

The Alliance leaders

by **Zainon Ahmad**
merdeka@thesundaily.com

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Tunku Abdul Rahman

Tunku Abdul Rahman was one of 45 children of his prolific father, Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah of Kedah. The Sultan had married eight women at various stages of his life and died in 1943, aged 79.

One of the eight women, Makche Menjelara - a Siamese - was the Sultan's favourite. She was Tunku's mother. She was a kind woman and would go out of her way to help others - a trait the Tunku inherited.

One day, the Keeper of the Ruler's Seal committed a grievous error which annoyed the Sultan who ordered him sent to prison. The ruler also ordered an executioner to cut off all his children's thumbs.

The man's wife pleaded with Menjelara to intercede with the Sultan as she did not want her children to go through life without thumbs. Menjelara decided to help her.

She told the Sultan she was pregnant and pleaded with her husband not to cut off the thumbs of the Keeper's children as she feared the child



in her womb would be born without thumbs.

The Sultan was superstitious and rescinded the order, not knowing his wife had lied.

However, shortly after the incident, Menjelara became pregnant with the Tunku.

That's why Tunku often joked, "I was born under a lie."

The young prince grew up as a good-natured sportsman and when it was time for him to continue his education abroad, his mother used her influence to get a scholarship. He went to England, studied law and returned to join the administrative service and also Umno.

When Datuk Onn Jaafar resigned as Umno president in 1951, Tunku, who was deputy president, succeeded him. Umno entered its second stage of party struggle with Onn's departure.

Tunku and his deputy, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, and other party leaders agreed on a new agenda - Merdeka. Tunku tried to get the cooperation of Onn, who had formed the Independent of Malaya Party, but was spurned.

However, the warm and affable Tunku, with his easy leadership style, was able to forge an alliance with the MCA in 1952 for the Kuala Lumpur municipal elections, and later, with the MIC, in the first federal elections in 1955.

Tunku became chief minister and later, when the country became independent, prime minister. It was under his watch

that Malaysia was formed in 1963. In 1970, he gave up the leadership of Umno and the country.

He is remembered as *Bapak Kemerdekaan* or Father of Independence.

The Tunku continued to be active in public life until shortly before he died on Dec 6, 1990.

He helped form the Organisation of Islamic Conference based in Jeddah and became its first secretary-general. He was Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific president from 1982 to 1988. He also formed Malaysia's Islamic Welfare Organisation (Perkim) and was its president until 1989.

Tan Cheng Lock

Tun Tan Cheng Lock, recognised as one of the country's founding fathers, was born in Malacca on April 5, 1883. He was one of Malacca High School's top students and won a scholarship to study at the Raffles Institution in Singapore.



He remained there as one of its teachers until 1908 when he left to join the rubber industry where he was very active. He later started and owned three rubber

companies.

Tan became active in public life from 1912 when the government appointed him as Malacca Council Commissioner. In 1923, he was nominated to the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements.

As president of the Straits Chinese British Association, he championed social causes like the banning of opium smoking, Chinese education and immigration issues.

During the Japanese occupation of Malaya, he was in India where he witnessed the Indian struggle for independence under Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Pandit Nehru. He visualised a united Malaya as a "self-governing" British colony.

After World War II, he was active in a number of Chinese organisations. On Feb 27, 1949, Tan, together with a few close associates, founded the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) with an agenda of winning a place for the Chinese community in the country's affairs as it headed towards independence.

Tan was supportive of Dato Onn Jaafar's non-communal Independent of Malaya Party but decided not to cooperate with him when he discovered that the former Umno president was not too generous on the issue of citizenship.

Tan and Umno president Tunku Abdul Rahman were able to forge a partnership between their parties for the Kuala Lumpur municipal election in 1952. The cooperation was found to benefit both

parties, and later the MIC, which joined the partnership in 1955, and their respective communities. A more permanent arrangement came into being in the form of the Alliance, the forerunner of the Barisan Nasional.

In 1958, the MCA president was made a Tun for his contribution to his community and the nation. He died on Dec 16, 1960 at the age of 77.

V.T. Sambanthan

Tun V.T. Sambanthan, the fifth Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) president, was born in Sungai Siput in 1919. His father was a rubber estate owner and when he died, Sambanthan inherited the property.

He was sent to India to study at the Annamalai University in Madras. The Indians were fighting for independence then and much of what went on and what was said influenced the young Sambanthan.

When he returned to Malaya, he quickly became involved in the activities of the Indian organisations, especially the MIC which was formed in 1946 by mostly non-Tamil Indian elites.

Sambanthan



worked very hard to bring the party to the Tamil workers which formed about 85% of the plantation work force.

In 1955, he was elected MIC president and remained in that position until 1973. By then, the party had joined the Alliance after it had unsuccessfully tried to collaborate with Dato Onn Jaafar's Independent of Malaya Party.

Sambanthan was able to establish a personal rapport with Umno president Tunku Abdul Rahman and MCA president Tun Tan Cheng Lock. And it was under his leadership that the MIC achieved a stronger foothold within the Alliance.

Sambanthan was Labour Minister in the pre-Independent cabinet. He was subsequently Health Minister (1957-59), Works, Posts and Telecommunications Minister (1959-1971) and National Unity Minister (1972-74).

Sambanthan resigned as MIC president in 1973 and following that, was made chairman of the National Unity Board, which replaced the National Unity Ministry, until 1978.

In 1960, he promoted the idea of a cooperative to help Indian plantation workers. The cooperative bought an estate at Bukit Sidim, and thereafter purchased more estates that were being sold off by British concerns.

The cooperative later became the National Land and Finance Cooperative Society. Sambanthan was at its helm until his death in 1979.