

OBITUARY FOR DATO' DR. ADI HAJI TAHA

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Dato' Dr Adi Haji Taha, 60, former president of IPPA, died at home on 4 February 2012 after a six-year battle with prostate cancer. Adi served as President of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association in 2002-2004 and co-organised the highly successful IPPA Congress in Melaka in 1998. Adi always made an impression: he was readily approachable and good humoured, genuinely warm-hearted and generous, and egalitarian in spirit and action. Not least he was a caring husband and father. Adi was immensely popular and his passing is a great loss to his many friends and colleagues.

Born on August 3, 1951 in Kodiang, Kedah, Adi was the fourth of seven children to Fatimah Saman and Haji Taha Hassan. His father was a geography teacher at Madrasah Nahdatul Wataniah and an Ustaz (Islamic teacher) who was highly respected for his knowledge of Islam and Islamic law.

In 1958 Adi was enrolled by his parents in the Tengku Bendahara Primary School, the first school in the district to teach English language. For the child of an Ustaz this was highly unconventional to say the least. Adi continued his early education at an English language school, DERMA High School in Kangar, Perlis, where he boarded for some time. Adi excelled scholastically and went on to the Dato' Abdul Razak Secondary School in Tanjung Malim, Perak. Adi had a particular interest in Malaysian ethnography and in 1971 he began studies in anthropology and sociology at the National University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. Graduating with honours four years later he was immediately appointed the Curator of Archaeology at the National Museum of Malaysia (Muzium Negara). Towards the middle of his eight year tenure in this position Adi enrolled for a thesis MA at the Australian National University in Canberra. For this research he re-excavated the enormously impressive rockshelter site of Gua Cha in Ulu Kelantan. Many years later Adi returned to the ANU to undertake a PhD on the prehistory of Kelantan (1993-2000).

Adi's personal qualities and intellect destined him for higher office in government service. He rose steadily in seniority from curator to Senior Curator for Exhibitions

(1983-1986), Head of Research (1986-1991), Director of Antiquities (1991-1998), Museum Management Director (1998-2000), Deputy Director General (2000-2001) and Director General of the Department of Museums Malaysia (2002-2007). Besides his government service Adi was President of the Museums Association of Malaysia (2002-2009) and President of ICOM Malaysia (2002-2010). Adi was an internationalist and he forged enduring professional links with institutions and scholars overseas. After his formal retirement from public service in 2007 Adi continued his professional engagement and mentoring as Visiting Fellow at the Academic Heritage Museum, National University of Malaysia (UKM) and subsequently as Principal Fellow in the Faculty of Creative Technology & Heritage at the Kota Bharu campus of the newly established University Malaysia Kelantan (UMK).

Adi helped establish new museums in Malaysia and oversaw the creation of major exhibitions such as the provocative 'Ghost Exhibition' in 2001 designed to educate the public about prevailing superstitious beliefs in the community. He also initiated the successful Museum Volunteers Programme at the National Museum in 2006. His many years of field survey and cave excavations in the rugged limestone country of Ulu Kelantan provided a wealth of new data and insights into the prehistory of Peninsula Malaysia. Both his MA and his PhD theses were published as monographs: *The re-excavation of the rock-shelter of Gua Cha, Ulu Kelantan and West Malaysia* and *Archaeology of Ulu Kelantan*. Adi's excavations at Gua Cha, Gua Chawas and Gua Peraling uncovered tonnes of Hoabinhian stone artefacts dating back as far as the terminal Pleistocene, along with human burials, a long pottery sequence, traces of plant remains and in chambers of Bukit Chawas clay votive tablets stamped with Srivijayan-era style images. These tablets provided tangible evidence for the spread of Mahayana Buddhism into the rich alluvial gold province of Kelantan and hinted at the existence of a pre-Islamic kingdom recorded in ancient Chinese chronicles.

Adi was awarded several honours in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Malaysian history, culture and museums, including three awards with Dato' titles bestowed by the sultans of Kelantan and Kedah and the Raja of Perlis, and the Johan Mangku Negara (Companion of the Order of the Defender of the Realm) award bestowed by His Royal Highness the King of Malaysia.

Adi is survived by his wife Wan Aminah Wan Yusoff, their six children, Adrina, Adriyati, Adzwanee Fatimah, Adzimah, Ahmad Fadzli and Aufi Adawi, and six grandchildren.