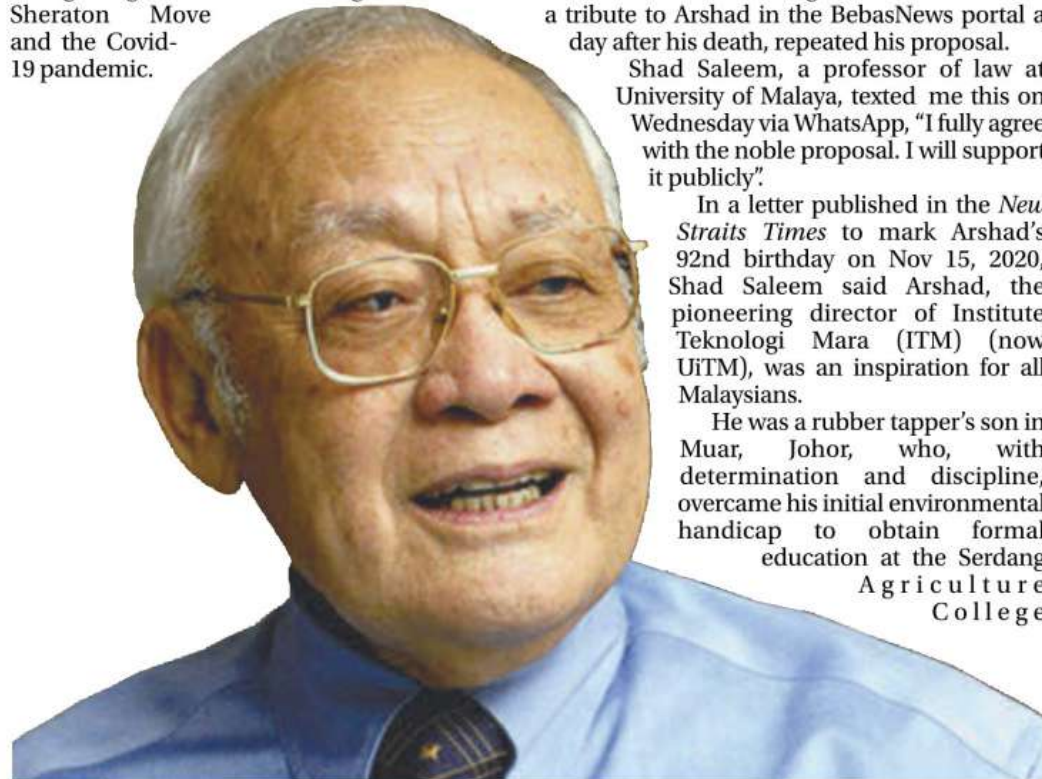


Rename UiTM Arshad Ayub University

WAY back in 2019, Prof Datuk Dr Ahmad Murad Merican had proposed that Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Malaysia's largest institution of higher learning, be renamed Arshad Ayub University. Tun Arshad Ayub (*pix*) died on Tuesday at the age of 93.

The proposal did not gather momentum since then as the nation was engulfed in more pressing issues such as the change of government following the so-called Sheraton Move and the Covid-19 pandemic.



The late Arshad had served the nation in numerous positions during his lifetime, but the most fitting tribute to this towering Malaysian is Prof Emeritus Dr Shad Saleem Farique's description of the man as "the greatest educational innovator and administrator, and social engineer this country has known".

Ahmad Murad, a professor of Social History and Intellectual at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, in a tribute to Arshad in the *BebasNews* portal a day after his death, repeated his proposal.

Shad Saleem, a professor of law at University of Malaya, texted me this on Wednesday via WhatsApp, "I fully agree with the noble proposal. I will support it publicly".

In a letter published in the *New Straits Times* to mark Arshad's 92nd birthday on Nov 15, 2020, Shad Saleem said Arshad, the pioneering director of Institute Teknologi Mara (ITM) (now UiTM), was an inspiration for all Malaysians.

He was a rubber tapper's son in Muar, Johor, who, with determination and discipline, overcame his initial environmental handicap to obtain formal education at the Serdang Agriculture College

(now Universiti Putra Malaysia), then to Aberystwyth in the United Kingdom and Lausanne in Switzerland.

At ITM, where he was the director for 10 years from 1965, he believed that everyone could be educated, and that among the young there were many late bloomers who were largely ignored by the prevailing system then.

He held steadfastly to the belief that entry points into courses should be flexible but exit points must be regulated, and that how a student ends the race is more important than how he or she began it.

For this, he devised many specially tailored, remedial, pre-university programmes to upgrade students who would not otherwise qualify for professional courses.

"While other universities boasted of admitting the best students and adding glitter to gold, ITM under Arshad accepted the challenge of fashioning ordinary clay into works of art," said Shad Saleem.

As he put it: "Thousands of students in top managerial positions today owe their success to the faith Arshad reposed in them by urging them to go from the precipice to the peak".

Arshad set up branch campuses in the remotest parts of Perlis, Sabah and Sarawak. Instead of rural students coming to the city, the city went to the rural hinterland to provide a catalyst for growth.

And because of his unflinching belief that English is the language for world-class education, coupled with ITM embracing external UK programmes in many fields, he stuck to English as the medium of instruction, much to the consternation of Malay language nationalists and politicians.

He reasoned out his stoical stand by telling the nation: "I am here to save the Malay race, not the Malay language!"

Shad Saleem told me yesterday of Arshad's fatherly side as he regarded his students as his children. For this reason, he stood up to the identity politics of race and religion raging in the country by recruiting capable academic staff from all races and religions. In fact, more than 50% of the academic staff at ITM comprised non-Malays.

His tolerance for the nation's dazzling diversity was exemplary. On Sundays, an ITM bus would ferry bumiputra Christian students from Sabah and Sarawak to the nearest church in Berkeley Estate in Klang from their campus in Shah Alam.

Towards the latter part of his life, Arshad devoted his time to a foundation named after him. The Yayasan Arshad Ayub is testimony to his great belief in life's second chances and human capital development, as well as the universal value of returning a favour or "membalas budi", as the Malay saying goes.

It was Arshad's way of expressing gratitude for the bountiful opportunities and favours that came his way throughout his illustrious and remarkable journey in life. The foundation provides scholarships, study loans and placements in institutions of higher learning, just like what he did at ITM.

In a previous column marking the Emerald Jubilee or 55 years of his marriage to wife Toh Puan Zaleha Mohd Arshad, which I wrote in 2016, an old friend of his said: "He is a man beyond comparison. His life is one of true service to family, friends and the nation".

The three of us, Ahmad Murad, Shad Saleem and I are praying and hoping for the best, that as a glittering and lasting tribute for this most extraordinary citizen, UiTM be renamed after him.

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