

# Tunku, a prince who was loved by the common man

NST - 16/8/2007

WHEN Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj died 17 years ago, the entire nation mourned.

Such was the impact of the man who had given his life for the people.

Today, there are still a few alive who can personally testify to the life and times of the Tunku.

One of them is Tan Sri Azahari Taib.

He was picked to contest the Baling state constituency in 1955 (he won) while working as a reporter with *Utusan Melayu*.

Now, more than 50 years later, Azahari still vividly remembers his association with the Tunku.

As a reporter, he had the opportunity to cover the Tunku on his whirlwind tour of the country.

This association was further cemented when he became a wakil rakyat.

The 83-year-old Umno veteran, who wears many hats including that of the member of the Umno disciplinary board, helped prepare and process some of the Tunku's speeches.

And usually when he had to report the Tunku's speeches, the Bapa Merdeka would ask him to "make them more interesting".

Such was the trust the Tunku had in him.

When attending to the Tunku at a ceramah in Johor, Azahari "reprimanded" him for using too much Kedah dialect when speaking to the people.

"I reminded him most of the people were of Jawa descent and would not understand some of the words.

"He just smiled and went about his ways. Apparently, the people understood him as he would draw laughter from them each time he cracked a joke or responded with thunderous applause to his ideas or programmes," he said.

On another occasion, the Tunku said during the rallies that he was very happy each time he saw people with "semangat berkibar-kibar" when fighting for independence.

Azahari would again pick on the Tunku, saying that the correct word was "berkobar-kobar" (ardour) while "berkibar-kibar" was to describe a flag flying.

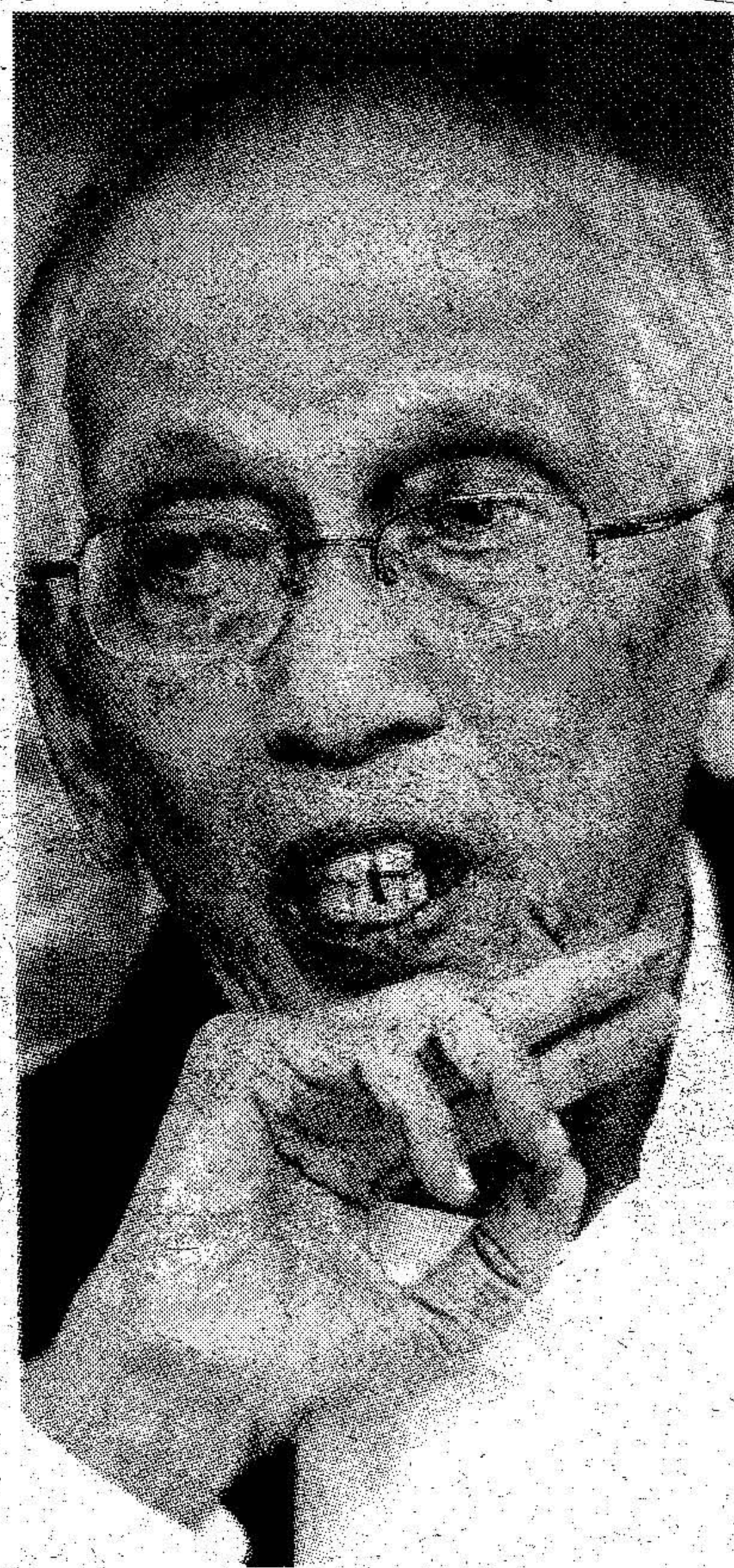
And the Tunku, always in his thick Kedah accent, turned to him and said: "See, it doesn't matter. They are still clapping because they understand me."

Azahari was with the Tunku when the Union Jack was lowered.

Like the thousands of people at the Selangor Club field that night and tens of thousands in other parts of the country, tears rolled down Azahari's cheeks.

"I said a prayer and thanked God for His gift of independence and the Tunku for leading the way," he said.

Another confidant of the Tunku is Tan Sri Khalid Abdullah.



Tan Sri Khalid Abdullah says Tunku always made the ordinary people feel very at ease despite his stature

The former executive chairman of Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd described the Tunku as a very accommodating person.

"Although he was royalty, he made us feel he was one of us.

"He always made the ordinary people feel very at ease despite his stature and they would reciprocate with the highest respect for him," he said.

In one instance, the Tunku was to attend a ceramah in Tandop and the people had slaughtered three heads of cattle for the event.

The Tunku was, however, still busy entertaining people at his office.

Fearing that he might be late for the event, Khalid reminded the Tunku of his engagement.

"I politely reminded him twice about the ceramah. After the third time, he excused himself and dashed out of his office since he was already about three hours late.

"I thought he was angry with me, but he was not," he said.

Datuk Wan Shamsuddin Mohd Yusof was a young man when the Tunku was fighting for independence.

The Kedah Historical Society chairman said the Tunku was a fun-loving but hardworking person with a heart of gold.

Wan Shamsuddin was among a handful privy to Tunku's dreams.

According to him, after returning from his law studies in England, the Tunku spent a night at the Istana Kuning in Alor Star.

He dreamt of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru but didn't know the significance of the dreams.

The Tunku mentioned this to a few friends when he returned to Alor Star a few years before his death.

"He only understood the dream when he struggled for the nation's independence," he said.



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