

TUN SARDON JUBIR

His life & times



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CHAPTER ONE

Early Life (1917—1945)

Sardon bin Haji Jubir was born on March 19, 1917 in Kampong Sungei Kluang in Rengit, an insignificant kampung where three well-known political figures first launched their political "careers". Here it was that Datuk Musa Hitam first entered politics. Here too Datuk Mohamad Rahmat launched his political career when he took over from Datuk Musa as Sardon's political secretary. They cut their political teeth helping Sardon with his political work. Sardon was the son of Haji Jubir (Zubir) and Jiah, and the eldest in a family of eighteen, nine boys and nine girls. Jiah died at childbirth after her ninth child, and Haji Jubir was to remarry four more times.

Sardon's maternal great grandfather, Haji Jabbar, originated from Kudus in Central Java, Indonesia. He came to Padang Muar, Johore about two hundred years ago and opened up an area which he called Parit Jawa. To this day, the little township and name still remains. Jabbar's son, Haji Sirat, Sardon's maternal grandfather, possessed his father's adventurous nature and sailed up the river from Parit Jawa to found the township of Sungei Kluang Rengit. Later he was appointed Penghulu of Sungei Kluang Rengit.

Haji Sirat was an enterprising and resourceful man. In a short time he opened large tracts of land, planted them with coconut trees and with the help of about 40 Javanese contract labourers, (*Java kontrak*), developed a flourishing trade in copra.

Sardon's paternal great grandfather was also from Indonesia, from Demak in Central Java. Haji Mohamed Amin bin Karjani, Sardon's paternal grandfather, settled in Singapore in the mid 1800's.

Here Haji Mohamed Amin met and married Napisah who bore their only son Haji Jubir, Sardon's father. Aside from transporting copra by boat to Singapore for sale, Haji Mohamed Amin was a successful restaurateur and pilgrim broker in Singapore. In those days, many people wishing to perform the Haj were from villages and knew nothing of

arrangements to be made for travel to a foreign land. As a pilgrim broker, Haji Mohamed Amin made all travel and accommodation arrangements for these people, saw them off when they sailed and welcomed them when they returned.

When Haji Jubir was still in his early teens, he was sent to Mecca for studies. On his return ten years later as a qualified religious teacher, he was invited by Haji Sirat, the penghulu of Sungei Kluang, to settle there to help him in his various enterprises. As the kampung penghulu, Haji Sirat had additional responsibilities, and it impressed him that Haji Jubir was the right man to help him out. By then, Haji Sirat had struck up a firm friendship with Haji Amin, Haji Jubir's father, whom he had met in Singapore while making arrangements to perform the Haj in Mecca.

Haji Jubir accepted Haji Sirat's invitation and proved himself a worthy worker. Though he had the help of *Java kontrak* (Javanese contract labourers), he often took to physical labour himself, planting as well as harvesting coconut and tapping rubber. His hard work and perseverance paid off for he became not only a successful planter and trader but a private contractor engaged in building roads and houses as well.

Physically, Haji Jubir was well endowed. Fair complexioned and nearly six foot tall, he had very distinguished features. He was a very pleasant and tolerant man with a cheerful, outgoing personality and was popular with everyone. For all his entrepreneurial talents and material success, Haji Jubir was also a deeply religious man who prayed five times a day and taught religious studies.

Haji Sirat, who looked upon Haji Jubir as a promising young man with good qualities, arranged to have him married to Jiah, his eldest daughter. Marriage saw increasing prosperity for Haji Jubir who became the wealthiest man in Sungei Kluang Rengit. For his wife and children, he built the only brickhouse in the area. Set on four acres of land, the house had tile roofs and six bedrooms, four upstairs and two downstairs. In front of the house, Haji Jubir built a row of shophouses which he rented out.

In his advancing years, Haji Jubir retired from business to concentrate on religious teaching and was appointed a *kathi* by the Singapore Government. He was much sought after to solemnise marriages and other religious ceremonies. During the Japanese occupation, this robust, respected elderly man could be seen peddling on his bicycle to attend to these duties. A conspicuous feature about him was his waist-band moneybag in which he kept the *sedekah*, the unsolicited cash



Haji Jubir bin Mohd. Amin.

tokens received from wellwishers for his services. These tokens, from \$5 to \$50, kept Haji Jubir financially well off. He was a healthy man with few ailments, apart from those normal for men of his age, and was active until he died in 1959 at the age of 64.

Sardon's childhood was a happy one. Family life was warm and closely knit. Though his parents were busily engaged in numerous businesses and there was a constant hive of activity — rubber trees had to be tapped, coconuts harvested, rubber sheets smoked and copra dried, the young boy never wanted for attention. His parents saw to it that as the eldest son, Sardon was educated in both secular and religious studies. Sardon himself was determined that he should be somebody in later life.

He began his primary education when he was seven at a Malay School in Sungei Bagan Mukim XII, one-and-a-half miles away. Like many children in those days, he had to walk barefoot through country paths. School, called *Sekolah Atap*, was a single-storey building with four classrooms. The floor was of mud and the roof of atap. Discipline was strict for the forty to fifty pupils, most of whom were overaged. Caning was meted out generously. Lessons lasted half a day for these schoolboys (girls stayed at home). Sardon was the youngest of the pupils. Writing, reading, arithmetic, geography and religious studies were all taught in Jawi.

After three years of school, Haji Jubir decided, with imaginative foresight, to send Sardon to stay with his grandfather, Haji Mohamed Amin, in Singapore so that the young boy could attend an English school. Haji Jubir knew no English, being mainly versed in Arabic religious knowledge. But he saw the value of an English education; not so much as a means of making money but to better achieve the aim of helping other people. It was a brave step for Haji Jubir to take in those days, when few people, especially in the rural Malay kampungs, sent their children to study English. He was the object of ridicule of his "enlightened" friends and he was to suffer it until his son became well-known.

In Singapore, Sardon was enrolled at the Victoria Bridge School in 1926. In his five years there, he had two double promotions — from Standard 3 to Standard 5 and from Standard 5 to Standard 7. He was then transferred to the Raffles Institution in 1929. He enjoyed his schooldays in Singapore. It was both satisfying and stimulating for the lively, intelligent and friendly youngster. His leisure hours were spent on sports. The only shadow that marred this generally happy time in