

**Tunku's vision poisoned by racism**  
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Tunku Abdul Rahman was born on Feb 8, 1903, in Alor Setar. He was the seventh prince of Sultan Abdul Hamid Shah, the 24th Kedah sultan. A robust and bright boy, Tunku received his early education at the Debsurin School, Bangkok and Penang Free School.

He then went on to study at St Catherine's College in Cambridge University on a Kedah government scholarship, where he received his Bachelor of Arts in law and history in 1925.

During his overseas studies, Tunku experienced firsthand racial discrimination at the hands of the college's administrators, which convinced him to fight for equality and to make his homeland an independent state, free from the yoke of British colonialism.

tunku abdul rahman 290809His flair for leadership unfolded in England. Realising the Malay students there were not represented by any organisation, he established the Kesatuan Melayu Great Britain (Malay Association of Great Britain) and became its first secretary.

In 1931, after returning home Tunku joined the Kedah civil service as a cadet in the Legal Advisor's Office, and then as a district officer in several Kedah districts. He proved himself unpopular among some British officials due to his outspokenness and tendency to introduce reforms in his quest to improve the living standards of the people.

His attempt to complete his law studies at the Inner Temple in England in 1938 came to a halt when the Second World War broke out. He resumed his studies only eight years later, coming home with legal qualifications in 1949.

On Aug 26, 1951, Tunku became Umno president, succeeding Onn Jaafar.

tunku abdul rahman and patrick keith 020805His first mission was to travel throughout the nation to meet people from all walks of life and various races to promote unity. His efforts in overcoming the country's political problems by way of cooperation among the various ethnic groups saw the birth of the Alliance Party in 1955.

In 1956, he led a mission to London for a discussion with the British government concerning Malaya's independence.

The meeting resulted in the signing of the Independent Treaty at Lancaster House in London on Feb 8, 1956 and, consequently, the independence of Malaya on Aug 31, 1957.

On his return from London on June 3, 1957, after finalising plans for independence with the British, Tunku in his first speech, upon landing at the Sungai Besi Airport, issued the clarion call for unity.

"The situation in this country is different from other countries in the world. Because of this, one race cannot take everything for itself. In order to set up an independent government, we must compromise and make sacrifices."

Racial slurs

Tunku would never have thought that five decades later, things would develop to a point that national school officials would make remarks ridiculing other races. If a headmistress

could make such racial slurs, what more ordinary teachers?

I know of many children who tell their parents not to raise a hue and cry over the incidents of racism they experience at school out of fear that they, the students, would be punished. There must be many cases that go unreported.

This not only goes contrary to the concept of 1Malaysia, but against the fundamental rights of human beings.

The government must call upon teachers, students and parent-teacher associations to report all cases of racist utterances and behaviour. The laws are clear and provide ample sanctions against such behaviour.

As we celebrate Merdeka today, our political landscape has worsen from what Malaya was 53 years ago when Tunku declared Independence. At that time, Malays, Chinese and Indians believed in consensus as the basis for how the nation should be ruled.

You did not hear much of non-Malays being called 'immigrants' and compared to dogs or prostitutes. No leader dared to threaten Umno presidents that they would lose Malay support, as Perkasa president Ibrahim Ali has done recently.

In this era of globalisation, we must think as citizens of the world, not as creatures living under a coconut shell. There is no room for racism.

Malays powerless

In his Independence proclamation speech, Tunku said: "We fully realise that (there are) difficulties and problems that lie ahead and are confident that, with the blessing of God, these difficulties will be overcome and that today's events, down the avenues of history, will be our inspiration and our guide.

tunku abdul rahman merdeka declaration 261004" At this solemn moment, I call upon you all to dedicate yourselves to the service of the new Malaya: to work and strive with hand and brain to create a new nation, inspired by the ideals of justice and liberty - a beacon of light in a disturbed and distracted world. High confidence has been reposed in us; let us be united and face the challenge of the years ahead."

About a month before independence, July 10, 1957, at the Legislative Council, Tunku explained the feelings and aspirations of the three major component races.

On Malays, he said: "Before the First World War, the Malays accepted the intrusion of hundreds of thousands of men and women of other races because they realised that they were powerless to prevent it.

"But in those days, few people were brave enough to interest themselves in politics and our complicated treaties with Britain had given the 'protector' absolute right to do as they liked in this country.

"The Malays had the assurance that the British government would protect their interests and that they would be given time to learn the art of administration and time to develop a business sense, and so they believed in the British."

Not an easy journey

Reflecting on the early Chinese settlers, Tunku said: "They have been in this country for many hundreds of years. In the early days, they came here to trade and later to like this country and decided to settle down, and they were absorbed by the country and followed local customs and spoke the Malay language, which at the same time retaining some of their own culture and traditions. Later, after the First World War, a large number of Chinese came into the federation to further its development."

On the Indians, he told the Legislative Council: "The Indians also came to the federation to seek wealth in the country and they found employment in government services or in estates. They, too, have made their contribution for which we are all grateful."

"Men and women of many other races have also come to Malaya, though in smaller numbers, and I should like to make particular mention of the part played by the British people. They have admittedly devoted their lives to the advancement and development of our country. Whatever may have been their fault, they have made Malaya a prosperous and happy place today."

The road to nationhood has not been an easy journey. Malaysians then, and Malaysians now, have endured the trials and tribulations with confidence and patience, calmness and forbearance, with faith in our final goal of establishing a united Malaysia.

Tunku knew that there would be challenges for the co-existence of the various races.

A visionary, he said in his proclamation speech: "Let no one think we have reached the end of the road: Independence is indeed a milestone, but it is only the threshold to high endeavour - the creation of a new and sovereign state."

Fifty-three years after, Malaysians strive to reach, with great difficulty, yet another milestone.

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