

Funeral with full honours

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PETALING JAYA: Full national honours marked the final journey of former Deputy Prime Minister and one of Malaysia's well-loved political leaders Tun Ghafar Baba, who was laid to rest at the Heroes' Mausoleum in Masjid Negara, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.

Late afternoon sunlight filtered through the leafy surroundings of the mosque as Ghafar's body was lowered into the grave.

Ghafar, 81, who died at 7.35am yesterday, was accorded a state funeral in recognition of his contributions to the country.

It was a fitting tribute to the Malay leader who began life as an impoverished village boy, became a teacher, partook in the independence struggle, joined Umno and rose to become first Malacca Chief Minister, then Cabinet Minister and finally deputy prime minister.

He was laid to rest alongside Tun Abdul Razak Hussein and Tun Hussein Onn (respectively Malaysia's second and third Prime Ministers) and former Deputy Prime Minister Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, looking solemn, was at Masjid Negara to receive the body on behalf of the Government and people.

Ghafar had been hospitalised for several months after suffering a heart attack, followed by complications of the lungs and kidneys.

His condition took a turn for the worse early Friday morning and he breathed his last surrounded by close family members.

He is survived by seven out of a total of nine children and dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. His first wife, Asmah Alang, died in 2004.

The family had been keeping vigil over their patriarch for several nights, but still there was no holding back the emotions and tears when the final moment came.

At 9.30am, Ghafar's remains, covered in a green sheet with Quranic scripts, were carried out of the hospital by son Tamrin and other male family members to be taken to his Pantai Hills home.

The simple bungalow was already teeming with people waiting to pay their last respects.

From 9.30am till about 2pm, his body, draped in a piece of white cloth and a yellow embroidered sheet, lay in the



LAST RITES: Tamrin Ghafar (left) and Sally Ghafar (right) joining in the prayers after their father was laid to rest at the Heroes' Mausoleum in Masjid Negara, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.

modest living room of the house, as family and friends recited the Yassin and other Quranic passages.

Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who was at the house with Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, described Ghafar as a patriot whose contributions to the country dated back to the pre-Merdeka era.

"He was also very close to my father," said Najib, recalling the ties between Ghafar and former Prime Minister Tun Razak Hussein.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam, who once challenged Ghafar for the deputy Umno president post, was in tears as he described Ghafar as a grassroots leader who did not abandon his roots even as he rose through life and politics.

Shortly after 1pm, those present gathered for *zohor* prayers. The air was thick with emotion and nostalgia as the coffin, now draped in the *Jalur Gemilang* was lifted and carried to the hearse by Armed Forces and Police personnel.

After the family part of the funeral was over, the state funeral proper began.

The hearse arrived at Masjid

Negara at 2.15pm where the Prime Minister, waiting at the main entrance, formally took over the process.

The body lay in style in a high-ceilinged hall till about 4pm during which people from ordinary citizens to Cabinet Ministers paid their respects, many of them pausing to recite verses from the Quran.

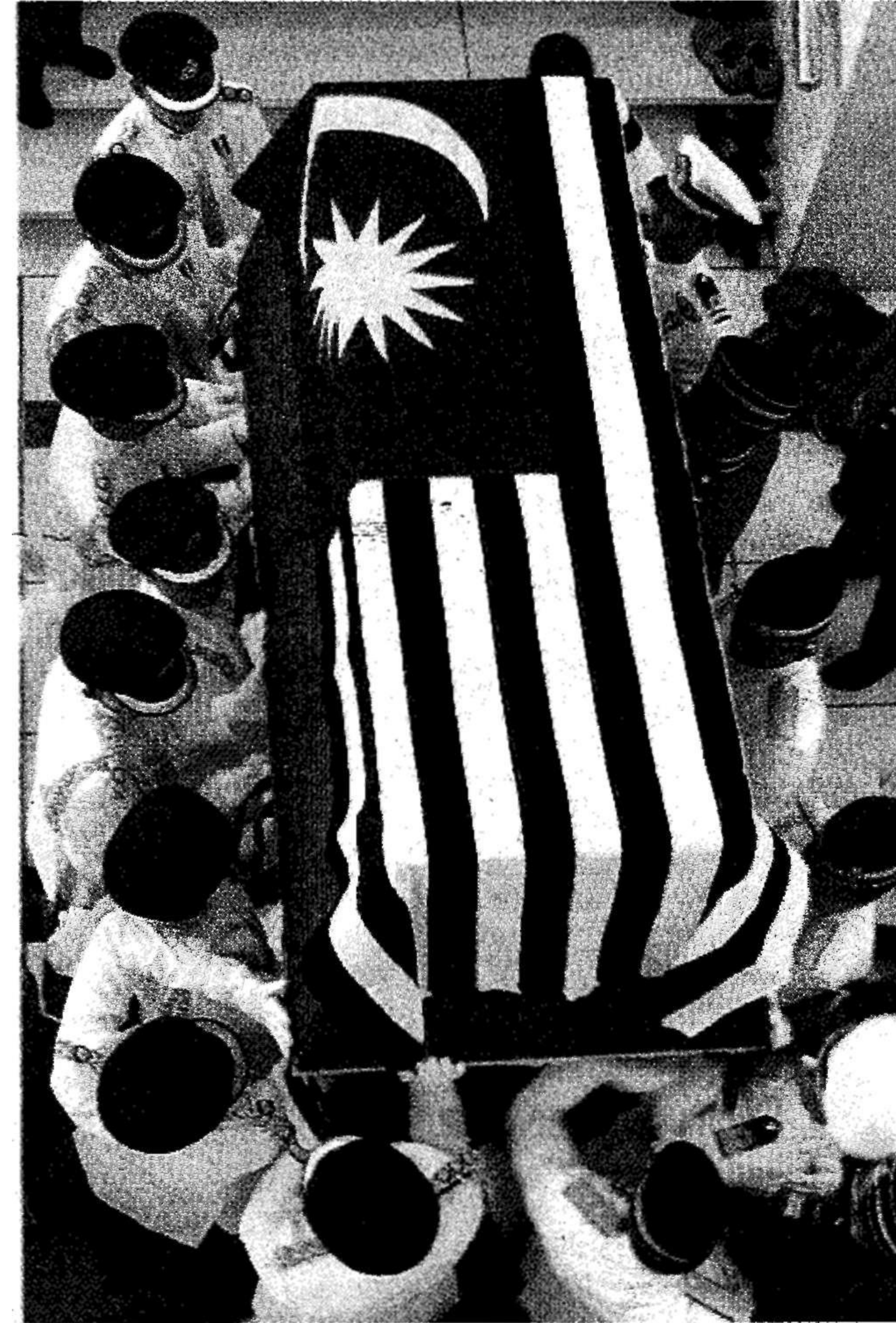
Umno veteran and Ghafar contemporary Tan Sri Khir Johari touched many hearts when he arrived, looking frail as his wife and son helped him through the hall.

At 5pm, after the *asar* prayers, the pallbearers carried Ghafar's body to the mausoleum area.

Tears flowed freely as the body was lowered into the grave and covered with earth. The Prime Minister was also somewhat overcome, resting his chin in one hand, the other arm wrapped round his waist.

The burial ended at about 5.45pm with the final rites led by the national mosque's chief imam Datuk Kamaruddin Zakaria.

VIP mourners and family members sprinkled water and scattered petals over the grave, before leaving the site.



FINAL JOURNEY: Pallbearers carrying Ghafar's casket from the mosque area to the Heroes' Mausoleum.