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OBITUARY

Professor Kernial S. Sandhu 1929–1992

I first met Professor Kernial S. Sandhu in 1979 when I was working as a consultant for the Ford Foundation to help set up a research programme on international economics in Southeast Asia. The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies was selected as a candidate to host the programme.

I still remember our first meeting vividly. My first impression of Professor Sandhu — or simply “Prof.” as he became known to most of his acquaintances — was that he was a serious and no-nonsense type of a person. He was interested in having the Institute host the programme. But, and this was a big but, the programme had to be designed in his own way, and was not to be imposed on the Institute by an outside organization like the Ford Foundation. Clearly, he appreciated the Foundation’s financial input, but wanted ISEAS to have a free hand in conducting the research itself. As I learned later, this was Prof.’s typical attitude in dealing with all funding agencies.

This first meeting with Prof. impressed me enough to recommend to the Ford Foundation that the grant be given to the Institute to set up an international economics programme focusing on the ASEAN economies. This recommendation was accepted by the Foundation, and this was how the ASEAN Economic Research Unit (AERU) was born.

As it was difficult to find a coordinator for AERU at the beginning I became the acting coordinator, working from Bangkok and commuting to Singapore twice a month. This was how I came to work closely with Prof. We were also fortunate at that time that the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAF) agreed to help us with the research programme on ASEAN and the European Community. The KAF grant allowed us to invite Professor Chris Rieger to work with us at AERU. So, at the initial stage, it was Prof., Professor Rieger and myself who helped develop AERU, an arrangement which went on for a few years.

Prof. was a historical geographer by training. He understood economics well enough, but his interest leaned towards political economy. To him, economics was not only a matter of market forces, it was also of institutions and personalities. This was especially the case with respect to regional economic co-operation, such as ASEAN and APEC. I am happy to admit that I learned a great deal of this dimension of economics from Prof.

After AERU was established in 1979, Prof. and I worked closely together to build it into a premier research unit on the ASEAN economies. Our roles complemented each other very well. Both of us would develop ideas of what should be done; I then helped develop the methodology and Prof. would see to it that the project was implemented,

and its research results published and disseminated. In the process there would be meetings and seminars where, together with other participants, we would discuss our ideas and research results. Throughout the process Prof. was always an active participant, intellectually as well as socially. Because of his multidisciplinary approach to the issues under investigation, our research results became more practical in their discussions of policy implications and recommendations.

As a scholar Prof. was a very colourful person, as reflected by his comments at our meetings and seminars. He would point out the politics of the issues under investigation, and was usually not short for words!

Prof.'s vision of Southeast Asia was that of a respectable region of the world economic community. He wanted Southeast Asia to have relationships with all regions of the world, and he was willing to go everywhere to establish the research relationships.

Prof.'s commitment to ASEAN, and to the rest of Southeast Asia were unquestionable. Although he was critical of the region, his approach was constructive and he never "bad-mouthed" the region. The achievements of peace and stability in the region was regarded by Prof. as the ultimate goal, and he would give the highest credit to any efforts that would contribute towards this end. Thus, ASEAN as an institution was always highly regarded by Prof. Always aware that it was important to keep the ASEAN members talking to each other, Prof. initiated a series of ASEAN Roundtable discussions designed to serve this purpose. Prof.'s involvement in other research programmes on politics and security was also intended to promote peace and stability in the region. No one has any doubts that the knowledge people have gained from participating in the Institute's activities and from reading its publications have contributed a great deal to the understanding of Southeast Asia. This understanding has been crucial for the attainment of peace and harmony in the region.

Prof. was an excellent manager but a workaholic. The Institute's seminars were always

perfectly organized and the projects duly completed, despite the fact that many seminars and projects were usually organized concurrently. Prof. would work tirelessly. On one occasion when we were working on the ASEAN-U.S. Initiative project, he stayed up until dawn to finish a draft needed for the following morning's discussion.

Prof. was the best research partner in my academic career. But to me he was much more than a research partner. He was a real friend who was always concerned about my well-being and my future. If Prof. and I had no opportunity to meet, we would talk on the telephone. His advice on what I was doing or what I should do concerning my involvement in politics or my changes of career was always very valuable and carried a lot of weight in the decisions I subsequently made. In our circle of friends in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific, Prof. was always the one who continuously kept in touch with all of us. By this means he must be credited for having helped build up a Southeast Asian research community. Because of his efforts, many of us, such as Associate Professor Chia Siow Yue, Professor Mohamed Ariff, Professor Mohammed Sadli and Professor Florian Albuero, have become like a family, and a very happy one, at least until 2 December 1992.

Now that Prof. has gone, I have lost a very dear friend, our Southeast Asian research family and community have lost a most valuable member, and the region has lost a truly devoted son. Most certainly this loss is a major setback to the process of research development on and in Southeast Asia. I know it will take us time to regain the momentum he had created. But knowing Prof., he would surely want us to continue.

These days, during my engagements on ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific, Prof. is constantly in my thoughts for I know that if he were still alive I would be consulting him on all these tasks. Now these tasks seem much harder to perform.

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