

# Tribute to a great son of Malaysia

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## Tun Tan Cheng Lock played a vital role in negotiating for the country's independence

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**F**ROM the wee hours of the morning until late evening, buses trail down Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, choking up many stretches of the road as they make their way to Kota Raya or Pudu Raya.

At one end of the busy road, peddlers set up their stalls to sell snacks, beverages as well as pirated CDs and DVDs to passers-by, both locals and tourists.

The road, previously known as Foch Avenue, is right in the heart of the city, adjacent to the famous Petaling Street as well as Cross Street, which has now been renamed after Tun Tan Cheng Lock's son Tun Tan Siew Sin.

Foch Avenue was the original site of the railway line that ran through Kuala Lumpur to Sultan Street before it was re-aligned to Victory Avenue, which is now known as Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin.

Tun Tan Cheng Lock was a leading member of the Straits Chinese community and, as the first elected president of the Malayan Chinese Association (now the Malaysian Chinese Association) or MCA was one of the men who were instrumental in the negotiations for independence for the then Federation of Malaya.

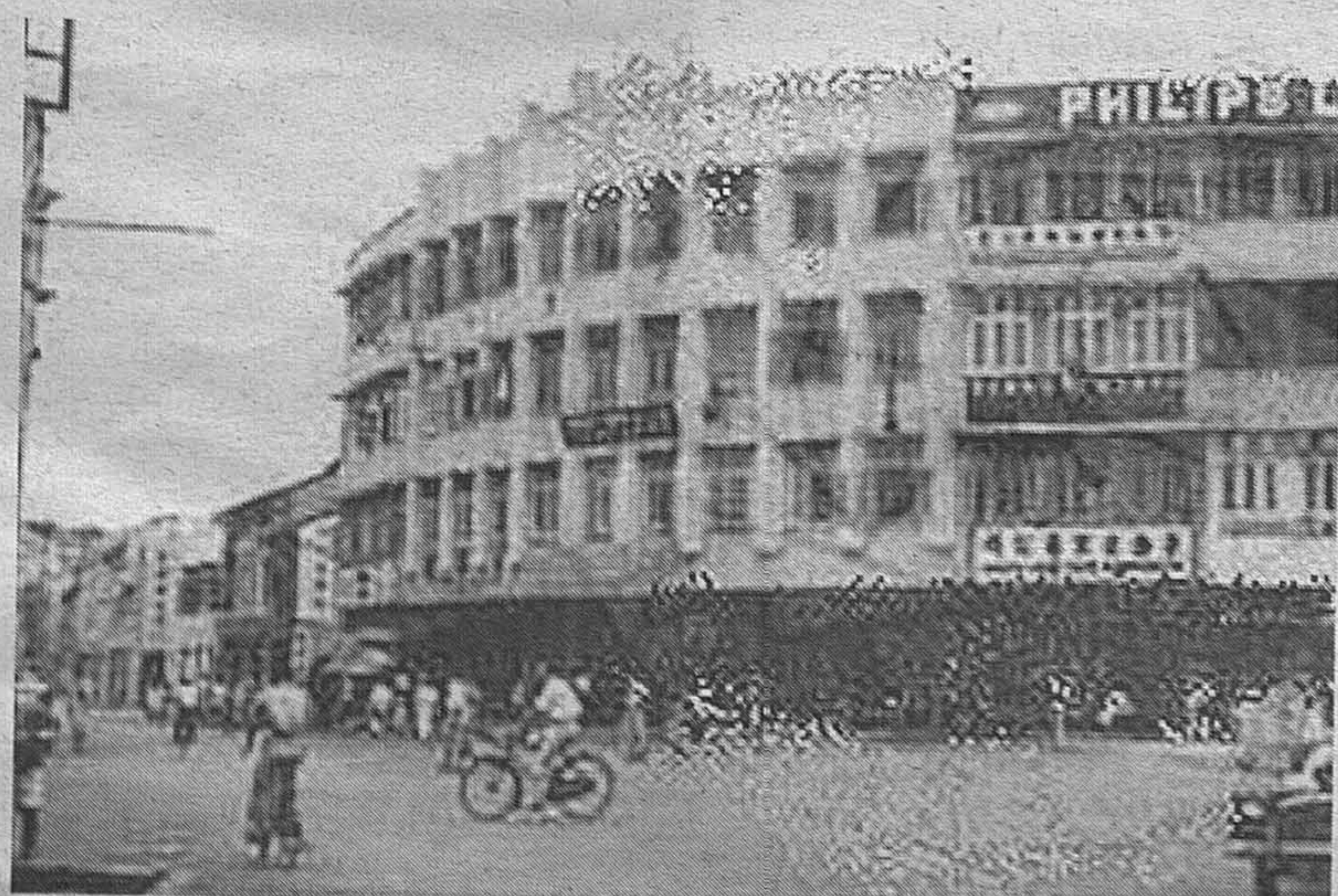
Born on April 5, 1883 in Malacca, Tan attended Malacca High School and won the Tan Teck Guan scholarship, which was awarded to top performers in the school. He then taught at the Raffles Institution from 1902 to 1908. After he left the institution, he joined the rubber industry as assistant manager of the Bukit Kajang Rubber Estates. Picking up the skills of the trade quickly, he was appointed visiting agent to Nyalas Rubber Estates in 1909.

Tan went on to be involved in various estates, including the Malacca Pinda Rubber Estates, Ayer Molek Rubber Company and the



**Busy even in the 1970s:** This old photo of two men pushing their overloaded tricycle right in the middle of Jalan Tan Cheng Lock (Foch Avenue) shows the road was just as busy then as it is now.

**Back in the old days:** Foch Avenue as it was in 1953. (Photo courtesy of the National Archives.)



Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, KL



**Chinese pioneer:** Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

United Malacca Rubber Estates.

He was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Malacca and subsequently the Commissioner for the Municipality of the Town and Fort of Malacca from 1912 to 1922.

Like many Straits-born Chinese of his time, Tan was partial towards Britain but was deeply influenced by ideas of independence which were sweeping across many British colonies. He truly advocated the concept of a "united self-governing British Malaya".

Tan and his son Siew Sin had spent some time in India during the Japanese Occupation and witnessed the struggles of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for independence. It was this that inspired them to take up the cause for Malaya.

At the age of 40, he was appointed an unofficial member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council, and from 1933 to 1935 was an unofficial member of the Straits Settlements Executive Council. He championed social causes like opium smoking, Chinese vernacular education and immigration issues.

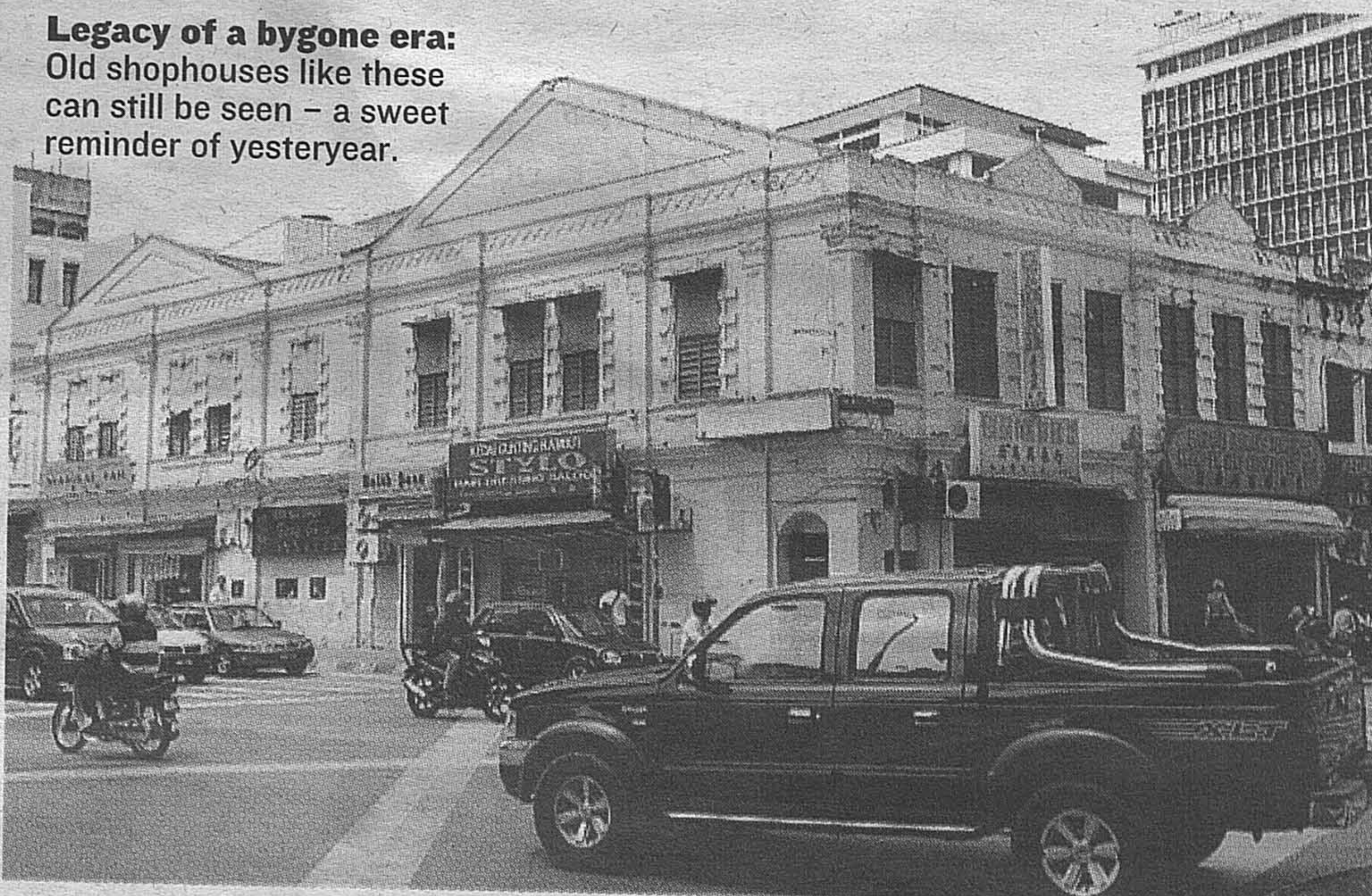
In 1949, Tan was elected the first president of the MCA and was actively involved in public affairs. Tan passed away following a heart attack on Dec 8 1960 in Malacca, leaving behind a great legacy and a strong family.

Today, it is not only in the heart of Kuala Lumpur that there is a street named after this great man; Heeren Street in Malacca, where Tan's first home stands, has also been renamed after him.



**Shopping centre:** One of the oldest shopping centres in town is located on Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock. It has recently undergone a facelift to appeal to a younger crowd.

**Legacy of a bygone era:** Old shophouses like these can still be seen - a sweet reminder of yesteryear.



**Iconic landmark:** The Kota Raya shopping mall in Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

