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Boys will be boys: Malay College Kuala Kangsar's (MCKK) Class of '71 unites!

By Intan Maizura Ahmad Kamal - July 21, 2024 @ 10:00am



Datuk Mohd Shukri Hussin's intellectual curiosity was ignited at the Malay College Kuala Kangsar.

STEPPING into the bustling grounds of Saujana Hotel Subang, Selangor, I'm greeted by the lively hum of reunion — a gathering of boys-turned-men from the illustrious Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK), their divergent paths intertwining once more in the tapestry of memory.

It's a scorcher of a day; the sun beating down as if in homage to the warmth and laughter emanating from pockets of alumni huddled around makeshift tables set up along one corner of the entrance, plates in hand and voices rising in animated cadence.

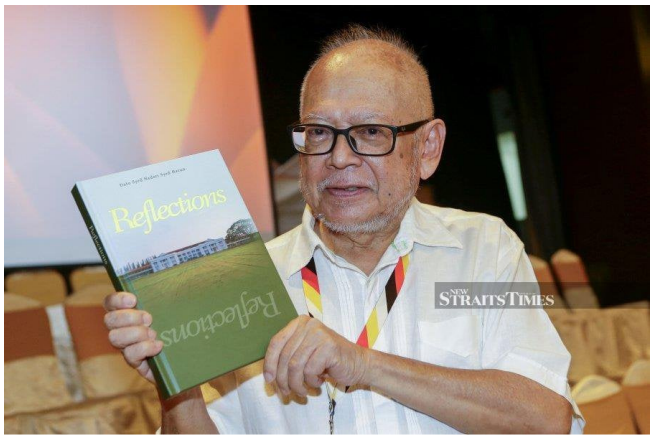
After circling through the congested hotel parking lot in search of an elusive spot, I reluctantly settle for a space quite a distance from the venue. As I finally join the gathering, which include the country's eminent figures, the sun has left its mark, turning me into a perspiring spectacle under its relentless gaze.

Amidst the jovial throng, my eyes search for a familiar face: that of Datuk Syed Nadzri Syed Harun, the former *New Straits Times* (*NST*) group editor (who is also my ex-boss) and the "linchpin" connecting me to this sea of testosterone and nostalgia.

He's also, incidentally, the man being honoured with an impressive coffee-table book, a compilation of his columns published during his stint with the *NST*, put together by members of the alumni and presented as a door gift to the attendees of this 70th birthday bash for the Class of 71.

The prime-mover of the project, and the man I've also come to see, is Datuk Mohd Shukri Hussin. Roped in to help were Captain Aziz Abdullah, Nasir Hamid (Nash), Idrus Ismail and Mohd Ismail Ibrahim (Mael).

THE BROTHERHOOD



Datuk Syed Nadzri Syed Harun holding a copy of Reflections, a coffee-table book comprising a collection of his articles during his stint with the New Straits Times.

Finding respite at a table nestled in a verdant corner, shaded by a large umbrella, I settle in to observe and participate in the vibrant tableau of reunion. Around me, snippets of conversation weave tales of triumphs, challenges and the shared experiences that define the brotherhood of MCKK.

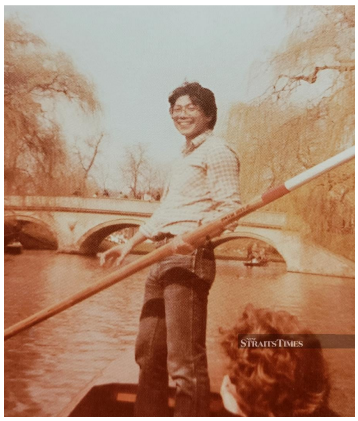
Before long, I see the familiar and warmly welcoming face of my former boss, slightly wizened by the years. His gait is somewhat more measured now, but there's no mistaking that gentle smile, which I still remember him casting in my direction on my first day in office when he discovered that I was the daughter of someone whom he knew well.

"Let me introduce you to Shukri," he says softly, once the formalities are out of the way. "Did you bring a photographer?" he asks, as if recalling the typical routine of us journalists. I nod in affirmation, and his smile broadens warmly.

Perched at a lively corner table under the shelter of a broad umbrella, surrounded by animated fellow classmates, Shukri, a prominent figure from the Class of 71, rises eagerly as he notes us approaching.

"Come, come!" he calls out heartily, his face breaking into a wide grin. Resting on the table before him is a copy of *Reflections*, the commemorative coffee-table book featuring Syed Nadzri's articles. "Tell her your story," suggests my former boss with a fond smile, before excusing himself to attend to the other guests.

ALL SHAKEN UP



A youthful Shukri punting in Cambridge in 1984.

"What would you like to know?" asks the dapper father of five (and grandfather of four), his voice booming over the cacophony around him. His grandfatherly warmth immediately puts me at ease.

"Everything!" I declare, tapping the record button on my device and settling back in my seat, mindful of the sweat trickling down my face. Chuckling to myself about the lengths we go for a good story, I shift my full attention to the gentleman before me, eager for his tale to unfold.

As he slowly rewinds the years, I duly learn that Shukri's journey spans from humble beginnings at a Malay school in Kampung Chempaka, Kelantan, where he started a year earlier than his peers, as his father, a worker in a power supply company, wanted him to accompany his brother, a year older, in the classroom.

His education progressed and the school allowed him to continue to Year 2 after a year. And when his brother died a couple of years later, Shukri became the family's eldest child.

Prior to MCKK, Shukri attended "remove class" before starting his lower secondary education in an English school, SM Kota Bharu. After sitting for the Lower Certificate of Education (LCE), he was offered a spot in MCKK.



Shukri (third from right) with his children and grandchildren last year.

It was here that Shukri's intellectual curiosity was ignited, delving into subjects like History and Literature. Tone laced with fondness, he confides: "I considered myself very lucky to be in the arts stream. I got to read Dickens, Shakespeare, Orwell, Shahnon Ahmad, Pramoedya Ananta Tur, Usman Awang and more. I believe that subjects like History and Literature helped me to improve my lateral thinking and to see the big picture."

His path continued to unfold through various milestones — a stint at Petronas Carigali, a pivotal articleship in London that led to him qualifying as a chartered accountant, and a transformative backpacking journey through Europe on a shoestring budget of US$10 a day.

These experiences enriched his perspective, from exploring historic cities along Germany's Romantic Road to soaking in the artistic fervour of Provence, France.

Shukri's professional trajectory solidified in the financial sector, notably contributing to CIMB Bank's evolution into a regional powerhouse. After 27 years of dedicated service, he transitioned to championing social and community causes through various foundations.

His commitment to national service deepened when he was called upon to lead Urusharta Jamaah Sdn Bhd (UJSB), tasked with revitalising troubled assets, including the Offshore Patrol Vessel project crucial for Malaysia's maritime security.



A great day for Shukri as KM 'Tun Fatimah' prepares to set sail in the Pulau Indah shipyard.. (Inset) The completion of the Offshore Patrol Vessel project is one of Shukri's milestones when he was leading Urusharta Jamaah Sdn Bhd.

Amidst accolades for restructuring excellence, including prestigious awards from Islamic Finance News, Shukri's leadership at UJSB underscored his resolve and strategic acumen. The successful delivery of KM 'Tun Fatimah', a milestone in maritime defence, epitomised his dedication to national interest and prudent stewardship.

IMPORTANT PROJECT

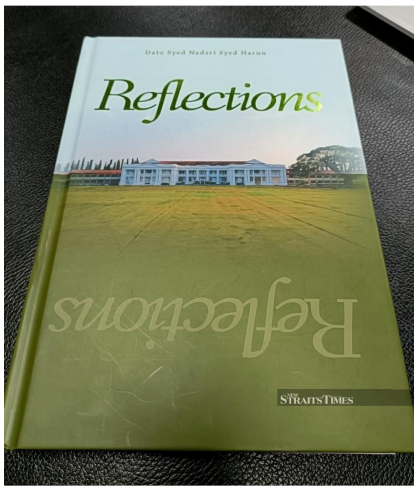


Shukri smiling broadly as the ship KM Tun Fatimah he helped build, sails in the background.

Amidst the festive ambiance of the 70th birthday celebration, Shukri's pride in the alumni book project shines through. "Compiling Syed Nadzri's writings was a labour of love," he says simply, hand gesturing towards the book on the table.

His face creasing into a smile, Shukri reflects warmly on the pivotal role played by *NST Klik* in bringing their ambitious project to fruition. "We owe a great debt of gratitude to *NST Klik*," he says, tone laced with appreciation, before adding: "From the inception of our idea to compile Syed Nadzri's writings, they were instrumental every step of the way."

Recalling how it all started, Shukri continues: "The idea was triggered over two years ago. Syed Nadzri's health had been a concern for some time. The initiative was primarily driven by myself and Ismail, aiming to lift his spirits and commemorate our batch, the distinguished Class of 71."



Reflections, the book.

Brows furrowing in recollection, he recalls: "We started with the book, and as the book was progressing, we started planning for this birthday bash. Our gratitude goes to the *NST* for granting us the copyright, and in particular, the Klik team of *NSTP* who supported us wholeheartedly, providing us with access to the archives, assisting in the downloading process, and even meticulously proofreading our drafts without any charges."

As he's spoke, several of his former classmates nod heartily in agreement, their faces reflecting a mix of nostalgia and gratitude.

"It's through their unwavering support that we were able to honour not just Syed Nadzri's legacy, but also to celebrate the diverse achievements of our fellow alumni," says Shukri with a heartfelt smile.

MEMORIES APLENTY



A wonderful gathering of MCKK old boys and their families.

Throughout our conversation, the affable Shukri is periodically interrupted by the jovial banter and good-natured ribbing of his fellow alumni. "Remember the time you snuck out to watch that Indonesian movie?" a voice suddenly chimes in from a nearby table, prompting laughter and shared memories.

"Ah, yes, and the subsequent caning!" replies Shukri, chuckling at the memory, as his kindly eyes twinkle mischievously. "Funny thing was, I didn't even enjoy the film. I was 17 at the time and well aware that we weren't allowed out after hours. The lure of adventure got the better of me, though."

Grinning, he continues: "I was caught, of course. Interestingly, my friend who was with me escaped the prefect's notice entirely. So, there I was, receiving my due punishment. Surprisingly, that incident didn't dampen my school career; it seems my prowess in sports (I played football and rugby) earned me a role as a prefect overseeing the prep school, where I had to look after the 13-year-olds."

As the afternoon unfolds, Shukri's gaze lingers on the faces of his classmates — some of whom comprise distinguished professionals, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. "Our paths diverged after MCKK," he muses, before adding solemnly: "But the brotherhood we share remains steadfast."

In the heart of Saujana Hotel Subang, amidst the laughter and camaraderie, the Class of 71 is celebrating more than a reunion; it's also a celebration of their timeless bond and the enduring legacy of their alma mater, MCKK.

The theme for this historic bash, "A Time For Us" resonates deeply among the alumni, inspired by a cherished memory that binds them together — a class trip to Ipoh to watch Franco Zefirelli's 1968 masterpiece, *Romeo and Juliet*.

Remembers Shukri: "We were in Form 4 and our teacher, Anthony Lu, orchestrated the outing. The theme song, *A Time For Us*, from the film left a lasting impression on us. When it came to choosing a theme for this gathering, we unanimously agreed on using that title. The significance of this theme is known only to our class, reflected in every detail from the invitation cards to the decorations."

Eyes dancing with enthusiasm, he elaborates: "While some might associate A Time For Us with a love story, for us, it transcends romantic notions. It symbolises our shared experiences during those school years, a period some might jest was full of struggle (prompting a quick rebuttal in the background — 'Who struggled? It was smooth sailing for most of us!')."



Datuk Syed Nadzri seen here with Datuk Lat, the cartoonist, to his left.

A Time For Us, indeed — a theme that encapsulates their journey from youth to maturity, from schoolboys to accomplished individuals making a mark in various fields. As the day draws to a close, amidst handshakes, hugs and promises to keep in touch, Shukri reflects on the enduring spirit of MCKK.

Asked why this bash is so significant for the group, he pauses, brows furrowing to reflect. He eventually replies, voice low: "This is our 70th birthday gathering. The last one we had was when we were 60 — 10 years ago. Because of the view that this could be our last one, we decided to put all our efforts to organise something memorable."

Adding, he shares: "We even did a *Jejak Kasih*, tracing all those guys that we'd lost touch with. We tried to locate them through friends of friends. It was challenging and took us at least six to seven months. They're all scattered everywhere and some have passed on. The last time we were all together as a big group was back in 1971."

As the minutes tick and calls for his attention become louder, Shukri grins apologetically before concluding: "We may all have aged, but the memories and friendships remain timeless. It's a testament to the enduring values instilled in us at the Malay College Kuala Kangsar."