

Pioneer and true leader

COME Aug 31, Malaysians will celebrate yet another year of independence from our colonial masters. In these 49 years, we have seen many leaders come and go.

I would like to remind Malaysians of yet another of our pioneers, and share the contributions made by Dato Sir Clough Thuraisingam to our nation.

Thuraisingam was born in Taiping, Perak in 1898. He was a lawyer by profession and obtained his law degree at Cambridge University and at the Middle Temple, London, in 1925. At Cambridge, he was active in student organisations and was the president of the Ceylon Society.

A successful lawyer, Thuraisingam helped manage family-owned rubber estates in Johor and Perak during pre-war days. He displayed a keen interest in rubber research, and founded the Malayan Rubber Estate Owners Association.

In 1946, Thuraisingam decided to enter public life. He founded the Ceylon Federation of Malaya (CFM), a political party representing the Sri Lankan community in Malaya, and was its founder president from 1946 till his death in 1974.

As CFM president, he shared a close relationship with the founder president of Umno, Datuk Onn Jaafar.

Onn left Umno in 1951 when his suggestion to make Umno a party for all Malaysians was rejected. He formed the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP). Thu-



Thuraisingam was one of very few Malaysians to be knighted by the King of England.

raisingam became his deputy.

The IMP had the support of the MIC and the CFM under K.L. Devaser and Thuraisingam respectively, as both leaders were professed non-communalists.

Thuraisingam became a member of the Malayan Advisory Council, Selangor, and later sat in the Federal Legislative Council in accordance with the Federation of Malaya agreement of 1948, as a representative of the Sri Lankan community.

He played an active role in the council, where he spoke on a wide range of issues which included the introduction of the pension schemes for civil servants.

Though he was strongly criticised by the council for some of his views, Onn Jaafar often convincingly argued on his behalf.

In 1951, the member system, based on ethnic representation, was introduced to

administer the various ministries. It was primarily to provide administrative experience to the future leaders of the country.

The British appointed six Europeans, three Malays, one Chinese, one Indian and one Sri Lankan. Thuraisingam was made the first Member for Education, Federation of Malaya.

Thuraisingam played an instrumental role in establishing the Malayan Teachers Training College in Kirkby and Brinsford Lodge, both in the United Kingdom, and also in the establishment of the Kota Baru Teachers Training College.

In 1953, when the Elections Committee was appointed to study the question of election to the Federal Legislative Council, Thuraisingam successfully sought nominated seats for minority communities.

He had warned that the test for qualification was "whether the community in question was of sufficient size and importance to the life of the country as a whole to merit some representation in the council, but not so numerous, widespread and politically active as to ensure that its voting power must be taken into account by all political parties".

For his contributions to his nation, Thuraisingam was knighted by the King of England.

**DR RAJ KUMAR MAHARAJAH
Putrajaya**