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Malaysiaku Gemilang

A kingmaker extraordinaire

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Born on 19th July 1922, Tuanku Ja'afar ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman ascended the throne as the fourth Yang di-Pertuan Besar of modern Negeri Sembilan in 1967. He served as the country's 10th Yang di-Pertuan Agong from 1994 to 1999, bringing to full circle the system of a rotational monarchy where his father was the first King of Malaya.

By **TUANKU JA'AFAR IBNI AL-MARHUM TUANKU ABDUL RAHMAN**

AYAH (Tunku Abdul Rahman) was a born leader.

He and my father were contemporaries when my father, while being groomed as heir to the throne of Negri Sembilan, was reading law at the University of London.

Ayah was also a kingmaker in the actual sense of the word.

According to the order of precedence, the octogenarian Sultan of Johor, Major-General Sultan Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Sultan Abu Bakar should have been the first King.

He was the most senior, having succeeded as Sultan in 1895.

Ayah must have felt that he was too old, and that he was spending too much of his time in London.

Also, the Sultan had been dead against the idea of Independence, as he did not think that Malaya would be capable enough to stand on its own feet without British presence in the country.

The next in line, Sultan Abu Bakar of Pahang, was also not elected despite having become the Sultan in 1932.

The reason given was that he had

too many consorts!

Both of them were bypassed in favour of my father.

Besides loyalty and friendship, *Ayah* wanted as the first Agong someone who would bring honour and dignity to the Throne of the newly independent country and as he wrote many years later, to "set the standard of Kingship for successive Rulers."

My father took the oath at the Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman, which was the venue of the first Parliament. It symbolised the ushering in of the Abdul Rahman era in the country.

In the beginning of my father's reign, he resided in the Istana Persinggahan.

It was through *Ayah's* initiative that the government soon managed to purchase a house with extensive grounds from a Chinese gentleman.

This became the new Palace or Istana Negara.

Not unlike their days together in the Inner Temple some 30 years earlier, the similarity in the names of the first King and the first Prime Minister continued to remain a cause of hilarious confusion.

Their letters were often misdirected.



Special recognition: Tunku receiving his Honorary Doctorate of Law from the Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan Tuanku Ja'afar ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia chancellor in June 1981. — National Archives of Malaysia

It was to overcome this problem that *Ayah* added Putra (or Prince) to his name, as though to emphasise that he was only a Prince and not the King.

My father believed strongly in parliamentary democracy and one of

his most memorable quotes was to a foreign dignitary from a Middle Eastern country who complained about *Ayah's* "high handed" manner and wanted my father to sack him.

> TURN TO PAGE 18

Tunku's concern for royalty not compromised

> FROM PAGE 16

To this, my father merely replied: "Alas, I cannot sack him; he is elected by the people; but as Prime Minister of the country he can sack me."

That answer astounded the foreign envoy who found the whole concept of kingship in this country inimical, and entirely contradictory to that in his own.

(Another) anecdote is often narrated about a foreigner from England who once told *Ayah* that he wanted to understand the complicated workings of the Malayan Constitution, but found it too difficult.

Ayah explained: "Actually the Constitution of Malaya is very simple. It is exactly like that of Britain.

"In England you have the Queen and the Prime Minister. Likewise, in Malaya you have the King and the Prime Minister.

"In England the Prime Minister changes every five years, but the Queen stays on in power.

"In Malaya, it is the other way around: the King changes every five years, but the Prime Minister stays on in power."

My father did not stay on even for five years, for he passed away in office on 1st April 1960.

Ayah tried to always give precedence to my father.

He urged that the first Malay residential school in Ipoh, Perak, be named *Sekolah*

Tuanku Abdul Rahman (STAR) instead of after himself.

In 1963, *Ayah* ensured that the most popular road in Kuala Lumpur, the Batu Road was re-named Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

It was again *Ayah* who was responsible for using my father's image on the new currency.

Ayah was extremely concerned for the royalty and its dignity. He was not willing to compromise this on any account.

There was a time when the police were waiting to arrest (Tun) Dr. Mahathir (Mohamad) for allegedly trying to destabilise *Ayah's* government.

Tunku Abdullah, who was a good friend of Dr Mahathir, made arrangements to provide refuge for Dr Mahathir at the Istana Sri Menanti in the event of the possibility of arrest by the Special Branch.

But it was *Ayah* who prevailed on the police not to arrest Dr Mahathir if that would mean tarnishing the sanctity of the Palace.

Obviously, *Ayah* had high ideals that would be incomprehensible to a lesser mind.

It is sad that a man who always found happiness in entertaining others and making them laugh should himself be seen publicly in tears following the events of May 13th.

(With) his exit from power, we lost the guiding hand of a great leader who had built this nation of ours with wisdom and a sense of love, sidelined by the very people whom he had groomed and loved dearly.