

Warrior who loved peace

Sarawak's colourful Temenggong Jugah anak Barieng, the last Paramount chief of all Ibans, was one of the prime movers in the formation of Malaysia.

By SUHAINI AZNAM

HE SEEMS to have stepped out of the pages of Iban folklore and onto the modern political stage. With his distinctive short bangs and wavy locks down the nape and garbed in the bear-skin jacket of the Iban warrior, he cut a distinguished, colourful figure as he eloquently held his audiences in sway. It was the eve of Merdeka, the birth of a new nation.

In the longhouses along the river basins crisscrossing Sarawak, he was *primus inter pares* — first among equals. The late Tun Jugah anak Barieng was the second and last Temenggong or Paramount Chief of all Ibans.

Jugah was born in 1903 or thereabouts and grew up in Rumah Gong, a longhouse of 30 *pintu* (doors) on the Sungai Merirai. The longhouse still stands today.

He was a lively, mischievous lad, which his Iban elders read as a mark of intelligence. Despite never having gone through formal schooling, for there were none in his day, he valued education immensely. After having led his people to Christianity, he "insisted that the Methodist mission put up a school near his longhouse," related his grandson Alexander Nanta Linggi, the two-term MP for Kapit.

The SK Nanga Entuloh stands to this day, even though it has very few pupils.

In his zest for adventure, "Aki (grandpa) took after his (maternal) grandfather, Penghulu Melintang," said Alexander Linggi. Melintang began life as a homeless *kampar* (wanderer) but grew in stature as a *lemambang* (chanter) whose oratory skills Jugah inherited.

Jugah's eldest son, Datuk Amar Leonard Linggi Jugah, described his father as a practical man.

He learnt to be thrifty, saving RM2.50 out of his RM5 monthly stipend as a penghulu, noted Vinson H. Sutlive Jr. in *Tun Jugah of Sarawak*.

Although Iban society admired war leaders and enjoyed "taking heads" during raiding parties, Jugah preferred to avoid conflict, making him an excellent arbiter. Despite being ambitious, he was not manipulative. By all accounts, he was honest, a man of his word.

He grew padi. And he was an early entrepreneur, rearing cattle, goats and deer. He owned fish ponds and grew rubber across the river from Nanga Gat, the Sungai Gat estuary, where the family settled by the 1950s. He bought a shop for RM12,000, which now costs RM1mil. By the early 1950s he had become a partner in a timber business.

Later, while officially based in Kuching,

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The government man: Young Jugah (left) and family show Governor General of Malaya and British Borneo Sir Malcom MacDonald and the Resident of the Third Division Denis Charles White the steps in preparing a *miring* (offering) ceremony in Rumah Gong. Penghulu Gerinang watches from the extreme right.

Jugah would take breaks in Kapit, visiting his many relatives, close Chinese friends and his farm for a week at a time.

"My grandmother (Toh Puan Tiong anak Anding) was always there," recalled Alexander Linggi.

"He walked around town in his shorts, sometimes in his singlet, going to the coffee shops with his walking stick. He always made people feel at ease."

Jugah's culinary taste revealed his longhouse roots: wild vegetables, pounded tapioca leaves, local river fish cooked in bamboo.

Jugah's love for pranks endured. Andria Ejau, then with the fledgling



Firm friends: Jugah with Tunku Abdul Rahman who held him in great affection.

Jugah had his own mentor in his predecessor, Temenggong Koh anak Jubang, from whom he learnt to deal with the responsibilities expected of a community leader of the day.

His career path was true as a blowpipe. He was made penghulu in 1928, and in 1952, attended the Council Negri. He was elevated to temenggong in 1955. He took over leadership of the Parti Pesaka Anak Sarawak, which later merged with the predominantly Malay-Melanau Parti Bumiputera.

In 1964, he was appointed Federal Minister of Sarawak Affairs, the only person to have ever filled the post.

His stature was further enhanced when in 1953 he was invited to London to represent his people at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1963, he travelled there again to sign the Malaysia Agreement.

As a leader of his egalitarian society, Jugah was a natural. The British merely formalised a hierarchical system of governance that confirmed Jugah to high office. When the Japanese came in 1941, Jugah was made *sanji* (chief) but did just enough to keep himself and his people safe.

Later, after Malaysia came into being, Jugah remained a close personal friend of first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, who held Jugah in great affection. His deputy, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, visited Kapit and Jugah was part of Razak's delegation on his historic visit to China in 1974.

For Jugah instinctively knew where the power pulse lay. "He ingratiated himself with the British," said Alexander Linggi. "My grandfather was always a government man."

Radio-Television Malaysia, regaled Sutlive with the story of Jugah, by then already a Federal Minister in his 60s, taking a break from a serious *randau* (meeting) at 2am. Stripping down to his shorts, he descended below the longhouse with some young boys and girls, and set some kerosene-soaked dry thatch alight, "pretending to be the enemy".

He ran back and forth beneath the longhouse, with the women above screaming and pouring water to douse the fires. After half an hour he was covered in soot. He bathed, climbed back up into the house and resumed deliberations.

Attracted by the prospect of a better life

In the face of the "threat of a neighbouring country, of Kalimantan, of Sukarno, my grandfather didn't need much persuasion."

In Sutlive's book, Jugah himself described the communist factor as being decisive in swinging an initial preference for Indonesia to Malaysia.

Nevertheless, people were initially doubtful of Tunku's idea, noted Linggi.

"In the end, there was a lobby for Malaysia, with the British explaining to Apai (father) and to my way, way backward community the advantages of forming a larger unit.

"A number of the community leaders, including women, were brought down to Kuala Lumpur, to stay at the Hotel Merlin. And to them, that was Malaysia. Even though we know that Kelantan and Terengganu are quite different. (But) that sort of image attracts a simple mind.

"My auntie, Limau anak Barieng, was one of them. She was really caught up in this world when she came back. To say that the British convinced Apai, yes and no. What really convinced him was the prospect of a better life under Malaysia.

"The Malays in Sarawak accepted the concept very easily because of the (common) religion and (the prospect of being part of a) greater Malay community. The Chinese objected very seriously at that time. The Sarawak United People's Party was against Malaysia.

"The Ibans were quite divided, until the Cobbold Commission came. My father organised a meeting of 51 penghulu in Kapit in 1962, where they made a presentation to



Colourful past: Iban leaders of the 1950s enjoyed close relations with British administrators. Jugah (right) is seen here, at Nanga Entawau on the Sungai Balleh, with first paramount chief Temenggong Koh and the Governor General of Malaya and British Borneo, Sir Malcolm MacDonald.

the Commission that they agreed because they wanted:

- a) better security;
- b) economic development;
- c) the indigenous people from these areas, the Dayak or the Iban,

will (sic) be accorded the same rights and privileges as the Melayu in Semenanjung."

The Iban accepted it straight

away because of their eagerness for a better life, said Linggi.

Reservations at the meeting were encapsulated in a local anecdote: "I hope that Malaysia is not like sugar cane. Tebu, at the bottom it is very sweet but towards the end (tip) it is less and less sweet," said Linggi.

Linggi was diplomatic as to whether the social contract — par-

ticularly the promise about indigenous rights — has been honoured in full.

"Well, it's enshrined in the Constitution. In terms of the practical effect, it depends on whom you talk to.

"That's why during the Dewan Rakyat sessions, the Dayak MPs are always asking for better facilities.

That is to go back to that promise. As to whether his late father would be happy with Sarawak's position in Malaysia today, Linggi said:

"I think as far as security is concerned, I'm sure he's very happy, even though we had Confrontation after the declaration of Malaysia.

"As to federal-state relations, I think he would be happy with it too.

"As far as economic progress is concerned, I'm sure he would say there is a lot of room for improvement.

"The people in Apai's generation looked at the birth of a new nation, very, very seriously. It was something to be nurtured, something to be fanned.

"During the Confrontation, not only later with Indonesia but during the communist insurgency in Semenanjung, lots of our people were sent over there to fight for the nation. He himself visited the army, our (Sarawak) Rangers there a number of times. To them, this is one of their duties.

"The deal was that we also must do our part to defend the nation.

"Both sides have a duty to do. We have done ours in Sarawak.

"In order to increase the cohesiveness of our society, it is vital that the promise that we made during the formation of our nation is remembered. Of course, you cannot do everything in just a short span of time. But just to ignore it, is no good for us all.

"It's the tebu theory," he laughed.

Jugah died in 1981, finally succumbing to cancer. A dynamic leader, he had navigated Sarawak's political-cultural rapids through its watershed years. His had been an inspired life, richly eventful, a tapestry of memories.