

A united Malaya was his dream

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BETTER known by his last two names, Clough Thuraisingam's passion to do the best for Malaya was matched only by his love of horses and his Chevrolet.

Thuraisingam, who served as Member (Minister) for Education from 1951 to 1955, was known to all and his dream was to see a united Malaya.

Datin Lady Thayamany Thuraisingam, 82, remembers all this and more.

The family home at Clough House in Bukit Travers, Kuala Lumpur, speaks loudly of the past. There are many old photographs adorning the walls.

And they bring back memories of his compassion, love for his family and his starting the day at 5am with a flask of plain tea and settling in his armchair to listen to BBC Radio.

Thayamany, 82, remembers how her husband turned on the radio loudly and pottered about the house.

"When he was awake, nobody got a chance to sleep longer," she said, surrounded by three of her seven children and a granddaughter.

"Even now, I still get up at 5am every day because it is the best time to read and say my prayers."

Thuraisingam, of Jaffna Tamil origin, was born in Taiping on Aug 28, 1898.

After completing a degree in Arts, he went on to read law at the Inns of Court in London.

Soon after returning as a barrister to Singapore, Thuraisingam



Thuraisingam at a meeting with his officers when he was Member for Education from 1951 to 1955.

met journalist Onn Jaafar with whom he forged a close friendship that led them to being firm political allies.

When Onn became Umno leader in 1946, Thuraisingam and several others, including Henry H.S. Lee and V.M.N. Menon, were in the forefront of the Malayan independence movement.

The two friends were firm believers of multi-racialism in politics, opposed by rising star Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Thuraisingam, worried about the growing wedge between Onn and the Tunku, arranged for a meeting at his home at Treacher Road (now Jalan Sultan Ismail) for both men to settle their differences.

"When they arrived, my husband did not want anyone to be around," said Thayamany.

"The family and relatives were told to stay outside. I organised refreshments and that was it."

The meeting, which took place in the piano room, lasted the whole night but the two could not come to an agreement.

A second meeting was arranged and that, too, failed.

Disappointed with the racial slant in Malayan politics, Thuraisingam resigned as Member for Education in 1955, on the day his youngest daughter was born at the Bangsar Hospital.

"On the way back from a teacher's training college in Kota Baru, he came straight to hospital and

told me he wanted to resign and return to his law practice and social work.

"I thought he had worked hard enough and since he wanted to practice again, I supported him.

"He said one term or two was enough and that if he stayed too long, he would lose interest."

His daughter, Dr Chandramani Thuraisingam Nadarajah, 53, recalls the superstitious side of her father.

"On race days, if the jockey was wearing yellow and red, my mum had to wear a sari with the same colour combination," she said.

"Or if a black cat were to cross his path on race day, he would withdraw his horse (from the race)."

Her brother, Balan, 64, who is the eldest of his children, recalls the day when his father escaped death.

"In the late 1950s when my father was the president of the Rubber Producers' Council, he was scheduled to go to Europe for a meeting. But because I had a high fever, he cancelled the trip," said Balan.

"Later, we heard that the Comet 4B aircraft that he was to have travelled in blew up at the Sungei Besi airport in Kuala Lumpur as it was taking off."

Thuraisingam was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II on July 10, 1955 for his services to the country and Malayan education.

A proud Thayamany was only too glad to show pictures of the ceremony.

"We stayed in a hotel across Buckingham Palace and could see the horses.

"We had to alight from the car at the main gate and walk in, and put on gloves before greeting the Queen."

The family took countless pictures on the occasion.

"There are so many pictures that I don't know who some of them are. But I made sure I kept all of them because they are important to me."

Thuraisingam, the first leader of the Ceylon Federation of Malaya, a political party representing the Tamilian community from Sri Lanka, was appointed a senator in 1957.

He died on March 30, 1979.