

THE STAR

DATE: 28/08/2007

Working as one for Merdeka

The Star - 28/8/2007

TUNKU Abdul Rahman's greatest achievement lay not only on what he managed to get out of the British but also in the crafting of a formula to manage race relations that made Malaysia's independence and subsequent nation building possible.

The Alliance may not have been Tunku's idea but it was he who recognised its importance and nurtured the fledgling coalition until it acquired the strength and authority to ask for independence.

Political stability being the key to getting freedom, Tunku relied greatly on the support and contributions of the leaders of the three main parties of the Alliance – Umno, MCA and MIC – and they functioned as members of a closely-knit family and not as leaders of communal political parties trying to be heroes to their own people.

As a result of this close rapport at the top, the spirit of tolerance and understanding was communicated down the line.

The political consciousness of the Malayan Chinese began as early as 1926 when Tun Tan Cheng Lock advocated a united self-governing British Malaya.

In 1949, the Malayan Chinese Association was formed. Cheng Lock was the inaugural president, Yong Shook Lin was honorary secretary and Khoo Teck Ee was honorary treasurer. Other founding leaders included Col Sir H.S. Lee, Tun Tan Siew Sin and Leong Yew Koh.

In his inaugural speech, Cheng

The role played by non-Malay political leaders in ensuring racial harmony was crucial to Tunku Abdul Rahman's negotiations for an independent Malaya.



Malaysiaku Gemilang

Lock said one of the basic aims of the MCA was to help develop the process of making the whole of Malaya into one country, one people and one government.

When Tunku took over as Umno chief, he faced the challenge of undermining the Independence of Malaya's political influence.

Shortly before the Kuala Lumpur municipal council elections in February 1952, Umno Election Committee chairman Datuk Yahya Sheikh Ahmad and Lee, who was MCA Selangor branch chairman, formed an electoral understanding to face the IMP challenge.

This co-operation was a success and the relationship between Umno and MCA was formalised in 1953 as the Alliance, joined by the MIC the following year.

The Alliance swept to a landslide victory in the 1955 general election, winning 51 of the 52 Federal

»The political consciousness of the Malayan Chinese began as early as 1926 when Tun Tan Cheng Lock advocated a united self-governing British Malaya«



Legislative Council seats contested. The huge majority gave the Alliance the mandate to negotiate independence.

Tunku was especially grateful to Cheng Lock whose wisdom about this country and its people was profound. The task of the MCA was to prove to the British government that a majority of the Chinese were loyal citizens and they did not sympathise with the communist struggle.

Tunku, in his condolence speech in Parliament when Cheng Lock died on Dec 18, 1960, said:

"If not for the great support and contributions rendered by the late Tun Tan, the struggle for independence for Malaya would not have succeeded."

Cheng Lock's son Tun Tan Siew Sin also played a key role in the country's independence process. He was one of the key negotiators of the Merdeka Bargain and went on to join the first Cabinet. He was MCA president from 1961 to 1974.

Siew Sin had always held the view that the future of Malaysia lay in the close co-operation among the various communities in the country. In recalling his association with Tunku, Siew Sin described the Tunku as a great leader and statesman who gave his wholehearted support when he was in the Treasury.

"This meant I was able to initiate and maintain policies which I felt

were in the nation's best interest," said Siew Sin.

The MIC under its fourth president K.L. Devaser (1951-1955) became the third partner in the Alliance in 1954. The MIC had always believed that within the context of Malaya, political alignments were fundamental between the various organisations.

When Tun V.T. Sambanthan took over the leadership (1955-1973), the party grew in membership as well as in the number of branches.

Sambanthan was acceptable to the Malay leadership because he played down political rights in favour of cultural and language rights. The MIC's success in the early years was due to the close personal friendship between Tunku and Sambanthan.

It is this spirit of interdependence among the races that Tunku had always stressed on. There were many occasions when he had to battle with critics, both Malays and non-Malays who questioned the logic and practicality of his ideas.

Each time, he institutionalised a bit more the reality of this interdependence among the races. Acceptance of this interdependence meant the acceptance of the reality of a plural society. – Merdeka Press Secretariat