



Tun Dr. Daim bin Zainuddin

(29th April 1938–13th November 2024)

On 13 November 2024, Malaysia bid farewell to one of its most distinguished, Tun Daim Zainuddin, who passed away at the age of 86. His death was neither unremarked nor unnoticed. He was a figure known throughout the nation, not only for his immense contributions in law, business, and politics but for the quiet, determined way in which he shaped the modern Malaysian landscape.

Daim's journey began humbly, rooted in the legal profession that remained close to his heart throughout his life. In 1957, just months before Malaya gained independence, he set sail for England to pursue his legal studies. It was a time before widespread air travel, and so he journeyed by slow ship, carrying with him a trunk full of law books. Onboard, he devoured those texts with singular focus, preparing himself for a legal education that was, at the time, less structured and formalised than it is today. One can picture the young Daim, slender and resolute, gazing at the ocean ahead, his future vast and uncharted, yet waiting to be claimed.

At Lincoln's Inn, Daim formed friendships with many who would go on to become national figures, among them Hussein Onn, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, and Manan Othman. It was a remarkable generation of students, unknowingly preparing themselves to define the direction of a young nation.

He was called to the English Bar at the age of 21 and subsequently to the Malaysian Bar in 1961, beginning his career at the prestigious firm of Allen & Gledhill. Between 1962 and 1965, he served as a magistrate, sessions court judge, and deputy public prosecutor. These formative years were spent alongside legal titans such as Braddell, R. Ramani, and the Seenivasagam brothers. It was also a time when Singaporean lawyers, including the formidable David Marshall, practiced in the Malaysian courts, and justice was still determined by a jury of one's peers.

In 1965 Daim left the service and rejoined Allen & Gledhill. During this time, he was involved in the celebrated Stephen Kalong Ningkan case, and briefed the Federal Cabinet on the matter. He was just 28 years old.

Sometime in 1968, Daim decided that it was time to be on his own and founded Daim & Gamany; the very same firm he was affiliated with until his passing. His partner, S.T. Gamany, a principled socialist lawyer, shared Daim's belief in justice and public service. Together, they addressed union meetings at a time when unionism was equated with radicalism, a surprising chapter in Daim's life that reveals a man far more complex than the simplifications and assumptions made of him. His bond with Gamany endured as a lifelong friendship.

During the early 1970s, Daim ventured into property development with a vision for uplifting the emerging middle class. One of his landmark contributions was Taman Maluri, now a thriving township near Kuala Lumpur's TRX district. All his developments were marked by generous space, solid construction, wide roads and thoughtful urban design. He did not build cramped or soulless structures, but homes that reflected dignity and foresight. As Themistocles once said, ***"I cannot fiddle, but I can make a great city."*** So too did Daim.

His foray into politics and public service would eventually lead him to serve as Malaysia's Minister of Finance. His role in shaping the national economy especially during the 1980s and 1990s was transformative. Daim spearheaded the push for industrialization, steering Malaysia away from dependence on commodities and agriculture toward a diversified, modern economy. His legacy is etched across the country's skyline and economic resilience. *Si monumentum requiris circumspice If you seek his monument, look around you.*

Even in the later stages of his life, Daim remained a principled actor in Malaysia's evolving political narrative.

The tumult of the 1MDB scandal stirred him to return to legal practice and to support efforts for reform. Though he did not live to see all the change he dreamed of, he continued to advise, encourage and inspire a new generation, urging them to take up the torch.

In a speech at UTM Skudai in March 2019, Daim expressed his clear and inclusive vision for the nation:

“The national agenda is not a Malay agenda or a non-Malay agenda. It is a Malaysian agenda that takes into consideration all Malaysians; that fights poverty and inequality without discrimination, respecting the Constitution.”

At the time of his passing, Tun Daim was among the ten most senior members of the Malaysian Bar a living archive of its tradition, discipline, and intellectual rigor. He remained loyal to the Bar, never losing his affection for the profession that had shaped him.

In remembering Tun Daim Zainuddin, we recall not just a man of achievement, but a man of depth, humility, and enduring vision. His was a life lived with purpose. His story, now complete, will remain an indelible chapter in the nation's collective memory.

Daim & Gamany