

# Razak drove a hard bargain

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Most Malaysians fondly remember Tun Abdul Razak Hussein as a tireless patriot. Yet not many can recall his role in the struggle for independence.



Malaysiaku Gemilang

## Founding Fathers

A weekly series

By ABU TALIB AHMAD

**T**O SCHOOLCHILDREN and most Malaysians, the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein is simply remembered as the country's second prime minister and the Father of Rural Development. In fact, to most Malaysians he is synonymous with nation-building notably in the field of education and rural development when he was deputy prime minister (1957-70). His drive and stamina was legendary and he inspired many around him.

As prime minister (1970-76), he was associated with the New Economic Policy, a non-aligned foreign policy, normalisation of diplomatic relations with China and the creation of Barisan Nasional.

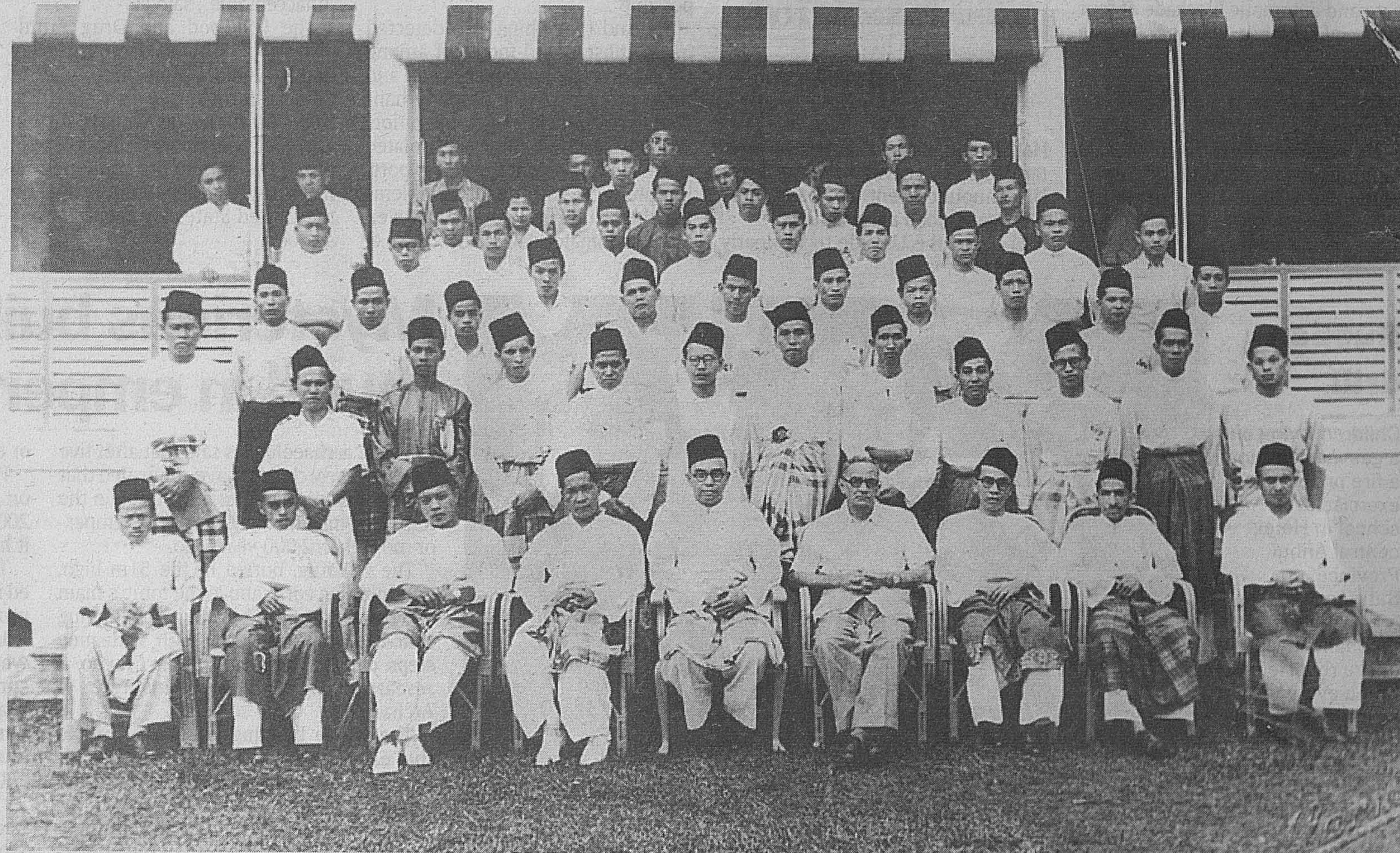
However, there seems to be a lack of awareness about his role in Malaya's struggle for independence although his contribution was equally as significant and crucial, especially when that independence came through the negotiating table.

Razak's autobiography provides interesting snippets of the highly venerated nationalist from Pekan, Pahang, as well as his political thinking on issues facing Malaya and how he came to grips with them.

He traced his lineage to a Bugis aristocrat from Sulawesi who emigrated to Pahang in the 18th century and later introduced weaving to Pekan.

Razak was born in March 1922 in Pulau Keladi and passed away in London in January 1976 while undergoing treatment for leukaemia. In 1950, he was bestowed by the Sultan of Pahang the title of Datuk Orang Kaya Shahbandar which still is one of the important titular chiefs in the state.

Like many from his generation,



**Youth leader:** Razak and Datuk Onn Jaafar with Umno Youth members at Kampong Baru, Kuala Lumpur, in February 1951 after the meeting at Kelab Sultan Sulaiman. — Courtesy of National Archives

Abdul Razak found employment in the British colonial administration as a junior clerk and later as officer in the Pahang administration beginning with Raub Assistant District Officer.

During the Japanese period he found employment as a junior officer in the Bentong and Temerloh district offices.

He served as State Secretary, and was Acting Mentri Besar prior to his retirement in 1955 to enter politics.

As State Secretary, he supervised the transfer of the state capital from Kuala Lipis to Kuantan in August 1955 despite the objections of High Commissioner Gen Sir Gerald Templer who preferred Temerloh.

Razak's attitude towards British colonial rule was very much influenced by what happened in Malaya-

»The 1941-42 British withdrawal made a mockery of the much-publicised British protection of Malaya«

Singapore in the 1930s and 40s that left an indelible imprint in his mind and shaped his approach to politics, notably the push towards independence from Britain.

These events include the role of the High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States (FMS) and Pahang Resident in the installation ceremony of Tunku Abu Bakar as the Sultan of Pahang in 1932 (the British officials were seated while the Pahang chiefs had to stand); the hasty British withdrawal in 1941-42, leaving Malaysians to face the Japanese on their own; and the August 1943 secession of Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah to Siam which caused much resentment among the Malays and pushed Razak to join the anti-Japanese resistance called Wataniah (in defence of the motherland).

As he noted in his autobiography, the 1941-42 British withdrawal made a mockery of the much-publicised British protection of Malaya

which hardened his conviction that the British should not be allowed to rule the country again. This view was made known to his close friends while he was a student in London.

In one way or another, the Malayan Union affected all politically conscious Malaysians when it was first introduced in late 1945. What was particularly unacceptable was the use of coercion and threats by the British in forcing the sultans to sign the MacMichael Treaty to establish the Malayan Union.

As head of the Raub Malay Association, Razak attended the Malay congress which was held at the Sulaiman Club in March 1946 to protest against the Malayan Union proposal.

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This congress made the decision that Malays and the Pahang sultan should boycott the installation ceremony of the new Malayan Union governor. They did.

### Independence negotiations

Razak's involvement with Umno began in 1950 when he joined the

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party as a member of the Kuala Lipis division. In the same year, he was elected head of Umno Youth to succeed Hussein Onn (later Tun Hussein) who was appointed secretary-general.

Under his leadership, the Youth wing became more vocal and began to advocate "Merdeka" in place of the slogan "Hidup Melayu". Undoubtedly, the entry of former members of the PKMM after it was banned in mid-1948 was a contributory factor to this change.

From 1951, Razak served as Umno deputy president while Tunku Abdul Rahman was president. He held on

to the deputy presidency until 1970 when he assumed the presidency upon Tunku's retirement.

Malayan independence was a negotiated settlement that involved hard bargaining between the colonised and the coloniser. This was where Razak contributed significantly.

He played a major role in the many direct negotiations between 1955 and 1957 by virtue of his position as Umno deputy president and the Tunku's right-hand man. Quite often, he was entrusted to iron out details with the colonial authority after broad agreements had been

reached between Malayan leaders and the British government.

Being an important member of the Tunku Cabinet since 1955, he played a crucial role in the smooth transition of power from colonial rule to independent Malaya. In January 1956, he was a member of the Merdeka mission to London that negotiated various details for the future of Malaya.

In April 1957, he was part of the Tunku's team to finalise the Malayan Constitution with representatives of the Malay rulers and the British government.

Prior to the formation of Malaysia

in the early 1960s, he was also actively involved as deputy chairman in the International Governmental Committee which sought to accommodate popular opinion in Sarawak and Sabah on the proposed federation on matters relating to freedom of religion, language, education, immigration, land, the state civil service, and the position of bumiputras in Sabah and Sarawak.

Razak also played a crucial role in the socio-economic dimension that indirectly affected the negotiating process. One aspect of this socio-economic dimension was the move towards nation-building through



**First meeting:** The new Malaysian Cabinet held its first meeting in Parliament House, Kuala Lumpur, on May 13, 1964. Photo shows (from left) Tan Siew Sin, Minister of Finance; Razak, Minister of Defence, National & Rural Development, Land and Mines; Tunku Abdul Rahman, Prime Minister; Datuk Dr Ismail Datuk Abdul Rahman, Minister of Home Affairs, Justice; and Datuk V.T. Sambanthan, Minister of Works, Posts and Telecommunications. — Courtesy of National Archives

# Playing a crucial role in nation-building

education, as seen in his efforts in producing the 1955 Razak Education Report.

The report outlined a national education policy for Malaya that would contribute towards nation building based on the primacy of the Malay language but without jeopardising the interests of the major ethnic groups, besides stressing technical and vocational education. Subsequent policies on education continued to be based on this report.

The other aspect was the move to win the hearts and minds of the rural population through rural development at a time when the country was facing the communist insurgency. An important element of this rural programme was the establishment of Felda in 1956, which aimed to eradicate rural poverty.

In the first 10 years of its existence, Felda opened up 145,000 acres (58,679ha) of virgin jungle for agricultural settlement and farming, mainly rubber and oil palm, to help the rural poor who were predominantly Malays.

For his untiring efforts in the field of rural development, Razak was awarded the prestigious Magsaysay Award from the Philippines in 1967.

*Abu Talib Ahmad is Professor of History at Universiti Sains Malaysia and author of 'Malay-Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941-4'. The Founding Fathers series is coordinated by Dr Joseph Fernando from the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur; and Research Editor Dr Lee Kam Hing.*