

Tribute to a nationalist

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Prominent early Malay politician Onn Jaafar's legacy lives on



Jalan Dato Onn, KL

By DEBBIE CHAN

debbie@thestar.com.my

HOME to ministry offices and the Tunku Abdul Rahman memorial is the tranquil Jalan Dato Onn.

When the road was first built, it was known as Brockman Road, after Sir Edward Lewis Brockman who was the British Resident of Pahang from 1909 to 1910 and chief secretary to the Federated Malay States from 1911 to 1920.

It was later renamed Residency Road after Tunku Abdul Rahman's residence which was located on the road. The residence has since been turned into the Tunku Abdul Rahman memorial with which we are familiar now.

But, more importantly, the road is now known as Jalan Dato Onn, after one of the most prominent Malay politicians in the history of Malaya.

Dato Sir Onn was the founder of the United Malays National Organisation (Umno) and was also responsible for the social economic welfare of the Malays by setting up the pivotal Rural Industrial Development Authority (RIDA).

Onn was born in 1895 in Johor



Visionary: Onn Jaafar (Photo courtesy of Arkib Negara Malaysia).

Baru to the first chief minister of Johor Datuk Jaafar Muhammad and his wife, a Turkish woman named Hanim Rogayah. He received his early education in England and later at the elite Malay College Kuala Kangsar. Onn served as a government official in Johor before he ventured into journalism, editing several newspapers like *Warta Ahad*, *Lembaga Melayu* and *Warta Melayu*.

He was also a member of the Johor State Council (Majlis Mesyuarat Negeri Johor), in which capacity he made two important political contributions - the setting-up of the Sultan Ibrahim Scholarship and issuance of free airfare to Muslim government officers who wanted to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca.

Onn became active in politics after World War II and founded Umno to rally the Malays against the Malayan



Quiet and serene: Jalan Dato Onn is probably one of the few roads in KL that are rarely congested.

Union plan proposed by the British colonial authorities. In the wake of the strong opposition from the Malay community, the plan was eventually withdrawn and Onn was made Chief Minister of Johor.

A visionary, Onn soon became appalled at Umno's policies and called for the party membership to be opened to all Malaysians and Umno to be renamed the United Malaysians National Organisation. However, his suggestions fell on deaf ears and he left the party in 1951 to form the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). The IMP did not get enough support from Malaysians and Onn then formed Parti Negara, which placed membership restrictions on non-Malays to gain the support of Malays.

Although Onn failed to secure a win in the 1955 general election, he played an important role in paving the way for Malaya to achieve independence in 1957. He passed away at the age of 67 in 1962.

Onn's legacy lives on as his son Tun Hussein Onn became the third prime minister of Malaysia and his grandson Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein is currently the Umno Youth leader and Education Minister.



Rallying the Malays: Onn speaking on the occasion of the UMNO flag being raised for the first time. (Photo courtesy of Arkib Negara Malaysia).