

# Racial unity was more than just an agenda to him

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**KUALA TERENGGANU:** He was a God-fearing man, a strict father, a philanthropist, a dedicated headmaster, as well as a pioneer educationist.

But above all, Datuk P.C. Isaacs was the epitome of "Bangsa Malaysia".

It was his faith in national unity, coupled with his tireless efforts to promote the country, which saw him selected by the Reid Commission to help draft the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya prior to the country's independence from Britain.

The commission comprised constitutional experts from Australia, India and Pakistan, and it was presided by Lord James Reid, a Lord of Appeal from Britain.

It was appointed in accordance with the London Agreement of 1956 between the British government, the Conference of Rulers, and representatives of the major political parties in Malaya.

Isaacs' religious tolerance was legendary. Even though he was a non-Muslim, Isaacs would join the procession during Prophet Muhammad's birthday and he was instrumental for introducing religious classes for Muslim students at a private school which he set up.

It was also at the school that he would stress the importance of unity and encourage students of various races to work together.

At home, the same encouragement would be given to his 13 children.

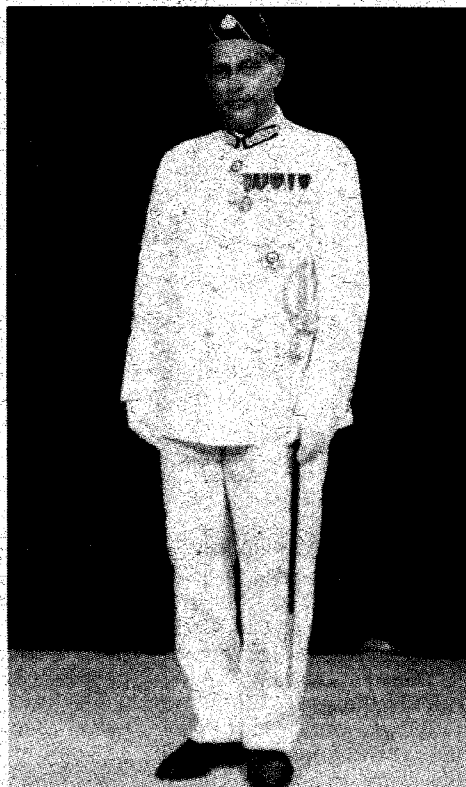
His second child, John Isaacs, a book publisher based in Sydney, Australia, told the *New Straits Times*: "He knew I had a lot of Malay friends, but he told me to also befriend the Chinese boys in Kampung Cina."

For Isaacs, the festive period was a time to foster unity and to celebrate with all races. During Christmas, for instance, outsiders would be forgiven for thinking that he was hosting a kenduri as most of his guests would be Malays.

Born in Mavelikara, a town in Kerala, in 1908, Isaacs moved here at the age of 20 after working as a teacher at the Anglo-Chinese School in Ipoh.

He set up the Crown Grammar School, the first private English school in Malaya, in 1932. The school could boast among its alumni royalties, like the late Sultan Mahmud Al-Muktafi Billah Shah, and two former menteris besar.

The school was shut down when the Japanese invaded Malaya and Isaacs was arrested by the *Kempetei*, the feared Japanese military police, who tortured him and confis-



Datuk P.C. Isaacs worked tirelessly to bring the various races in the country together.

cated his books after they learnt that he was giving tuition privately.

He subsequently joined Force 136, an anti-Japanese resistance movement.

After the Japanese surrendered, he was appointed assemblyman in Terengganu and became the only Indian in the East Coast to hold that position in 1948.

He reopened his school immediately after the war in a rented two-storey house in Kedai Binjai road.

Having witnessed the horrors of war first hand, Isaacs was even more passionate in his quest to promote unity, especially since the invading army had tried to split up the different races.

In 1956, his views on racial unity were sought by the Reid Commission and he submitted a paper to them.

"But my dad was a private person. We never knew of his involvement until after independence, where it was mentioned in the book on the Federal Constitution," said John.

Isaacs was nominated as a senator but before he could accept it, he was killed in a road accident in 1974. He was 67.

A street was subsequently named in his honour but the name was changed during the Pas administration. The street is now known as Jalan Sultan Sulaiman. The family is trying to get Jalan Dato' Isaacs reinstated.

And what would P.C. Isaacs have felt about the country celebrating its 50th year of independence?

"I think he would have been proud that the nation has become so successful and that some of his former students are in high positions."