

Unity through diversity was the way to go

THE best thing was to try to build up unity through diversity, which means that Umno would represent the Malays, the MCA, which had been formed under Tan Cheng Lock (Tun), would represent the Chinese and the MIC, the Indians. These parties should come together in a coalition and make Merdeka our common cause, to merge as one party. With the Chinese and Indians being divided in their loyalty to this country, this would not satisfy the prerequisites for a united front.

We did not have to wait long, for Cheng Lock, as head of the Malayan Chinese Association, was saying the same thing. He was a true Malayan, a Chinese baba born in Malacca who could not speak a word of Chinese.

MCA, having thrown in their lot with Umno to fight the Kuala Lumpur Municipal election, was deprived of its right by the Government to run the MCA welfare lottery on the ground that MCA had acquired political status.

MCA took it stoically and decided to go all out, do or die, for Malaya's independence. The man who took the initiative for this alliance was Ong Yoke Lin (now Tun Omar Yoke Lin) and Datuk Yahaya bin Abdul Razak. They held several meetings between the local leaders of Umno and MCA. On the MCA side were Col. H.S. Lee (Tun), Ong Yoke Lin, S.M. Yong (now Tan Sri) and on the Umno side, Encik Yahaya, Encik Ramli and Ali bin Taib, the father-in-law of the Prime Minister (Tun Dr Mahathir). T.H. Tan (now Tan Sri Tahir) was the secretary.

Umno-MCA went to the polls to fight in the elections united and determined. In the municipal election that took place in 1952,



the alliance won 11 of the 12 seats. T.H. Tan, in his book *The Prince and I* said: "It was a resounding success that dictated the course of Malayan politics for the next two decades. It was a success which gave heart to ideals. It was immediately apparent that Umno-MCA co-operation would be the tide for the future of Malaya."

I personally was very elated with this success. We had few more elections to fight in Johor and Malacca. In all these places the results followed the Kuala Lumpur pattern, i.e. the alliance swept to complete victory. Then it was decided to call for a national conference to form the alliance at national level between Umno and MCA.

The first meeting was held at the Selangor Miners' Club Kuala Lumpur on Feb 3, 1953. Quoting from *The Prince and I*: "Those present were Tunku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Sir Tan Cheng-Lock, Col H.S. Lee, Mr Leong Yew Koh, Mr S.M. Yong, Mr Ong Yoke Lin, Encik Sardon bin Jubir, Encik Bahaman bin Samsuddin, Dr Ismail bin Datuk Abdul Rahman, Encik Syed Nazir bin Ismail, and Mr. T.H. Tan (Tan Sri Tahir) as secretary.

"That first meeting was a complete success, Tunku told the Press later, and it formed the basis of Sino-Malay friendship and collaboration as symbolised by the Umno-MCA alliance today.

"A meeting with Datuk Onn to reconcile

our political differences took place at the house of Sir Clough Thuraisingham one evening on the intermediation of Sir Clough himself who suggested that it might be a good thing if Datuk Onn and the Tunku could get together to try and work together for the good of Malaya.

"Tunku said nothing would please him more than that for, after all, he was not working for himself but for the country: If he wanted to work for himself, his legal profession would give him more remuneration and peace of mind than shouldering the burden of the movement of independence.

"Tunku met Datuk Onn that evening. On Datuk Onn's side, there were Yong Shook Lin, Ramani, Thuraisingham, Zainal Abidin, Raja Ayub and one or two others whom Tunku could not remember.

"On Tunku's side were H.S. Lee and Ismail Ali. Datuk Onn was rather brusque in his behaviour towards us. He (Datuk Onn) told us in no uncertain terms that he would agree to any coalition with the alliance but that if Tunku was serious about independence he (Tunku) would have to dissolve the alliance, and join IMP. Tunku told Datuk Onn that would be asking too much and he (Tunku) would never agree to it, but if there was room for compromise he would be happy to consider it.

"So Datuk Onn pooh-poohed him. Tunku was naturally roused, and he told Datuk Onn that if that was his attitude then he (Tunku) would go all out to fight him and his party to the bitter end or die in the attempt.

"In a speech later on the question of nationalism, Tunku said that Malayan nationalism had to be forged out of the major impulses of the Malayan and Chinese.

"The narrower nationalisms of these two communities were the beach-heads on which a Malayan nation could be forged. They could also be nettlesome, and if intensified on the basis of opposition to each other and mutual suspicion, make smithereens of the entire country.

"The Umno and MCA worked hard against often overwhelming odds to prevent any polarisation of races. It was the legacy of the two parties that they made possible a Malayan nationalism in the early 50s. From there, they were but steps to freedom.

"Among the first to the dramatic steps was the holding of national conventions. The first took place at the Hotel Majestic in Kuala Lumpur on Feb 23, 1953. From the British, there was perhaps only studied contempt. For Malaysians the conventions were a chosen instrument to bring about national self-respect.

"Participants in the convention were Umno, MCA, the Peninsular Malays Union, the Persatuan Islam SA-Malaya (PMIP) and the Persatuan Melayu-Malaya Kelantan.

"The delegates represented 90% of the entire population of Malaya. Registered membership of the participating organisations totalled at least 350,000. There was massive enthusiasm. The signals were already there that a new destiny was being forged out for Malaya."

As chairman of the national convention, I stressed that a strong urge for self-determination was finding its way into the hearts of the people of Malaya and the people felt that it was time that they were given bigger roles to play in the political affairs of the country. That part can only be given them with the institution of popular franchise.