

Obituary: Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba (1925-2006)

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He scrounged for food as a child in an impoverished family. He caddied for the well-heeled to earn the few cents to feed his family and see him through school.

It would have been totally natural for a little ego to creep in when later in life, he served term after term under the country's first four Prime Ministers — as Chief Minister of Malacca, as Member of Parliament, as a minister in the Cabinet and eventually, as Deputy Prime Minister.

But Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba remained plain Abdul Ghafar Baba, a simple man from the people, unassuming and humble, a nationalist and, to the end, a patriot.

Oh yes, he had the little imperfections. Who among us is perfect?

If the truth be told, Abdul Ghafar Baba was a giant among men.

He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth yet he never let that prevent him from striving to get out of the shackles of poverty by working his way to becoming a teacher at the then premier Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris.

How many poor people of that era had the fortune and luck to even make it to school, what more a university?

At the age of 15, he was already aware of the need for Malaysians to be freed from the shackles of colonialism, and he was a freedom fighter in the ranks of Datuk Onn Jaafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, Tun H.S. Lee, Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Tun V.T. Sambanthan, and the many more unheralded forefathers of modern Malaysia.

His passing today signals the end of an era; the end of the last surviving original father of independence.