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Past experiences influenced Tunku

Tunku Ismail Jewa

POLITICALLY, Kedah was stable when Tunku Abdul Rahman was born in 1903. In accepting Thailand's suzerainty, the Sultan of Kedah was allowed to rule according to the laws and customs of his State.

The population then was largely rural and homogeneous and there was integration among the indigenous communities with the Malay-Indian Muslims and Malay-Kedah Thais.

The Tunku's father, Sultan Abdul Hamid, then a figure of unity in the feudal State, was becoming progressively ill after a stroke he had in 1895. As a result, the Sultan's younger brother, Tunku Abdul Aziz, took over the administration of the State.

Despite its political stability, Kedah was facing financial difficulties. In 1905, Kedah agreed to accept a British financial advisor, W.F. Williamson, who was appointed by the Thai Government to help in the financial administration of the State.

The administration of the State was reorganised and a State Council was formed to govern the country, ending the absolute control of the Sultan over the affairs of the State.

In 1909, Thailand transferred Kedah to the British Government by treaty agreement and so Kedah became one of the Unfederated States of Malaya.

When the Sultan's health worsened the Tunku's eldest brother, Tunku Ibrahim (Tunku Sulong), was appointed the Regent of Kedah in 1913.

All these political changes had an impact on the Tunku's early education as well as his style of dealing with people, management and administration in years to come.

The Tunku was born a prince but he had the heart of a commoner. He grew up to be what he was because of his mother, Che Manjalara Luang Naraburi Rak.

His mother would always impress upon her children not to forget the common people but to work for their welfare and interest, and above all, to be humble. She would remind them they would not be royalty without the support of the people.

The Tunku's father was ill most of the time and was kept in isolation in the palace from his children. The responsibility of raising his children therefore became the responsibility of the Tunku's mother, who was affectionately called Mak Che by all. The Tunku was also lucky to have older brothers to see to his formal education.

As the Regent of Kedah, his eldest brother Tunku Ibrahim made sure that Sir Laurence Guillemard, the Governor of the Straits Settlements and the High Commission of the Malay States, agree to allow the administration of the State be carried out by Malay officers while the State Council be responsible for the higher education of Malays, before signing the 1923 treaty between Kedah and Britain.

In 1919, another elder brother of the Tunku, Tunku Mohammad Jewa, as secretary of the State Council, was instrumental in sending the Tunku to England on a government scholarship to further his education after his schooling at Penang Free School.

It was the education the Tunku received at Cambridge University (1923-1926) and the company he mixed with in England that moulded him to become a future politician in British Malaya.

In England, the Tunku studied at St Catherine's College. There, he was denied a room twice. His tutor told him it was only for Englishmen. The

Tunku described his reaction to the incident in his book *Something to Remember* as follows:

From then on, there grew inside me an intense anti-colonial feeling. I was determined to fight for the independence of my country. I started to attend meetings of the Indian students movement for independent India and joined them in their activities.

His mother's influence of caring for the common people; the inter-ethnic harmony in the State ruled by his father; the racial prejudice he encountered in Cambridge as well as his involvement in political activities with Indian students there made him realise the importance of racial harmony and national unity in an independent country. The Tunku's dream was realised when our country achieved independence through inter-ethnic cooperation, tolerance and understanding 40 years ago. Today, we have peace, security and prosperity in Malaysia under Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad because of the legacy of the Tunku's Alliance Government.

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