

Other political leaders

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AS THE nation celebrates a major historical milestone, the role played by those who at one time or other constituted His Majesty's Opposition - that important feature of parliamentary democracy, without which the concept is truly just a shell - must be remembered.

Names like Tan Sri Dr Tan Chee Koon, K. Karam Singh, Datuk Ahmad Boestaman, Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Dr Zulkiflee Muhammad, Datuk Asri Muda, Lim Kean Siew and Dr V. David should not be allowed to slip from the national memory.

Then there are those who never made it to the national legislature but played just as important a role during the various stages of the country's political development. They too, undeniably, form part of Malaysian nationalist history.

Among them are lawyer Lim Kean Chye, journalists Ibrahim Yaakub, Ishak Muhammad and M. Saravanamuttu, Johor politician and union activist Abdul Majid Salleh, Datuk Bandar Abang Mustapha, Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang Abdul Wahab Toh Muda Abdul Aziz, Keningau community leader G.S. Sundang, MIC's first president John Thivy and George Town mayor D.S. Ramanathan.

They should take their rightful place in the nation's history just as the names of their political organisations should, too. These include Partai Rakyat, Labour Party, Socialist Front, Kesatuan Melayu Muda, National Association of Perak, Parti Negara, Kekuatan Rakyat Istimewa (Kris), Independent of Malaya Party, Malayan Democratic Union (MDU), Pasok Momogun, Pembela Tanah Air (Peta), Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Api), Partai Negara Sarawak (Panas) and Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) or the Malay Nationalist Party.

Had fortune smiled on them or had the course of events taken a different route, they would have, either singly or as an alliance, be writing the country's history. Victors always do.

Putera-AMCJA

In fact, an alliance of some of these parties and organisations, which included the MIC, did emerge long before the Umno-MCA Alliance was formed prior to the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal elections.

Even MCA founder Tun Tan Cheng Lock was involved in this coalition of forces to fight the post-Malayan Union constitution that was being drafted in 1947.

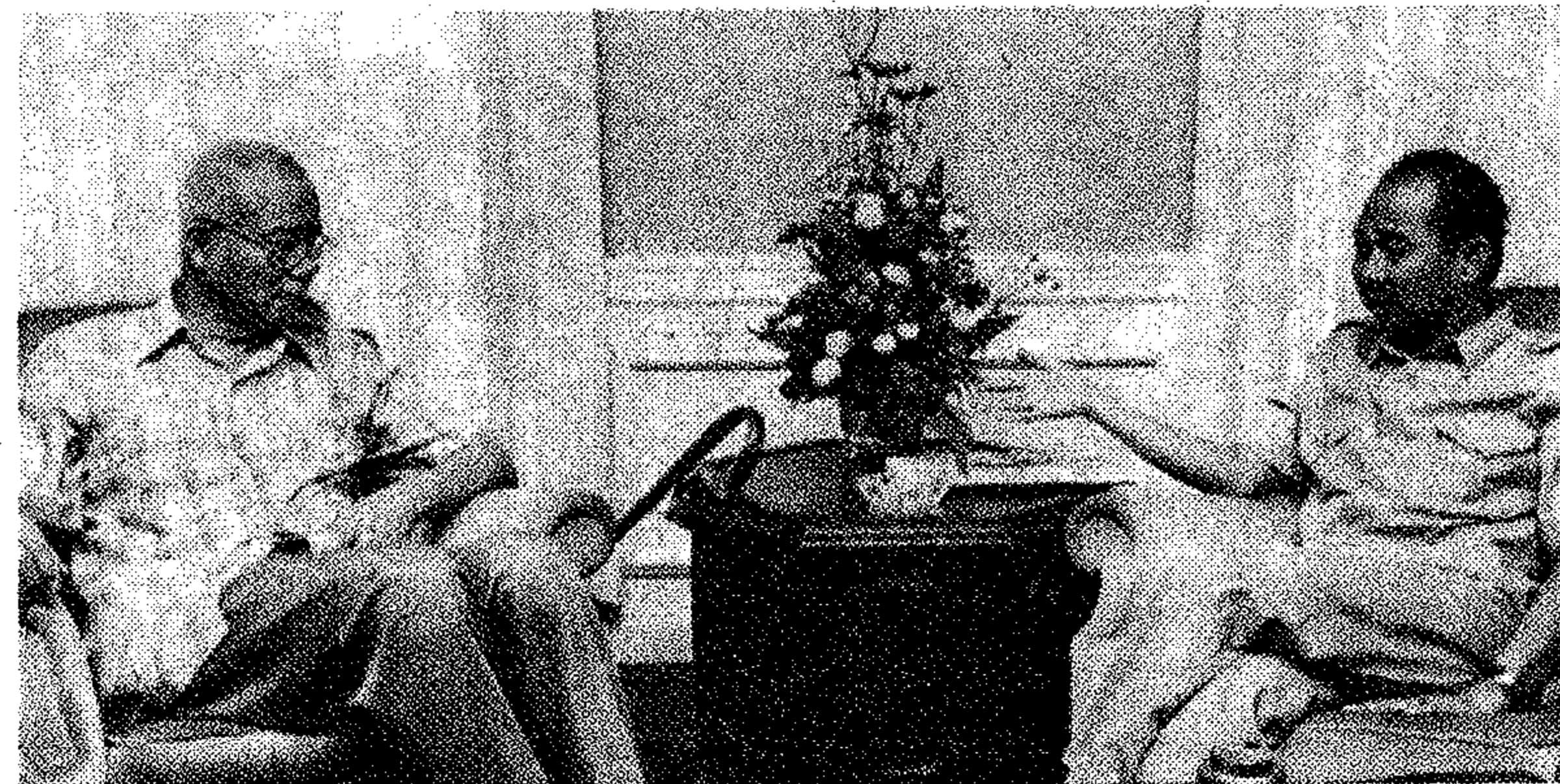
This alliance was the Putera-AMCJA. It was the first national multi-racial and multi-party coalition to work together to produce a constitution for a self-governing united Malaya which included Singapore.

The MDU, originally a Singapore-based organisation formed in 1945 - comprising mostly English school

Lembaga Kesatuan Melayu, Indian Chamber of Commerce, and a few leftist or communist-infiltrated organisations such as the Malayan New Democratic Youth League, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army Ex-Service Comrades' Association and the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions.

The MDU and others in the AMCJA were against the Malayan Union because the people were not consulted on its formation and because there was no mention of an elected legislature.

Among other things, the AMCJA also proposed the establishment of an elected legislature, equal citizenship rights for all, for the sultans to remain as constitutional monarchs, and for matters pertaining to Islam and Malay customs to be regulated



■ Chee Koon with Tengku Razaleigh.

rulers and Umno on the new Federation of Malaya agreement, and to look instead at its constitutional proposals completed in August 1947.

The coalition said the constitution drafted by representatives of the British, the Malay rulers and Umno was illegal as other people in the country were not consulted.

sign in January 1948. And on Feb 1, the Federation of Malaya came into being to succeed the April 1, 1946 Malayan Union.

The AMCJA-Putera hence failed to prevent the formation of the Federation of Malaya. Its major weakness was that it lacked Umno's political cohesion. After the federation came into being, it collapsed. The MDU, too collapsed.

AMCJA partners quickly deserted the coalition and the last straw was when its communist backers disappeared following the declaration of the Emergency in June 1948.

Despite having a wide network of grassroots organisations, Putera's egalitarian appeal among the Malays dissipated in the face of actual appearances by "representatives of the rulers" in their midst.

The Emergency

The communist insurrection and the declaration of the Emergency caught Putera, which had used "Merdeka" as one of its slogans, offguard.

When it heard that a few Api members were leaving the organisation to join the communists in the jungles, PKMM or the Malayan Nationalist Party - the backbone of Putera - issued a statement "cautioning its members against violence or illegal acts and stating that its political creed was based solely on nationalism".

That statement did not save its president, Ishak Haji Mohamed, from being arrested by the colonial authorities for his links with the communists. Also arrested for the same reason was Api leader Ahmad Boestaman.

The party subsequently broke up after its members refused to register



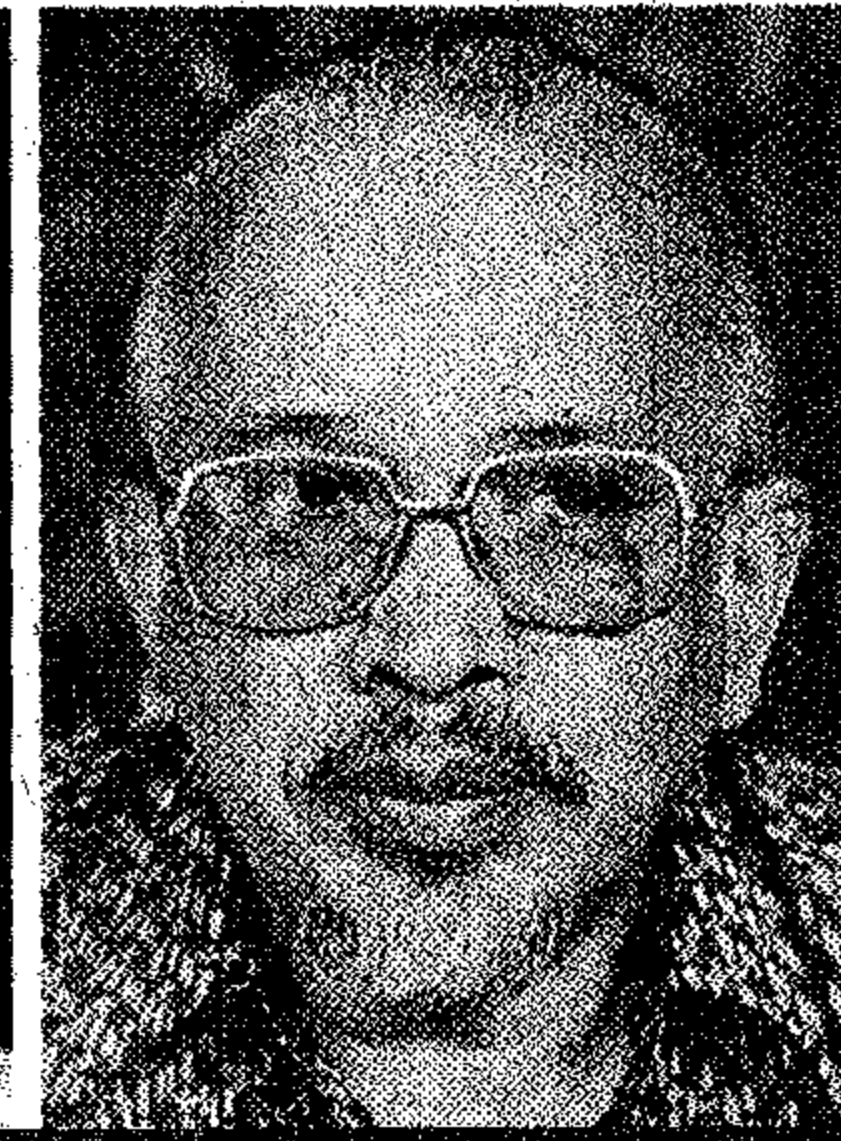
■ Lim Kean Chye



■ Ishak Muhammad



■ Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy



■ Datuk Asri Muda

teachers but also including other English-educated and westernised elements among the Chinese, Indians and Eurasians throughout the peninsula - were the ones who invited other organisations to "join hands in submitting proposals on the future Malayan constitution" after the Malays successfully forced the British to come up with an alternative to the Malayan Union.

Among the groups which agreed, at the end of 1946, to form the All-Malaya Council for Joint Action or AMCJA together with the MDU were, the MIC, Straits Chinese British Association, PKMM, Api,

through institutions formed solely by the Malays.

But as details of the proposed constitution were being worked out and in the discussions that ensued, AMCJA broke into diverse groups.

In January 1947, the three Malay groups left the council to form their own caucus for joint action called Pusat Tenaga Rakyat or Putera. But Putera continued to work with AMCJA and subsequently came out with a constitution.

The AMCJA-Putera coalition demanded to be heard by the British and even called for the colonial authorities to break off talks with the Malay

At the suggestion of some of its leaders, including Tan Cheng Lock, the alliance even organised a nationwide "hartal" (strike) on October 20, 1947 with the aim of stopping all businesses including other economic activities.

The colonial authorities were unimpressed and rejected the AMCJA-Putera's claim that it represented all Malayan people. The British-Malay rulers-Umno talks gradually gained wider support as a result of Umno's nationwide explanation exercise, but the non-Malays were still left out.

Working at breakneck speed, the final Federation of Malaya agreement was ready for the Malay rulers to