

# Remember this is a 'united nation'

NST- 24/7/2007

■ **By Koh Lay Chin**

laych@nst.com.my

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The only surviving member of Malaysia's first cabinet had this advice on his 90th birthday: "Work hard and stay united".

Tun Omar Ong Yoke Lin, who worked alongside Tunku Abdul Rahman and other founding fathers in the fight for independence, said it was important for young politicians to remember the principles of a "united nation".

At a birthday celebration at his house yesterday, attended by his family and MCA leaders, the former party founding member appeared sprightly.

He suffered a stroke six years ago and his speech is limited, but with the help of his wife, Toh Puan Dr Aishah Ong, he fielded questions from the press.

When asked why he had decided to join MCA, Omar paused before replying "I started MCA", to the amusement of everyone.

On being part of the country's first cabinet, Omar said: "Oh, it felt great, I was in it."

Omar said he had always been interested in politics as "it was in my blood", and that he helped form an alliance with Umno rather than going it alone as the ultimate goal was to achieve independence for the country.

He had combined forces with Datuk Yahaya Razak from Umno to contest in the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections in 1952 in which the newly-formed Alliance won nine out of 12 seats, heralding the beginning of the Alliance Party as a major political force in Malayan politics.

"Umno had 50 per cent more members than MCA, so it was natural that we formed an alliance with them. And they accepted it," he said, adding that it was not difficult to convince the Chinese community over the alliance.

He was selected as a member of the Alliance Party's delegation led by Tunku to London in April 1957 to finalise the Constitution of Malaya.

In 1961, Omar led the delegation to a meeting of the Solidarity Consultative Committee

in Kuching, Sarawak, to discuss the proposal to form a larger Federation of Malaysia.

Omar said it was possible for the founding fathers to win over so many to the cause of freedom and attain Merdeka without bloodshed through the formation of the Alliance.

"By forming the Alliance with Umno and two years later with MIC, we were able to persuade our grassroots supporters that independence could be achieved if we worked together towards a common goal.

"After Merdeka, one of the biggest challenges was fighting the communists and eradicating poverty, where we finally triumphed and eventually declared the country communist-free," he added.

Those who attended Omar's birthday included MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, deputy president Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy, vice-presidents Datuk Seri Dr Fong Chan Onn and Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek.

Ong later said Omar had contributed and sacrificed a lot for the country.