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Many remembrances of a time past

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Time present and time past  
are both perhaps present in time future  
and time future contained in time past  
T.S. Eliot (Four Quartets)

SOME memories are indelible including, and especially those associated with persons whose decisions affect one's life in more ways than one and provide for continuity in the scheme of things for the country and the nation as a whole. Remembered with affection in this respect is Tun Razak who passed away 25 years ago in London this Sunday.

Mentioned at times was that Razak went barefooted to the Malay primary school at Langgar in Pahang in the early days of colonial rule. Inferred was his poverty. He was not poor as his father was Datuk Hussein, Orang Kaya Indera Shahbandar, one of the State's territorial chiefs.

It was simply that others in the school were dirt poor and could not afford to buy rubber shoes, and out of respect for his schoolmates Razak too went barefooted. It explained his early understanding of problems that ordinary Malays faced then, their hopes and aspirations for a better life.

It explained also why much later as Minister in charge of rural development he travelled more than 60,000 miles a year to all parts of the country.

A story has been told by J.J. Raj, once Pahang Chief Police Officer about Razak's visit to the police headquarters in Kuala Lipis in 1962, just five years after independence.

There was no proper police officers mess then but situated at some distance was a large mansion, once the official residence of the British Adviser. It was then being used as a hostel for Malay students from surrounding villages. From Raj came a suggestion that it be converted into a police mess and that the students be transferred to another place.

Razak and Raj visited the mansion to meet some of the students there. As Raj later recounted, Razak gently remarked: "Even if 10 per cent of these poor Malay students could one day become university students, their success would make me extremely happy." The suggestion was dropped and Raj apologised to Razak.

Raj took note later of the thousands of Malay students graduating from local and foreign universities every year, and he remembered Razak's words which were "not only prophetic but also showed his keen sense of perception and foresight".

Razak is remembered for many things; that while the colonial government built 2,000 schools in over 100 years, he built 3,000 schools in just 10 years; that some three million adult illiterates were taught to read and write; that he opened over 200,000 acres and 75 land schemes for thousands of landless families.

Bank Bumiputra, Mara and ITM, Universiti Kebangsaan, Risda, Felda, Pernas, Petronas and MAS were among those established during his tenure.

On the larger canvas was Razak's role in reviving parliamentary democracy after just 21 months of emergency rule under the National Operations Council (NOC) which he chaired after the May 13 tragedy.

There was Razak's crucial role in ending Indonesian confrontation against Malaysia and effecting a major change in the country's foreign policy to one of equidistance.

His was the decision to enlarge the Alliance to become Barisan Nasional

and persuade Pas to join it.

His also was the decision to bring Dr Mahathir Mohamad back into the party fold. The consequences of his decisions have been momentous for the nation. As with his predecessor, Tunku Abdul Rahman and other leaders who followed him, Razak exercised power to mould the future.

Recalled by his schoolmates in the Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) was that he studied hard and won double promotions - from Standard I to III to Standard V and yet again to Standard VII. It explained why he was said to be poor in arithmetic!

Much later, though, he passed his Latin in four months enabling him to pursue law studies in London which he completed in just 18 months.

Certain other events during his childhood influenced his outlook. At the age of 10 he was present at the coronation ceremony of the Pahang Sultan in Pekan. Present in the audience hall were territorial chiefs in the traditional dress, and all standing. Among them was his father.

Also present was the British Governor accompanied by British Residents. Everyone of them was seated while the Malay chiefs remained standing. It was a scene which remained engraved in Razak's mind.

Cemented was the close association between Tunku and Razak during their studies in London. Thus it was that Razak later persuaded Tunku to become President of Umno following the resignation of Datuk Onn. At first reluctant, Tunku had suggested that Razak himself contest the party presidency which the latter immediately rejected on grounds of his age. He was just 29 then.

Tunku later managed to persuade Razak to contest the deputy presidency. Each in the separate contests won by a small majority.

Much later was Razak's appointment of Hussein Onn as Deputy Prime Minister following the death of Tun Dr Ismail in 1973. It had its consequences when Hussein became Prime Minister after Razak's demise, and in due course appointed Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir as Deputy Prime Minister.

The rest is history. Who was it who said something about a nation sometimes looking for a confluence of time, place, person and transformation? And the continuing journey from Tunku to Razak, Hussein and C.H.E Det.

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