

# The steaks Tunku cooked

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THE balmy summer had given way to the falling leaves of autumn and it was beginning to get chilly.

But there was no mistaking the glow of pride on the faces of the Malaysians who had gathered outside the High Commission in London's Trafalgar Square on the morning of Aug 31, 1957.

Octogenarian Tan Sri Dr "Coco" Abdul Majid Ismail, the former director-general of Health, remembers that although they numbered less than a hundred, it was quite an emotionally-charged event.

"Maybe there were 50 or 60 of us gathered there, mostly students from the Malayan Teachers Training College at Kirkby College and Brinsford Lodge but the mood was quite euphoric," recalls Dr Majid.

"Although we were thousands of miles away from home, we were no less joyous at achieving Independence."

Most of these students were studying outside London and like Dr Majid, who was pursuing his Master's in Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of Liverpool, they made the special trip for the historic event.

"Naturally, we were very excited about our Independence and we made the trip to London to take part in the celebrations at the Malayan High Commission."

Together with his wife Ani (Khairany Mahyudin) and his two young children, Dr Majid left Liverpool on Aug 28 and drove his Ford Zodiac to London.

"Early on the morning of Aug 31, we made our way to the Malayan High Commission office in Trafalgar Square and joined the others."

"Ani, my children and I stood at the bottom of the steps of the High Commission and we had a good view of the High Commissioner, (Tan Sri) Nik Ahmed Kamil, announcing our independence and raising the Malayan flag."

"We were very happy and proud," remembers the 85-year-old Dr Majid.

And the doctor was pleasantly surprised when a picture of his family at that historic event appeared in the *Evening Standard* that day.

"Unfortunately, I do not have a copy of the newspaper," he laments.

That night, Dr Majid and his wife attended a celebration dinner and dance hosted by the Malayan High Commission at the Festival Hall.

The couple also attended another dance to celebrate the event at the Dorchester Hotel the following evening.

Dr Majid remembers fondly his

It may have been a long journey for the scores of Malayan students who attended that celebration in London 50 years ago. One of those students tells P. SELVARANI that he wouldn't have missed it for the world



Dr Abdul Majid Ismail receiving the Alliance Victory Cup golf tournament trophy from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Nasiruddin Shah in 1965. Looking on are Tunku Abdul Rahman (seated, left), Tun Abdul Razak (seated, second from right) and Tun Dr Ismail (in foreground with cigar).

friendship with both Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj and Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, much of which was nurtured on the greens over a round of golf.

While he knew Razak very well from his student days at the Raffles College in Singapore before World War Two, Dr Majid's friendship with Tunku grew when he served as a senior civil servant.

It was the Tunku, who as Chief Minister of Malaya, was instrumental in helping Dr Majid pursue his Master's in Orthopaedics.

Dr Majid had completed his fellowship in Orthopaedics at the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh in 1955.

Dr Majid had applied to do his Master's but the Chief Secretary to the Malayan government, a Mr Newbolt, turned him down and insisted that he return to Malaya.

"I wrote to my medical alumni association which was headed by (Tan Sri) Dr Tan Chee Khoo.

"My alumni went to see Tunku and appealed to him. Tunku then directed Newbolt to approve my application which he duly did."

But by the time approval was given, Dr Majid had already boarded the SS *Canton* for Malaya.

When the ship docked at Tanjong Pagar in Singapore, he was surprised to see a crowd of irate alumni members led by Dr Tan demanding to know why he had come back.

"When I reported for duty at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, I was informed that Tunku had instructed that I return to England the following year for my Master's course."

This was in accordance with

Tunku's plans for the Malayanisation of the civil service which would see Malaysians eventually take over the positions held by the British.

Dr Majid says that Tunku's style of government was such that he enjoyed a very close rapport with the civil service.

"As I was president of the Senior Asian Government Officers Association, I became closely involved in the decisions made with regard to the civil service, especially doctors."

And, because of his sociable nature, the Tunku got many government servants involved in whatever he was doing when it came to sporting events.

Tunku was also quite passionate about football and it was during a match at the TPCA stadium in Princess Road (Jalan Raja Muda) in 1951 that Tunku was asked to head the Football Association of Malaya (FAM).

FAM secretary A.R. Singam, who was Majid's former teacher at the Maxwell School, had noticed "a very distinguished looking Malay gentleman in a fawn suit with a felt hat, carrying a colourful umbrella" who used to turn up at the stadium to watch matches.

"Singam wanted to know who the gentleman was and I said it was the new Selangor DPP, Tunku Abdul Rahman," recalls Dr Majid.

The next time Singam saw Tunku at the stadium, he suggested that he consider becoming FAM president.

Tunku declined, saying he merely enjoyed watching matches. Singam got Tunku nominated as the president to replace the outgo-

ing man.

"Although Tunku modestly declined, he was eventually persuaded to take up the post," says Dr Majid.

As both Tunku and Dr Majid shared similar interests, they got along like a house on fire and Dr Majid found himself being invited to many social functions.

"I think one of the reasons was because Tunku liked to dance the *ronggeng*, so he could rely on me and a few other aficionados to join him on the dance floor."

The Tunku also loved the *joget* and whenever there was a party at the Residency, the Majids and their friends (Datuk) Dr Abu Bakar Ibrahim and his wife were almost always on the guest list as not many of Tunku's cabinet colleagues could dance the *joget*.

"The Tunku even hired an old *joget* dancer from Kedah to teach the wives of the senior officers to dance and the lessons were held in my house."

Dr Majid says Tunku would often invite his golf mates to the Residency for dinner after a round of golf.

"On the way home, he would stop at the Weld supermarket and buy the choicest steaks and cook them himself. He was a very good cook."

"I have to say that as a person, the Tunku was a man out of this world."

"He was warm, charismatic and always a gentleman. You couldn't help being drawn to him."

"He loved a good joke and oh, his laugh! It was uproarious, uninhibited and infectious."

"He once told the BBC that he was 'the happiest prime minister'."



TURNING 50 MEANS...



I come from a remote village called Long Lelang. I saw a car for the first time in my life when I was 12. When I turned 14, I owned my first pair of shoes. Those days, there were no access roads to town. Never did I imagine I could become this successful. Although it was hard in the beginning, I have been blessed with a wonderful life. Independence has given me and other Kelabits the opportunity to improve our lives.

Issac Lugun  
group general  
manager from Kuching