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Tajuk : Ungku Aziz the irreplaceable academician

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Royal Prof Ungku Abdul Aziz Ungku Abdul Hamid

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 15 -- The country's education and economic icon Royal Prof Ungku Abdul Aziz Ungku Abdul Hamid, who died today, is considered one in a million.

Ungku Abdul Aziz, affectionately known as Pak Ungku, reportedly breathed his last at about 4 pm at a private medical centre here due to old age. He was 98.

News of Ungku Abdul Aziz's demise affected many, especially Universiti Malaya, which is synonymous with the late academician. Through its official Facebook page, the university described the passing of Ungku Abdul Aziz, its longest-serving vice-chancellor for 20 years, as an irreplaceable loss.

Many have described his death as a great loss to the country for he had contributed in various fields including education, economy, poverty eradication and the national cooperatives movement.

The deeds and contributions of Ungku Abdul Aziz to Muslims and Malays economically were second to none as he was instrumental in the establishment of Lembaga Tabung Haji (formerly Prospective Haj Pilgrims Fund Corporation) in November 1962.

Ungku Abdul Aziz, who was born on Jan 28, 1922 in Hampstead, London, received his early education at Bukit Zaharah English School and Sultan Abu Bakar College in Johor Bahru. In 1940 he served as an officer on probation under the Johor government Malay officials scheme and was sent under a scholarship to Raffles College in Singapore a year later.

He made history as the only academic figure to hold the title of Royal Professor of Economics, and his involvement in the academic world began in 1948 when he was loaned to Raffles College as assistant lecturer.

In 1951, Ungku Abdul Aziz received a bachelor's degree in economics from Universiti Malaya in Singapore and a year later became a lecturer at the same university.

He was also Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka director from 1956 to 1957.

He was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Economics for five years from 1961 before holding the position of Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in April 1965 and in December of the same year he became Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Administration.

In 1966, he earned a doctorate in economics from Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan.

On Oct 1, 1968, Ungku Abdul Aziz became the third vice-chancellor of Universiti Malaya and the first Malaysian to hold the post until his retirement in 1988.

His commitment in empowering the people's economy had been significant. Apart from the establishment of Lembaga Tabung Haji, he was the driving force behind the national cooperatives and was the president of the Angkatan Koperasi Kebangsaan Malaysia (Angkasa) for almost 40 years from 1971 to 2009.

Ungku Abdul Aziz was awarded the Royal Professor of Economics by the federal government in 1978. He also received honorary awards from over 10 local and foreign universities including the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Warwick and Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

In 1997, Ungku Abdul Aziz was the recipient of the Tokoh Maal Hijrah award for the year 1418 Hijrah.

He married cultural figure Sharifah Azah Mohamed Alsagoff, better known as Azah Aziz, who died in 2012. Rahaiah Baheran was his other wife.

Ungku Abdul Aziz's expertise in economics was also inherited by his only child Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, now chairman of Permodalan Nasional Berhad and former Governor of Bank Negara Malaysia, the first woman to hold the post.

National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN), in its posting on Facebook three days ago in the segment 'Kenali Tokoh' (Know your icon), named Ungku Abdul Aziz as the first Malay economist and called him The Renaissance Man for his expertise in opening doors especially in the rehabilitation and implementation of the national economy.

The country's leaders, in their condolence messages, described the loss of Ungku Abdul Aziz as irreplaceable. May his achievements set an example and inspiration to future generations.

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