

BOOK REVIEW

The Power of Deeds: The Untold Story of Abdul Kadir Shamsuddin, by Khadijah Md Khalid, Shakila Yacob and Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi. Selangor: MPH Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 2020, 363 pp.

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The book *The Power of Deeds: The Untold Story of Abdul Kadir Shamsuddin* outlines Abdul Kadir's inspirational and magnanimous contributions towards Malaysia's development. The biography's publication is a serious endeavour by authors Khadijah Md Khalid, Shakila Yacob and Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi to document and illuminate the important role Abdul Kadir played in the country's public administration. In particular, the biography sheds light on Abdul Kadir's career path from his humble beginnings in the civil service, up to Abdul Kadir becoming the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia. The position of Chief Secretary to the Government is the most senior officer in the Malaysian Civil Service and entails huge responsibilities in tandem with its primary position in the country's administrative structure. The role of the Chief Secretary is akin to a "territorial boundary" between the executive body, which draws up the country's policies and the administrative officers who enforce those policies. The Chief Secretary provides professional advice to the government regarding the feasibility of and necessity for a policy. This is important in ensuring there is no deviation and breach in enforcing the country's policies. Hence, cooperation and tolerance between the Chief Secretary to the Government and the parties which shape and form the government is crucial in ensuring administrative competency and keeping the country on the right track.

Within the first 20 years of achieving independence, Malaysia had a great need for public administrative figures that were capable of forming ideas for the country's development, when the setting up of institutions was still in its infancy. As a civil servant, Abdul Kadir was directly involved in the formation of the Federation of Malaya and Malaysia. Responsible for the reformation of

the country's administration after Malaya gained independence, Abdul Kadir remained highly dedicated towards serving his beloved nation until the end of his life. Taking over the helm of the country's administration from the British required resolute leadership and impeccable public administrative skills. This book offers insight into the experiences and contributions of Abdul Kadir and the severe challenges he faced during the early phases of Malaysia's development.

Among Abdul Kadir's lasting achievements was his transformation of the Federal Establishment Office into the Public Service Department, a shift intended to restructure the Employment Office of the Federation of Malaya. While in office as the Chief Secretary of the Government of Malaysia, the visionary Abdul Kadir also spearheaded other significant civil service reforms, including the avoidance of laws that were bureaucratic in nature, introducing the feedback and monitoring system, and researching into the appropriate wage scale. As a true nationalist, Abdul Kadir did not abandon his fellow countrymen in rural areas who were constantly plagued by poverty. He took measures to develop those areas and prepared rural development programmes. Abdul Kadir became the Chairman for the National Development Division, which was tasked with formulating new economic plans for Malaysia. After six years of serving as the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia, Abdul Kadir finally retired in 1976. After his retirement, he was appointed as Chairman and Chief Executive of the national oil company PETRONAS (Petronas Nasional Berhad). Whilst there, he successfully manoeuvred the company through various crises with other oil companies. One of his biggest achievements as Chairman and Chief Executive of PETRONAS was the implementation of the Product Manufacturing & Sharing Contract, as well as the establishment of Malaysia LNG Sdn. Bhd. Additionally, Abdul Kadir was a Chairman of the administrative committee of Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM: now known as Universiti Putra Malaysia), Chairman of the Malaysian Society for Public Administration, committee member of the National Commission for Development Administration, and Chairman of the National Electricity Board (now known as Tenaga Nasional Berhad). Also active in voluntary activities, Abdul Kadir became Chairman of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society and served as Chairman of the National Library of Malaysia Advisory Board.

The timing of the publication of this book is relevant to the current political turmoil that Malaysia is undergoing, in the wake of Barisan Nasional (BN)'s loss of power after 60 years of uninterrupted rule, followed by the rise of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition which took power after a triumphant election in May 2018 but whose rule lasted only 22 months, and most recently by the power grab initiated by a hastily formed Perikatan Nasional (PN), which includes defecting elements from the PH government, as of 1 March 2020.

It is undeniable that the BN's dominance, especially after Mahathir Mohamad's assumption of the Premiership in 1981, has had a significant impact on

the style and performance of the Malaysian public service over the years. Malaysia initially started out as a country that inherited a civil service that was quite effective and admired, even envied, by many in the region. The public service has been the foundation of national development and progress. However, over the years, mainly due to the domination of politicians over bureaucrats, the nature of the relationship between politicians and public administrators has continued to change, from development projects led by the ruling elites to the control of political leaders over government administration. The performance and delivery of public services appears to be determined by politicians to the extent that the organisation of mass events largely utilises the talent and resources of private consulting companies and private companies with minimal involvement from the public administration. This third-party “hiring” approach provides a bad perspective of civil administrators who are viewed by society as having a less prominent and significant role in national development.

Indeed, Malaysian political history and the public bureaucracy have a close relationship. This is because many of the political leaders from the 1950s to the 1970s were recruited from the civil service. Political figures like Dato’ Onn Jaafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn all served in the civil administration.

Perhaps it is this phenomenon that can explain why during this period a harmonious relationship between the political elites and the state administration was formed, based on mutual trust, respect, and a mutual understanding in driving national development. In the context of this close relationship, the authors of the book conclude that the friendly relationship between Abdul Kadir and Tun Abdul Razak was a key to the success of the country’s administration and development. Thus, when Ghazali Shafie resigned as the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to contest as an election candidate for the ruling Perikatan coalition, *Berita Harian* (13 January 1969) reported that Abdul Kadir, then the Public Service Department of Malaysia director, was also rumoured to be following Ghazali Shafie. If only such action and speculation could be further elaborated by the authors, this book would be particularly interesting in giving readers a glimpse of the real story behind the news.

This book is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter, the author focuses on Abdul Kadir’s early life. The authors describe Abdul Kadir’s school days at the Kajang High School. Upon completing high school in 1939, he was appointed as the Assistant Postmaster with a monthly salary of RM120 (*Berita Harian* 10 March 1960). The authors then narrate how the scholarship received by Abdul Kadir affected his life in the future, stating that, “All of these scholastic achievements have had a significant impact in moulding Abdul Kadir’s character and developing his skills in the subsequent years of his life” (p. 1). He received a scholarship to study economics at Raffles College in Singapore. Subsequently,

he was awarded the Queen's Scholarship to further his studies in law at Bristol University in England in 1947. In 1954, he succeeded in obtaining the Fulbright Exchange Fellowship to pursue his studies at Yale University in the United States.

Abdul Kadir's career continued to soar when he successfully joined the Malay Administrative Services (MAS) in 1948, as well as the Malaysian Civil Service (MCS) in 1952 as an Assistant State Secretary of Pahang. The authors believe there were no challenges, trials, or tribulations at this point in Abdul Kadir's life that would significantly curtail his love and dedication for the public service.

In the second chapter, the authors detail Abdul Kadir's early involvement in the MAS and the MCS. According to them, the scheme was imposed by the British administration to produce more Malay bureaucrats with excellent administrative and leadership qualities. Abdul Kadir was one of the privileged Malays who had been given the opportunity by the British government to prove his ability to lead and manage a nation at the dawn of independence through the challenging era of decolonisation of the 1950s and 1960s. As a nationalist in the opinion of the authors, Abdul Kadir was seen working tirelessly, devoting his energies and mind to free Malaysia from its British occupiers. In the ongoing negotiations towards independence, the authors explain the involvement of Abdul Kadir, who also participated in the discussions on basic matters concerning issues of control over the country's finances, appointing citizens of Malaya to head government departments, domestic security, and constitutional restoration. Furthermore, Abdul Kadir was entrusted to join the "Malayan Independence" delegation. He became the Co-Secretary along with Tan Sri T.H. Tan. With the slogan, "To Fight or Die", he worked day and night together with the other members of the delegation. His perseverance and diligence were acknowledged by Tunku Abdul Rahman (1977, 67) in his memoirs, "Our two Secretaries, Encik Abdul Kadir (now Tan Sri) and T.H. Tan (now Tan Sri Tahir Tan) did more than their normal and fair share of work".

In the third chapter, the authors trace the history of the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) during the formative stages of Malaya after freeing herself from the clutches of British rule. This chapter generally succeeds in making clear the role and contribution played by Abdul Kadir in upholding the MINDEF as one of the most respected and important ministries in Malaysia, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Abdul Kadir's career continued to rise, as in 1955 when he was appointed as Assistant Secretary in the MINDEF and in 1956 as Acting Chief Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs. In 1957, he was appointed as Chief Assistant Secretary to the MINDEF and in 1961 was promoted to become the Permanent Secretary of the MINDEF. He attended courses at the British Imperial Defence College (now the Royal College of Defence Studies) for a year. Perhaps due to his long service with MINDEF, the issue with native born Sabahan and Sarawakian citizens who wished to join the Royal Malay Regiment was successfully resolved

in 1966 when he announced that native-born citizens of both states were allowed to enlist. The issue arose due to the regiment's exclusive recruitment of only Muslim Malays (*Berita Harian* 1966b).

As a former colony that had been dependent on the British for internal security and defence, Malaysia gradually emerged as peaceful and progressive as she experimented with democracy in the 1960s and 1970s. While many of the country's neighbours in Southeast Asia struggled to achieve peace, stability, and economic prosperity, Malaysia has risen above its colonial state status. In addition to the dynamic political management under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak, the authors conclude that this was accomplished with the guidance and support of Malaysia's public administration, led by key personnel such as Abdul Kadir and other like-minded and dedicated senior bureaucrats.

In Chapter 4, the authors highlight the significant contribution of Abdul Kadir in the evolution of Malaysia's bureaucracy, namely the Federal Establishment Office (FEO) to the Public Service Department (PSD) in the latter half of the 1960s. In the second part of this chapter, the authors look closely at the founding of the national training institute for public officials, popularly known as INTAN or the National Institute of Public Administration, in 1972 from the earlier Staff Training Centre (STC) in Port Dickson. The establishment of this institute occurred in the context of Malaysian nation-building and development, immediately before and during the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The 1960s and 1970s saw the founding and transformation of many national institutions in Malaysia, which were geared towards building the capacity and improving public delivery of many government agencies or bodies with a strong emphasis on human resources development. With the formation of the Department of National Unity in 1969, the introduction of the National Principles (Rukun Negara) in 1970, and the implementation of the NEP in 1971, the authors conclude that Tun Abdul Razak had put his trust in Abdul Kadir to manage the critical state of affairs in the nation. Tun Abdul Razak needed bureaucrats such as Abdul Kadir, whom he could trust to carry out his dreams and vision for the country. Tun Abdul Razak was confident that Abdul Kadir would ensure the successful implementation of the various policies and programmes that were introduced while he was the director of the National Operations Council. Abdul Kadir admitted "he was made responsible for the civil side of the administration" (p. 179) and that he had to focus on developing national unity in the Second Malaysia Plan. He further reiterated that the committee he chaired "concluded that national unity could not be achieved without firstly eradicating poverty irrespective of colour and race, and secondly, correcting the economic imbalance between the Malays and other races" (p. 179). The idea was to move the Malays from the predominantly low-productivity, rural-traditional, and urban-traditional sectors to high-productivity, modern-rural, and modern-urban sectors. This idea was taken up by Tun Abdul Razak and became

the two-pronged objectives of the NEP approved by the National Consultative Committee.

As Principal Establishment Officer of the FEO, Abdul Kadir collaborated closely with the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of graduates, which in turn increased the number and quality of graduates, many of whom were later inspired to enrol in INTAN. As discussed in the following chapter, another major initiative of the Tun Abdul Razak government that was strongly supported by the civil service under the leadership of Abdul Kadir and his team of dedicated bureaucrats, was the founding of two public universities in the early 1970s: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and UPM, which would provide a bigger pool of promising graduates who would enter the challenging and exciting Malaysian civil service in the 1970s.

Chapter 6 focuses on the development of the energy sector in Malaysia, with special reference to the Central Electricity Board (later renamed National Electricity Board and finally, Tenaga Nasional Berhad). By virtue of being the Chief Secretary to the Government of Malaysia, Abdul Kadir was appointed as Chairman of the National Electricity Board from 1973 to 1977. While serving as both, he was involved in laying down the foundation for PETRONAS. Abdul Kadir managed to tackle the emerging issues with Malaysia's oil company exceptionally well. His negotiation skills proved valuable when contracts were efficiently executed with British Shell and the more challenging American-owned Exxon. He managed to avoid a diplomatic row over oil and gas concessions by adeptly negotiating with both British and American oil companies.

Chapter 7 briefly highlights the importance of agriculture as the key sector of the Malaysian economy, particularly in the first decade of independence. It also emphasises Malaysia's early need to build capacity in the agriculture sector with the primary objective of increasing productivity and income for the rural population. The authors focus on the role of the Malaysian civil service in the late 1960s and the 1970s, particularly the contribution of Abdul Kadir and his younger, but equally bright and dedicated colleagues and subordinates, such as (Tan Sri) Dr. Rashdan Baba and (Tan Sri) Abdullah Salleh in establishing and transforming institutions of higher education, namely, UPM and UKM, which were critical to the capacity-building and developmental efforts of a relatively young nation. Abdul Kadir's appointment as chairman of the UPM council demonstrates the trust and respect that Tun Abdul Razak had in him. The 1960s and 1970s saw the founding and transformation of many Malaysian national institutes geared towards capacity-building and development.

In Chapter 8, the authors explore the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation. The authors trace the trust given by the Malaysian government to Abdul Kadir on the country's affairs. He was involved in the formation of Malaysia and also in peace talks with Sukarno, the first President of Indonesia, in Manila, Tokyo

and Bangkok. It might have been more interesting if the authors had been able to elaborate on the claim of Central Provincial Military Chief General Panoedho who alleged that the Malaysian government had twice sent armed intruders to Central Sumatera aimed at dividing Jakarta from other districts in Indonesia (*Berita Harian* 1966a).

Abdul Kadir died on 8 November 1978 at the age of 58, leaving his wife and five children. Paying tribute to his predecessor, Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid noted in his book that Abdul Kadir was an administrative genius, quick thinking and very fair. Meanwhile, Ramon Navaratnam described him as the epitome of the ideal civil servant, one with dedication, loyalty and integrity. Many words of praise commended the sacrifices and contributions that Abdul Kadir had shed, coming not only from his political bosses but also from his peers. As the authors of this book point out, all interviewees were grateful and fortunate to have worked with Abdul Kadir through Malaysia's colonial and post-colonial epochs. Indeed, as a pioneering bureaucrat, Abdul Kadir was one character worthy of emulation by the current and future generations of civil servants as they seek to drive Malaysia forward in the development process.

For those wishing to know more about Malaysian history from the 1950s through the 1980s, this book is a must-have. As a historical biography, this book takes the reader through the passage of time. It is laden with details of events and figures of Malaysia's early years as a nation state. For all its quality and scholarship, the book is not all thumbs up. Its strengths as a biographical account of Malaysia's former top mandarin aside, the tone and writing style of this book is perhaps "a bit too heavy" for the common reader to digest. The work, while undoubtedly interesting, exhibits a somewhat heavy academic bias. The authors appear to be overemphasising the background of historical events so much that it can be categorised as "long-winded", with an average of 4–5 pages at the beginning of each chapter. Sometimes the background of a historical event appears to be irrelevant to Abdul Kadir's biography. The bulky 363 pages can easily be a disincentive to the average reader interested in biographies, in as much as the authors' comprehensive account of Abdul Kadir's career, arranged chronologically with the help of detailed schedules and indexed names, is a gem to researchers. It would also help the general reader if the book dispenses with unnecessary citations and footnotes such as the description of UMNO (footnote 165, p. 68) and Tan Siew Sin's brief background (footnote 655, p. 246). In addition, it could have been made clearer that the *Berita Harian* referred to in many places of the book refers to the Singapore-based newspaper, not the *Berita Harian* published in Malaysia.

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