

## The Olympians among us

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Comment

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TWO personalities captured our imagination this past week, the dynamic Datuk Seri Idris Jala and the late Senator Professor Datuk Dr Ismail Md Salleh who was equally dynamic.

Idris, who was hand-picked in December 2005 to helm Malaysia Airlines as its managing director and chief executive officer, is now a cabinet member.



Datuk Seri Idris Jala is all about single-minded determination

A graduate of Universiti Sains Malaysia, Idris made a name for himself while working for Shell where he spent a good 23 years as an industrial relations officer of Sarawak Shell Berhad, then as the head of staff development and was on assignment as human resources planner in the Netherlands.

Between 2000 and 2002, Idris was made vice-president of retail marketing of Shell International, based in London.

He was also vice-president, business development consultancy where he led a team of top-notch internal consultants on radical business improvement projects, and revamped the Shell global retail business model to achieve profitable growth.

Before this, Idris was the managing director of Shell Sri Lanka, where he shaped the turnaround of Shell's LPG business in that country.

It was while serving in the position of managing director, Shell MDS (Malaysia), the multinational's middle distillates plant in Sarawak, and vice-president at Shell Malaysia Gas & Power (Malaysia), that Idris' ability blipped on the government radar screen.

Malaysia Airlines was undergoing massive losses but this "turnaround wizard" did his magic again and the airline once again became profitable.

Last week, Idris was sworn in as Minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

His appointment as minister and chief executive officer of the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu) is a definite boost to the cabinet line-up.

Idris holds a bachelor's degree in Social Work from Universiti Sains Malaysia and a Masters in Industrial Relations from Warwick University, Britain.

Ismail, awho had equally mesmerised us, passed away recently on board a flight from China to Singapore at the age of 61.



Born in Pasir Mas, he became the first visually-challenged person in the world to obtain a doctorate in economics from the State University of New York, an achievement that made it into the Guinness Book of World Records.

Ismail was also the first senator from among the disabled community in Malaysia in December 2007.

His dedication and determination led him to hold a number of key positions, such as the first vice-chancellor of Twintech International University College, chief executive officer of Twintech Holdings Sdn Bhd and president of the National Association of Bumiputera Private Colleges.

Ismail served as a member of the National Implementation Task Force in the Prime Minister's Department, and deputy director-general of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

Diligent and hardworking, Ismail "never made an issue of his blindness" or drew attention to it, said a fellow consultant economist, Datuk Zainal Aznam, who constantly came in touch with Ismail in the course of their work.

Specialising in fiscal economics, macro-economics, project evaluation and industrial economics, Ismail's opinions were often sought by several government and private agencies.

Ismail regularly raised concerns about the country's economic development, in particular the affirmative actions under the New Economic Policy.

As a leading economist from Malaysia, Ismail was also regularly consulted internationally.

His departure in this economically challenging time, is a great loss to the nation. But he leaves a legacy of sheer determination for others to emulate and be inspired.

If there is one secret that these two personalities shared in achieving excellence, it would be best summarised by Idris' "game of the impossible".

To be successful and grow to be a leader, one must excel by playing the game of the impossible, apart from having discipline of action, forming winning coalitions and praying for divine intervention.

Idris revealed this during his first talk at USM after being appointed managing director and chief executive officer of MAS.

To play the game, according to Idris, is to set "Olympic targets" not unlike becoming the next Usain Bolt.

Whether one can really succeed as an Olympic champion is another matter. What matters most is that you must have belief in yourself.

One thing for sure is that you will become a better person, even the best sprinter for Malaysia, if not an Olympic champion.

"What matters is that you really put in the effort to carry out the plan to become an Olympic champion."

And this is what Malaysians must embrace, just like how Idris and Ismail blazed the trail for Malaysia.

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