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A nation's tearful tribute

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"ACCORDING to Chinese beliefs," says Fong Loon on Jan 16, 1976, "his facial features denoted longevity. "His death, therefore," continues this watch repairer of Kuala Lumpur's Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, "comes as a particular shock to the Chinese community."

The man of whom he speaks - Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, the nation's second Prime Minister - "appeared, to those who didn't know him, cold," says his chief private secretary.

"Many feared him," he continues. "He expected you to know your stuff.

"With him, you couldn't waffle."

But, continues Zain Azraai Datuk Zainal Abidin, Abdul Razak had commanded the respect of those who did know him - and enjoyed the love of those who understood him.

"He bore no malice. He would take pains not to be clever, not to show off, not to assert himself."

He had reportedly also taken pains to conceal his illness - leukaemia - from all but former deputy premier Tun Dr Ismail ... whose death preceded his own by 2 1/2 years.

"His death has been imminent since Christmas Eve," says a source close to the late Prime Minister. Abdul Razak had travelled to London, and had there been attended to by eminent consultant Sir Ronald Bodley Scott and personal physician Dr D. MacPherson.

He died on Jan 14.

"Before his trip abroad, he submitted a medical chit - like any public servant - which demonstrated his illness," says Zain Azraai. "When requesting the finances for the trip, he was mindful of cost; to save, he didn't even bring his wife."

Though it is her loss which is the most personal, it is that wife - Toh Puan Rahah - who demonstrates the most composure in the midst of crisis. Successor Datuk Hussein Onn weeps throughout his swearing-in; Malaysians who come to pay their last respects as the late Prime Minister lies in state at Parliament House faint; some, in the crush, fall into a pool in the vicinity; women have hysterics.

Abdul Razak is conveyed to his final resting place on a gun carriage, preceded by police outriders and a brass band which, though impressively accoutred, is utterly silent - only the steady tramp of boots marking the funeral procession.

The Yang di-Pertuan Agong's eyes are moist as Abdul Razak's casket is lowered into his grave at the Heroes Mausoleum of the National Mosque. A youth reads verses from the Quran and fights back tears.

Ahmad Mat and Yusof Ahmad, who are blind, come by taxi to join the cortege.

"We can't see him," says Ahmad, "but we can pray for him, and pay him our last respects." Azlan Said, also blind, walks two miles to the mosque from his flat in San Peng.

Education Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has announced that, in deference to the late premier, schools will be closed this day. Government departments will likewise be closed, as will the Stock Exchange.

Spokesmen for the capital's Hilton and Merlin hotels declare that the Tin Mine and Tomorrow discotheques will not be open for business.

Abdul Razak's eldest son Mohamed Najib, 22, succeeds his father as Orang Kaya Indera Shahbandar, one of the four chieftains of Pahang - an

appointment announced by the Sultan of that State.
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