

Talk of independence during England sojourn

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TUN Abdul Razak Hussein had a varied educational experience. He first attended a Malay school in Pekan followed by the Malay College Kuala Kangsar where he excelled in sports, studies and leadership, before proceeding to the Raffles College in Singapore in 1940.

He became a hero after scoring the winning goal in a soccer match against the college's perennial rival, the King Edward VII Medical College. At Raffles, he was actively involved in student activities.

The friendships made at Raffles continued to flourish in the 1970s when Razak, as prime minister, entrusted former college mates such as Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Yusof and Raja Mohar Raja Badiozaman with important positions in his administration.

However, his time at Raffles was

interrupted by the Japanese Occupation, although under Japanese rule he did attend the leadership training institute for young leaders from Malaya-Sumatra called the *Koa Kunrenjo*, which was located in Singapore.

This institute was established to train future leaders of Malaya, Singapore and Sumatra and to usurp the role of the pre-war Malay College and Raffles College.

In 1947 Abdul Razak continued his education in England and managed to complete a law degree in 18 months at the Lincoln's Inns of Courts but had to wait until May 1950 before being called to the Bar.

In 1949 he enrolled at the London School of Economics for a Bachelor of Science degree in economics but did not complete the course due to his father's death in 1950. He also

attended the Second Devonshire Course on Economics and Public Administration at Cambridge University.

Razak's sojourn in London enabled him to polish his organising skills, besides cultivating the acquaintance of the future leaders of Malaya and Singapore. With a few friends he began to "talk" actively of Malayan independence but without incurring adverse reactions from British officialdom.

He was secretary of the Malay Society of the United Kingdom while Tunku Abdul Rahman served as president. This partnership was to figure again from 1951 until 1970 both in Umno and the government. The Malay Society was concerned with the slowness in implementing the proposed Federation of Malaya which it claimed to have "driven

more Umno members to join the Malay left."

As a student leader, Razak attempted to organise a Malayan student society to reflect Malaya's multi-cultural character but failed. He later organised the multi-racial Malayan Forum. This move was reflective of his to see things within the context of pluralism in the future independent Malaya.

As attested by Maurice Baker, former Singapore high commissioner to Malaysia, Abdul Razak was already discussing possible independence and the premise that the British would leave Malaya. Well-known lawyer and diplomat P.G. Lim, who was a member of the Forum, recalled in 2005 that "one could not predict if this independence could be achieved without bloodshed but in this struggle all of

us work as one."

The Malayan Forum focused on independence and debated political issues, and involved students from Malaya and Singapore besides well-known scholars from the London School of Economics like Harold Laski and luminaries from the British political parties.

As was fashionable among foreign students from the colonies at that time, Razak was a member of the British Labour Party although by the 1950s the Conservative Party was more enthusiastic about decolonisation.

Razak showed great interest in the workings of British parliamentary democracy which he observed first-hand through the 1950 general election (won by the Labour Party). He was also fascinated by parliamentary debates.