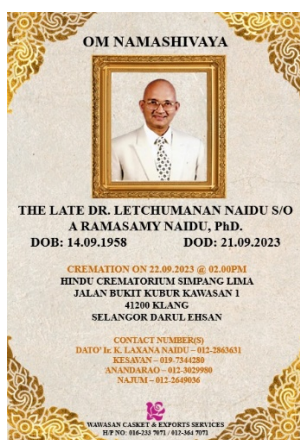


Eulogy and death anniversary notice

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I would like to take this opportunity to eulogize Dr. Letchumanan Naidu on the occasion of his birth and death anniversaries for 2024 and hereafter to both appreciate his remarkable capacity and enthusiasm for pure mathematics, theoretical physics, applied biomedical statistics and engineering mathematics and his very humane approach to life.

I heard of his passing away from his niece, who informed me a few days after his death that his body was discovered a few days after his death in his house where he lived alone unmarried. Every University that I have worked in (located in the West and the USA) has an official bulletin and web obituary column writeup detailing the life and contributions of their deceased members, but unfortunately in Universiti Malaya where he worked, no such lists are automatically circulated for all deceased faculty members, unless notified, and so his death notice was only thru word of mouth.

His life and circumstances underscores the problems I think that extremely motivated people with an uncompromising love for their discipline have in societies that have no place at the present times for such persons, and therefore I think that

these sociological issues must be addressed before one can speak of scientific and technological development and advancement in any society due to the contributions of motivated and responsible persons. I joined Universiti Malaya at the same time as him in 1989, where he was assigned a lectureship in the Engineering faculty whereas I joined the Chemistry department as a theoretical chemist. I consulted with him on several occasions on technical issues, such as Group theory applied to chemical spectroscopy (such courses have been discontinued due in my opinion to the difficulty of comprehension for the current generation of students, although routinely taught elsewhere as a full course). I was very impressed with the grasp that he had for the field, and in fact for the areas that I was researching into, that required mathematical elaboration, such as differential vector calculus. He always kept abreast of social and national issues as well. I can provide my own recollections of Naidu, who commands my admiration for his deep interest and enthusiasm for pure and applied mathematics where he worked alone on his own problems. He had spent some years at Cambridge University in the faculty of Engineering, and knew personally Stephen Hawking and other members of the Dept of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics (DAMTP). His Ph.D. was in pure analysis, in a branch of Lie algebra. He had ideals of developing the standard of science and mathematics in Malaysia to the same level of his peers at Cambridge, presupposing that the work ethic, respect for colleagues, appreciation of the fellowship and discussion and the gargantuan discipline required for academic excellence found in such places as Cambridge could obtain in the Third World as well if he attempted to create such an environment thru example. He also expected highly motivated and well-prepared students in UM. All these high expectations eventually proved disappointing. His pass rates were considered too low in examinations for his undergraduate courses due to his very high standards, and soon there were mumblings and murmurings of discontent in the faculty that arose from the above predispositions and expectations that he cherished. He informed me of poison penned letters written to the higher administration by fellow faculty members. All this occurring whilst being of immense voluntary help to Ph.D. and research students in the Engineering and the Medical faculty that availed of his ability (and goodwill) in solving their mathematical quandaries and formulations in their research when they had recourse to nobody else, including their supervisors. He also worked late into the night, assisting others gratis. He wrote several yet-to-be-published research monographs in his field of Lie algebra and Applied mathematics (about 30 in number) and pedagogical texts to college and graduate level (about 40 in number) during his time in UM. He worked 3 years in engineering and another 2 in the IPT (Institut Pengajian Tinggi, UM), where Prof. Kumar Dass, the then Dean of Science kindly recommended him a position there. Naidu suffered from ill health throughout his life, and towards the end of his life, he was agreeable to the idea that I should help edit his scientific work and publish it as a contribution to the world. It was with this understanding in mind that his niece contacted me, but so far I have not been informed of how to proceed with his desire.

After UM, he was actively interested at his own cost in wishing to establish a research institute, and even rented an apartment to store his very valuable, extensive and expensive library of mathematical printed monographs and books.

These books and materials were to stock the library of his proposed mathematical institute. His apartment was ransacked and the books carted away. Furthermore, to assist in the support of this project of supporting such a research institute, he sent copies of monographs of his research to leading individuals and departments in the U.S.A. by very expensive courier mail – that he could barely afford – for their endorsement and comments. Absolutely no acknowledgement was made to these communications. Such then was the sabotage he was frequently subjected to, and clearly in these instances, the sabotage was motivated by the higher powers as there was no commercial value attached to such books in Philistine Malaysia where the ransacking was concerned, and the non-acknowledgement of communication of research material is typical of those that use the work of others in their own research, a well-known form of abuse known worldwide. He even approached important people (who will remain unmentioned) from 1989 onwards to create a type of national academy of science to deal with the progress of science in the country. These recommendations, whether from him or not were adopted, but not within the context, work ethic, ethics, discipline and expertise that he presupposed would obtain.

With the current threat of climate change and irreversible cultural and hegemonic political ruptures, I expect industrial manufacturing and economic models and the market for goods and services to be severely impacted in the future. It is evident to me therefore that non-apically directed science based on problem-solving within a social and intact cultural context will be the only viable basis of doing science that is beneficial, and not the apical domination model, characteristic of Latin and Roman hegemony, with their election of local elites (in politics, business, administration, education, research etc.) to regulate their colonies and now neo colonies. This apical model was the bedrock of colonialism and imperialism, and persists as the model used to regulate nations and universities throughout the Third World at the current times. I consider Naidu therefore to be an obvious victim of this neocolonial order, that has extinguished any hint of creativity, discipline, independence and goodwill expressed by those few with so many gestures of self-giving. Thus I feel that Naidu's contributions to UM, and indeed the world are not to be gauged solely by his free and generous ability to technically address the research issues of students in the faculty in an impromptu manner and at no cost, but his lifestyle of work and dedication shown to the discipline, based on personal interests and goals, and a fascination for nature, irrespective of the costs he incurred, ending his life in poverty and obscurity. He always possessed a very abstract, rational, non-prejudicial but practical and kindly non-militant Hindu faith, that provided a perspective for his fascination for nature and his ability for discipline and capacity to help people, irrespective of their race. Such a predisposition will I believe become a sine qua non in the development and formation of new nations, peoples, and economies in the foreseeable future as the current world transits into chaos and nihilism due to the powers of apical domination and the local complicity to it. I believe that the future study of pharmacognosy in the Third World can only be successful if the social conditions in which it is situated is different from that which prevails today. And Naidu has I believe provided an example of the first indicative steps of the necessary behavioral

traits that are required to secure a better future where research, science and good citizenry are concerned.