

Tunku's 'great escape' from Dr Ismail

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tunku Abdul Rahman once climbed out of a second-floor window just to avoid Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman.

The then Prime Minister was forced to resort to the drastic measure as Dr Ismail, who was then his Foreign Affairs Minister, had stormed to his house with a resignation letter in hand.

But Tunku did not want to lose Ismail, a man of great integrity. Hence, the great escape.

The year was 1960 and Tunku, it seemed, had incurred Ismail's wrath when he said Malaya would sooner or later have to recognise the People's Republic of China.

Ismail, who at the time was in charge of combating the communists threat, felt that Tunku's words had deviated from the official policy, which stated that as long as the Beijing regime supported the Malayan Communist Party, there would be no relations with China.

Thus, he was prepared to tender his resignation.

This interesting bit of history was recalled by former Finance Minister Tan Sri Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah at a luncheon gathering yesterday.

The luncheon was hosted by Tan Sri Abu Bakar Sulaiman to express his appreciation to the late Dr Ismail's family and close friends who were interviewed for the biography, *The Reluctant Politician — Tun Dr Ismail and His Time*.

"It (the biography) brings us back to a time when leadership was based on integrity and principles without bias," said Tengku Razaleigh, who was among those interviewed

for the biography.

Written by Dr Ooi Kee Beng, the biography brought new perspectives on Malaysia's struggle for independence, the May 13 riots, the New Economic Policy and other important events from the nation's past.

"Tun Dr Ismail was remembered by many as a great man who managed to rally Malaysians together when racial politics were at its worst," said the Penang-born Ooi.

"His tenure in politics, although short, was an impressive one that deserved to be

told."

Ooi, who is a fellow with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, described the book as his *magnum opus*.

"I believe we should be allowed to study our past without the curtains of 'sensitive issue'.

"Only then will we be able to grow as a nation."

The book also hailed Dr Ismail as the most powerful home affairs minister and deputy prime minister in Malaysian history.

"The book truly reflects the late Tun as a man ahead of his time (and) who was taken

ahead of his time," Tengku Razaleigh said.

The sentiment was echoed by the late minister's daughter, Zailah Ismail, who was 18 when her father died.

"The book revealed things I never knew about my father like his motivations and the reason he hid his sickness from us," she said.

Zailah said her mother, Toh Puan Norashikin Mohd Seth, was pleased with the book.

She said the book had managed to capture her father's unspoken greatness which his peers had come to recognise.