. We had nasi goreng, fried chicken, chili sauce... And coffee. Lots of it.

The Tun hardly ate. But over thick black *Nescafe* and amidst clouds of his favourite *Craven A* (a brand of cigarette), we talked for hours about his life.

We talked about his father, Dato' Onn bin Jaafar, the charismatic father of Malay nationalism, whom he deeply revered. They were exceedingly close — no generation gap there.

We talked about his career: as the first leader of Umno Youth (1946); the third Secretary General of Umno (at age 28, in 1950); and Minister of Education (1970).

Above all, on that unforgettable night, we talked about what he believed in and what hopes he had for the country he would one day have to lead. (Even then, before anyone had any inkling of Tun Razak's fatal affliction, we all knew that the Tun was choosing not only a Deputy Prime Minister but also a future Prime Minister.)

Yet there he was, on the eve of becoming Deputy Prime Minister, and one step away from the premiership of the nation, yet still a mystery to the general public — a public figure of unknown quantity.

It was his own fault, I politely suggested. With a smile, he agreed. But why did he shun personal publicity, I asked. Almost apologetically, he replied: 'People can be too easily led into wanting publicity more than achievement.'

'If you are down, you must not be downhearted. But if you are up, you must not lose your head. 'With too much publicity, you cannot be humble. You can come to a stage where you feel you can't be wrong.'

'What I do is important. But me, I'm not important.'

Me, I am not important. To his credit, during his premiership, it was clear that this was a rare politician — a man who was acutely unaware of his own importance.

But even on that night, 17 years ago, it was clear to me that what the Tun had said was a justification not only of his own natural shyness but was a central part of the philosophy of a man who had been touched by the hand of defeat, who knew the pain of profound disappointment, who had a deep-seated fear of the corruption of power and of the tyranny of applause, who was much more worried by the responsibility of high public office than enamoured of its heady trappings.

Throughout his premiership, Tun was concerned — perhaps to a fault — by the responsibility of leadership. It did not lie light on his earnest shoulders. And it was not helped by an equally profound sense of duty — handed down from father to son. All his life, he lived by a great old-fashioned sense of what duty demanded. He had a great sense of duty to his father, to his mother, to his wife, to his children, to his friends. And to his country.

'I am an old soldier,' he once told me. 'In the Military Academy at Dehra Dun where I was trained during the war, there was this inscription on the wall: "The safety, honour and welfare of the men under your command come first, always and every time. Your own safety, comfort and welfare come last, always and every time". He did put nation before self.'

On that night in 1973, on the eve of his Deputy Prime Ministership, he was adamant: 'I would rather be politically unpopular than fail in my duty; what is one's political future compared to one's responsibility?'

I would rather be politically unpopular than fail in my duty ...

'*Baik diumpat keji sekarang daripada dikencingkan kubur kemudian* (It is better that they curse me now than that they urinate on my grave),' he quoted an old Malay saying.

'Many of the miseries of life,' he went on, 'are due to sacrificing the future for the present; the happiness of years to come for the satisfaction (and he might have added, the expediency) of the moment.'

It is the Malaysian way that we will speak not evil but good upon the passing of any man. And practically all Malaysians will today think only the best things of this man of honour and duty.

The historian has to look at the negative side of the ledger as well as the positive side.

History may well say that Tun Hussein bin Dato' Onn had weaknesses and was flawed. He made mistakes. I am sure the Tun himself would have agreed.

Was he too much of a statesman when he needed to be much more of a politician? Was his total integrity too idealistic in a world where even the most powerful ideals must be bereft of even the slightest shred of illusion? He would have said a resounding 'NO'.

Was he straight and honest to a fault? He would have found the very question perplexing.

Many questions can of course only be answered with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight. It is not for us to judge from the myopia and the emotion of this day. I feel assured that history will say that Malaysia has been fortunate with regard to its Prime Ministers. Each was different. Yet each was appropriate for the time in which he had to lead the way.

I have been privileged to have known this man, and to have worked closely with him these last six years. He has helped to shape my life even as he has shaped a great deal of the life of his nation.

It is good that he spent his last days in the bosom of his family who loved him dearly. And that he passed away peacefully, tranquilly.

Seventeen years ago, on the eve of his Deputy Prime Ministership, his last words to me were on the country he hoped to help build. It was not an uncommon vision: a united Malaysian nation at peace, and living in harmony.

'There is no alternative to such a nation — only chaos,' he said. 'My children and their children must have a future. Differences of opinion we may have, but this is too big to let differences stand in the way.'

'We, the Malaysian people who love this country, must build this nation. My father's generation has passed. Now it is my generation's turn to struggle. Those who follow us must continue.' Indeed we must.

The Tun is now no longer with us. But these parting words of his — as meaningful in 1990 as they were in 1973 — should inspire all Malaysians, even as they had guided him during his years in office. May God bless him and shower upon him His blessings. May the life he tried to live, and the ideals he tried to uphold, guide all those who will lead the Malaysian nation for generations to come.

The Interview that never was ...

What was the scene at ISIS when news of Tun's demise reached us? What kind of imprints did Tun leave in the Institute of which he was so much a part? This article attempts to provide some answers. By **Soo Ewe Jin**, former ISIS Focus Editor and currently Deputy Executive Editor at the Star Publications Berhad.

THE heartbreaking news from halfway across the globe was transmitted to No 1 Pesiaran Sultan Salahuddin almost immediately. Another working day was about to start at the nation's premier think tank and as the staff trickled in, the news of Tun Hussein Onn's death in San Francisco — conveyed through a phone call from the Prime Minister's Department — was received.

There was an air of despondency, of sorrow; a feeling of emptiness which words could not articulate. Tun, as he was affectionately referred to, was very much a part of ISIS. And ISIS was very much a part of Tun. Some of us knew him at close quarters. Most of us knew him only from afar. But there was no doubt that the profound loss of one of the nation's favourite sons was felt by one and all on the morning of May 29.

When I joined ISIS in September 1988, I had marked in my diary that I would like to do an interview piece with Tun for ISIS Focus one day. He was not only our first chairman but a living historical figure with much to reveal and share.

His role was unique. His contributions to the institute, by all reckoning, were immeasurable. In the one and a half years since I joined ISIS, I had been taking down notes, making observations, figuring out the man from afar. I was looking through his speeches, selecting pictures, listening to him speak at conferences, at the dinner table — it was a journalistic trait of trying to learn as much about your subject before coming face-to-face with him.

Pulling out the diskette of these jottings on the morning of May 29, I found it to be in near com-



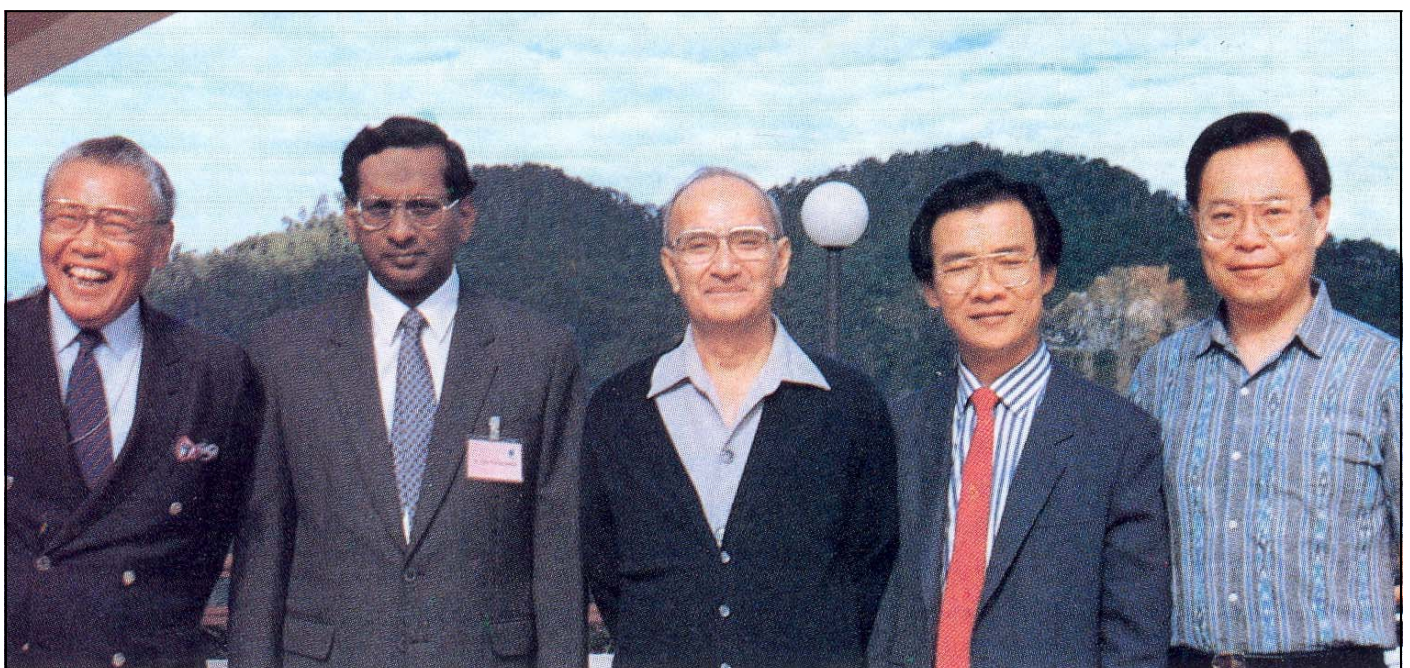
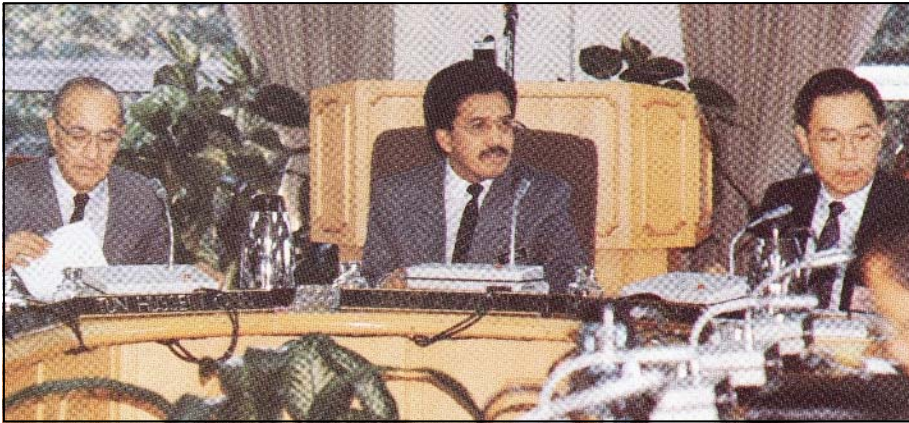
Tun Hussein Onn

plete shape — except for the part where I was to let Tun speak for himself. This then is the story of the interview that never was.

January 14, 1976. I remember the moment well. It was the day Tun (then Datuk) Hussein Onn announced to the nation that Tun Abdul Razak had passed away in London. I can still picture the tears. I can still hear the emotion-choked voice. It is an image that never fades away.

I remember too the days of apprehension at the height of the Harun crisis. I was still in Penang, far removed from the stand-off in Kuala Lumpur, but the school authorities were not taking chances — we were all prepared to be sent home at any time should the situation take a turn for the worse. I





remember then the firm hand of the judiciary, and the firm hand of the government of the day under Tun Hussein.

These are the two most vivid images of Tun each time I see him at any ISIS function. Tun, the man of compassion. And Tun, the man who told the nation — and especially the man who held a nation hostage — that all are equal before the law.

I wanted to find out from Tun himself what kind of thoughts ran through his head at those critical junctures. What manner of man is he who, on the day he took over the helm of the government, would break down so unashamedly in front of the nation he was to govern? What kind of man is he who, faced with an acute political problem that threatened to turn nasty, would hold firm and true to the calling of his office?

Tun Hussein resigned as Prime Minister on May 16, 1981, after undergoing a heart operation in February the same year. On his last day in office, he was quoted in the Press as saying he was going home to sleep. To many, that was a sign that Tun was going to relax and enjoy his retirement. The burden of public office was at last lifted from his shoulders and the nation was more than glad to wish him all the happiness he deserved.

But it was not long before Tun was back in the limelight when he was appointed Chairman of ISIS. With his commanding stature as a former Prime Minister and his vast experience in statecraft, Tun was the logical choice to head the fledgling institute when it started operations in January 1984.

It was an appointment befitting his status and a chance for him to continue serving the nation. Those who suggested that Tun would do no more than become a figurehead were terribly wrong.

The institute would not be where it is today if not for the able stewardship of Tun. His influence ensured us a stability which was much needed in the

... the man who told the nation — and especially the man who held a nation hostage — that all are equal before the law

formative years. He steered the institute towards an agenda that included two of his pet topics — national unity and world peace.

And he worked hard at them. One needed only to attend an ISIS event to realize the ease with which Tun, the elder statesman, was able to welcome visiting heads of government and heads of state and compare notes with them. The intimacy and the frankness with which he was able to converse with these people who had a decisive hand in world affairs cannot be underestimated.

As an elder statesman, Tun was held in high esteem by individuals from all across the political spectrum. Those who found that they could not agree with each other were often seen to be more accommodating in the presence of Tun.

As ISIS Chairman, he was involved in major conferences as well as minor in-house meetings. Whether in a room of ten or in a big conference hall of 100, Tun was there to share his expertise and his wisdom. In his very humble way, he moved delegates to speak, sometimes from their heads, sometimes from their hearts, but rarely from their texts.

Tun believed that lasting peace in the world could be built brick by brick. He believed that institutes such as ISIS can go beyond the normal world of diplomacy to build bridges and tear down walls. It was a mission he was firmly committed to.

Many of the traits that were faithfully documented in his life as PM were brought very much into his role at ISIS.

It was apparent, for example, that the legendary six-inch white ruler with which he used to go through every speech, continued to be very much in use at ISIS. Tun would go through every draft of the speeches he was to deliver at ISIS functions with the same thoroughness.

Those of us who had to make the changes when the drafts were returned would often be amazed and tickled by the results. I used to comment, after each exercise, that Tun would make a very good sub-editor indeed. He did not like verbiage and would strike out long-winded phrases and replace them with simple words. His tightness in editing would have made any editor proud.

Tun also did not like the pronoun 'I'. One could see that here was a man deliberately and consciously making sure that it was the speech and not the speechmaker that was to take the limelight.

At meetings and conferences, Tun would measure his words before delivering them. Yet some of the most intimate 'confessions' could be heard within the closed walls of ISIS. In a soft-spoken voice, he would captivate the audience with his simple but profound observations of the many issues of the day. And when Tun talked, everybody listened.

The image of Tun as the gentleman statesman is accurate in every respect. At ISIS, he has shown the way for us all to be a little more gentlemanly, a little more statesmanlike. Long before ISIS was even conceptualized, Tun was quoted as saying: 'Many of the miseries of life are due to sacrificing the future for the present; the happiness of years to come for the satisfaction of the moment.'

He could not have realized that he would one day lead an institute committed to such a philosophy — and that his imprint would be there for all to see. In many ways, all of us here at ISIS have lost not only a leader, but a mentor and a friend.

It was Alexandar Pope who said, in 'Moral Essays':

Statesman, yet friend to truth! Of soul sincere In action faithful, and in honour clear, who broke no promise, served no private end, who gained no title, and who lost no friend.

This is an edited version of an article that appeared in ISIS Focus Issue No. 64, July 1990

Reflections on Tun Hussein Onn

By Dato' Dr Muthiah Alagappa

Dato' Dr Muthiah Alagappa, the first Tun Hussein Onn Chair, reflects on Tun Hussein, the leader who, as Prime Minister, placed the making of a strong and united Malaysian nation high on his agenda.

The late Tun Hussein Onn was a man of great honesty, integrity, conviction, and steely courage, who put service to country ahead of self. He is a leader to be admired and emulated. Coming from a family that played central administrative and political roles in Johor and in the formation of Malaya, Tun was deeply interested in the unity of the Malaysian nation.

Recognizing the complexities of building a multi-ethnic nation, the late Tun Hussein took firm action on key issues such as in education, finance, trade, and industry. His warnings and actions against corruption in public life, however stern and unpopular they may have been at the time, were prophetic. They reflected his deep conviction that uplifting the Malay community and building a united Malaysian nation would be undermined by the lack of integrity and rise of corruption in public institutions.

Believing that a stable and secure regional environment was crucial for the attainment of domestic goals, Tun was actively engaged as well on the regional and international stages, such as in seeking a settlement of the Cambodian conflict. Concerned about the national security of the country, Tun Hussein authorized a big buildup of the Malaysian Armed Forces during his tenure as Prime Minister. At that time I was a serving military officer, working in the defence planning department in the Ministry of Defence. In that capacity I had the privilege of interacting with and observing first-hand Tun's methodological and meticulous approach to problems, that have become his hallmark.

Subsequently I also had the pleasure of working with Tun Hussein when he became Chairman of ISIS Malaysia. Having taken early retirement from the Malaysian Armed Forces, I was then a Senior Fellow at ISIS.

While authorizing a big military build-up, Tun recognized that Malaysia's national security hinged even more on national unity and resilience at home. Building a united and strong Malaysian nation was very much at the heart of the endeavours of Tun Hussein Onn and his father Dato' Onn.

The topic of my inaugural lecture on nation making stems from that concern of Tun's. Tun Hussein's deep commitment to the nation and his selflessness were reflected both in his decision to rejoin UMNO over the objections of some of his family members, and by his decision to hand over power as soon as he realized that the state of his health would not permit him to carry the burden of the duties of Prime Minister.

Reminiscing on Tun Hussein Onn: A Book Lover

By Susan Teoh

Director, Information Services, ISIS Malaysia

As the first chairman of ISIS Malaysia, Tun Hussein Onn had a significant impact on the development of ISIS. When ISIS first began operations, it was housed on the fifth and ninth floors of the then Asian Pacific and Development Centre (APDC) building at Pesiaran Duta. It was through the efforts of Tun that we were given the bungalow that ISIS is housed in today.

My personal encounters with the Tun have been very memorable ones. 'Reading was his favourite pastime since his youth and he once said, "I love to read books on politics, sometimes war stories. However, I am not very interested in books on love stories."'* I could see this interest first-hand when he was Chairman of ISIS.

When the ISIS Library was established at the current premises, Tun would often visit. He would seat himself in the corner where the political history books were and he would browse through the shelves picking up the books that he liked.

The Library was newly established then and was not stocked with many books. I would regularly source for him books on politics and world events and especially of World War I and II. I got the books mainly from the University of Malaya Library. It became routine for me to borrow books for him. While initially the task was quite easy, later, I had to ensure that I did not borrow the same titles by mistake and had to browse longer and among many more bookshelves in the UM Library.

On some occasions, Tun would sit in the Chairman's room looking through the books I had



Tun Hussein Onn

borrowed for him. He would quite often tell me what he had read, his views and comments on certain books and why he agreed or disagreed with some of the authors' views.

Although Tun was a former Prime Minister, he was a very approachable man, with no airs about him. He may have been soft-spoken but he spoke with great wisdom, as an elder statesman. Tun was truly respected and appreciated.

* www.pmo.org

South-South Cooperation has a Viable Future*

I SIS Focus reproduces here the full text of Tun Hussein Onn's address delivered during the welcoming dinner for the conference titled 'South-South II: Charting the Way Forward,' 5-8 May 1986, Kuala Lumpur.

We all come from different backgrounds, from vastly different parts of the world, from countries at different stages of development and different stages of socio-economic advancement. Yet, I believe that we are all united, that we are all at one in our commitment to move our nations forward. I am certain that we are at one in our belief that South-South cooperation is a timely and powerful idea. I am also certain that we are at one in our belief that it is the task of true leadership to adopt, implement and make this powerful idea a reality.

The idea of South-South cooperation is a powerful one. Yet, the record speaks for itself. The rhetoric has been awesome in quality as well as in volume – many assembled in this room have contributed much to that quality and that volume. The argument has been resplendent in elegance as well as eloquence – again, many who are with us tonight have contributed splendidly to that elegance and that eloquence. Yet, after all these years, in terms of concrete accomplishments, the nations of the South are still at the starting block – even as other less powerful ideas are reaching the finishing line.

There are pessimists amongst us as there are optimists. We need neither pessimists nor optimists, but realists. Realism tells us that there must be powerful forces that stand in the way of breakthroughs on South-South cooperation. We must find these obstacles, identify and dissect them meticulously, and with the utmost creativity, we must discover the ways to contain, undermine and remove them. More than sheer creativity and



Tun Hussein Onn welcoming participants to South-South II on 5th May, 1986

ingenuity will be required. But creativity and ingenuity — the intellectual input — must come first.

Against the dismal record of promises unfulfilled and potential unexploited, perhaps we should ask the question: given the past, does South-South cooperation have a future? My answer is clear. The answer of the Third World Foundation and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies is clear. Our organization of this conference is ample testimony to that answer.

We start off tomorrow with an overview of where we are, where South-South cooperation has been and the present state of affairs. The conference will address two other specific themes. Firstly, it will critically examine the problems and obstacles that stand in the way of our forward movement. Secondly, it will examine the specific and concrete opportunities for South-South cooperation. It is my hope that at the end of the day we would be able to chart clearly where we go from here. It is

* Reproduced from *ISIS Focus* No. 15, June 1986

time, I think, to talk about specific projects rather than broad objectives. It is time for specific workable action, however humble. It is not the time for impracticable great schemes, however grandiose they may be.

We in ISIS believe that South-South cooperation has a viable future, and that it is a necessity upon which a substantial part of all our future will depend.

The ills of the South stare us in the face. Between 1970 and 1984, the total medium and long term debt of the South increased ten-fold, jumping to US\$686 billion. If we include short term debt, the total debt of the least developed countries (LDC) stood at around US\$900 billion. Before the decade is out, and if we proceed on past trends, we will have reached the trillion US dollar level. The ratio of debt to gross national product (GNP) more than doubled from 14 per cent to 34 per cent in the period 1970-1984. Debt is growing faster than the net export proceeds of the countries of the South. The debt crisis will be with the world for the rest of this century.

It is important to note that it is not only the problem of the debtor but also of the creditor. It is interesting to note that in the 1930s, nine states in the United States defaulted by suspending their debt service payments. During the 1970s, Great Britain defaulted on payments to the United States. In 1953, West Germany was given a 'breather' when the donor, the United States,

reduced Germany's debt by two-thirds and stretched repayments over 35 years, at a concessional rate of three per cent.

It is obvious that we must all live within our means. It is obvious that foreign capital should never be treated as an alternative to domestic capital, but only as a supplement. It is also interesting to note that whilst at the governmental level, Latin America is a debtor continent to the United States, there is more money owed by American banks to individuals and private institutions in Latin America, than is owed by Latin American governments and governmental institutions to American banks. In actuality, the United States is a debtor to Latin America.

The Bleak Picture of Official Aid

When we come to official aid, the picture is also bleak. Official aid to the countries of the South has declined not only in relative but also in absolute terms. Both official and non-concessional aid accounted for 50 per cent of the LDC inflows of capital in 1980. By 1984, this had fallen to 46 per cent. Likewise, foreign investments in LDC, which stood at US\$17.2 billion in 1981, had fallen to US\$7.8 billion by 1983. To this should be added the problem of capital movement and capital flight from Third World countries.

Our terms of trade have worsened at an alarming rate. Increasing protectionism in the North makes it difficult for exports from the Third World to compete and to enter markets.

There are a host of other problems confronting the South, which the South can only solve by dealing with all states in the international system. There is no point deluding ourselves at any time about the crucial importance of the North to the South. But there is much that we in the South can do for ourselves.

... there is more money owed by American banks to individuals and private institutions in Latin America, than is owed by Latin American governments and governmental institutions to American banks

Given the poor prospects for North-South trade, expansion of trade between the countries of the South is an option that is too obvious to elaborate ...

Trade is an area we must really start to develop with vigour. Given the poor prospects for North-South trade, expansion of trade between the countries of the South is an option that is too obvious to elaborate, yet so apparently difficult to achieve. Given that investments from the North will be hard to come by, we must obviously do more to invest in each other.

In my view, greater South-South cooperation requires not only major political initiatives but also readjustments, both within the international economic system and the internal economies of the Third World countries. Such readjustments require, among other things, a fundamental change in the intellectual environment and developments in the South.

This conference and future meetings on the South must closely examine the need to liberate ourselves from the intellectual bondage which at present restricts us. We do need to restructure our thinking, even our areas of intellectual concentration and interest. Those countries of the South which do not look closely at opportunities in the South, will have only themselves to blame in the years ahead.

It is my hope that the participants of this meeting on South-South cooperation will be truly inspired — at a time when inspiration is truly needed.

South-South cooperation must be made into more than a slogan or dream. We must be humble about what we can achieve. But let us resolve to achieve over the next four days something that will be worthwhile, at least a small milestone in our long journey towards the fulfillment of the dream of deep and enduring South-South cooperation.

Domestic Problems Loom larger than External Threats*

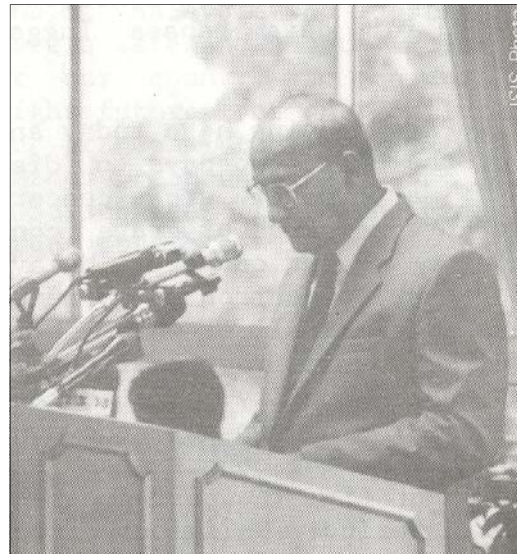
IISIS Focus reproduces here the full text of Tun Hussein Onn's opening address to participants at the First ISIS National Conference on Security entitled, 'Comprehensive Security: Challenges and Responses,' July 15-17, 1986, Kuala Lumpur.

We are meeting here today and over the next two days to discuss matters of great concern, and in some cases, of grave consequence to our country. Malaysia today is confronted by numerous problems, all of which have a direct or indirect bearing on national security.

The current economic slowdown is the most severe that the country has experienced in the post-independence period. Religious extremism and racial feelings threaten the very fabric of our society. The number of *dadah* (drug) addicts has increased to over 100,000 and illegal immigration is becoming a serious issue – especially in the light of the economic slowdown. We continue to face communist insurgency and subversion and we have to attain a state of preparedness to meet external threats that may arise – if not in the short term, then in the longer term.

None of these threats or problems are new, we have experienced nearly all of them at one time or another. We have shown national resilience in the past. What might be new is the severity of the threats, and more importantly, the fact that so many of them confront the country concurrently, with one complicating the other.

These problems traverse political, socio-cultural, psychological and economic dimensions — thus emphasizing the total or comprehensive nature of Malaysia's national security. It is vital to recognize this and to view individual problems in the light of the overall totality.



Tun Hussein welcoming the prime minister and guests to the conference

Malaysia's present security concerns, like those of its Asean partners, emanate from the domestic and international environments. In common with its Asean partners, the domestic threats remain the more critical dimension. They must, therefore, remain our primary concern.

In a multi-ethnic multi-religious country like Malaysia, the attainment of national security is dependent, to a very large degree, on the satisfaction of two very basic conditions.

First, there must be a tolerable level of harmony between individual security, group security and national security. Individual liberty is vital and

* Reproduced from ISIS Focus No. 17, August 1986

must be protected – except for certain curtailments in the interest of the society at large. Group security is also vital. As human beings can only find security through association in groups, it is important that group security is also not undermined.

In the implementation of policies, it is obviously important that we do not create unnecessary tension between group security and national security; it is important that this tension be managed and reduced.

True national security rests on the attainment of harmony between all the three levels of security – individual, group and national security.

The second condition is that our external environment must be made conducive and supportive of internal political and socio-economic development. Malaysia's regional environment must be made safe. In this regard, the development of Asean has contributed a very great deal. Let none take Asean for granted. To a significant degree, because of Asean, we no longer perceive Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei or the Philippines as posing threats to our national security.

We must work in the context of Asean to enlarge the zone of peace already established in Southeast Asia, to include the other states in the region and

to ensure that the interaction of great powers in this part of the world does not lead to tension and conflict. In fact, our external security environment has improved markedly in recent years and we should work to maintain and improve upon this situation through political and diplomatic means.

We have assembled here today, some of the best brains in the country and nearly all the key officials involved in the formulation and execution of security policy in the country. I believe this is a unique forum – possibly without precedent. It is our hope, therefore, that all present will participate fully and be candid in their views. To facilitate this, all sessions of the conference are closed and participants do not even have to identify themselves when expressing their views.

We are not here as representatives of the various institutions, but as responsible citizens of Malaysia, who desire to chart a safe and smooth passage for our country, and to ensure a bright future for our children and grandchildren. Ours is an onerous responsibility; let us discharge it to the utmost extent possible.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you all for your participation in this conference, I now have great pleasure in inviting the Honourable Prime Minister to deliver his keynote address.

Thank you.

NOTES



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA
No. 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin
PO Box 12424, 50778 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia
Tel : +603 2693 9366
Fax : +603 2691 5435
Email : info@isis.org.my
Website : www.isis.org.my

