

Academician receives international award

Shamsul bestowed Fukuoka Academic Prize for 2008 for outstanding achievements in field of Asian studies

By Churchill Edward

KUCHING: An academician and a political economist, who are former students of the Royal Military College in Sungai Besi in the 1960s, are the winners of prestigious international awards.

Professor Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, the founding president of Malaysian Social Science Association (MSSA) and Dr Jomo K Sundram, its past president, are dubbed the "two top Malaysian social scientists" even before they won their respective awards.

Shamsul was bestowed the Fukuoka Academic Prize for 2008 for his outstanding achievements in the field of Asian studies in contributing to the world's understanding of Asia while Jomo was bestowed the Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought for 2007.

Shamsul, from Negri Sembilan, is attached to Universiti Malaya (UM) while Jomo, from Penang, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

MSSA president Professor Datuk Dr Abdul Rahman Embong presented the awards to Shamsul and Jomo's representative Professor Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, at the opening of the Sixth International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC6) held at Crowne Plaza Riverside Hotel here yesterday.

Abdul Rahman is also the co-organising chairman of

the MSC6. The other is Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Associate Professor Dr Mutalip Abdullah.

The congratulatory message or citation text, read by Prof Dr Mohd Hazim Shah, said the MSC6 was made more meaningful because MSSA would be celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

Shamsul was among the early social scientists in the country who, some 30 years ago, undertook the proactive task of putting MSSA into shape and had it officially registered with the Registrar of Societies in 1978, and helped to steer MSSA until 1980.

Over the last three decades or so, he has made his lasting intellectual imprint on the Malaysian social science landscape, particularly in the field of social anthropology, and has brought into international prominence, Malaysian studies as part of Asian studies.

An indefatigable institution builder, Shamsul has restructured and successfully led the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation (ATMA) in UKM for 10 years from the late 1990s, later becoming the founding director of Institute of Occidental Studies (IKON).

Shamsul still holds the directorship in both Institutes.

Recently Shamsul has been appointed the founding



SOCIAL SCIENTIST: Abdul Rahman (centre) presenting the Fukuoka Academic Prize for 2008 to Shamsul. Also seen is Mutalip.

director of the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) in the same university. His speaking engagements on various international platforms throughout Asia, Europe, Australia and America and his many publications on important themes, especially of politics, culture, ethnicity, religion and social change have earned him wide international acclaim, thus deserving the Fukuoka Academic Prize.

He is without doubt, an academician and institution-builder par excellence. Through his dedication and tireless efforts he has managed to attract scholars, students and Asian experts of various persuasions from all over the world to Southeast Asia.

And he still does that.

This certainly makes him a worthy recipient of the International Academic Prize of the Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prizes. Previous recipients include Ungku Aziz, Wang Gungwu, Ramila Thapar, Stanley Tambiah, Clifford Geertz, Ben Anderson, Yoneo Ishii, Taufik Abdullah and Antony Reid.

Jomo was formerly economic professor at the Faculty of Economics and Administration in UM until 2004. He had been assistant secretary-general for Economic Development in the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) since January 2005 and honorary research coordinator for the G24

Inter-Governmental group on International Monetary Affairs and Development since December 2006.

He was also a founder director of the Institute of Social Analysis (INSAN) from 1978 to 2004 and founder of the Chair of International Development Economics Associates (IDEAS) (2001 to 2004), where he now serves on the Advisory Panel.

Jomo was also on the Board of the United Nations Research Institute on Social Development (UNRISD) from 2002 to 2004.

Like Shamsul, Jomo's link with MSSA has been very close.

After taking over MSSA leadership in 1996, he became the prime mover in establishing the MSC to make it the largest biennial

congress for Malaysian scholars and 'Malaysianists' to share and debate their research findings.

It was Jomo who successfully organised MSC1 and MSC2 in 1997 and 1999 respectively, thus, laying a strong basis for future MSCs. Jomo is a renowned political economist who has written more than 50 books and monograph and hundreds of articles, critically engaging with economic theories and policies of the developing world.

Very importantly, he has worked at the frontier of economic thought, advancing it further with brilliant insights into the state of affairs of the economy of various countries of the Third World, especially on issues of poverty and inequality, thus earning international recognition and honoured with the Wassily Leontief Prize.

Though Shamsul hails from Negri Sembilan and Jomo from Penang, they both share some things in common which are that they both attended the same elite Royal Military College in Sungai Besi in the late 1960s before proceeding to further their tertiary studies — Shamsul at UM and Monash in Australia while Jomo at Yale and Harvard Universities in the USA.

Both subsequently joined the teaching staff of UKM, though Jomo left later for UM while Shamsul remained in UKM to this day.

Their achievements are a tough act to follow, but they have inspired other scholars to work harder and produce high quality scholarship which is worthy of international recognition.

The MSC is the flagship of the MSSA.

This sixth MSC, co-organised by MSSA and Faculty of Social Sciences Unimas (also the host) as well as Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) and IKON — the two social science research institutes based in UKM, is the biggest conference in the last 11 years since its inception.

Themed 'Engaging Malaysian Modernity 50 Years and Beyond', its objectives are to bring together scholars from Malaysia and abroad for the purpose of scholarly exchange and interaction based on their research findings and reflections on Malaysia; to analyse issues and problems relating to contemporary Malaysia and to compare Malaysian experience with that of various countries in the world, especially that of Malaysia's neighbours.

Other objectives are to examine the state of Malaysian studies and suggest ways for its advancement.

For the three-day MSC6 in particular, taking advantage of it being held in Sarawak, its objective is also to pay special attention to Borneo studies as part of Malaysian studies.