

## **Game Changers**

A few days ago I received a call from Mr Mohd Nawawi Zain, former senior officer at TAVED (Technical and Vocational Education Division), Ministry of Education Malaysia and we had a long and hearty chat about the nostalgic old days in the Ministry of Education. Mr Nawawi was one of the panel members who interviewed me at the Federal House, Kuala Lumpur in 1968 for the Ministry of Education Scholarship to study at Kuala Lumpur Technical College. Later, I left the Sixth Form in Muar High School when I got the scholarship and had my destiny changed forever.

The first time that TAVED came into my life was when I visited Mr Nawawi at his office in July 1968 before reporting to Kuala Lumpur Technical College. TAVED was established in 1964 and was housed in an old wooden building at No. 60 Lorong Gombak, Off Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur. The first Director, Mr A. R. Richards was seconded from PWD (Public Works Department). He retired in 1971 and was succeeded by Mr Ung Cheng Pee, previously Vice Principal of Kuala Lumpur Technical College. Mr Nawawi had just graduated from the University of Western Australia and joined TAVED when I met him at the scholarship interview.

As a student in Kuala Lumpur Technical College from 1968 to 1971, I used to drop in TAVED to see Mr Nawawi with my college-mates when we were in downtown Kuala Lumpur, and he would always order coffee for us. We also met other TAVED officers: Mr Mohd Rafik Khan, who would impact the future course of my life; Mr Tsen Keng Phin who was in-charge of agriculture studies; and Mr. Ong Hean Tat, a respected senior TAVED officer who later resigned to join Scott & English.

I was posted to Penang Technical Institute as a teacher in January 1972 after I graduated from Kuala Lumpur Technical College and completed the Certificate in Education from University of Malaya. I was transferred to Ungku Omar Polytechnic, Ipoh in January 1976 after I passed the CEI (Council of Engineering Institutions, UK) Examinations.

Mr Nawawi was the Principal of Ungku Omar Polytechnic when I reported there. He was a caring boss but was difficult to keep up with his “outside the box” ideas. On my first day at Ungku Omar Polytechnic, he asked me to design a tractor that could cut the grass on undulating terrains. I couldn’t fulfil his request before I left the polytechnic for TAVED five months later. Later I realised that I was not the only staff he had asked to design the tractor. Mr Nawawi resigned in 1981 after the student demonstration incident.

Along my journey of life, there were events and people that I thought had nothing to do with me but had changed the course forever:

On 27 April 1976, Tun Hamdan Sheik Tahir retired as the Director General of Education and he was succeeded by Tan Sri Murad Mohamed Noor. Just at that time the Director of TAVED Ir. Tahir Majid who was seconded from PWD had also retired. The new Director General brought his good friend Mr V Murugesu out from the cold storage at TAVED and promoted him to be its fourth Director. Mr Murugesu was the first TAVED Director without any technical background. After becoming TAVED Director, he wanted somebody with an engineering degree and education certificate to work in TAVED. I was the only one among my fraternity who met the criteria at that time. So in May 1976 I had to move to TAVED in

Kuala Lumpur just when I thought I would settle down in Ungku Omar Polytechnic and live happily ever after with my newly married wife in Ipoh.

My exposure and experience in TAVED had helped me to grow personally and professionally. In my first week at TAVED, I represented the Director for a meeting at the Federal House (Ministry of Education's headquarter). I was the first to arrive at the meeting room. Later a senior-looking man came in and chatted with me. He asked me, "Where are you from?" I answered simply, "Ministry of Education." Then asked him, "And where are you from?" He smiled and said, "I am also from the Ministry of Education." Later I learnt that he was Dato Latif Sahan, then Deputy Secretary General of Ministry of Education. From then on I learnt not to simply ask a stranger question!

Mr Rafik was my immediate boss at TAVED. He was the officer in TAVED who did my posting to Penang in 1972 and set my destiny of meeting my future wife there. He was a learned and articulate gentleman and we had a very good mentor-mentee relationship. In January 1987 he helped me in being awarded a Ministry of Education Fellowship to attend a program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, where I successfully used the opportunity to complete a Master's Degree. When I returned from Wisconsin in May 1987, Mr Rafik told me that while I was away he had accepted on my behalf a promotion post at Ungku Omar Polytechnic. He said, "I knew that you would not reject it." I left for Ungku Omar Polytechnic for the second time in December 1987 after serving in TAVED for 12 years, and moved on in the polytechnic system until my retirement in January 2005.

When Mr Rafik retired on 1 September 1989, I sent a letter to wish him a happy retirement and expressed my gratitude to him for having touched my life.

*Gan Chee Kuan*  
August 2017



Met Nawawi (right) at former PUO  
Principal Ahmad's house on Hari Raya 2016



With Rafik at a seminar in 1987

*PS: Another game changer happened recently. This time was not by someone as influential as Tun Hamdan or Tan Sri Murad but was due to my daughter Pei Wee who offered to transfer her additional maid to my house. My wife and I had always preferred to manage our household without a full-time helper. However with my nonagenarian parents require more and more attention, having only a part-time nurse for daily visit is no longer a viable solution. My life has become easier since Yanti came into our household. It is touching to watch a previously unknown stranger from Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia showing love and care to my parents.*