COMMENT

Making a difference in lives and society

FOR LOVE OF NATION: Good leaders fight for people's rights and against unjust policies

EOPLE from all ethnic ommunities contribute in their spheres of in-terest, influence and meaning. There are peo ple who support their causes and there are people who diminish, dis-miss or even despise their causes Whatever the consequences of their actions, good leaders engage in the conscious raising of virtues and rights, and confront policies and practices considered unjust

During his presidency of the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP), P. Ramanathan fostered effective cooperation between NUTP and the Education Ministry. Ramanathan champi-oned the International Labour Organisation's agenda regarding con-tinuous improvements in the "Terms and Conditions of Service of the Teaching Profession". He was the initiator who drove con-*tributions by students and edu-cators towards education reconstruction in Bosnia, and passed on the donations of the Bosnia Ed-ucation Fund to the ministry until the Malaysia School in Bosnia was built. He also drove the Caring Campaign among schoolchildren for victims of the Kobe earthquake in Japan in 1995. He was the principal driver of NUTP's memoran-dum on the New Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM). Many of the recommendations from the mem orandum were incorporated in the reformation of KBSM.

Ramanathan raised Malaysia's stature internationally when he became one of the 24 council mem-bers of Education International

the largest and most influential of the teachers trade unions in the world. Although he has retired for 20 years, he continues to con-tribute to enhance bonds with other organisations, and to build the next generation of trade union and professional organisation leaders. In his contributions to education, he focuses on teacher excellence in

the classroom, school leadership, efficiency of the education system, and cooperation and col-laboration between teachers movements in Asean and globally

Datuk Dr Ibrahim

Ahmad Bajunid is deputy

of INTI Laureate

chancellor

Datuk Ambiga eenevasan is a human Sreenevasan is a human rights advocate, including for the rights of indigenous people. She is co-chair of a non-governmental organisation coalition advocating free and fair elections. She serves on the executive committee of a women's



nd gender equality.

While she may be considered

has been recognised internationally as someone whose influence is felt beyond Malaysia's borders. Among her awards are an Honorary Doctoral Degree in Law from Britain, the Legion of Honour In-signia from France and the In-ternational Women of Courage Award from the United States

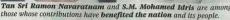
Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam held important posts in the govern-ment, including deputy secretarygeneral of the Finance Ministry, secretary-general of the Transport Ministry, and member of

the National Develop ment Planning Commit-tee, National Economic Consultative Council and National Unity Ad-visory Council. As a for-mer civil servant, Navaratnam was privy to Navaratnam was privy to the mechanism of gov ernmental decision making, character of civ il-service mentality, and priorities of politicians and their ways of achiev-ing their ends. He brings

his acumen to private-sector leadership. In between his public- and private-sector leader-ship is his NGO leadership. He was president of Transparency Inter-national Malaysia, director of the Asian Strategy and Leadership In-stitute and chairman of the Centre

for Public Policy Studies.

He has written significant books on Malaysian economic development and, also, My Life and Times — A Memoir. In explaining the 57th Merdeka spirit, he stated: "How can our people enjoy declining ed-ucation standards, high crime rates, rising prices and relatively low incomes? We even have to endure water shortages in a rain-



blessed country!" For the love of the nation, he has become a con-

the nation, he has become a constructive critic on education, public policy, business, development and economic planning.

Tan Sri M. Thambirajah, a Kirbytrained teacher, has a passion for lifelong learning. He was one of the early history textbook writers who approached history from the inapproached history from the in-digenous Malaysia-centric per-spective, while fostering critical thinking and historical objectivity, benefiting thousands of primary and secondary school students. At Universiti Malaya, he introduced one of the earliest courses on Russian History. Later, he studied law and established his own law firm. He is a member of many governmen is a memoer of many govern-ment and non-governmental com-mittees with the alm of fostering unity and development. Commit-ted to helping Indian students who were neglected and marginalised, on Sept 24, 1982, he founded the Sri Murugan Centre (SMC), which has assisted thousands from primary assisted thousands from primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, and university to achieve their potential.

SMC upholds three core beliefs, namely: All are created equal, all are bestowed with the same intelligence, and faith in religion is crucial to success in education. The principles embody an enabling philosophy, which acts as a dynamic change agent to mobilise a marginalised people towards in-dividual and community excel-lence. Every year, he mobilises students and parents for the Kalvi Yathirai (educational pilgrimage), walking up the 272 steps of Batu Caves to become disciplined, confident, successful and filial. His educational mission has raised the consciousness of parents regarding the importance of education.

At a time when the people had no At a time when the people in an invoice and consumers had no rights, the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) was speaking on their behalf. For 40 years, S.M. Mohamed Idris, president of CAP, steadfastly alerted society to the issues of the rights of fishermen in Juni factory eiths endangered issues of the rights of fishermen in Juru, factory girls, endangered aborigines, species at risk, envi-ronment degradation, polluted rivers and seas, road safety and food poisoning in schools, *Utusan Konsumer* has educated millions of Malaysians on consumerism, health, rights and the environment. CAP has worked closely with Sahabat Alam Malaysia and other NGOs championing consumerism. Mohamed raised awareness on the Monamed raised awareness on the dangers of smoking, sugar in carbonated drinks, and oppression of small and medium enterprises by middlemen. CAP has provided scores of opportunities for law and science students to learn about law and have access to scientific like. and have access to scientific literature on consumerism and health. CAP has published many books that are affordable and set the standards for a good quality of life through the protection of the people's health by prevention, rather than cure. Examine the literature of CAP and we will see that issues that were raised decades ago and denied by the authorities are now key in the formation of gov-

ernment policies and have become matters of public awareness. Mohamed is a role model, being a humble, outspoken and commit-ted leader, a person of integrity devoted to a cause, altruistically. He did not expect anything from the authorities, except for them to formulate policies, take action to protect the people and uphold the people's rights.

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