

Underneath the waving frond stands the impoverished farmer

NEW SUNDAY TIMES 20/5/07 M/S 17

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He attributed this loss of poetic fervour to the combined effects of Ungku Abdul Aziz's articles on the economic position of the Malays and his sojourn in Australia where the farmers apparently enjoy a standard of living incomparably higher than that of the Malay paddy planters.

The realities

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been acutely conscious of their economic backwardness for many years.

It was a subject of frequent discussions among Malay intellectuals in the early twenties and since then, a spate of articles has appeared in the Malay press, bewailing the abject poverty of the kampung people and pleading for relief and redress.

But all these discussions and articles did not produce any tangible results since the laissez-faire policy of the past did not permit the adoption of any really effective measures to ameliorate the

economic position of the Malays.

The consequence has been that despite special privileges and all the rest of it, many sensitive Malays have felt all along like strangers in their own native land or as the saying aptly puts it — *seperti melukut di-tepi gantang*.

I would like to suggest quite seriously that it is this sense of repeated and continuing frustration in the economic sphere that is really the root cause of much of the intransigence and dihard racialism of certain Malay political parties and individuals and that the appeasement of these seemingly unreasonable extremist elements is not possible so long as the great and difficult problem of rural poverty remains unsolved and the Malay people as a whole are not conscious of a sense of real participation in the economic life of the country.

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Chinese audience in Kuala Lumpur that he alluded "now make up our minds to sink or swim together."

One of the logical implications of this sane and sane remark is that in future the Malay must not be allowed to sink deeper and deeper in the mud of their sawahs.

M. Said Seremban

MAN-IN-THE-STREET

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It was only on new year's day in 1964 that Tunku Osman Jawa, who was Tunku's nephew, was appointed general and chief-of-staff of the armed forces.

Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard, a well-known MCS officer was appointed director of the National Museum and Public Record Office. Tunku maintained a very close relationship with all of them.

Tunku's role in mediating the transition between colonialism and independence is best expressed in the following tribute that Datuk Seri Najib Razak pays to Tunku in his book *Globalising Malaysia*:

“When Tunku led the independence movement and subsequently became our first premier, his diplomatic skills and being an anglophile

helped him to reassure the British that granting independence to Malaya was the right thing to do.

“To be given freedom without bloodshed is a far greater achievement than with the spilling of blood over the flag of independence.

“Tunku's affable personality and his astute skills in negotiating first and foremost with all the ethnic groups and then together to negotiate with London were indispensable to Malaya's quest for independence.

“Were we to have (had) someone different, someone the British were suspicious of, things could well have turned out differently.

“Tunku, our father of Independence, was a great Malaysian leader who was destined to lead us in breaking the shackles of colonialism.”

It was Tunku's hope that “future historians will record our achievement in letters of gold”.

Indeed, Tunku left behind a legacy of peace that we should prize and treasure on the 50th anniversary of our independence.

It is important for us to understand the true significance of our peaceful transition to nationhood in the light of criticisms (from within and without the country) to the effect that our independence is only “half-baked”.

As Shariff Ahmad writes in *The Great Patriot*, these peo-



Signed and sealed. Tunku Abdul Rahman signing the document of Declaration of Independence in the presence of British Secretary of State for the Colonies Alan Lennox-Boyd in February 1956. — Pictures courtesy of Pustaka Wira Negara

ple were deliberately trying to belittle the Tunku's achievement by saying that the independence he had achieved was only a gift presented on a silver plate.

Human as he was, the Tunku would fuss for a while over the criticism, but he never forgot to remind them that the most important thing was the achievement of independence itself.

As Malaysians, we need to be proud of the fact that ours is the only country in the world that achieved independence without any bloodshed.

We should be proud of having avoided the kind of violent upheavals that accompanied independence in countries such as Indonesia.

As Shariff Ahmad rightfully asks, “Was it not much wiser to achieve independence for the

nation without spilling the people's blood?”

That Tunku was able to achieve so much for the country was due to the force of his larger-than-life personality. Capping it all was the one important factor — his sportsmanship.

■ **Article courtesy of Press Secretariat, 50th Merdeka Celebration**

TURNING 50 MEANS...



It means celebrating my birthday throughout the year with the whole nation and the world as it is also Visit Malaysia Year 2007. I have come a long way as I am more mature and able to see and appreciate things from a different perspective. I'm looking forward to celebrating the next 50 years together with the nation and to have grown older gracefully by then.

*Chong Siew Chin
lecturer
from Penang*