

11/11/1999

Fond recollections of my schooldays in Kedah

Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj

IT is hard to recall correctly when I was a young schoolboy and what happened then, i.e. 70 years ago, when the Sultan Abdul Hamid College was founded or its foundation laid.

In 1909, I was six years old and that was the time when Kedah was transferred from Thai suzerainty to the British. An English school started that year in a house facing Jalan Bharu, now called Jalan Putra, where the new court is. At the back of the building was a built-up pool where crocodiles were kept for show. After the school had opened something had to be done with the crocodiles as otherwise it would be difficult to prevent the boys from climbing over the fence to take a peep at the vicious animals, so they were removed.

I remember I was sent to school soon after it had opened. I was carried on the shoulders of Pak Dris, the old man of the palace, as the distance from the palace to the school was only across the Padang. I was dressed in tunic and shorts with a cap adorned with gold leaves around it.

I was given a seat at the teacher's table, presumably to prevent me from disturbing the other boys. I still remember him as a kindly man by the name of Master Hassan. There were two classes, one for bigger boys and the other for smaller boys with a partition to separate the classes. The teacher for the bigger boys was Mr Mohammad Iskandar, the father of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who if I am not mistaken, was the man entrusted with the opening and the running of the first school.

Then a third teacher was brought in to help him, Mr Manaf. My attendance in school was rather irregular.

One day it was in the English school and another day in the Malay school in Jalan Bharu, now called Jalan Putra, and shuttling between the two schools, I learned nothing except to worry the teachers. In the afternoons I had to learn the Quran at home.

As the number began to show further increase, a bigger building had to be found and the school moved to a house next door to the Central Police Station. More teachers were recruited from Penang, and if I remember correctly, Mr Ismail Merican took over as headteacher from Mr Mohammad Iskandar who left to join the Government Service.

My interest in school had improved somewhat though my attendance was still irregular and a Chinese teacher (I cannot remember his name), took it into his head that Royal Family or not, I must be corrected, and so he caned my hand, as a result of which he was sent back to Penang.

It must have been about 1912 when my brother Tunku Yusof returned from England as a Royal Engineer at the Royal Military Academy Woolwich with an English wife. He decided to go to Bangkok where he had been schooled and sent to England as a King's student and so I went with him and began learning a new language - Thai - at the Debssirindir School.

When my brother died in 1915 I returned to Alor Star but instead of going back to the English school I went to the Malay school in Jalan Bharu and left in 1916 to enter the Penang Free School and there it was that I took to serious schooling. It was when I was in Penang that a new school building in Alor Star was built and with that the name was changed from the Government English School to the Sultan Abdul Hamid College. In 1919 I left on a Kedah scholarship to go to England.

Seventy years have gone by - all the teachers are gone, all my old classmates are gone, all that remains with me today are memories, happy

ones of the carefree days I spent in the old school now the Sultan Abdul
Hamid College. - Sultan Abdul Hamid Dalam Kenangan