

A fine human being

The large-hearted man from the tiny islands of Maldives, and a new Member of ICSF, passed away on 13 July at Perth, Australia

Bureaucrat, fishery researcher, entrepreneur, artist, musician, theatre professional, photographer, scuba diver, technology historian, lover of early-morning walks—Maizan Hassan Maniku was all these and more. What you got to know of him depended on the ‘*avatar*’ of him that you knew.

As far as I was concerned, Hassan’s fame preceded him. He was a close friend of a close friend of mine, and I had heard a lot about him. Finally, we met for the first time at a meeting in Bangkok a decade ago. He was then Director of Fisheries Research of the Republic of Maldives. With his salt-and-pepper French beard, grey hair combed back, and a youthful and easy gait, he didn’t fit with the stereotype image one had about bureaucrats. He had heard about me too from our common friend and this was adequate to warrant a warm embrace that marked the beginning of a close comradeship.

For a fisheries researcher, Hassan’s concerns went far beyond fish resources and well into the life and struggles of fishworkers. Fishing craft, the sociocultural significance of their designs, and the skills of those who made them, were among his passions. We had some common ground there too. This helped to get him easily roped into the concerns of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and, while in government service, he extended his moral support to ICSF. In fact, he was one of the few open supporters of our Rome Conference in 1984. When he left his job in government, a few years ago, to, in his words, “do what I like at my own pace,” his involvement in the activities of ICSF often showed more commitment than that of a regular member.

Our last and closest interaction was the week we spent together in Maputo, Mozambique in June 2002 at the ICSF General Body meeting. We stayed together in the same large cottage, which was the hub of activity for all the participants during the happy hours after sunset and dinner. Those of us who were there will always cherish those moments. Hassan was very happy and proud of having been granted membership in ICSF. On the last day of our African sojourn, we were again together, at the City Lodge in Johannesburg *en route* to India. There, Hassan talked well into the night about the various ICSF initiatives that were needed in the Indian Ocean region, for which he could help in the future. But all that was to be after August, by which time he would settle a pending land deal in Sri Lanka and make a visit to his daughter in Australia.

Alas, that was not to be. We will now forever miss his charm and the passion with which he took on his multifarious commitments. He impressed you as a large-hearted person. His first love was Maldives, but whichever ‘*avatar*’ of Hassan you dealt with, one thing came through well: you were dealing with a fine human being, someone who cared, someone who went out of his way to reach out to you.

This obituary has been written by John Kurien (john.kurien@vsnl.com), Fellow, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum