

A peaceful journey to freedom

**MERDEKA
MEMOIRS**



Starting today, in this new Sunday column, John M. Gullick, a former Malayan civil service officer and archivist Prabhakaran S. Nair will take turns in providing glimpses of the years before and after independence. Gullick is 92 and lives in Essex, England, while Prabhakaran is the director of Pustaka Wira Negara at the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial in Kuala Lumpur.

"If I am credited with nothing more, I can at least thank God that I was able to lead our country along the path of independence, and beyond, without one drop of blood being shed."

Tunku Abdul Rahman the Father of Independence

NON-VIOLENCE may have been a Gandhian ideal, but it was Tunku who succeeded in securing independence for Malaya through non-violence.

After the Umno-MCA Alliance was forged, Tunku could no longer afford to think of himself merely as a leader of Umno but as a leader of the alliance as a whole.

He realised the need for peace not only between the coloniser and the colonised, but more importantly, between the various races in the country.

When Hashim Ghani, president of the Peninsular Malays Union, wanted Tunku to consider his one-sided proposals for independence, Tunku said: "Independence is far too big a thing for me to plan hastily or to talk loosely about, and I cannot commit myself (to Hashim Ghani's proposals) at this stage.

"The Malays are not the only people in this country. The others have to be considered in plans we make. But even after detailed plans have been

It is a constant source of Malaysia's pride that we achieved our independence peacefully. Much is owed to Tunku Abdul Rahman's affability, writes PRABHAKARAN S. NAIR

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Tunku Abdul Rahman giving a speech after signing the Declaration of Independence in London. On his left is Tun H.S. Lee and Alan Lenox-Boyd is on his right.

made, it will be a long time before they are materialised.

"My duty is to prevent bloodshed in the fight for independence. We must obtain our freedom peacefully and constitutionally."

Tunku emphasised that the struggle for independence had to go hand in hand with the quest for peace and unity among the various communities, an ideal that appeared elusive in the light of the intercommunal riots that took place against the tumultuous background of the Emergency.

The communist insurgents were largely identified with the Chinese community. They were looked upon as traitors who tried to usurp power unconstitutionally, while the Malays were perceived as patriots on account of their numerical strength within the security forces.

The racial divide was deep, and no one but the Tunku had the charisma and skill to heal the rift.

He had the onerous task of negotiating the terms of independence with the various races before he could even be-

gin negotiations with the British.

He succeeded. He worked out the details of interracial co-operation and prepared the various races for the federal elections of 1955.

After his spectacular victory at the polls, which made him chief minister of the Federation of Malaya, Tunku could press for independence on the strength of the mandate he enjoyed from the different races, whom he was then able to represent in the negotiations for independence.

Again, he wanted to do this peacefully and constitutionally.

On the occasion of the anniversary dinner of the Press Club of Malaya in September 1956, Tunku said that while his "great ambition" was to fulfil all the alliance's election promises, his main aim was to achieve independence for the federation with the "minimum of political storm and the maximum of peace and goodwill".

Indeed, there was a great deal of peace and goodwill between the future leaders of Malaya and the British.

Independence celebrations

were jointly deliberated. In these deliberations, it was agreed that since sovereignty had never rested with the British Crown, there was no necessity to lower the British flag in the Malay states during the Merdeka ceremony.

Even at the federal level, it was agreed that there would be no lowering of the British flag at the official declaration of independence held at Merdeka Stadium in Kuala Lumpur.

The Union Jack was only lowered in the former Settlements of Penang and Malacca, as well as at the unofficial midnight ceremony that was organised by the Alliance Youth at the Selangor Club Padang in Kuala Lumpur.

At the main official ceremony, the Duke of Gloucester, who represented the Queen, said that independence marked the beginning of a new chapter in the close and cordial relations between the two countries.

"A jewel is beautiful in itself but far more beautiful when it is set and mounted in fine gold," he said.

The reference was to the

jewel of independence that was to be "mounted in the unrivalled setting of the Commonwealth".

Tunku became a great friend of the British and a firm believer in the Commonwealth.

Nine months after Merdeka, because of a vow he had made, Tunku went on a special pilgrimage to Mecca to give thanks to the Almighty for Malaya's peaceful attainment of independence.

Henceforth, he became known as Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. The title Al-Haj is used by members of the royal family who have made the pilgrimage.

It will always remind us of Tunku's role in mediating the transition from colonialism to independence in a peaceful manner.

There was a great deal of goodwill on both sides before, during and after independence.

British officers who left the civil service under the Malayanisation scheme were given lump sum compensation in addition to pension.

Although Malayanisation

was an important component of independence, Tunku felt that critical posts should continue to be held by existing officers until suitably qualified Malaysians could take over from them.

He cautioned wisdom as early as 1956: "We have all the time at our disposal to replace expatriate officers with our very own. Let us do it without losing our heads and our reason."

By the time Malaysia was formed, we had a British officer in command of the Malayan army and five senior British civil servants holding key positions in Malayan government ministries.

We have the example of Tan Sri (Sir) Claude Fenner who served as the country's first inspector-general of police right up to 1966. He had a long track record of meritorious service as a police officer since the pre-war years.

General Tan Sri Rodney Moore held the fort as chief-of-staff of the armed forces for a number of years, helping the nascent country grapple with both internal as well as external threats.

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It was only on new year's day in 1964 that Tunku Osman Jawa, who was Tunku's nephew, was appointed general and chief-of-staff of the armed forces.

Tan Sri Mubin Sheppard, a well-known MCS officer was appointed director of the National Museum and Public Record Office. Tunku maintained a very close relationship with all of them.

Tunku's role in mediating the transition between colonialism and independence is best expressed in the following tribute that Datuk Seri Najib Razak pays to Tunku in his book *Globalising Malaysia*:

“When Tunku led the independence movement and subsequently became our first premier, his diplomatic skills and being an anglophile

helped him to reassure the British that granting independence to Malaya was the right thing to do.

“To be given freedom without bloodshed is a far greater achievement than with the spilling of blood over the flag of independence.

“Tunku's affable personality and his astute skills in negotiating first and foremost with all the ethnic groups and then together to negotiate with London were indispensable to Malaya's quest for independence.

“Were we to have (had) someone different, someone the British were suspicious of, things could well have turned out differently.

“Tunku, our father of Independence, was a great Malaysian leader who was destined to lead us in breaking the shackles of colonialism.”

It was Tunku's hope that “future historians will record our achievement in letters of gold”.

Indeed, Tunku left behind a legacy of peace that we should prize and treasure on the 50th anniversary of our independence.

It is important for us to understand the true significance of our peaceful transition to nationhood in the light of criticisms (from within and without the country) to the effect that our independence is only “half-baked”.

As Shariff Ahmad writes in *The Great Patriot*, these peo-



Signed and sealed. Tunku Abdul Rahman signing the document of Declaration of Independence in the presence of British Secretary of State for the Colonies Alan Lennox-Boyd in February 1956. — Pictures courtesy of Pustaka Wira Negara

ple were deliberately trying to belittle the Tunku's achievement by saying that the independence he had achieved was only a gift presented on a silver plate.

Human as he was, the Tunku would fuss for a while over the criticism, but he never forgot to remind them that the most important thing was the achievement of independence itself.

As Malaysians, we need to be proud of the fact that ours is the only country in the world that achieved independence without any bloodshed.

We should be proud of having avoided the kind of violent upheavals that accompanied independence in countries such as Indonesia.

As Shariff Ahmad rightfully asks, “Was it not much wiser to achieve independence for the

nation without spilling the people's blood?”

That Tunku was able to achieve so much for the country was due to the force of his larger-than-life personality. Capping it all was the one important factor — his sportsmanship.

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