

Focus

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Singing angel
of the
homeless



P35

I'm single,
I'm sexy and
I'm only 13



P36-37

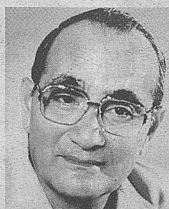
FIVE PRIME MINISTERS



TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN



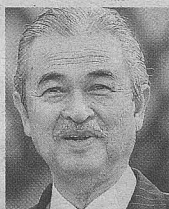
TUN ABDUL RAZAK HUSSEIN



TUN HUSSEIN ONN



TUN DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD



DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI

FIVE TEACHERS

NST-5/8/2007

Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim juggles several duties, the most pressing now is being head of the 50th Merdeka celebrations. He tells AISHAH ALI about working with all five prime ministers over a 33-year span.

THE rituals of that defining moment of August 31, 1957 when frenzied shouts of Merdeka reverberated Kuala Lumpur as our country gained dignity through independence, will be re-enacted in a spectacular ceremony when Malaysia celebrates her golden jubilee at the end of this month.

The midnight birthday bash with guests dressed in period costumes to capture the nostalgia will see among other highlights, the lowering of the Union Jack and hoisting of Jalur Gemilang.

A grand parade depicting developments during the tenure of each of the five prime ministers will take place the next morning in front of Sultan Abdul Samad building and at Merdeka Stadium in the evening, a grander programme for the capacity crowd of audience of 22,000 includes a hologram projection of

Malaysian images.

In between that, there will be a tea party at Istana Negara for foreign guests with Britain's Prince Andrew among the VIPs.

These and nitty-gritty details like making sure 10,000 uniforms are completed on time and looking into the needs of 24,500 participants, including ex-servicemen from abroad, are among those weighing on the shoulders of pointman Datuk Seri Rais Yatim. The Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister is so determined to give Malaysians a meaningful day to remember that nothing misses his eye.

As chairman of the Merdeka 50 Celebrations Committee, he holds daily meetings as the big day draws near and puts his committee and its 15 sub-committees through the paces to make sure they get everything down pat.

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Rais confirms he's out of the race for Commonwealth post

□ FROM PAGE 29

When he was appointed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to head the committee, the general consensus was that the affable Rais, with his experience and flair, was the best man for the job. When he takes on something, he does so with a passion, say his senior officers. Most of all, he is articulate and meticulous.

But now it seems his allegiance to duty has cost him the loss of a potentially bigger job as secretary-general of the Commonwealth for which he was nominated last May by the prime minister. Rais' two rivals to replace the current secretary-general, Don McKinnon of New Zealand, in March next year are India's Kamalesh Sharma and Malta's Michael Frendo. The election will be held at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kampala, Uganda, in November.

With Singapore, Brunei and New Zealand rooting for him, many felt Rais had the attributes for the high profile international job. A Rais win would also reflect well on Malaysia.

Alas this was not to be. Rais withdrew his nomination last week, saying he lacked time to campaign among Commonwealth member countries due to mounting responsibilities of overseeing Merdeka celebration plans.

Only two weeks ago, he was gung ho about the job and was quoted in a newspaper interview that if elected, he would take the challenge of proving that the Commonwealth is relevant.

When he informed the Deputy Prime Minister of his change of mind, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he would leave it to the prime minister to be the final arbiter since Rais' appointment was the decision of the government.

Perhaps Rais has his personal reasons for withdrawing but the obvious question is, did he have the government machinery at his disposal to facilitate campaigning? Also, if he was bogged down by the Merdeka workload, shouldn't more help be given to enable him to take on globe-trotting lobbying work among Commonwealth heads of government?

His mind made up, Rais was in no mood to re-open the subject, saying the PM and DPM understood his predicament. It is also learnt that Rais has another pressing matter to attend to — a



Family in tune. Rais and his wife Masnah spending some quality time with their sons at home.

For now, I must say we should spare no effort in coming up with programmes that would make the Malays, Chinese, Indians and the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak come into the premier lane, through education, culture, training.

Rais Yatim

close member of his family is ill and due for an operation. From his demeanour, the Commonwealth idea can be considered closed.

Which is just as well as the Commonwealth's loss is Malaysia's gain. Rais is not only the best man for the Merdeka job, for his fastidiousness and fountain of fresh ideas, but also his rich back-

ground as an intellect, writer, lawyer and politician of 33 years.

He is probably the only member of the cabinet who has worked with all five prime ministers — Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi — and

On Tunku Abdul Rahman

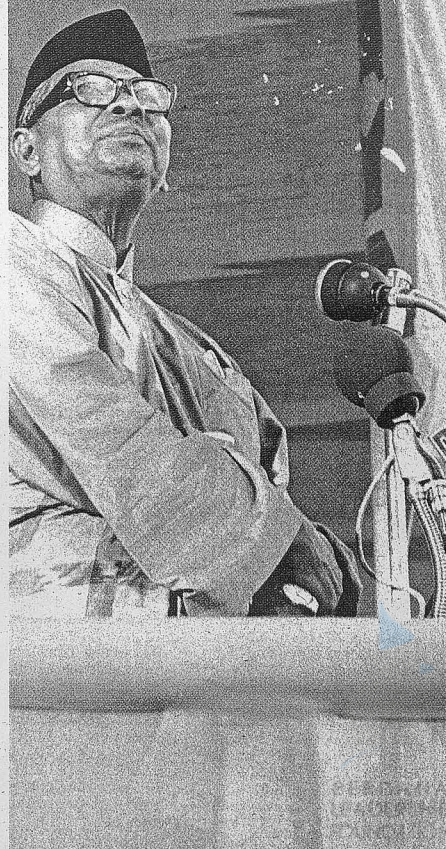
Rais was the deputy president of Semangat in 1989 when Tunku Abdul Rahman was Semangat 46 adviser until his death in 1990.

"I had a brief period of association, chiefly through his involvement as adviser in Semangat 46. Being in the opposition taught me a lot about an overturned value system in politics, meaning you have to be magnanimous in your thinking and action so that you do not become too parochial in your approach.

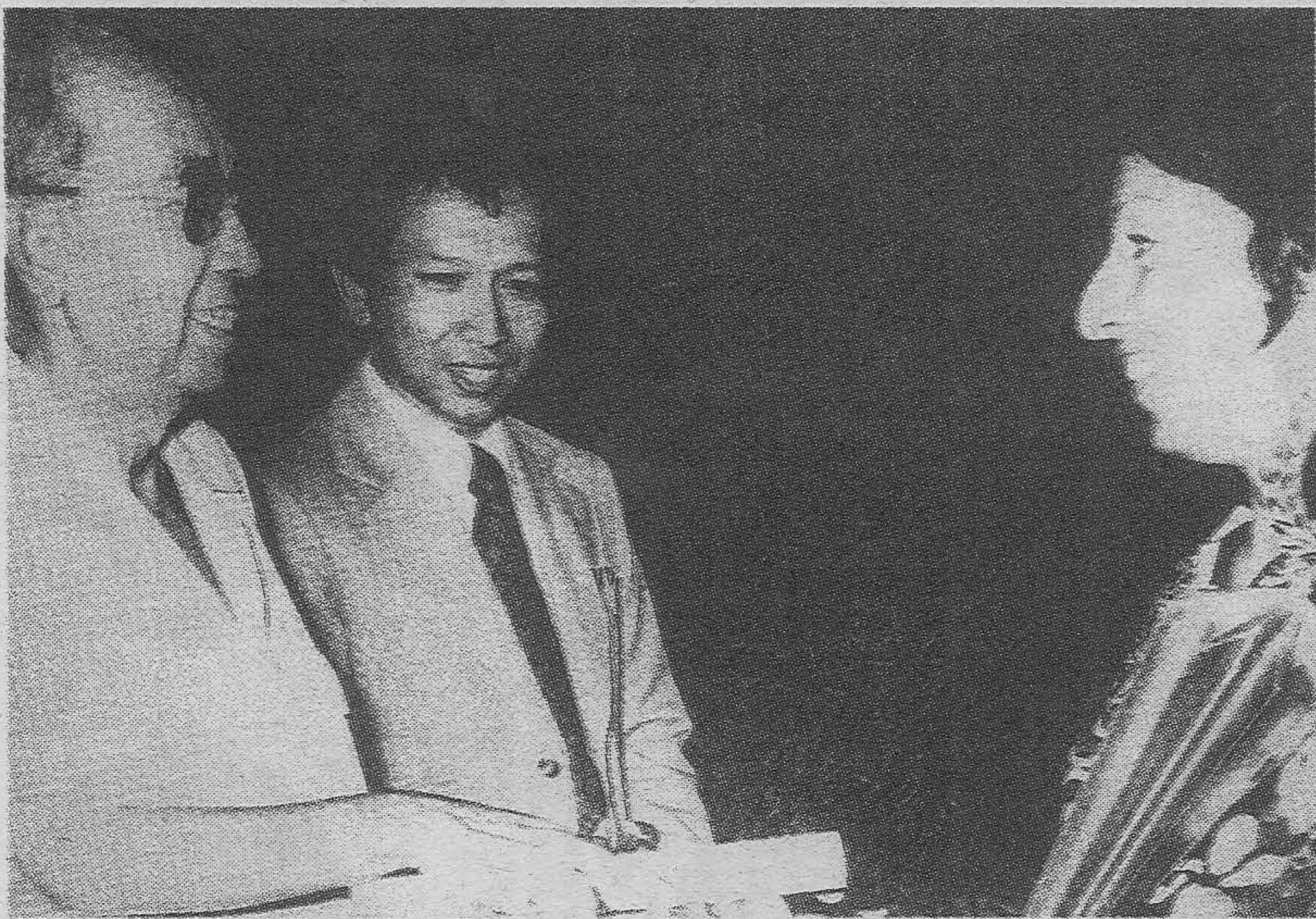
"In the Tunku, I have learnt the philosophy of 'give and take' and 'live and let live' in politics. I have also learnt not to make enemies, ever.

"The good nature of the first prime minister must be remembered because he practised the art of human communication and human love. A true Malaysian at heart, the Tunku cherished friendship and an uncluttered stable of politics and government.

"His famous words are 'tolak ansur' (give and take). It should be the motto today when we practise multi-racial politics."



From Tunku Abdul Rahman, Rais learnt the philosophy of 'give and take' and 'live and let live' in politics.



A young Rais, then Youth, Culture and Sports Ministry parliamentary secretary, at an awards night with Tun Abdul Razak.

On Tun Abdul Razak Hussein

Rais was parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports.

"From Tun Razak, I learnt the art of being efficacious and resilient. I learnt about his real love for the people and his human touch. It is next to nil. I also learnt how important it is to answer letters. When people write to you, you should have the courtesy to answer, he would say and he was very good about it.

"I also admire his tenacious attitude towards land development. He toured the country state by state to determine which districts ought to be involved in land development.

"Tun Razak imbued a soft approach, much like Pak Lah, and had the uncanny ability to encourage others to work hard and give their best without directing in a commanding voice. His penchant for hard work was in itself a style of leadership by example, very much in vogue during the early years of the Mahathir administration (1981-1986).

"He was not an ostentatious politician and though his tenure was comparatively short, Tun Razak will always be remembered for his Green Book and Felda implementation programmes and remains a hugely popular prime minister with the Bapa Pembangunan (Father of Development) epitaph succinctly by his side."



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad receiving a mock cheque for RM10 million from Land and Regional Development Minister Datuk Rais Yatim to launch a fund aimed at upgrading smallholder productivity in Pontian in May, 1984.

On Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

Rais was Minister for Land and Regional Development (1982-1984), Minister of Information (1984-1986) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1986-1987).

"Dr Mahathir would have done things today, yesterday. He is the man who really taught me about both sides of the coin. He, of course, had the lion's share of the time as prime minister. Enigmatic as the Mahathir leadership may be, the sights and sounds of development and well-being of the country and its people did not come by way of mere luck. He had indeed planned his work and worked his plan, quite oblivious to the criticisms of his detractors.

"He liked his ministers to be innovative and encourages them to be IT savvy. Above all, he proved that he was approachable. After every cabinet meeting, ministers would approach him for all sorts of matters that needed to be solved. We are indebted to him for his policies and in 22 years, he had done a tremendous amount of service for the country.

"This man taught me to do things fast and efficaciously as well. In many ways, he is ruthless but look what we have gained? We must not be just a nice leader, we should be able to deliver and uphold our principles.

"The Mahathir stamp is indelible even if one tries to undo some of his fabric of government."

On Tun Hussein Onn

Rais was Deputy Law Minister (1976-1977), Deputy Home Minister (1977-1978) and Menteri Besar of Negri Sembilan (1978-1982).

"Like his predecessor Tun Razak, Hussein's tenure as premier was short (1976-1981), but he set the scene to become a prime minister of stoic and just disposition.

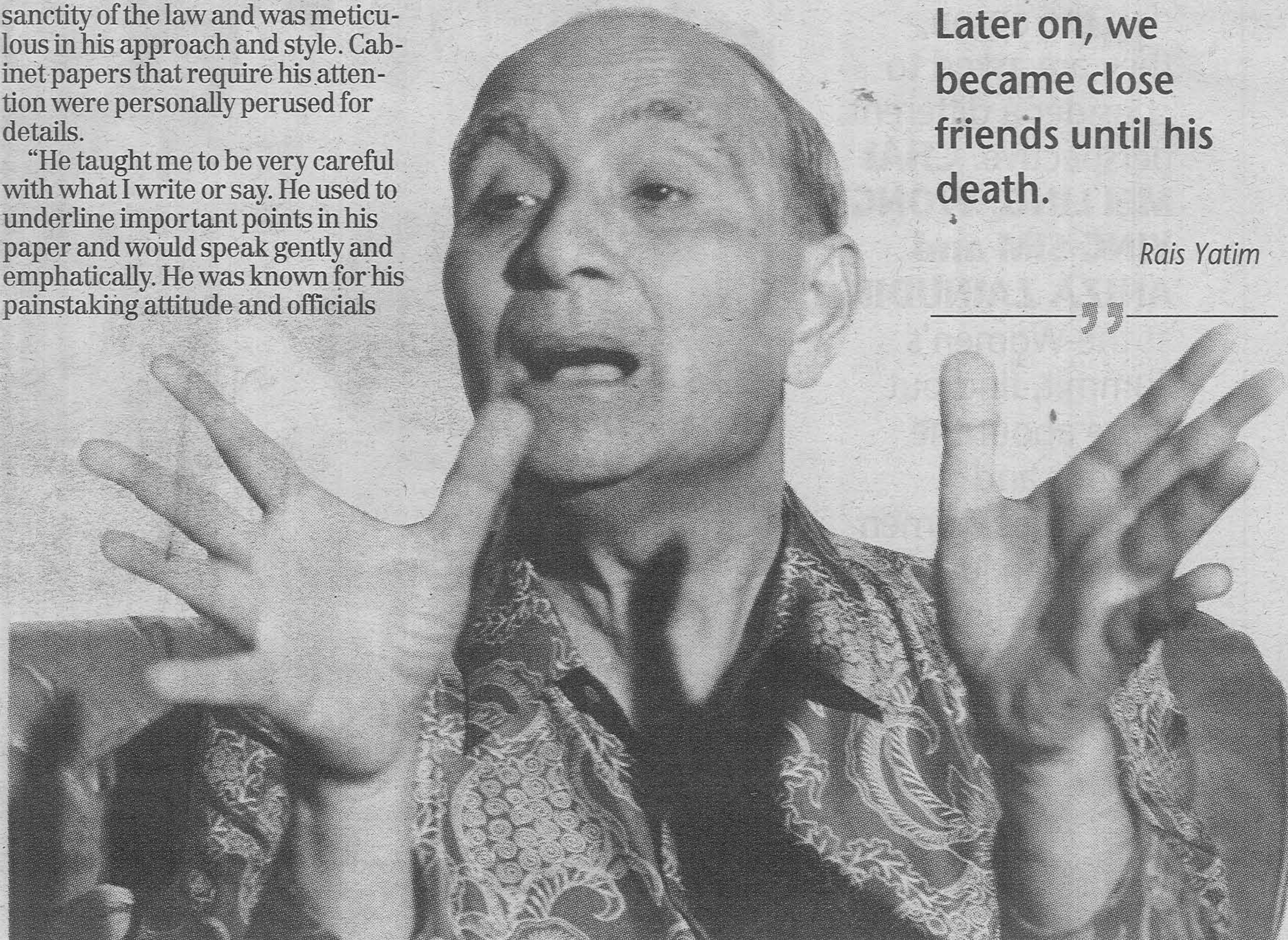
"He had full confidence in the sanctity of the law and was meticulous in his approach and style. Cabinet papers that require his attention were personally perused for details.

"He taught me to be very careful with what I write or say. He used to underline important points in his paper and would speak gently and emphatically. He was known for his painstaking attitude and officials

particularly appreciated his non-intervening style once a task was given for action.

"He might be seen to be slow in some of his actions but once he reached a decision, he never abated.

"I'm grateful to him for making me the third Menteri Besar of Negri Sembilan. Later on, we became close friends until his death."



Tun Hussein Onn appointed Rais as the third Menteri Besar of Negri Sembilan.

On Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

Under the present administration, Rais has been Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage since 2004.

"I started working with Pak Lah in 1974 when I was the Culture, Youth and Sports Ministry parliamentary secretary and he was the director-general of Youth. When he took over as PM, we ministers were quick to adapt to Pak Lah's style of doing things.

"Many tend to be confused over his overtly mild and smiling outer layer, not quite sure that behind that smile and amiable disposition is a steely innard.

"Pak Lah is a tenacious and diplomatic leader and his soft touch is not to be construed as inefficiency. On the other hand, his soft touch is his style, the Islam Hadhari way.

"He has said this many times: 'I am a believer in the power of prayers.' That epitomises his faith in the al-fatihah, the opening verse of the Quran which he recites on many official occasions. This is truly his inner credo that has entwined his personality as a God-fearing leader.

"The fifth prime minister has his own justification for having his sizeable council of ministers. He believes in having a good cross section of experience and talents. He has this in abundant in the present set of cabinet ministers."

Rais says the Merdeka celebrations should teach us something. We have achieved much within such a short period. Many other



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi officiating at the launch of National Handicraft Day in Kuala Lumpur in March this year with Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Rais (second from left) looking on.

countries which attained independence at the same time we did have not achieved our success.

"This must teach us to be more resilient. As a government, we must learn the art and practice accountability. The rule of law should never be put on the margin. If Malaysia were to achieve what it has vouched to achieve, the civil service and the political guidance has to work hand in hand to upgrade the delivery system."

One of his concerns for the future is national unity. He says the problem of polarisation is the biggest enemy in the future.

"So we must jealously guard the

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Rais Yatim

value of harmonising people and if necessary, we should have a Race Relations Act in future if the Sedition Act doesn't work. I think there is room for us to have that kind of law in the future, not now.

"For now, I must say we should spare no effort in coming up with programmes that would make the Malays, Chinese, Indians and the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak come into the premier lane, through education, culture, training.

"It is easier said than done but it has to be done and we must do it in earnest."