



# Tunku

## Man of The Hour

Khair Johari

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## Foreword

Leaders who make life better for their fellowmen live forever. Such a man is Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, the leader who won independence for Malaya (later renamed Malaysia, under a bigger grouping) and who led the young nation as the First Prime Minister, for the first decade.

Some of the thoughts and actions of this great national leader are now documented by his confidante, Tan Sri Khir Johari. To Tan Sri Khir, the 'Tunku' as the latter is affectionately known to all Malaysians, was mentor, colleague and friend.

The untold events of the Tunku's efforts in championing the cause of his countrymen, when Malaya was under the British Regime, were related by Tan Sri Khir Johari at the First Tunku Abdul Rahman Address of the Malaysian Academy of Medicine on 21 August, 1992.

I was inspired by the revelations. The deeds of the Tunku must be told and told again, so that generations of Malaysians will be inspired to emulate this great leader and to rise to challenging situations. He was, truly, the Man of the Hour.

Dr Ian K M Chia

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Dr Ian K M Chia

I make no apologies for choosing the topic of my address tonight, which is, 'Tunku — Man of the Hour' because of the very close relationship I enjoyed with him for about 48 years. During that period he was my friend, my mentor, my colleague, and later on my boss. I was particularly attracted by the special qualities in him — his high sense of patriotism, loyalty and his kindness to his friends and fellow human beings, without any regard to the colours of their" skins, to their religions or their status in society.

Quite by accident it was politics and patriotism that first brought us together. When the Japanese surrendered to the Allied Forces at the end of World War II in 1945, the armed MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army) the Communists in Kedah, then known as the **Tiga Bintang** or Three Stars' tried to take over the State as their flagship before the arrival of the British Occupation Forces.

The Tunku enlisted the assistance of a small band of young men, that included me, to stop these elements from achieving their objective. We had no arms whatsoever but out of sheer guts, we managed to put up a front pending the arrival of the British-led Force 136.

This was our first taste of confrontation with the Communists. To me, as an innocent young man, it was a lesson in human leadership and sacrifice which was imprinted in my mind.

This paper is adapted from the Inaugural Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Address, delivered by Tan Sri Khir Johari, at the Annual Dinner of the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, on Aug 21 1992.

The Tunku was to me clearly, even at that hour, the 'Man of the Hour'.

The second phase of the relationship between me and the Tunku started with a common desire to help the victims of the Japanese-sponsored Burmese Death Railway, who managed to escape into Kedah. They originated from various States in the

Peninsula and Indonesia. They were in dire circumstances and needed medical attention and shelter.

With the assistance of a few of us (including Senu Abdul Rahman — now a Tan Sri), we started, from scratch, a Home which we called 'Rumah Miskin' or 'Home for the Poor'. The Tunku was the Chairman and I was the Secretary. Indeed it was the beginning of the establishment of what is now known as the 'caring society'. And in later years he used to tell me that it was the prayers of these victims which contributed largely to his becoming the Prime Minister of the country.

To help finance the running of the Home we staged plays in Kedah and Perlis with Senu as the Director, I as the Orang Muda (the Hero) and with Tunku as our advisor in the background.

My relationship with the Tunku continued through the political party of SABERKAS which Senu and I together with a few colleagues founded. The Tunku was our unofficial Patron. Among our other colleagues were Mohamad Jamil (later, Tan Sri Mohamad Jamil, who became the Director-General of Agriculture) and two graduates, from the London School of Economics and Cambridge University, respectively. Two of them are still alive today.

Later on we had a minor disagreement over a technical matter and it was this factor that prompted the Tunku to leave the country to finish his law studies in the UK. Even in later years, he used to remind us that this disagreement was fated and subsequently changed his entire life.

As you all, know at the age of 45, the Tunku qualified as a barrister in London and subsequently returned to this country.

The rest is history which I shall try to relate to you very briefly in order to re-affirm my theory that the Tunku was the 'Man of the Hour'.

It is perhaps a coincidence that this Inaugural Dinner is held on

the anniversary — almost to a day — of the historic day when, on August 25th 1951, at the Majestic Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Tunku was elected President at the General Assembly of a little known body — UMNO.

This near coincidence has re-affirmed my desire to title my address 'Tunku — Man of the Hour'.

On that day Dato Onn, a famous Malay leader and a former Senior State Official of Johor had resigned, to lead a rival political party, the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), and had predicted that UMNO would disintegrate within three months. And so it might well have, had it not been for one man — the Tunku — a little known individual from Kedah, with no previous experience whatsoever of organising or leading a political party.

Dato Onn believed that a political party which included all the three racial communities — Malay, Chinese and Indian — was the best suited and qualified to bring *Merdeka* to the country. Tunku was convinced that under the circumstances prevailing then, each community should continue to create and support its own political party. Dato Onn had the support of some of the leading British Civil Servants, and, at first, even several leaders of the Malayan Chinese community. Tunku, a lone figure and a voice which lacked eloquence, toured UMNO branches throughout the country and spoke vigorously in his Kedah Malay in favour of a wholly Malay UMNO. He proved to be the 'Man of the Hour' and achieved a success which no other man could have. I must say here that the Royalty in him played a significant part in the role he was destined to play throughout these years.

While Tunku toured the country, seeking to strengthen UMNO, Col H S Lee in Kuala Lumpur took the initiative together with Tun Omar Yoke Lin Ong and a few others in preparation for the first Municipal elections, and formed a group which was called the Alliance of UMNO and MCA. The Tunku knew nothing of this, and was at his country home in Seberang Prai (PW) when an UMNO member asked him to return to Kuala Lumpur urgently. On his return he

found that even a number of UMNO members in Kuala Lumpur were opposed to this new venture. At the same time a leader of Dato' Onn's party (Dato' E E C Thurasingham — to be exact) vehemently declared that it would never work. It was this last statement which inspired the Tunku. With the genius which guided him all his life, Tunku quickly recognised the potential advantages, and declared that he would go all-out to support the Alliance move.

Other UMNO leaders followed Tunku and the Alliance was accepted as a united political party. Had the initiative been rejected, Onn and his Independence of Malaya Party might have achieved some success. Here again Tunku was the 'Man of the Hour'.

The success of the Alliance in the Kuala Lumpur Municipal elections was followed by similar successes in other Town Council Elections. I happened to be one of the candidates in Alor Setar. In Johor Bahru, the Alliance captured all the seats, in a straight fight with Dato Onn's new 'Party Negara'.

Tunku now decided to take the initiative in asking for Government consultations on the subject of *Merdeka*. The new British High Commissioner, General Templer, was sympathetic and Tunku established a rapport with Templer which no other Malay leader could have achieved in such a relatively short time. Here again Tunku was the 'Man of the Hour', and progress in negotiations with London was almost miraculously rapid. Tunku's rapport with General Templer extended to Lennox-Boyd, the new Conservative Secretary of State for the Colonies.

There can be no doubt that no other Malayan leader could have secured the approval of the British Government for the granting of Independence in such a relatively short time. The political and other road-blocks were everywhere.

Meanwhile the first Federal elections were held in 1955 with Tunku leading the Alliance and Onn heading the opposition. The Alliance manifesto was pure and simple — *Merdeka*.

Tunku's charisma and untiring energy in touring every State

proved once again that he was the 'Man of the Hour' and his party won all the seats except one. Here I can speak with some authority, because I was one of the Alliance candidates in Kedah.

Tunku accepted his 99 per cent victory in the first Federal Elections with unequalled humility. He remained the genial, generous individual who had emerged from obscurity in the short period of four years. With supreme authority, he picked his first Cabinet with the wisdom of a seasoned politician.

It was a crucial test, but Tunku, as the 'Man of the Hour' chose wisely and chose men who would help lead the nation to world recognition. Here again, I was privileged to have been chosen to be one amongst them.

As he guided his Government towards progress he created a new Federal Capital on the site of a little tin mining settlement, which was less than seventy years old. Tunku made no claim to cultural supremacy but he chose the nation's National Anthem, from a selection of compositions by many composers. He has brought into existence a spacious Stadium (now known as Stadium Merdeka) where, after the independence ceremony was carried out with pomp and pageantry, he provided the focus for national, and later international football and other sporting championships.

He caused a tall Parliament Building to be erected, a new style National Mosque to be built, and a new National Museum to be constructed on the site of the pre-war State Museum (but rejecting the uninspired plans of the Public Works department which introduced a design of a traditional Malay house). Later, after observing an impressive War Memorial, Tunku raised funds to build the National Monument which stands proudly today. Even the present site of the University of Malaya (which was then a jungle) was chosen by him. Another landmark which can be seen to this day is the Subang International Airport whose site was handpicked by him.

All this initiative was the genius of one man — the 'Man of the

Hour — Tunku’.

Having said so much about the Tunku let me divert a bit and talk very briefly about the May 13, 1969 incident which caused Sino-Malay disturbances in Kuala Lumpur. I am doing this in order to put the record straight for the benefit of posterity.

It seems that even today a few people are still blaming the Tunku for the incident. The trouble really started with the procession on May 9, 1969 on the eve of the Federal election, scheduled for Saturday May 10. Communist sympathisers, secret society members and hooligans spearheaded the move, supposedly to ask the people to boycott the election on May 10. Tunku and I were in Kedah at that time and I can say without any fear of contradiction from any quarter that had he been consulted, he, as Prime Minister, would have rejected the request for a procession and the result would have been different.

To blame Tunku would be to ignore the facts and would be, I would think, an act of deplorable ingratitude for a life dedicated to the service of the nation since 1945, as I have related to you.

I am sorry for this small ‘commercial’, but I thought I might, as I said earlier on, ‘put the record straight’ in this Forum.

Over and above his achievements as the ‘Father of the Nation’ Tunku must go down in history as the ‘Father of National Unity’. All his life and indeed even when he celebrated his 78th birthday (which proved to be his last) on February 8, 1990 National Unity was the theme of his messages to everybody.

Even when we were writing the Constitution of this country before Merdeka, he believed very strongly in parliamentary democracy. That is why today, any one, be he of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Dayak or Kadazan descent can become the Prime Minister of our country provided he has the majority support of Parliament.

His dislike of apartheid, as practised in South Africa, led to the

expulsion of that country from the Commonwealth in the early 1960s. As a great believer in the capabilities and talents of others, he wanted to see Malaysians of every race and creed grow up as brothers and sisters.

We are therefore happy that our Government led by YB Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has launched the Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Memorial as a centre for research on our Tunku and as a memorial to remember his sacrifices and contributions to the nation. The nation must **not** forget him.

To you in the Academy of Medicine I must express once again my sincere thanks and deep gratitude for inviting me to make this inaugural Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Address. It is an honour which will remain with me all my life.

I think, as an Academy of such high standing, you should work towards becoming a source of truth. You can become much more effective as a public voice if you can bring analysis and facts to bear on your arguments.

In this respect, I was very encouraged to see the role played by the academics in Bangkok, whose voices during the recent troubles in Thailand were loud and clear.

Finally, I wish the Academy success in its endeavours in future years.

Kuala Lumpur  
August 21, 1992

## **Short biography of Y.T.M. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra**

Y.T.M. Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra was born at Istana Pelamin, Alor Setar, Kedah on 8 February 1903. He was the seventh prince, born to the 24th Sultan of Kedah, the late Sultan Abdul Hamid Shah. His mother was Che' Manjalara, the daughter of Luang Mira, the Leader of the Shan Tribe in Siam. In 1939, the Tunku married Sharifah Rodziah Syed Alwi Barakbah.

At the age of six, the Tunku started his formal education, when he attended the English school in Alor Setar in the mornings and al-Quran classes in the evenings. He was sent to the Thebsurian School in Bangkok at the age of eight. In 1915 he returned to Kedah and continued his studies at the Penang Free School in Penang.

In 1919, the Tunku was awarded the Kedah State Scholarship to enable him to further his studies overseas. He left for England in 1920 to study at the St Catherine College, Cambridge University. He obtained his BA in 1925, thus becoming the first Kedah prince to obtain a degree from a British university.

While studying at the University, he successfully formed the Malay Association of Great Britain in 1926. He was elected as the first Secretary of the Association. In 1938, the Tunku went back to England to pursue his law studies at the Inner Temple, but was forced to return home before completion of his studies when World War II broke out. Upon returning to the country, he worked as a Cadet at the Law Consultancy Department in Alor Setar. After that, he continued his service as Assistant District Officer of Sungai Petani and Kulim, and later on as District Officer of a few districts in Kedah, including Langkawi.

In 1946, he went to England once again, to resume his studies in law. Upon completion of his studies in 1949, he returned home. He was elected Chairman of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Kedah Division, at the age of forty-six. Not long after that, he was transferred to Kuala Lumpur, to be the Deputy Public Prosecutor in the Federal Law Department. The Tunku resigned from government service in order to be the President of UMNO, replacing Dato' Onn Jaafar on 26 August, 1951.

While holding this position, he tried his best to solve the country's political problems by trying to obtain the cooperation of all races. As a result, an alliance was formed between the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and this was known as the Alliance.

The first Federal Elections were held in July 1955. The Alliance won a landslide victory of 51 out of the 52 seats contested. The Tunku was then elected Chief Minister and Minister of Home Affairs.

One important platform of the Alliance's Election Manifesto was to end the 'Emergency' by way of discussion with Chin Peng, the Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party, and to pardon the terrorists.

The pardon was declared on 9 September, 1955 and the Baling Negotiations were held from 27-28 December 1955. However when the Tunku asked Chin Peng for a surrender of weapons, Chin Peng did not agree and the negotiations ended abruptly.

In 1956, the Tunku went to London to discuss the country's independence with the British Government.

The trip was successful and 31 August, 1957 was declared as the date for the granting of independence. On Merdeka Day, the Tunku was made the First Prime Minister. He worked hard to ensure the success of the newly-formed government. The country continued to enjoy good relations with other countries. Malaya became a member of the Commonwealth and signed a Defence Agreement with the United Kingdom.

Within the first few months of his administration, the Tunku made several goodwill trips overseas including to Vietnam, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Japan and Brunei. In January 1959, while being a guest of the Philippines Government, the Tunku proposed the formation of an Association of South East Asian countries in order to foster economic and cultural co-operation within the region. This proposal was fully agreed to by President Garcia of the Philippines. Thus the Association of South East Asia (ASA) was formed in 1961. Earlier, while attending the first Economic Conference of Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) at Kuala Lumpur, on 5 March 1958, the Tunku urged Asian countries to reduce their spending on arms and instead try to upgrade the living standards of the people.

May 1961, during a luncheon talk with the foreign press in Singapore, the Tunku shocked the world by declaring that Malaya would have a special arrangement with Britain, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. This was the origin of the Malaysian Plan which has become a reality today. The aim of the Tunku to form Malaysia was opposed by the Philippines and Indonesia. However, the Tunku's strong determination and patience ultimately led to the formation of Malaysia, consisting of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak, on 16 September 1963. Unfortunately, Singapore left this line-up in August 1965 to become an independent country.

Alliance continued to be the ruling Government, winning the 1964 and 1969 elections. However, on 13 May 1969, an incident involving inter-racial conflicts in the Kuala Lumpur area resulted in the Government declaring a state of emergency once again. Parliament was suspended and the country was ruled by an Emergency Council, called MAGERAN, headed by Tun Abdul Razak. The Tunku stepped down from his post as Prime Minister on 22 September 1970 in order to give way to younger leaders. His successor was Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein.

During his term as Prime Minister, the Tunku brought about many changes and also made Malaysia well-known throughout the West and the Asian region. He was praised throughout the world when he bravely voiced his criticism against Apartheid in South Africa. His visits to Belgium, Holland and France were highly successful in promoting Malaysia.

Tunku was awarded the distinguished degree of Doctor of Laws by Cambridge University in 1960. He also received similar acclaim from the University of Malaya; Sydney University, Australia; Areleta University, Philippines; Saigon University (1961); Aligarh University, India, and National University of Seoul, Korea (1965). He was awarded the distinguished degree of Doctor of Letters from Oxford University, England in 1970 and a distinguished degree in Public Administration from a university in Thailand.

The Tunku continued his activities in welfare even after retirement. He continued leading the Islamic Welfare Organisation of Malaysia (PERKIM) which he started in 1960. He was also the President of the Regional Islamic Da'awah Council of South East Asia and Pacific (RISEAP) and the Secretary-General of the Islamic Secretariat in Jeddah. This vocation enabled him to propose, and finally, to

establish the Islamic Development Bank in 1974.

The Tunku contributed substantially towards the growth of sports in the country, especially football. His keen interest in this sport was evident since his schooldays. He was once a player in the football teams of the Penang Free School, and St Catherine College, at Cambridge University. The Tunku was the Honorary Life President of the Football Association of Malaysia. He was also elected President of the Asian Football Confederation and the Asian Badminton Association. In appreciation of his varied contributions, the Malaysian Government awarded him the National Sports Personality award on 2 June, 1979. The Tunku's excellence in the sports arena was duly recognised by other countries and he was awarded the United States Distinguished Service Award on 6 December, 1981.

The Tunku paid special attention to culture. He stressed the importance of creating the spirit of national integration among the races in the country through culture. He made this statement while officiating at the first Cultural Festival at the Lake Gardens in Kuala Lumpur, in 1956.

The Tunku was also active in the field of writing. Through the 'As You See It' columns in *The Star* the Tunku conveyed his views to the public. Most of his writings were published. Among his noted publications are *Sudut Pandangan (Viewpoints)*, *Something to Remember, Lest We Forget*, *Challenging 'Times, May 13, Before and After*, *Political Awakenings*, *Contemporary Issues in Malaysian Politics* and *As A Matter of Interest*.

He received many awards and medals for his great contributions towards the nation. The Kedah Order of Merit (KOM) which he received from the Sultan of Kedah in 1958 was one which he treasured deeply.

## **A short biography of Tan Sri Khir Johari**

Tan Sri Khir was born on January 29, 1923 in Alor Setar, Kedah.

He was involved in the political movement in Malaysia from its very beginning and later on became one of the founding fathers of Independent Malaysia.

He stood for Parliament in the first General Elections in 1955 and remained an M.R till 1982.

On Independence Day (31 August, 1957) he was made Minister of Education. In 1960, he changed portfolios and became Minister of Commerce and Industry. In 1964, he was appointed Minister of Agriculture, and three years later, went back to the Education Ministry, thus completing a term of over 9 years in all in that Ministry.

In 1968, he returned to head the Ministry of Trade & Industry, serving a total of more than 8 years in that Ministry.

In February 1973, he was made Ambassador of Malaysia to the United States and later on, concurrently, Ambassador to the United Nations, in New York.

He is involved in many business activities. He is currently Chairman and Director of a number of public companies. He is President of the Malaysian Institute of Directors.

As far as social activities are concerned, he is President of the World Wide Fund for Nature of Malaysia (WWF) and President of the Malaysian Zoological Society. He is also President of the Royal Commonwealth Society of Malaysia.

He has been equally active in sports and is currently Deputy President of the Malaysian Olympic Council. He is also **President of the Sepak Takraw Association of Malaysia.**

As far as State honours are concerned, in June 1986, he was conferred the Panglima Mangku Negara (P.M.N.) which is one the highest honours of the country and carries the title of "Tan Sri". In

addition, he is the recipient of a number of foreign State honours from Thailand, Korea and Japan.

On 15 August, 1987 he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters by the University of Agriculture, Malaysia. Earlier on, he had obtained the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Malaya and the honorary degrees of Doctor of Education and Science from the La Salle College of Manila.

In March 1992 he was awarded the DPMS by the Sultan of Selangor which carries the title of Dato'.