

'I still sense the Tunku's presence'

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He was often in the company of Tunku Abdul Rahman, right from the pre-independence days. **AUDREY DERMAWAN** gets to know the chauffeur, and friend, of the Tunku



THE rich and famous, the titled and the ordinary man. There were some 20,000 of them who turned up that night at the Selangor Club padang in Kuala Lumpur.

Chauffeur R. Kalimuthoo, who turned 82 on Wednesday, was among them.

And he was no ordinary man.

Kalimuthoo was one of the privileged ones to be with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the father of the nation, on that historic night when he read the Proclamation of Independence.

And he is probably one of the last few surviving Malaysians of his time who is able to tell the happenings on that night of Aug 30, 1957.

Kalimuthoo, who was 32 years old at that time, was the Tunku's chauffeur and a loyal friend (a fact acknowledged by Tunku himself).

"The atmosphere that night was ceremonious. I can still remember vividly all the happy

faces I saw that night," recalls Kalimuthoo, who now stays in Kulim.

"I can definitely remember how proud the Tunku looked when the Union Jack was lowered and, for the first time, the Malayan flag was raised in independent Malaya. I will never forget the moment for as long as I live.

"It may have been 50 years now, but it seems like only yesterday that we celebrated the joyous occasion."

Not only can Kalimuthoo remember that day and other days but he also has hundreds of neatly laminated newspaper clippings on Tunku as well as himself, dating back to the early 1970s.

He also proudly showed off the two books on the Tunku that he received from the Tunku himself. Tunku had written his appreciation of Kalimuthoo in one of the books.

"Wait. I have more pictures at the back," he says and walks to the back of the house. He re-



R. Kalimuthoo, who was Tunku Abdul Rahman's chauffeur from 1957 to 1990, was privileged to be with the Tunku on the historic night when he read the Proclamation of Independence.

turned a few minutes later with more newspaper clippings. He made five trips to the back of the house and the hall.

The hall has only a sofa set and an altar. There were paper clippings and books everywhere.

After glancing through some newspaper clippings, the cheerful Kalimuthoo, who looks healthier than most people his age, adds that he was one of the thousands who had interrupted Tunku when he read out the proclamation of independence with shouts of "Merdeka!, Merdeka!".

"The shouts of 'Merdeka' filled the air. Nothing seemed to matter at that time. We shouted as loudly as we could like a bunch of kids."

That night, Kalimuthoo did not drive the Tunku to the Selangor Club.

"The other driver (Kalimuthoo can't remember his name) was given the job."

Kalimuthoo's duty was to drive the Tunku's children, family members and VIPs to the club.

"We were not anywhere close to the Tunku, but the fact that we were there in the same place is something to shout about until this very day.

"Tunku may not have told me this in his own words but I knew he was the happiest and proudest man that night. You could tell from the way he looked.

"Tunku continued to tell of Malaya's fight for independence to whomever he met, especially visitors from abroad after that night."

Kalimuthoo says every time he sees a picture or advertisement in the newspapers or television showing the Tunku at the Selangor Club, his heart aches with sadness.

"I can still sense Tunku's presence. To me, he is still very much alive."

Kalimuthoo was first introduced to the Tunku when he was in his early 20s.

He was an office boy at the Football Association of Selangor then when Tunku became its

president. The Tunku was at that time a deputy public prosecutor.

"In fact, Tunku was the one who encouraged me to take up driving. I worked part-time for him.

"I used to take his children, nieces and nephews to school. Back then, he had a white Jaguar as well as a Morris Minor."

Kalimuthoo started working full-time in 1957 and was with the Tunku till he died on Dec 6, 1990.

"I remembered driving him around those days. It was really fun. We talked about so many things.

"He was born a prince but his humble nature prevailed at all times. He was well-liked by everyone.

"We were so close then that Tunku even invited me to stay in his house on numerous occasions even after he 'retired'."

The Tunku, Kalimuthoo remembers, always summoned him when he needed anything.

"We even went out shopping to-

"I can definitely remember how proud the Tunku looked when the Union Jack was lowered and, for the first time, the Malayan flag was raised in independent Malaya. I will never forget the moment for as long as I live."

To Muthu (Kalimuthoo)
my faith full
Chauffeur - who has
with me from youth to old
age - whose loyalty
to me is unshaken
and for whom I have
the warmest personal
regards
R. Kalimuthoo
19/11/78

Tunku gave this autographed book to Kalimuthoo in 1978

gether, sometimes clad only in a sarung and singlet.

"We had *char koay teow* together, including *cucur udang* and *tauhu*, some of Tunku's favourite food when he was staying in Penang after his retirement.

"He was the nicest man I have ever come across in my life."

Kalimuthoo, who has a monthly pension of RM360, stays alone. He spends his time doing gardening, something the Tunku did back then as a form of exercise.

Kalimuthoo has seven daughters and nine sons from two marriages, and 27 grandchildren.

He has since separated from his second wife, S. Thanam, 65, while his first wife, C. Suppamah, whom he divorced, died three years ago.

And what is he planning to do with all the newspaper clippings and books?

"It all depends on my children," he says. "I came into this world alone and will return the same way."



Kalimuthoo now spends his time doing gardening, something the Tunku did back then as a form of exercise.