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Adapted from speech at  
the Official Launch of *The Judgments of  
HRH Sultan Azlan Shah with Commentary*,  
editor, Visu Sinnadurai,  
28 February 1986, Kuala Lumpur.

# A Tribute by Tun Mohamed Suffian

Former Lord President, Federal Court, Malaysia

**T**his book makes history: it is the first collection within the covers of a single book of the judgments of a judge in this country.

It is fitting that the judge so honoured is Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah (better known among the legal fraternity as Raja Tun Azlan Shah), Sultan of the State of Perak, the fifth Lord President of the Federal Court, who reached the pinnacle of the judiciary after 17 years on the superior courts—at the comparatively youthful age of 54, an achievement predicted for him by the first Lord President Tun Sir James B Thomson who recommended his elevation in 1965 at the age of 37. But for his sudden succession to the Perak throne he would have had 28 years on the superior bench and the opportunity of leading and moulding the Malaysian judiciary for 11 years. The judiciary's loss is undoubtedly Perak's gain.

Educated at Nottingham University, now famous for the quality of its legal education, and at Lincoln's Inn by whom he was called to the English Bar in 1954, at an early



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stage of his career in the public service he showed remarkable interest in the law by subscribing, at his own expense, to the *All England Law Reports* and buying law books which the judicial or legal department, because of financial and bureaucratic constraints, was unable to supply, and by the practice, which I adopted but only haphazardly as being too tedious, of noting in a large book points of law which might become useful later on. It was on this foundation that was laid the learning which shines through in his judgments.

At work on the Bench he was a good and patient listener, seldom interrupted or asked questions and thereby gave the impression of agreeing to what was being said. It was a good way of curbing prolix counsel, for the experienced judge knows that with some counsel the more you try to steer them away from tedious repetitions and irrelevancies the more persistent and garrulous they become; all the while you are thinking of the reserved judgments still to be pondered and written and the long list of trials and appeals to be disposed of. It was only after Raja Tun Azlan Shah had delivered judgment that counsel realised to his dismay that the Lord President's reticence meant that he was only listening, but not necessarily agreeing.

In a splendid lecture, the Tunku Abdul Rahman Lecture XI, delivered to the Malaysian Institute of Management on 23 November 1984 entitled *Supremacy of Law in Malaysia*, the Sultan gave his views on the relations between Parliament, the executive and the judiciary.



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