

Tun Razak and his wife pose with four of their five sons. The smallest, when this picture was taken, was in bed.

THE QUIET LEADER

*Tun Abdul Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia,
talks softly, but always to the point*

by **DOM MORAES**

B RITISH NYMPHETS in bikinis, attended by youthful but muscular beaux, cavorted at the poolside. The boys laughed loudly: the nymphets fluttered their hands and emitted the shrill, voracious cries of baby birds. Two of them were seized by their escorts and tossed into the lifeless, chemically blue water: the air filled with shrieks and spray. The mothers of these chronically lively young people sat in deck chairs in the shade. They talked to each other, read, or smiled benevolently at the activities of their children. From time to time, waiters fetched them tall drinks that clinked deliciously in frosted tumblers.

"This is still," murmured the young Malay official beside me, "a very *white club*." His voice held no echo of bitterness. He had been up at Oxford, and the

British were not the overlords of his country any more. People like himself and his two companions, all Government officers, were in charge now: he could afford his small, cynical smile as he eyed the blotched, heavy British mothers, dripping visibly in the heat, and their noisy brood. The battle for independence was over. It had been fought for him by such men as the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman, and his quiet successor, Tun Abdul Razak.

"The Tun is a man few people know well," said another of the officials. "When strangers meet him, they sometimes think him cold and unemotional, because he doesn't speak easily, as the Tengku did. He is rather shy, really, but he's not a cold person at all, and he's not unemotional. He has a sharp sense of

humour. But he's used to staying in the shadows: he did most of the work even when the Tengku was Prime Minister, but he doesn't talk about it. I hope he will talk to you. The difficulty is not only that he's shy but that he's usually very tired. He works too hard. As you know, to be in his position is no holiday."

T HE HOUSE in which Tun Razak lives is close to his office. Broad lawns surround it. He has occupied it for 11 years, so that it has rather more personal character than most official residences. A glass case hangs in the porch outside his reception room: it is filled with the numerous decorations he has received, a colourful display of ribbons and medals. Opposite the decorations, under the stairs, is an array of walking sticks.



Golf in the garden for Tun Razak.

The Tun collects them. They include a stick purchased in the U.S., which can act as a container for beverage: useful for the habitual walker who is also an occasional drinker.

The Tun himself awaited us in the reception room, a short man with a limp handshake. His gentle, intelligent face had a tired look about it. He sighed, and sat down in a brown leather armchair. "My favourite chair," he said. The room was spacious and handsome, with orange sofas and flowers on the tables. At the far end were portraits of the Tun and his wife. On the wall beside us, a glass cabinet was filled with numerous and varied specimens of the Malay *kris*. The Tun pointed to one. "That one," he said in his soft, nearly inaudible voice, "is the hereditary *kris* of my family.

"We have been chieftains in Pahang for 11 generations now. The custom is that when my father died, I took over the *kris* and handed it over to the Sultan. If he gave it back to me, I got the title. The same if I die. My son will have to hand over the *kris*, and if the Sultan returns it to him, he will get the title. But by this time, it's our right. The *kris* has been in my family all these years, we have been Chief Advisers to the Sultan all these years. It doesn't mean that we are all that prosperous. I was born in a village called Pulau Keladi, about a mile away from a small town called Pekan in Pahang."

The Tun pauses often between sentences. His style of speech is slow and meditative: he tends to repeat phrases, almost to himself. "A small town called Pekan," he said. "Yes. In those days, people commonly led a poor life, looking for subsistence. Since I came from the family of the chieftain of the area, I was treated a little differently from other children, but not much. We had nothing special: life was hard for everybody. My father was then in the Civil Service. After my sister was born, my grandparents took me away, and I lived with them all the rest of my childhood, in a village across the river from Pulau Keladi."

He passed a hand tiredly across his face. "I was born in 1922. I started to attend the Malay school in 1928. I remember I used to get a cent a day. Truthfully, if I didn't get that cent, I went hungry. A cent a day," he repeated, with a gruff little laugh. He looked up at the *kris* in the cabinet. "But even then I felt I belonged to a family which was destined to lead the people, I felt I had a duty, when I grew up, to serve the people. As I said, at that time my father was in the Civil Service. This was rare then, to be in the Civil Service under the British, and my main ambition was to follow his footsteps, to be a Civil Servant.

"The thought came to me when I was 10 years old, how badly we were treated by the British. We had the coronation of the present Sultan in 1932. I was 10 years old. They built a very big hall, and all the chiefs including my father, all nicely dressed, all stood in the hall, and the British Governor and the Residents were there. Everyone else was standing: but

they sat down. That picture has always stuck in my mind. The British put us on a stage like *prima donnas*, but with no part to play. This was our country, but they "sat there and ruled it, and all that we could do was to stand by and watch. I remember that occasion very well.

"When I was 12, I was sent to the Malay College. It was supposed to be the Eton of Malaya, where the Sultans and the chiefs were educated. I finished early. I passed all my exams, in four and a half years I passed my School Certificate, and in 1939 I joined the Civil Service. Then I went to Raffles College. I passed my first year, then of course the war came. It changed our lives. We saw the British driven away by the Japanese. The Japanese were the same Asian people as us, physically they were even smaller, so we thought, 'If they can defeat the British, we should be able to do it too. After all, this is our place.' "

THE TUN has a very low voice anyway, but for some minutes past it had been increasingly difficult to hear him because of a succession of childish shrieks nearby. At this point a small boy, clearly the source of all the sound, came hurtling into the room, pulled up, stared at us, decided we did not warrant investigation, and hurtled out once more. "My youngest," said the Tun, with a shy pride. "I have five sons. The two eldest, who are 18 and 16, returned recently from school in England. All those records you see lying around," he waved a hand across the room, "belong to them. All boys now seem to like pop music."

I asked him if he had been fond of



The youngest Razak takes a photograph of the eldest.

music as a boy, "Oh, no. There was no time. I was telling you about when the Japanese came... They made all sorts of promises which they never kept. They never administered the country properly. Instead, they committed atrocities. People were bullied and tortured. I worked for the Japanese. My father was a Civil Servant. So he had to serve them, as a District Officer. I helped him as his interpreter. But I felt that we should liberate the country. Towards the end of 1944, we came into contact with some British troops who were parachuted into our area.

"It was very risky. If the Japanese had come to know, we would have been finished. They became suspicious, but they were unpopular already, and nobody would provide them with any information. We formed a resistance battalion, and I was supposed to be Company Commander. The idea was that we should go to the jungle and fight. But, fortunately or unfortunately for me, the war ended, and so we never had to fight. And the British came back. But I had seen them conquered by the Japanese, and that filled my mind with the idea that they were not invincible, not invulnerable, that we could make them hand over power to us." -

In 1947, the Tun went to London as a student. "I got a scholarship. I was the first student from our state to be sent for further studies — after 70 years of British rule! Even then it was with great difficulty. I wanted to go to University, but they said there were no places. So I said, 'Send me to the Bar.' Then they said I must take my Latin. Three months I studied Latin, and I passed in October 1947. Then I went to the University of London and asked if they had a vacancy. They said yes, but the Government said no. They said it was too late now. That really made me furious. I thought "The British must leave."

He paused. He had seemed tired when we started but now, recalling his youth, he seemed more animated than before. "The Labour Party was in power. They were in favour of handing over power to the colonies. So I joined the Labour Party. Also we from Malaya had our own student unions. There was the Malay Society. It was there that I first met Tengku Abdul Rahman. He was the President. As soon as I met him, he asked me to be the Secretary. That was the first time we worked together. We thought and talked about the national movement. When he left England, I took over as President of the Union."

The Tun coughed, fitted a cigarette into a holder, and lit it. "There was an-

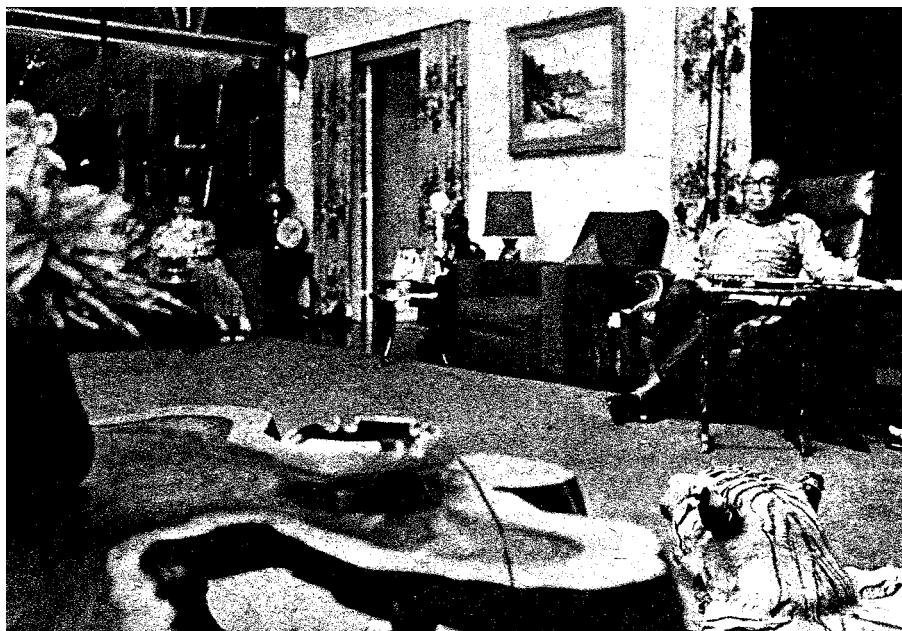
other Union, for the non-Malays, called the Malayan Students' Union. I took part in that too. I started a hockey team for all the Malayan students, and then I started the Malayan Forum, where all our students could meet and discuss matters of common interest. Yes, I did a lot of things while I was studying Law, except study. I didn't do more than three hours study a day. I got through my Law in 18 months. For the next 18 months I had nothing to do except eat my dinners. Life was hard in England then, after the war, but not bad."

ENGLAND at that time was full of colonial students who were later to be the leaders of their newly independent countries. "Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie was there, and so was the present Attorney General. There were others who are now in the Civil Service and the Foreign Service. The Secretary General in the Foreign Ministry was there too. We met the Indian students, they had already had their independence, the Burmese and Thai students, the Ceylonese, students from many African nations ... At that time there was nothing but talk of Independence. Independence was the order of the day.

"I had started to become involved in politics before I left for England. Just after the war we had had this trouble with the British. They decided to take away the power of the Sultans and the special position of the Malays. My father became President of the Malay Association of Pahang, and I was the senior officer. So my political involvement started there. My father died in April 1950, so I had to return to Malaya. I had finished my exams, and he'd left a big family, 16 of us, nine brothers and seven sisters. Now all my sisters are married to Government servants, and my brothers are small businessmen.

"I didn't have money, and I had a contract to serve the Government. But the Sultan handed me the *kris* - he made me chief — and he wanted me to serve in the state, I became Assistant State Secretary for a while. Then, after six months, I became State Secretary of Pahang. I was the juniormost officer in the Civil Service in the state, but the Sultan gave me the seniormost post. But I was still involved in politics. About four or five months after I returned from London, they elected me as the leader of UMNO Youth. I told the Sultan, 'I'm prepared to serve the state, but I also want to serve the country.'

"He didn't mind. So I used to do my office work two or three days a week, the rest of the time I spent on politics, going



Tun Razak finds a moment to relax in his favourite leather armchair.

around, I was pretty young then, and when you're young you can stay out late and not worry. The British didn't like it, but there wasn't much they could do about it. I was close to the Sultan, and I had followers in the state. I continued to work in politics. In the 1955 election, when we got 51 or 52 seats, we knew that we had won. We knew that the British would leave. They told us that they would be leaving. When we won the election, they knew they couldn't stay."

There was a pleasant interruption at this point. Toh Puan Rahah, a shy, pretty woman, drifted in, accompanied by her youngest son, the child we had seen earlier. She settled in a chair, while the little boy made quick forays of inspection towards us. "I don't really," said the Tun in reply to a question, "have much time to spend with the children. It is a pity." A moment later, the boy lost his shoe. A series of roars, remarkable in their volume when one considered how small their source was, filled the room, and the roarer retired to Toh Puan Rahah's lap. "You see what I mean," said the Tun, a little sadly.

WHEN HIS SON had been carried away and comforted, he continued slowly, "The British returned power to the Sultans, and they agreed to have a Chief Minister for each state. Meanwhile the Tengku asked me to come into his government. The power was in the hands of the local people, but the British still ruled at the Centre. So, well, I had to leave Pahang after four years as State Secretary. I had to beg the Sultan to let me leave the Civil Service. He asked me why I wanted to leave, because I could be Chief Minister of the state, whether appointed or elected, for

the rest of my life. So I told him why.

"I told him, 'Sir, I have to serve the country. We've got to control the centre. We can't run the country otherwise.' He agreed. He was always very kind to me. I went to the Centre and became Minister of Education. That was the most controversial portfolio at that time. There were few schools and many languages, there was no educational policy, and at first I really had a rough time. But I enjoyed it. I got people to agree to a national policy of education which is still in effect today. And then in 1957 we achieved Independence, and the Tengku made me Deputy Prime Minister.

"I was then made Minister of Defence and Internal Security. That was for the purpose of ending the emergency. I concentrated on fighting the Communists for two years, and we were able to defeat them. On July 16th, 1960, the emergency ended. As soon as that happened I started the Ministry of National and Rural Development. I thought, having won the war, we must now win the peace. I enjoyed that Ministry very much — travelling round the country, seeing for myself. That's really my element. It's my real ambition in life: to help improve conditions in the villages, since I know from experience how hard life is there.

"I am happy that the Ministry is a success. I ran it myself for 10 years. People responded well, but of course in 10 years you couldn't do everything you wanted to. We expanded the educational facilities. We provided people with the minimum necessities, like roads, houses, water supplies. But when you educate them and provide them with all this, they want more. These educated people - we are churning them out in thousands — na-

turally want better employment. This is the problem we face now. When you change a society, a way of life, you are solving old problems. But you're also creating new ones."

WE STROLLED AROUND the lawn. It smelt of rain and flowers: heavy clouds, overhead, drew together, then drifted apart, much as the people of Malaysia had done in the racial riots of May 1969. "Until 1969," the Tun said, "we were obsessed with our independence. The people who fought for it with us were happy. We gave them land and work. But the children of these people: they grew up in an independent Malaysia. There is no point saying to these young people that we fought for independence. They will say, 'Right, you fought for it and now we are independent. But what will you do for us now? Will you give us employment?'"

"Now let me explain to you the problem. You see, you have this young Malay. He has been educated. He couldn't stay in his village, his father is poor, and he couldn't find work in his home place. So he comes to Kuala Lumpur to look for work. He can't find any, there isn't enough for everyone, so he walks around, he looks at the big hotels, he sees that they are owned by Chinese, So he says, 'I am poor, why should these people be rich? I am a native of this country, my forefathers opened it up.' So he feels that there is something wrong with the system, that it is unjust, and he feels angry.

"They get wrong ideas in their heads, and eventually there are enough other people like our young Malay to start an intrigue. And trouble. But I think now our people have realised that we are sincerely trying to solve this problem. We have said, 'We can't make you rich, but we can give you your rightful place in this country.' That's what we are trying to do. In 1969 I said, 'From now on, we have to face this problem squarely. We cannot sweep it under the carpet.' We've discouraged people from discussing racial matters in public: such talk tends to create a great many problems. We founded the National Unity Council.

"I am the Chairman. We discuss the problem quite frankly, but the solution has to be brought about gradually. If we can help the poor Malays, half the problem will vanish. And we are helping. We now propose to open up large rural areas. One big area in the state of Pahang - it's 2 1/2 million acres - is an example. There I hope we can build towns, start industries, and absorb all these youths who are now unemployed. That's the main thing." He paused to light a cigarette. He is a moder-



An admiring host of female party supporters meet their leader.

ate man: he smokes, but this was only his second cigarette since our arrival: he smoked it neatly, without haste.

He pointed to a net on the lawn. "I practise my golf strokes there. I used to play a number of sports in my youth. Now, of course, I don't have time. I'm even unable to play golf regularly. But I play when I can, for exercise." He pointed up at a balcony. "I have my morning tea there, after I wake up at 6. I have breakfast about 8, working with my secretaries, then I leave for the office. I come home for lunch and a short rest. Then I return to the office till the evening. Of course, I work as much at home as at the office." We paced slowly back towards the house. Heavy drops of rain had started to fall.

A COACH DREW UP in the road outside the house, and numbers of Malay women in traditional dress started to issue forth. The Tun watched them flood into the porch with a slightly ambiguous expression in his mild brown eyes. "Party supporters," he explained. "The women are much more fervent supporters than most men. Usually we have parties of women supporters in the house nearly every day. They come to pay their respects. My wife will offer them tea. I," he added with some relief, "only go over for a few minutes and talk to them a little. Then they'll return to their homes. Sometimes they come from far away."

A few minutes later, he walked over to the dining room. The women were perched on chairs set along three walls. The Tun moved around, murmured welcomes, and eventually sat down with his wife at a table on the open end of the room. The women stared at him respectfully, and with some awe. He appeared to be very slightly embarrassed. They continued to

stare at him for a while, then presented him with a handmade mat which they had woven for him. He accepted it with an awkward little bow. Then he made his way, at a pace rather quicker than his normal pace, to the door.

Once he was safely back with us; he said, "Poor women, they came a long way. But I travel a lot myself, all over the country. In fact, I spend half my time travelling round Malaysia. I have to. It is the only way to find out, to see for yourself, on the ground. I know every District Officer, and I know his capacity. It keeps them on their toes." He paused, looked down at the carpet, then slowly repeated, "On their toes. Very little happens in the country which I do not know, because. I move around so much. It is part of my job. I even visit the Thai border areas where there is terrorist activity."

BEFORE DINNER, I was able to interview Toh Puan Rahah. She was very shy, and showed a tendency to break into giggles, which were unfortunately infectious: but she is an intelligent and capable woman. She runs the house, which she decorated herself: "I'm glad you like it. Actually, I had no training as an interior decorator: I simply read from magazines and all that sort of thing. We have quite a good cook here, but I supervise and sometimes, when I have time, I cook myself. I look after the children: we have servants, but you can't leave children to the servants: they need your attention.

"I have to do voluntary organisations as well, and I'm the National President of the Girl Guides Association," she added. "Each day I get up very early, you know. I get up about 5.30 to say our morning prayers. Then we have our morning tea, and bath, and then our breakfast. Then it depends on when I have any appoint-

ments. If I do, I leave about 10. I come back about 11. There may be visitors. We have our lunch about 1 o'clock. The children are back from school by then. We usually have a short nap in the afternoon, but about 2 or 2.30 my husband returns to the office. Afterwards I look after the children.

"Then of course there are the visitors. They come from all over Malaysia, more in the school holidays, to visit us and to see the house." Toh Puan Rahah paused to giggle. "Like the ladies you saw this afternoon. We try and take the children away for a few days in the school holidays - usually to the Cameron Highlands. It's all the time we have. The two sons we have in England - I miss them, of course, but they come back once a year, and they're here now. I think it's a good thing for them to be independent, as they are in England. Here we have servants round the house... I want them to be treated like any other children."

Toh Puan-Rahah was one of three sisters, the daughters of a Government official. Like the Tun, she had numerous brothers and sisters, 10 in all, but seven died. "I went to a convent school in Malacca. I was still at school when I married my husband." I asked her if the marriage had been arranged. She giggled once more. "At that time things were different from now. Anyway, we were engaged for nine months. At that time my husband was State Secretary in Pahang. I never knew he was going to be a politician when I married him. That was in 1952, you see. But I am very proud of him now.

"When he became Deputy Prime Minister, in 1957, I knew he had more responsibility, and this he likes. Being the **Wife** of a politician, life is not your own, you see. There is a lot of entertaining, and being entertained. And at campaign time, I sometimes make speeches. In the last election, I campaigned in his constituency. It was very interesting. I like to meet the country people. They are very simple and very nice people. I speak in the city, too, to groups of other ladies, when men aren't around. I have no ambitions for my sons: but after seeing their father so busy, I certainly don't think they want to be politicians."

WE DINED ALONE with the Tun, in the large room where the visitors had sat that afternoon. It was hung with a variety of photographs of politicians, including a picture of Lyndon B. Johnson, and silver shone from a corner cabinet. There was a long table beside us, but we sat at a little one. "The food is a mixture of East and West," said the Tun in his whispery voice.

"I hope you enjoy it." We ate soup, rice, noodles, chicken curry, a cold pudding, and fresh fruit. "I don't eat rice or curry at night," said the Tun, waving away the proffered dishes. I asked if he was interested in food. He shook his head.

"The British colonised us," he murmured over the soup. "It wasn't our fault: maybe it was the fault of our forefathers. But it can't be helped, you can't erase it from history. Once we took over from the British, we had to try and do better than they did. It's no use destroying the good things the British did — that was the mistake of Soekarno with what the Dutch left. What we said was this: if the British built 10 miles of road a year, we will build a huridred. I think we have kept our promise. Today Malaysia is prosperous. That is why I am not so much interested in foreign affairs. We must build Malaysia first of all.

"I took over from the Tengku in 1969. September 22nd, 1969. He and I get on extremely well. He's a father figure. They say he and I look very much alike. We were lucky to have him as our first leader. If he'd been a different man, we couldn't have won our independence. He's genuine and sincere, typically a father/figure. He's good. But after some time you have to tell him to get down to brass tacks.

You've got to tackle all the various problems. The Tengku liked to meet people, you see. He was very good at meeting people and presenting the country to people outside. He had a good, pleasant personality.

"But he didn't want to worry with details. I had to do a lot of the work." He busied himself with his pudding. "The qualities one needs to be a leader are sincerity, a genuine interest in the country, and patience. Patience is very important. There are a couple of statesmen I really admire and model myself on, and the first of these was Nehru. He died a disappointed man, but I admired him. He had a quiet personality, with deep sincerity. There is no doubt that the man was a genuine leader. Soekarno was different. He had charisma but you always felt he didn't have his feet on the ground.

"He was always looking across the horizon. He was a revolutionary, a man of the moment. If there is a fight, yes, but if there is a battle, it is not for him. He was no good in a settled situation like Churchill, whom I admire for his gift of the gab. I never met him, of course. But I did meet Kennedy. Kennedy impressed me as an intellectual. He oozed with charm and dynamism. . . a very efficient, very impatient man. Kennedy had an excellent staff, and he was almost a spokesman for his speech writers. Adlai Stevenson impressed me as a clever man, however. He could have made a fine leader.

- "I haven't met very many Russian politicians. Last time I was in Moscow I talked to Podgorny. Of British statesmen, apart from Churchill, Butler is the one I most admire: He should have been Prime Minister three times — instead of Eden, except that Churchill intervened, instead of Macmillan, and instead of Alec Douglas-Home. He was a clever man. I sat next to him at dinner at a conference in 1962. I asked him how he liked being Deputy Prime Minister. He said, 'I've been that for four years with no sign of succession.' I said, 'I've been that for seven years and I'm not worried about succession.'

" 'How's that?' he asked. So I told him, 'If you are Deputy P.M. with all the privileges attached to the P.M., and half the responsibility, why do you want to be P.M.?' " The Tun laughed his gruff, short laugh. I asked him if he had felt any regrets when he became Prime Minister. He looked thoughtful. "I was Deputy to the Tengku for more than a decade. It gave me experience and confidence. I knew the problems that faced me, but I felt it was an opportunity. You must trust your luck even if you push it. You must accept the opportunity given to you to serve

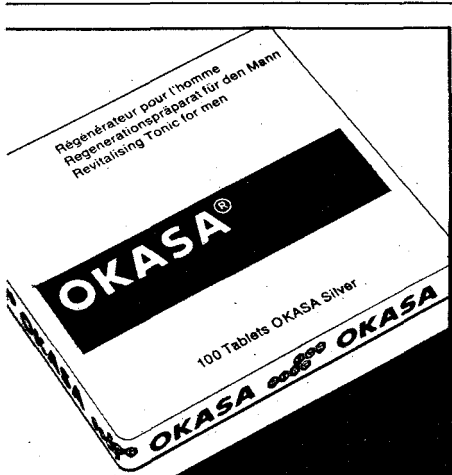
your country. It's the highest honour any man can have."

ASKED IF, apart from individual statesmen, the Tun had been influenced by the economic policies of any particular country. He shook his head slowly. "I don't think so, you know. I only have the desire to see that our people are better off than what they are. Of course I have seen European countries and other prosperous countries. I do not aspire, yet, for that standard of living for our people, but my idea is that I want them to have a better and more modern life. That's all." He hesitated a moment. "I have read up on socialism, you know, and other economic theories, but I have never tried to apply these theories to local conditions.

"We believe in levelling upward, not down. We feel that if you level down you will dislocate society and upset people. You allow the people in the shed at the back to make money, then tax them and help the poor. Try and level up the poor. That's the only way in which we can make progress. Levelling upward." His slow, soft voice came to a stop. "Some people, they level down, they close in. It's not possible to do that. If you don't open economics, if you don't keep the pride in initiative, where are you going to get the money to help the poor? That is my basic economic idea."

The Tun rose, and we returned through a floodlit courtyard to the reception room. Here we listened once more to his quiet, sane voice. The innumerable people who had told me he was remote, cold, inaccessible, had been proved wrong: he is, or so it seems to me, simply a silent man, a man accustomed to watch other people, to make decisions, to implement policies, but not a man accustomed to talk freely. To us he had talked freely and frankly, but at some points during the day he had made a visible effort to do so, and he now appeared to be very tired. He was clearly not used to this kind of work.

We rose to leave. The Tun rose too, expressionless but probably relieved. He gave me his limp handshake once more. The last statesman I met who had a handshake like that (most of them have firm, horribly honest, handshakes, and look you in the eye, while they wring your fingers, with an expression like that depicted in bad portraits of Abraham Lincoln) was the Tun's model, Nehru. "Goodbye," said the Tun in his soft voice. We said-goodbye. Then we went past the case with the *kris* display, the case with the display of decorations, and the serried, walking sticks, out into the damp, soft Kuala Lumpur night.



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