

Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957-70)

Father of Independence

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ARGUABLY the most loved of Malaysian prime ministers, Tunku Abdul Rahman exuded grace and warmth, but had a steely resolve.

Who can forget the Tunku's calm demeanour in defusing what would have been a riot when supporters of Sports Minister Datuk Harun Idris tried to prevent the police from arresting him for corruption in 1978?

"If you do not obey the law, then this country would go to the dogs for Umno is the custodian of liberty and justice."

After saying his piece, the crowd parted and allowed Harun to surrender. Such was the Tunku's effect and influence.

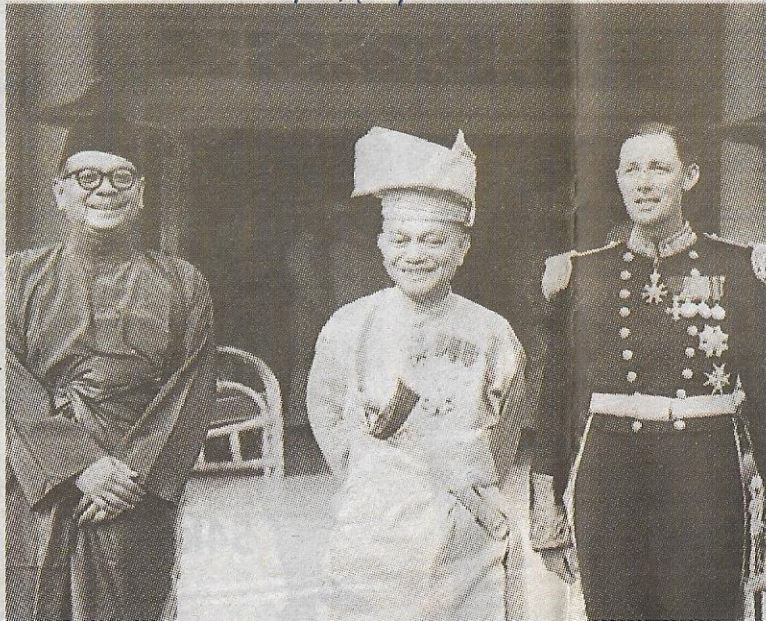
Still, in 1987, despite being the patron of and a columnist at *The Star*, the government suspended the daily for six months following a front-page report that was deemed sympathetic to Internal Security Act (ISA) detainees who had been arrested during Operation Lallang.

"I am *Bapa Malaysia* (the Father of Malaysia). So how can they say it is a threat to national security?" said the bitter Tunku.

His greatest achievement was, of course, gaining independence and securing the formation of Malaysia, but his post-premiership saw him push even harder for a united nation for fear that the race to acquire wealth was causing internal conflicts within the various communities.

The Tunku maintained the need for special privileges for the majority but also made it clear that this had to be in tandem with the protection of the rights of the minority.

His first words to newly-independent Malaya via a radio address are immortalised: "Independence was won by the spontaneous support of all communities in this country - Malays, Chinese, Indians and others who regard Malaya as their home."



Emerging from King's House, Kuala Lumpur after signing of the Merdeka Agreement on Aug 5, 1957 are Chief Minister of the Federated Malay States Tunku Abdul Rahman; Yang di-Pertuan Besar Negri Sembilan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and the last British High Commissioner to Malaya Sir Donald MacGillivray.

The May 13, 1969 tragedy marked the end of Tunku's premiership. In September 1970, he resigned in favour of his long-time and loyal deputy Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

But in spite of the adversities he faced, the Tunku never lost his wit. *The Sun's* political editor Zainon Ahmad remembers one meeting with the Tunku.

"Tunku was old and in frail health. I was to interview him with the understanding that it might be his last interview. Arriving at his home, I saw the Tunku in shorts and slippers cleaning the drain.

"He said: *Hang nak interview saya buat apa? Saya dah tua. Dah tak penting lagi. Hah! You ni nak buat obituary lah ni!* (What do you want to interview me for? I'm already old. No longer important. Hah! You want to write my obituary, don't you!) *Ok,*

then. If we have to, then let's do a good job of it!"

Former *New Straits Times* news editor Felix Abisheganaden remembers Tunku for his openness and as a friend of the press.

"He would always ask us for our opinion. He would say that the press and the government were one and made us feel that we were also playing our role in nation building," said Abisheganaden.

Press conferences, he reminisced, would be preceded by a round of drinks.

"When everyone was high and happy, he'd say: *'Ok gentlemen, what are we here to discuss?'* And he'd give you the whole story."

Abisheganaden said Tunku's wit and humour were legendary, citing an incident upon Tunku's return from the Haj together with then Education

Minister Khir Johari (later Tan Sri).

"When the press asked him: 'Sir, we can refer to you as Tunku Abdul Rahman Al Haj, but how do we refer to Encik Khir?', Tunku's reply was, 'That's simple. Call him Khir Johari Al Cohol.'"

Describing the Tunku's administration as the "golden years", Abisheganaden said it was an innocent period before ultra-racial sentiments started creeping in.

"Tunku's liberal lifestyle was, of course, the focus, and he was called un-Islamic," Abisheganaden said referring to Tunku's critics, PAS and Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Despite the manoeuvrings in Umno to get rid of him, the Tunku was steadfast. "I will resign properly," he said.

And this, according to Abisheganaden, was how the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) came about. "The Saudis decided on having this body and elected Tunku as its first secretary-general. You can say the OIC started off as a retirement plan for the Tunku!"

Under Tunku Abdul Rahman's premiership:

- » Bahasa Melayu becomes the official language
- » Bank Negara and Bank Bumiputra are formed
- » The Emergency ends with the historic 1955 Baling talks
- » Primary education is given free
- » Malaysia is formed
- » Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) is formed
- » The Youth and Sports Ministry is established
- » Three-year Confrontation with Indonesia ends
- » First Malaysia Plan launched
- » Asean, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is formed
- » Majlis Amanah Rakyat or Mara, to encourage and develop bumiputra entrepreneurship, is established
- » Malaysia International Shipping Corporation is established
- » Makes Islam the official religion



"It is right to pursue the policy of helping bumiputras (and) they need the help of others as well. (But) all the bleating gives non-bumiputras the impression they are foreigners and unwanted. So why should they cooperate?"

From his book
**'Contemporary Issues in
Malaysian Politics'**

"The problem is the old fellows will accept the condoms. They put it on, but thinking they are good Muslims, they cut off the tops ... what do you do?"

**On a programme to supply
condoms to rural Muslims
in the mid-60s.**

"We are not going to war, we don't need this. We need a love song."

**When calling off a contest to
compose the national
anthem. The Tunku
suggested adopting the tune
of *Terang Bulan*.**

"Depends on when Sukarno's b**ls will be itchy again."

**Replying to the Japanese
media on when he would
return to Japan, after a
mediation with the
Indonesian president,
following the Confrontation.**

Tun Hussein Onn (1976-81)

Father of Unity

TUN Hussein Onn began and ended his premiership in tears – announcing the death of second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein in 1976, and his own resignation for health reasons in 1981 following a power shift in Umno in favour of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Coming from a political dynasty that included his father, Umno founder Datuk Onn Jaafar, the third prime minister of Malaysia wore the tag of *Bapa Perpaduan* (Father of Unity).

This label was attributed to many of his policies which were geared towards bridging the racial divide and putting an end to the pigeon-holing of the major ethnic groups into economic classes, a task he inherited from his predecessor.

What remains his most profound legacy is the setting up of the National Unit Trust (Amanah Saham Nasional or ASN) scheme in 1981 where government-owned shares were transferred into bumiputra hands, and controlled by Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB).

The scheme allowed many bumiputras to make a killing at the stock market and PNB became an organ for the government to acquire controlling stakes in companies – both local and foreign.

Although ASN was geared towards benefiting the bumiputras, it would later evolve to include other races under Amanah Saham Wawasan.

Hussein's administration saw strides in positioning Malaysia as an influential voice on the world stage, with the prime minister playing an important role in charting the course for Asean, especially when Malaysia became the grouping's chair under his premiership.

Hussein, who was in the



Third prime minister Tun Hussein Onn visits a Made in Malaysia Trade Fair in Changkat Pavilion, Kuala Lumpur on Sept 24, 1975.

Indian army, strengthened ties with China which were renewed by his predecessor Tun Razak, who was also his brother-in-law. Hussein's son, Hishammuddin, is the current Umno Youth chief and education minister.

His foreign policy paid dividends with a leap in foreign investment. The economy also charted a 40% growth in 1978 – just two years after Hussein took over – undoubtedly due to the strong foundations set by both his predecessors.

Remembered for his meticulous style and for being a stickler for details – as evident from the pen, pencil and ruler he carried with him – cabinet meetings could go on for hours.

But his simplistic nature was also legendary. Former Asean secretary-general Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie best describes this while relating how Hussein and his Thai counterpart Gen. Kriangsak Chomanan resolved an oil dispute in the Gulf of Thailand at a *kuay teow* stall in Chiangmai.

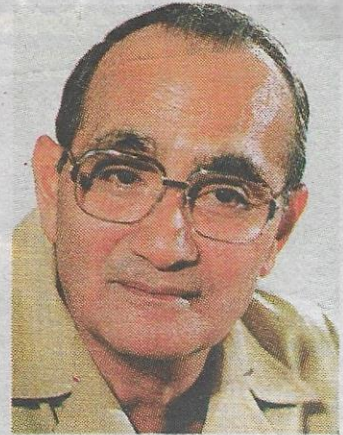
"Instead of the hotel it was scheduled for, the treaty was

signed over bowls of beef noodles – all because Hussein wanted to taste for himself if Kriangsak's endorsement of the beef *kuay teow* as the best in Thailand was true."

Hussein's words about power, which he continuously drummed into officialdom, continue to resonate for Malaysia till today: "Power is given to us not to lord it over others, not to improve our standing nor to enrich ourselves. Power must be used for the good and well-being of the people at all times. Power must always be used for the benefit of the people."

Under Tun Hussein Onn's premiership:

- » Amanah Saham Nasional created
- » Permodalan Nasional Bhd established
- » Rukun Tetangga launched
- » Koperasi Usaha Bersatu launched
- » Third Malaysia Plan launched
- » Federal Territories Ministry established in 1978
- » Malaysia becomes top semi-conductor exporter



"A leader must be honest. By this, I mean not just by the support he gives to his party's struggles, but also through his thinking, considerations and actions."

– Umno general assembly, 1981

"Without pure honesty, a leader will use his position as a bargaining tool to achieve position, seek influence, name and riches. He will use his party and its struggles as a mask to fulfil his own desires. He will take advantage of a crisis for his own benefit."

– Umno general assembly, 1981