

A trip to the Residency, home of Bapa Malaysia, leaves  
**INTAN MAIZURA AHMAD KAMAL** feeling decidedly patriotic.

**I**t was surreal, walking through the hallowed corridors of the Residency, home of Malaysia's first and beloved Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al Haj, who died in 1990 at the age of 87. I was at great pains to ensure that my steps on the wooden floorboards did not disturb the calm of my surroundings.

My sojourn into Tunku's home with my kids was an exercise in trying to comprehend the country's history, a history I know little about, having spent most of my formative years abroad.

The significance of Aug 31, a date so revered by Malaysians, I'm ashamed to admit, has less of a nostalgic impact compared to that of the anniversary of the death of Princess Diana, which also falls on the same date.

Time for a quick history lesson, I thought, and what better place to start than at the home of the Father of Independence.

The Residency was the official home of the British Resident of Selangor when the British were in power.

It was re-located from Klang, in 1880, to its present site (then known as Brockman Road, and later as Jalan Dato' Onn when it was renamed by Tunku in 1963) by the British Resident of



The impressive dining room where meetings were held

Selangor, Captain W. Bloomfield Douglas.

In 1888, Sir Frank Swettenham had renovations done on the place, taking care not to destroy the essential character of the original building.

The whole structure was completed by 1889 and subsequently occupied by other British Residents until the outbreak of World War II.

When Tunku, the 20th child of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halimshah, the 24th Sultan of Kedah,

assumed the reigns of power as the first Chief Minister of the Federation of Malaya, and later as Prime Minister, he made the Residency his official home until 1972, despite having stepped down as prime minister in 1969.

Many important meetings, including those that

paved the way for Independence, took place here.

In a speech made during the official opening of his old office in Petaling Jaya in 1978, Tunku expressed the hope that the Residency would be preserved as a national monument due to its historical significance.

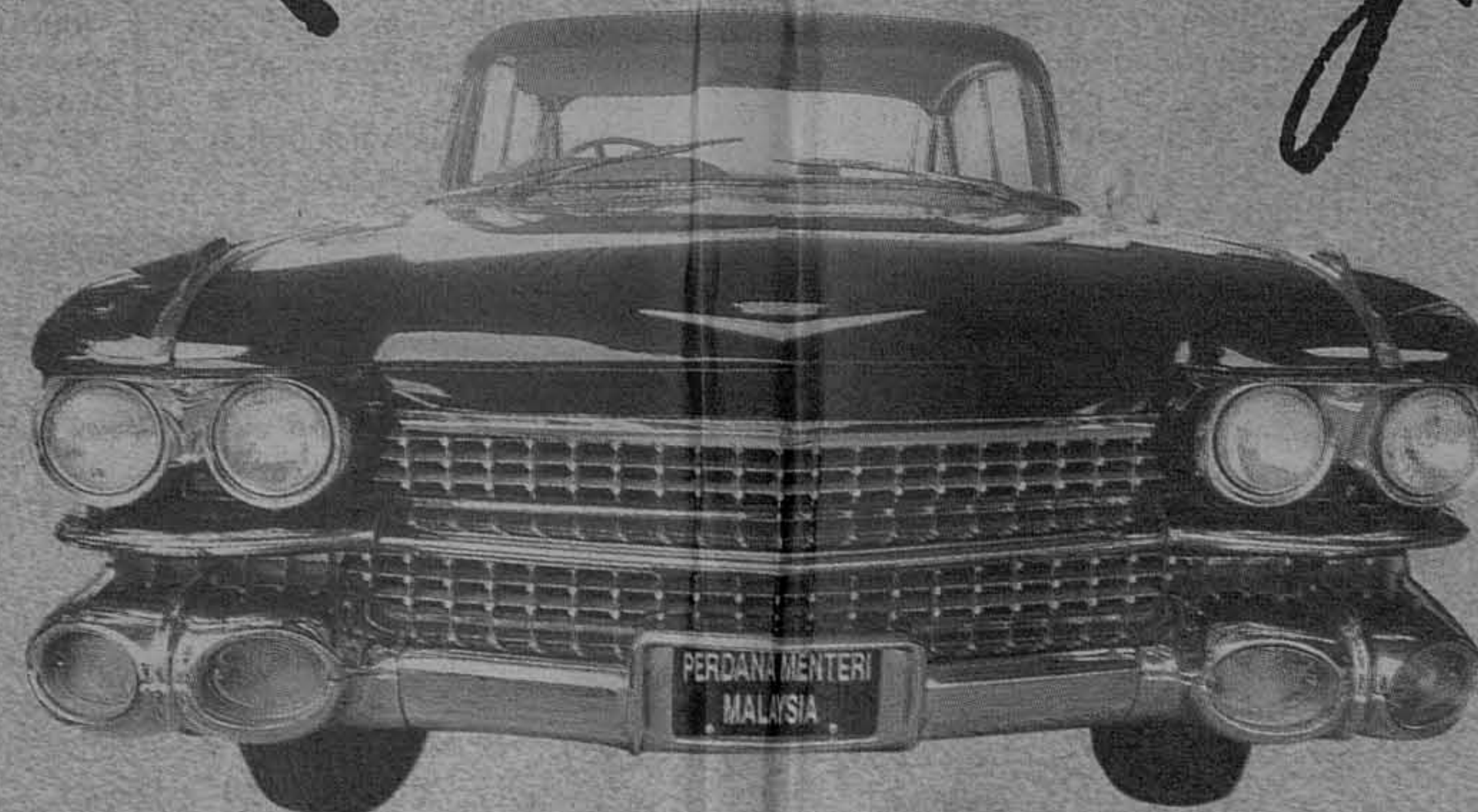
Today, two new buildings (comprising exhibition areas, a repository, office and working area) flank it, making up the Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Memorial.

This memorial was established to commemorate Tunku's contribution and services, and to highlight the importance of the period when Tunku emerged as the Father of Independence and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia.

History lesson over, my children and I made our way across the corridor of the ground floor to the gardens outside.

A majestic tree, albeit somewhat aged with protruding gigantic roots, greeted us.

## Walking in the *Residency*



NS7-26/8/2007 Tunku's Cadillac Fleetwood is on display in the driveway.

I can just imagine Tunku and his wife, Sharifah Rodziah Syed Alwi Barakbah (Tunku was previously married to Meriam, a Chinese convert who died of malaria in the mid-1930s and thereafter, albeit briefly, an English woman called Violet Caulson, before marrying Sharifah Rodziah in 1939) enjoying the cool morning breeze from the lofty heights of the spacious balcony that wound around the house and overlooked the compound.

A Mercedes, with the number

plate PAU 291, parked at the front porch, looked forlorn compared to the rather shiny dark Cadillac Fleetwood that we clapped eyes on earlier.

Moored at the driveway into the lobby of the main memorial building, all sharp lines and protruding wings, it had the number plate Perdana Menteri (or something like that).

Spread over two floors, the ground floor houses Tunku's private office, an impressive dining room, a spacious waiting room, and the rather charming Cairo

and Ante rooms.

The former, with a mother of pearl table in the centre, is known as the Cairo room on account of the chairs, white in colour, which were bought in Cairo.

The room, with its obvious inclination for all that's ivory, was used by Tunku during discourses with visiting foreign dignitaries, particularly after dinner.

The Ante room next door, charmingly furnished with a mix of western and



One of the Tunku's many golf souvenirs

Tunku's funky cigarette holder

An ornate Chinese bottle exhibited in the Ante room

A vanity case of Tunku's wife on display in the Ante room

eastern touches — ornate Chinese screens, side tables, vases, and floral-patterned furniture, with a line of spears used as a partition from the next room — was used by the ladies after adjourning from dinner.

The dining room is impressive. Large pictures of Tunku and his wife, as well as those of his parents adorn the walls. A long table, which can accommodate up to 30 people, holds court.

This room was primarily used as the venue for official dinners and those important Cabinet meetings that often dragged well into the night.

Tunku, born in 1903 and aptly known as the Prince with a common touch, had a natural rapport with the 'rakyat' despite being born in a palace.

Those who knew him spoke of his easy-going nature, and warm sparkle, traits that made him equally effective in public and in private, with the

great leaders of the world and with the simple folk.

Tunku's private office, which opens to the view of the gardens outside, is surprisingly sparse save for the numerous golf and horse paraphernalia that line the shelves.

The office is modestly furnished with a steel cabinet, a writing table and chair.

The spacious master bedroom, on the first floor with its high ceiling, is furnished only with two single beds, separated by a table with a small lamp on it, wardrobes, and in a cosy corner near the windows, a small table with an easy rocking chair facing it.

Tunku, it seems, loved to have his tea here in the morning before starting his day.

Apart from the bedrooms and guestrooms, there's also a spacious resting room furnished with chairs

from China. Tunku used this room to hold feasts, prayers and other thanksgiving ceremonies.

Reaching the end of the corridors, my tour of Tunku's home was finally completed.

Opening a wooden door to reveal the balcony outside, I took a moment to breathe in the calm and all that history I had just walked through. It had been a timely visit.

■ Memorial Tunku Abdul Rahman is located at Jalan Dato' Onn, Kuala Lumpur.

■ intanm@nstp.com.my



A frontal view of the Residency