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The man who shaped ITM

BAIDURA AHMAD talks to Tan Sri Arshad Ayub, a man who's biography is about to be written



VISIONARY: Tan Sri Arshad Ayub

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WHEN Tan Sri Arshad Ayub left Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) 31 years ago, he went on to become a secretary-general for two ministries and Bank Negara deputy governor. Now, he sits on the board of eight listed companies and 13 private companies.

Yet, this 78-year-old man is most remembered for his time as the first director of ITM which is now known as Universiti Teknologi Mara (UTM) after it was accorded university status in 1999.

Arshad's illustrious career began when he was hand-picked by the late Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein in 1967 to head ITM.

Razak believed that this bright man, who overcame a childhood of hardcore poverty to be a visionary civil servant, would be the right person to turn young, impressionable Bumiputeras into learned and confident individuals.

Speak to any of the thousands of students and staff of ITM from Arshad's days (October 1967 to March 1975), and whether they loved him or feared him, they all agreed on one thing - it was "Che Arshad" who turned ITM into a respectable educational institute.

But Arshad, a man known for being modest, said: "People always say that I was an integral part of ITM but I was only providing the leadership. The rest was teamwork. No matter how difficult the road or how fraught the challenges in our way, we pushed ahead in search of academic excellence with professional prospective and teaching respectability."

Although an institute by name, ITM operated as a university, premised on the fact that it had since 1967 offered degree level programmes, professional programmes such as the Institute of Chartered Management Accountants (ICMA), the Institute



ROLE MODEL: Arshad was father, mentor, disciplinarian to thousands of students

- File picture

of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA), and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). It also offered twinning programmes with the Ohio University and the University of Kentucky in America.

ITM was the training conduit for those who did not make it to the university. Yet, by the time they graduated, ITM students became marketable.

Arshad sent out lecturers to survey the job market, and then sat them down to discuss the introduction of new courses which were tailor-made to fit the job requirements as close as possible. Among the courses were Applied Sciences, Chartered Institute of Transport, Planting Industry Management and Stenography.

Even the students' lunch menu was changed from rice to big hearty sandwiches because Arshad believed the rice with its accompanying dishes were making the students sleepy and lethargic. Sandwiches also made for quicker lunch breaks.

Despite the euphoria of Malaysia's independent status, Arshad also insisted that English was retained as the medium of instruction for ITM because the institution was training human

capital mainly for the private sector.

Arshad was also remembered for his hands-on stewardship. In fact, in the case of male students caught smoking or playing truant, it was literally a tight slap on their faces delivered by the man himself. Students were known to go out of their way to avoid bumping into Arshad on his daily walk-about around the Shah Alam campus, which started at 8am.

"Some of the students came from poor, rural background. I was angry with them for wasting their families' hard-earned money on something as unnecessary as cigarettes. While they were at ITM, it was my responsibilities to instill discipline in them," said Arshad.

With such an illustrious career and personality, it was only a matter of time before a book on Arshad is written.

"I could not write it myself because I am too busy. I am touched that there are people who want to do it to commemorate the years I was at ITM," said Arshad who attributed his zest to life to having something to do and somewhere to go when he gets up in the morning.