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Enjoying simpler sides of life

Tunku and others knew they were always welcome to relax at the Australian High Commissioner's residence which adjoined the golf course. It was easier and more congenial to meet him early at the course and play nine holes of golf before office hours.

By **TAN SRI T.K. CRITCHLEY**

SO SUCCESSFUL was Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj as both a prince and patriot, that to refer to him simply as Tunku left no misunderstanding.

Tunku's emergence as the president of Umno in place of Datuk Onn Jaafar coincided with my own appointment early in 1951 to represent Australia in Malaya, Singapore and North Borneo as acting Australian Commissioner based in Singapore, on the eve of the "Maria Hertog" riots.

By the time I left Singapore in 1952 it was clear that a policy of including Malays, Chinese and Indians in the one party as proposed by Onn was at best ahead of its time and that, as the Tunku appreciated, the communities wanted their own leaders and parties.

In the elections to the Federal Legislative Assembly in 1955, the Alliance under his leadership had won all but one of the 52 seats contested.

I returned to Malaya as the first Australian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur in December 1955, to find the stage set for rapid progress to independence.

From early in my posting I played golf with Tun Razak Hussein and Tun Ismail Abdul Rahman and it was not long before Tunku joined in.

The Australian High Commissioner's residence adjoins the golf course and in those days there was no fence between the embassy grounds and the course. Tunku and others knew that they were always welcome to relax

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Malaysiaku Gemilang

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The first Australian High Commissioner to the Federation of Malaya and subsequently Malaysia Tan Sri T.K. Critchley was present when independence was granted to three neighbouring countries, namely Indonesia, Malaya and Papua New Guinea. His last posting before retirement was as Ambassador to Indonesia, completing 34 years of overseas service with the Foreign Ministry.

at the residence if they felt so inclined.

On occasions when I had instructions to speak with Tunku, it would be easier for him to find time, and certainly more congenial, to meet me early at the course and play nine holes of golf before office hours. Serious talk was of course left until after the game.

In 1959, Tunku made a most successful and enjoyable first visit to Australia, on which I accompanied him.

Unfortunately, at the first reception in Melbourne, hosted by the Australian Deputy Prime Minister, I noticed that pork savouries were being offered. Tunku observed my concern. "Don't worry," he said, "I know what they are."

On one of the sightseeing journeys we were making by car, he asked if we were likely to see kangaroos. Not here, I said confidently. Sure enough, at the next bend, two large kangaroos jumped out of our way.

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Modesty and sense of humour his hallmark

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The timing of our visit coincided with the Melbourne Cup, Australia's most prestigious and popular horse race, where he made a winning bet. Tunku had a keen interest in horse racing and kept a box at the KL race course.

As a Prince and Prime Minister, Tunku was used to splendour and finely presented meals. But he also enjoyed the simpler sides of life.

Winding up his visit, Tunku and his party were enjoying a quiet evening at Admiralty House overlooking Sydney Harbour and the butler asked Tunku what he would like for dinner. Without hesitation Tunku replied, "fish and chips."

It duly arrived, finely presented on a silver platter. Tunku was obviously disappointed. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Where's the newspaper?" he replied.

Clearly in ordering fish and chips, Tunku had a nostalgic memory of his student days in London when he enjoyed the fish and chips he bought wrapped in newspaper.

Other endearing characteristics of Tunku were his modesty and sense of humour. The end of colonialism saw prominent leaders emerging at approximately the same time in South and South-East Asia. In Indonesia, it was Sukarno; in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh; in India, Nehru and in Malaya, it was Tunku.

Tunku never made claims to be an intellectual, but he was an intelligent, sensitive man quick to appreciate practical suggestions. It was understandable that at that time there would be comparisons between the leaders of Asia.

But it was surprising when a journalist was foolish enough to describe Nehru as head and shoulders above Tunku. Naturally the Tunku was irri-

tated. But his response reflected his modesty and keen sense of humour. As he said to me, "If the journalist had left it as head, it would have been all right. But why did he have to throw in the shoulders?"

Another example of Tunku's sense of humour was the telegram he sent to his Cabinet colleague Colonel H.S. Lee when the latter was awarded a knighthood.

Tun Lee, who played a major role in the formation of the Malayan Chinese Association in 1949 and its subsequent political participation with Umno in the Alliance, was a small man. Tunku's warmly congratulatory message was sent to "the shortest knight of the year".

The communal riots in Selangor in 1969 left Tunku a bitterly disappointed man.

I happened to pass through Kuala Lumpur at that time and was asked by my government to report on the

situation. My information and impressions were that the riots were to a large extent localised in Selangor and that the situation would settle down.

Tunku was a man who enjoyed life and wanted others to enjoy it as well. Although a devout Muslim and pressed by Islamic leaders at the time of independence, Tunku did not support a theocratic state, believing that religion was a matter between individuals and God.

Tunku was a leader of wide understanding and human sympathy. He was one of those rare politicians who did not feel it necessary to seek to present an image larger than life. He had a great capacity to make friends. His many Australian friends were delighted when in 1987, shortly before his 84th birthday, he received Australia's highest honour – the Honorary Companion of the Order of Australia.